

# North Korean defector on escaping the secretive state



People march at Kim Il Sung Square during an assembly to commemorate the anniversary of the Korean War in Pyongyang

By Victor Mallet

Hyeonseo Lee bursts into the quiet warmth of the traditional Korean restaurant, bringing with her a blast of sub-zero air from the wintertime streets of Seoul. A miniature hurricane and a woman of strong will - "obstinate" is how she puts it herself - she is not at all the doll-faced persona suggested in photographs. Now 36, she escaped on foot across the frozen Yalu river into China from her home in North Korea at the age of 17. For the next decade, she survived abusive Chinese pimps, gangsters, importunate marriage suitors, informers and police interrogators, and then escaped again to seek asylum and a new home in South Korea.

Her traumas and adventures did not stop there. She returned to China in 2009 to smuggle her mother and brother out of North Korea and eventually had to extract them from a prison in Laos. She is now one of the most prominent global voices of the subjugated North Korean people, a bestselling author and public speaker and a campaigner against the thriving Chinese trade in Korean sex slaves. With North Korea developing nuclear weapons and long-range missiles, and Donald Trump questioning America's existing security commitments to its Asian allies, there has rarely been a more important time to hear the truth about the secretive, paranoid state of North Korea and its symbiotic relationship with the

neighboring Chinese superpower.

Lee has arrived 15 minutes late to Sosonjae restaurant. Since our dinner appointment was set for 5pm, early even by Korean standards, I am hardly complaining as she flings her coat aside and we order a Korean set meal, starting with vegetable pancake and japchae, a salad of glass noodles made from sweet potato and flavoured with sesame oil. The restaurant's name means "house of simple food".

I start by asking about identity and truthfulness, an issue that has haunted North Korean exiles - and played into the hands of Pyongyang's propagandists - ever since the most prominent among them were found to have lied or exaggerated their already gruesome experiences in their memoirs.

Lee, according to those who first heard her story and helped her tell it to the world, is different, not least because she openly loves her homeland and is able to evoke the cozy normality of family life in the north as well as the horror of public executions, the mindless worship of the Kim dynasty and the famine of the 1990s. Lee's North Korea is not just a country where peasants starve to death and denounce their neighbors - though it is that place, too - but one where people fall in love, friends gather to (illegally) watch foreign videos, and a young girl delights in a new pair of shoes.

Some memories, she admits, are "very painful", especially those of

her narrow escape from servitude in a brothel in the north-eastern Chinese city of Shenyang and her harrowing journey to smuggle her family out of North Korea and across China to freedom. But she is conscious of being peculiarly lucky, perhaps even the recipient of the kind of miracle attributed to the Christian God.

"In my life there are so many 'what ifs?' What if I was repatriated by the Chinese police when I was caught by them? What if I was raped by the Chinese gangsters? What if when I brought my family out of the country..."

Her voice tails off. "My mum and my brother and me, even today we are not talking about that experience." A few months ago, a fellow defector arranged the extraction of her own parents from North Korea via China; the Chinese police caught them and repatriated them, and the mother committed suicide by swallowing poison on the bus before recrossing the border. The father's fate is unknown.

Lee is *The Girl with Seven Names* (her autobiographical book describes how she escaped detection in China, learning the language and living under a series of assumed identities), and unless the two Koreas are reunified, I will probably never know her real name ("A girly name" is all she will say), which must remain secret to protect relatives and friends left behind under the dictatorship of Kim Jong Un. She chose the name Hyeonseo - whose two parts mean "sunshine" and "good luck" - to celebrate

her emergence from the "long tunnels" of darkness into her new life of freedom in South Korea, and insists that even her mother must use it all the time.

"Because if they use the old name at home, then they are going to get used to calling me by my original name and make a mistake on the outside when we are around with people. She says I'm trying my best to erase my name. Of course we can't forget about the name but you just get used to it."

The dangers are real. South Korea's National Intelligence Service has warned Lee that Pyongyang's agents may try to kidnap her - it has happened to other critics of Pyongyang and Beijing - and make an example of her in North Korea.

With chopsticks, we are delicately wrapping slices of boiled pork - one of Lee's favorites - with tiny raw shrimp and radish kimchi into a pickled leaf and popping the rolls into our mouths.

