

Reunions for Koreans ‘like a dagger in our hearts’

North Korea

She had waited more than 60 years to see her son. When Lee Keum-seom, 92, finally set eyes on Ri Sang-chol, the 71-year-old she had been forced to leave behind in North Korea when he was four, Lee wailed and pulled him to her chest. “Sang-chol!” she cried.

Ri wept and pulled out a family photo showing his father, Lee’s husband, who had already died. “Mother, it’s your husband,” he said. “It’s father.”

The bittersweet moment came as 89 elderly South Koreans were taken to the North’s Mount Kumgang tourist resort to meet relatives they had not seen since the Korean War of 1950-53.

The carefully selected families were given the rare opportunity to meet again amid a diplomatic thaw between Seoul and

Pyongyang that began when the countries’ two leaders came together for a historic summit in April.

These were the last surviving remnant of millions forcibly separated without warning after the Korean peninsula was permanently divided between North and South.

The reunions were taking place over three days but relatives would have just 11 hours, under close supervision, to catch up before parting.

Around them, other relatives met. Baek Sung-gyu, 101, met his daughter-in-law, Kim Myong-sun, 71, for the first time. She handed him a photo of his now deceased son. “Can I take this home?” Baek asked. “You can,” she replied.

Before the long bus journey north, he said he had packed clothes and toothbrushes as gifts for Kim and his granddaughter.



South Korean Cho Hye-do, 86, right, meets her North Korean sister Cho Sun Do, 89, left, during the Separated Family Reunion Meeting at the Diamond Mountain resort in North Korea. AP

“I also brought 20 stainless spoons,” he added. “I brought everything because it’s my last time.”

The families were the lucky few selected from more than 57,000 South Korean war survivors who registered for a chance to see long-lost loved ones.

For some, now older than 70, the reunion came too late. Chung Hak-soon, 89, had dreamt of seeing her older brother again, only to find out that he had died. “I really wished to see even the face of my brother, but the reunion has come too late,” she said.

Instead, like others on the trip, she would only meet family she had never seen before.

The two Koreas have held 20 such reunions since the first inter-Korean summit in 2000. According to local news reports, 3,000 applicants died in the first half of this year. Thousands of others have been left heartbroken in the twilight of their lives after failing to make it through the selection process.

When told of a 95-year-old who cried at failing to be selected, Moon Jae-in, South Korea’s president, said he “deeply

sympathised with their sorrow”.

“It’s like putting a dagger through our hearts,” said Lee Myung-sik, 84, who would not take part in this week’s event.

He escaped from the North when his father was shot by soldiers. “My neighbour told me people had come to my house to arrest me, so I ran away,” he said. Now, after decades of being unable to even send a letter home, Lee has little time for political gestures.

“It’s more cruel than murder,” he said. “They need to let us stay in touch.” – *Telegraph Group*

HELP us to help kids reach greater HEIGHTS

SIR GRAEME DINGLE HAS A VISION:

To make New Zealand the best country in the world for kids by 2050.

“That’s my plan. While there’s breath in me, I’ll strive for that,”

Sir Graeme Dingle and Joanne Wilkinson, Lady Dingle, Co-founders, Graeme Dingle Foundation.

Over twenty years ago Sir Graeme scaled heights he never thought possible and ever since then he has worked hard to help youth and young adults have the same experience.

“There is no better feeling than reaching your potential or taking the first step on the rung of the potential ladder,” says Sir Graeme.

“My world was changed and I want the world of others to change for them too,” he shares.

The Foundation is reaching out to all New Zealanders and asking for you to help us help others.

The Foundation has just launched a new brand campaign that clearly articulates the story of possibility and potential, thanks to the generosity of top creative agency, Colenso BBDO.

The new brand reflects the Foundation’s dream – to

transform the lives of our youth so that they can realise their dreams and achieve greater things, making worthwhile contributions to family, friends, community and the wider economy.

“We see young lives transform. There is no better feeling,” says Jeff Chapman, Graeme Dingle Foundation STARS Co-ordinator and teacher, Mana College.

“I run the Graeme Dingle Foundation STARS programme at Mana College and see first-hand what a difference it makes to our tamariki,” says Chapman.

The Foundation runs programmes with touchpoints throughout every step of a young person’s journey from new entrants to 18 year olds. Together the programmes form a transformational journey. The team behind the programmes are passionate and embedded in the communities they serve.

“If we can get more programmes happening

across more schools, transforming more lives before kids turn 18, then we are doing a world of good,” says, Graeme Dingle Foundation Kiwi Can Co-ordinator Paatfoi Seiuli, who is delighted to have the nationwide programme in his home town of Porirua.

“We’re actually making a difference in the kids’ lives and they take that home and out into society. What’s even better is that they love doing it!” says Paatfoi.

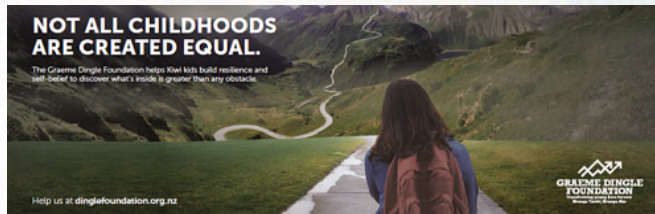
Another college that has seen the difference is Mana College.

“I’m excited and proud to be part of Mana College. We are making a significant difference to the lives of young people and their families through our work and Graeme Dingle Foundation is a bug part of that,” say John Murdoch, Principal, Mana College.



GRAEME DINGLE FOUNDATION

Transforming young lives forever
Oranga Taiohi, Oranga Ake



“Working with the Foundation allows us to make a greater impact than we would be able to without that resource”, says Murdoch.

“Education is about lighting a fire inside of young people so that they come curious and leave inspired. I see this with the Graeme Dingle Foundation STARS and Career Navigator programmes,” Murdoch shares.

The Foundation is actively looking for support for the powerful work that they are doing. We’re calling all philanthropists, corporates, individuals and families who have a dollar to give to help this not only worthy, but necessary, cause for the future of our nation.



Donations can be made directly to trustee: sarah.thompson@dinglefoundation.org.nz, via **PledgeMe**
<https://www.pledgeme.co.nz/projects/5703-porirua-tamariki-2019>
or a personal email can be send to info@dinglefoundation.org.nz | <https://dinglefoundation.org.nz>

We are currently transforming the lives of 700 Tamariki and Rangatahi in Porirua and Lower Hutt. We want to double that in the next three years and triple it after that but we need you to help us to help them.

“What you have inside is greater than any obstacle.”

For more than 20 years, Sir Graeme Dingle and his wife Lady Jo-anne Wilkinson have worked tirelessly with New Zealand’s youth, through their non-profit organisation, the Graeme Dingle Foundation.

It’s an organisation working with kids, families and

educators at a grass-roots level, with programmes tailored for different age groups, all designed to build confidence and resilience in kids – life-long skills that our young people need to overcome any obstacle that life throws at them.