"That's why the NIS tells me, every event, when you receive an invitation, better check if that's a real event. And the one thing they told me is, don't go to Southeast Asia, including China." After her book was published in 2015 and while she was in New York, she says, the NIS told her that Pyongyang had sent a message to its embassies abroad accusing her of slandering North Korea and ordering them to "do something".

After just two generations of separation since the end of the Korean war in 1953, the ill-nourished people above the 38th parallel north are on average a couple of inches shorter than those in the prosperous south. Lee herself witnessed devastating famines. Yet at 5ft 2in - "very small," she says - she seems always to have been determined and resourceful, driven to survive first by curiosity about the bright lights of China over the river from her home, then by the urge to find her family again, and now by her mission to speak out for the voiceless 25 million inhabitants of North Korea.

"I think I have some strong something that maybe other people don't have," she says, recalling the TED talk she gave in 2013 that propelled her to stardom. It has so far been watched 7 million times; and her book is being translated into at least 18 different languages. "The TED talk I gave, that gave me another character I didn't know about. I'm not saying the mind of a hero, but a kind of responsibility. Every word I'm speaking, it's not from myself. I'm speaking for and representing the people of communist North Korea."

With constant public appearances, by the end of last year she had driven herself into a state of exhaustion, "torturing myself", she says, in "mental agony" and with a sense of inadequacy for the task she had undertaken. "People in the past, they used to tell me you need a vacation, vacation, vacation - I didn't know what they meant."

To cheer ourselves up, we turn again to the food, including a large and delicious uncooked crab, its gooey flesh marinated in the restaurant's secret sauce.

Food is a difficult subject for North Koreans who survived the famine of the 1990s. Hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, died, and Lee left the country just as the disaster reached its peak. I ask her whether it still feels strange to be able to eat whatever and whenever she wants. "The food makes me the most sad," she replies, pointing out how often we leave it behind on the table. "For us, it's nothing. For people in North Korea, only for one bowl of rice - not this kind of fancy food - they don't have it and so many people have died [...] We are unlucky. We're born in the wrong country, with the wrong leader."

As she settled into the high-tech economy of South Korea eight years ago, Lee was astonished to discover from television and from Google that there were things called "human rights", even "animal rights". She suddenly reaches across the table and shows me a picture of a cat on her smartphone.

"In New York, last week - it's my friend's pet. And on her birthday, often, actually, she eats nice sushi. She loves sushi."

The cat? I ask, incredulous. "Yes. She loves sushi. Then whenever I see those pictures, I feel so sad. People who live in North Korea, they die for food, but living in the free world, the cat even eats expensive sushi."

Yes, but that's not really sensible, is it? "I'm not criticising the cat or the owner," she says. "I'm not. It's just reminding me how North Koreans live."

The memories come tumbling out, some good but mostly bad: her disbelieving mother - lost and now found again - running towards her in a prison yard in Laos; the corpses of famine victims floating down the Yalu; the handcart to take away the dead so that Chinese visitors would not see evidence of North Korea's shameful failure; a weakling flung on to the heaps of dead because he was probably going to die anyway and a passing Chinese driver laughing at the sight. Lee's hands are fiercely twist-



## North Korean defector on escaping the secretive state (continued)



A traffic police woman dressed in a raincoat directs traffic in Pyongyang

ing her long necklace of black beads as though she is trying to strangle the recollections.

"Sometimes the dead bodies wouldn't be moved, so the smell of the decomposing flesh was everywhere, especially under the bridge and near the train station, because under the bridge is where not many people can see."

I suggest we celebrate the good memories and the reunification of her family (her brother is studying at Columbia University in New York) and order soju, the local rice liquor. She rejects it as too ordinary and so we opt for a plump bottle of Korean black raspberry wine, a sweet drink that tastes to an Englishman like neat

Ribena.

We need the painful testimony of escapers such as Lee - who barely touches the wine - to understand the reality of life in North Korea and China's essential role in propping up the Kim regime. She does not want to dwell on other defectors such as the torture victim Shin Dong-hyuk or Yeonmi Park, a prominent young woman escaper, whose stories have been subject to scrutiny after having been shown to contain inconsistencies. All she will say over dinner is that it "makes me so angry" because the exposing of "fakers" helps the regime and undermines the credibility of those who do tell the truth.

The importance of Lee's story

rests on her intimate understanding of China. The country's communist rulers supported Kim Il Sung during the Korean war, but they worry today about the nuclear ambitions of his grandson Kim Jong Un. They also oppose reunification for fear of seeing US troops along the Yalu river.

The communist government in Beijing treats North Korean refugees with varying degrees of cruelty and indifference, depending on the winds of geopolitics. Even in South Korea, North Koreans find it notoriously hard to succeed in such a hyper-modern society, brainwashed as they are since birth and almost wholly ignorant about the outside world. (The north is seen by southerners as their "mad uncle in the attic. A subject best avoided," Lee wrote in her book.)

"We refugees, we become always a punchbag," she says now, as we turn to dessert, a large slice each of crisp and juicy pear. "A political punchbag between China and South Korea and North Korea. China has all the keys right now. On unification, China also has the answer. So if China wants North Korea to completely end, if China stops supporting North Korea, within one week or 10 days they can make North Korea chaos. I wish they could do more, but they are not doing it at all [...] Certainly North Korea is not easy to handle. And the west, including South Korea, they see North Korea in a

wrong perspective. They see them weak while western media make jokes about the Dear Leader's ridiculous hairstyle. What they've done over time, they've developed more the nuclear missile system, while we make fun of them. And right now it becomes a real threat. I don't know if the Trump administration can really have something change."

Lee wants reunification, she wants to be able to go back to her hometown on the Yalu, and she worries that young South Koreans do not care as much as their parents whether or not it ever happens. ("Many people in the past, they never predicted German reunification," she says hopefully, "but it did happen very abruptly.")

Her immediate goal is to build an NGO to stop the trafficking of desperate North Koreans in China as brides and sex-workers. She estimates that about 30,000-40,000 of the 200,000 North Korean defectors hiding in China are sex slaves. "As a woman who actually survived from there, I should be their voice. I want to end sex slavery in China, although I know it's really difficult to make it happen. One day maybe it's possible."

I ask Lee what she has learnt about North Korea since she escaped, but I quickly realise it is the wrong question. North Koreans flee because they realise there is something wrong with their homeland. It is the lies they have been taught about the rest of the world that are deeply ingrained. "We

learned that Americans are our primary enemies and all human scums live in America," says Lee, who stunned her mother and brother by entering a relationship with an American man called Brian, before marrying him four years ago.

"South Korea was described as the poorest country in the world, where beggars were filling the streets. And then the most shocking thing for us was the Korean war - it was created by the American and South Korean enemies together. We never learned it was actually started by the North Korean regime. My mum, who was brainwashed for more than 60 years, she still asks me: 'Show me the proof?'"

In South Korea, Lee also learnt about freedom. "Breathing in South Korea, even though the life here is not easy, makes me so happy. I feel that sitting in a coffee shop, having a cup of tea and looking out of the window at the blue sky - this is happiness. Truly happiness. I could never have this moment when I was living in North Korea for 17 years and when I was hiding in China for 10 years. I don't think many people, when they are having a cup of tea, go: 'That's freedom. It's the joy of life.' But me, I have that." For the first time in two hours, she laughs.

Victor Mallet is the FT's Asia news editor

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## From cars parts to Hollywood: Chinese companies' odd evolution

By Don Weinland in HK

Song Liao Automotive had tried its luck in different industries since the mid-1990s, moving from passenger cars to spare auto parts, infant formula, medical instruments and food packaging.

But after a string of losses, the group in 2016 recreated itself yet again - this time with designs on breaking into the global entertainment business through a billion-dollar overseas acquisition.

Song Liao, which changed its name to Cultural Investment Holdings (CIH) in April, is one of scores of Chinese companies that are trying to leave behind slow growth manufacturing and leap into new sectors fashionable at home and abroad - including entertainment, pharmaceuticals and travel.

Researchers tracking these companies say many listed Chinese groups have sought to make such a transformation, often with the help of an expensive overseas takeover designed to bolster their credentials in otherwise unfamiliar lines of business.

Many of those deals were done in 2016, helping drive the record USD220 billion in

overseas M&A Chinese companies agreed to last year, double the 2015 total.

But now they face two looming obstacles. First, regulators seeking to stem the outflow of capital from China have for the past few months been sharply restricting acquisitions abroad. Second, bankers have begun to worry about the commercial viability of investments in modern sectors by old-fashioned industrial groups; they are also wary of the impact of the new official curbs on capital outflows.

"Whatever is hot, they go acquire assets in that area and then ask for a name change," says Liu Wei, a professor of economics at Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business, noting that the decisions can be made hastily.

Prof Li has identified more than 100 similar groups, the majority of which change their names, adding words such as "technology", "internet" or "pharmaceutical" to their new titles. Chinese poultry group Sumpo Food changed its name to Leyou Technologies before buying UK game developer Splash Damage last year, for example. Driving the corporate upheavals has been local government and bank

support, Prof Li says.

Many of the groups have been large employers and generators of tax revenue for medium and small cities around the country. As manufacturing and other industry slows in China, company leaders and local government cadres have become eager for the groups to find a new means of survival.

Buying into higher-returning assets has been one solution, and local banks are often on hand to provide the capital needed to make the transition, Prof Li says.

Just months after changing its name and announcing a foray into film and television, CIH agreed to pay out USD187 million in November for a 75 percent stake in Framstore, the British visual-effects company that worked on blockbuster Hollywood films such as The Dark Knight and The Martian. The deal was backed by local banks.

Chemical group Jinke Peroxides, which changed its name to Jinke Entertainment Culture last year, announced in January that it would pay USD1 billion for UK-based Outfit 7, the developer of "Talking Tom", a computer application for children.

Jinke - both as a perox-

ide maker and as vendor for children's video games - has enjoyed strong local-government support for the deal.

But some investment banks have become increasingly tepid on supporting the companies' global ambitions following a recent regulatory clampdown.

China's foreign exchange regulators have vowed to stem capital outflow in the form of overseas investment. In December, the Ministry of Commerce warned it would monitor closely all outbound investments into gaming, entertainment and film production for speculative investments.

Around the same time CIH announced the buyout of Framstore, the company approached at least two investment banks about much larger acquisition targets, including Imagina Group, a Spain-based media company that has backed films such as Woody Allen's Vicky Cristina Barcelona and distributes Spain's top football league internationally.

Bankers who had contact with CIH were puzzled at its rapid swing from auto parts to film production and media rights. The banks decided against working with the company on

the deal that valued Imagina at more than \$2 billion.

"We have no idea how the regulator would treat [this kind of deal]," says one of the bankers. CIH did not respond to a request for comment on the matter.

Jingfeng Pharmaceutical's plan to buy a New York-listed hospital operator has ran into similar problems, with bankers questioning the company's ability to make a major transition.

Previously, Jingfeng was a producer of agricultural and industrial pumps called Hunan Tianyi Science & Technology. In 2015, after a period of restructuring, it emerged as Jingfeng and announced that its primary line of business was medicine investment and biopharmaceutical research.

During the final months of 2016, the company approached Chinese investment banks to explore a takeover offer for Nobilis Health Corp, according to two people familiar with the matter. Nobilis manages and owns healthcare facilities in Texas and Arizona and has a market capitalisation of USD163 million.

Banks reacted coolly to Jingfeng's proposal and do not plan to move ahead with the client - mainly because the

company's lack of experience in the area.

Jingfeng did not respond to requests for comment.

"It's difficult for management to go into these new industries," says Ivan Chung, a managing director at Moody's Investors Service. "Overseas investment is particularly tough because they may not understand things like tax and law in other countries."

Rapid corporate transitions can sometimes signal distress. Mr Chung points to the bond default of Cloud Live Technology in 2015 just months after the company made a radical shift into cloud computing. Originally it operated Hunan-style restaurants in Beijing.

Prof Li says many of the corporate transformations have been shortsighted, with the push into a completely new industry coming too late, misreading market or policy signals, or simply failing at the new business.

"Five years from now, based on what we know about economics, many of these companies will not succeed," he says.

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Japanese acoustician Yasuhisa Toyota speaks during an interview at Suntory Hall in Tokyo



The Japan Philharmonic Orchestra performs during their concert at Suntory Hall

# Concert halls call on this Japanese engineer to shape sound

By Yuri Kageyama

**B**EHIND some of the world's most reputed concert halls is a Japanese engineer whose finesse in shaping sound is so perfectly unobtrusive that all listeners hear is the music — in all its subtlety, texture and fullness.

Yasuhisa Toyota's talents are coveted as classical music venues are increasingly designed in "vineyard style," where audiences surround the stage to hear the performers up close and enjoy an almost-interactive experience, feeling more like a part of the music and being able to be seen and respond to it.

Toyota's Nagata Acoustics has just 20 employees globally, but it dominates acoustics work for halls in Japan and is expanding abroad. He's designed the acoustics for orchestras in Los Angeles, Helsinki, Paris and Shanghai. Another of his projects, the Elbephilharmonie concert hall in Hamburg, opened Jan. 11.

Still, when asked to summarize the reason for success, Toyota hesitates. So many factors are involved in fine-tuning acoustics, and each hall has a different design, creating fresh challenges.

"No one can explain in one word why a Stradivarius violin sounds so beautiful, or how the way it was made may have shaped that beautiful sound," Toyota said in a recent interview at his Tokyo home.

"Whether sound is beautiful, clear or pleasant is extremely complex," he said. "So when we're talking about acoustics in a concert hall, there is basically that space itself."

Toyota, 64, is not a musician but was raised listening to and

loving classical music. The company founded in 1971 has headquarters in Tokyo and Los Angeles, which is Toyota's main home these days as he oversees Nagata's projects outside Japan.

Toyota coined the expression "psycho-acoustics" to describe the importance of emotions and other senses in sound. Would a pink violin, for instance, sound as good as a brown one, he asks?

"There is discussion about a formula for acoustics because sound is invisible. People don't ask those questions about visual design," said Toyota, whose care-free flair, quick wit and laugh are unusual among Japanese of his usually staid generation.

At times sounding like a Zen monk when he talks about the art of sound, Toyota says crafting acoustics requires a thorough knowledge of building materials, close collaboration with architects, comprehension of musicians' needs, computerized simulations, use of scale models of the halls and analysis of reverberating sound.

The thickness of a wall, its shape, material and curves, the fixtures hanging from the ceiling, and the musicians themselves all affect acoustics. In the old-style shoebox design of concert halls, where the audience sits in rows facing the stage, the sound is easier to control. The vineyard format is trickier.

David Howard, a bass clarinetist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, has played in several halls Toyota has worked on and says he appreciates the direct, clear and full, and intimate nature of their sound.

"In that sense, Mr. Toyota hit a home run," he said.

Apart from the just opened

Elbephilharmonie, Toyota has done the acoustics for Stanford University's Bing Concert Hall, Helzberg Hall at Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts in Kansas City, Missouri, and the Chamber Hall at the Museo Del Violino in Cremona, Italy. His first major overseas project was the Walt Disney Concert Hall, which opened in 2003, for the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

The acoustics of the hall the Los Angeles orchestra used before were so bad that musicians overplayed to compensate, and that carried over to other venues.

**“This is really one of the best halls in the world. You can play unbelievably softly and it carries to the last row.”**

PIETARI INKINEN  
CONDUCTOR

"The ideal environment," Howard said, "is one where I can feel unencumbered in terms of being concerned about my individual sound, and I can just play, so that the ingredients are such that I don't have to worry about it being beautiful enough, or loud enough, or clear enough, that those things are more or less taken care of for me, so that I can just make music."

Toyota's fame started with Tokyo's majestic Suntory Hall, but its 1986 opening was a nightmare, he recalls.

It took time for the musicians to adjust to its finely tuned acoustics. That process can take several years. But these days, musical experts agree the acoustics in Suntory Hall are impeccable.

Toyota said he asks all musicians to play more softly while adjusting to a new venue where he's worked.

"When all 80 people are nervous and playing in all directions, then there is utter chaos on stage," he said.

Japan's love for classical music and Toyota's talent were evident at a recent Japan Philharmonic Orchestra performance at Suntory Hall of Bruckner's "Symphony No. 8 in C minor."

Kikue Sugimito, a long-time Japan Philharmonic season-ticket holder, remembers being awed by the sound quality when the orchestra moved from its previous venue to Suntory Hall.

"There is a transparency about the sound here," she said.

Pietari Inkinen, the conductor, said the hall was so close to perfect any kind of piece could be played, inspiring the performers because listeners can feel the symphony "in their stomachs."

"This is really one of the best halls in the world," he said. "You can play unbelievably softly and it carries to the last row."

The architect Frank Gehry, who worked with Toyota on Disney Hall, says the aim in designing a concert hall is to make the space comfortable and interactive for all in the room.

Gehry and Toyota donated their work to build a hall, opening in March, for Berlin's Barenboim-

Said Akademie, which was founded by conductor and pianist Daniel Barenboim and the American-Palestinian scholar Edward W. Said to educate and bring together young musicians, including Arabs and Israelis.

"In music, you're taking sounds and putting them together to create beauty and a feeling. When you do a building, you're taking inert materials and putting them together to create beauty and a feeling," said Gehry, who admires Japanese culture, including gagaku music and architecture, and, especially, Toyota.

"You make the space comfortable, interactive and humane so that people feel together in the room and people feel together with the orchestra. The orchestra feels the relationship with the people. And it makes it better. That was what we tried to do. We could talk about it that way," said Gehry in a telephone interview from Los Angeles.

"I love working with him — an enriching treat beyond belief," he said.

Although architects and acousticians sometimes don't get along, as they infringe by definition on each other's turf, Toyota told a story about the cross-cultural collaborative relationship he has with Gehry, joking about sharing blame equally if Disney Hall were to fail.

"So he tells me, 'Yasu, if things don't go well, let's commit harakiri together. But you have to do it first, and I'm following because I have no idea how to do it.' My response was, 'Frank, you have to do it first. If I did, there will be no one who can help you. I can help you. You should go first. I'm going after you.'" AP

# More than 200 whales swim away after New Zealand stranding



German visitor Lea Stubbe rubs water on a pilot whale that beached itself at the remote Farewell Spit

By Nick Perry in Wellington

**W**HALE lovers in New Zealand finally got some good news yesterday after more than 200 stranded whales managed to refloat themselves overnight and swim away, while volunteers managed to save another 17 whales at high tide.

More than 650 pilot whales had beached themselves along

Farewell Spit at the tip of the South Island in two separate mass strandings over recent days. About 350 whales have died, including 20 that were euthanized. Another 100 have been refloats by volunteers and more than 200 have swum away unassisted.

Hundreds of volunteers from farmers to tourists have spent days at the beach dousing the whales with buckets of water

to keep them cool and trying to refloat them.

"People seem to have an emotional attachment to marine mammals," said Department of Conservation spokesman Herb Christophers. "They've been singing songs to them, giving them specific names, treating them as kindred spirits."

Christophers said everyone is hoping the strandings are finally over, although he said

it's possible some of the whales will return to the beach and strand themselves again.

The first group of more than 400 beached whales was found early Friday, with many of them already dead.

"You could hear the sounds of splashing, of blowholes being cleared, of sighing," said Cheree Morrison, a magazine writer and editor who first stumbled upon the whales. "The young ones were the worst. Crying is the only way to describe it."

Volunteers managed to refloat the surviving whales from that stranding on Saturday, only to hear of a second mass stranding hours later.

Department of Conservation spokesman Andrew Lamason said they were sure they were dealing with a separate pod because they had tagged all the refloats from the first group and none of the new group had tags.

In recent days volunteers have formed human chains in the water to try to stop the creatures from beaching themselves again. The volunteers were warned that one of the whales had been found with

marks that looked like a shark bite.

Officials will soon need to turn to the grim task of disposing of hundreds of carcasses.

Lamason said one option was to tether the carcasses to stakes or a boat in the shallow tidal waters and let them decompose. The problem with towing them out to sea or leaving them was that they could become gaseous and buoyant, and end up causing problems by floating into populated bays.

Farewell Spit, a sliver of sand that arches like a hook into the Tasman Sea, has been the site of previous mass strandings. Sometimes described as a whale trap, the spit's long coastline and gently sloping beaches seem to make it difficult for whales to navigate away from once they get close.

There are different theories as to why whales strand themselves, from chasing prey too far inshore to trying to protect a sick member of the group or escaping a predator.

New Zealand has one of the highest rates of whale strandings in the world, and Friday's event was the nation's third-biggest in recorded history. The largest was in 1918, when about 1,000 pilot whales came ashore on the Chatham Islands. In 1985, about 450 whales stranded in Auckland.

Pilot whales grow to about 7.5 meters and are common around New Zealand's waters. **AP**

## ASK THE VET



by Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester

### FIRST AID FOR A BROKEN CAT BONE

**A** broken cat bone can be a very painful and traumatising experience for your pet. While feline fractures should always be treated by a veterinarian, you can perform first aid at home before you take your cat to the vet. Here's how you should deal with a cat who has a broken bone.

#### 1) APPROACH YOUR CAT CAREFULLY

If your cat has been injured, be it by a fight, a car accident or a fall, he'll be frightened and in pain. He may feel bewildered. He may be in such great pain that he won't recognize you, and may try to bite or scratch as you approach him.

Remain calm and patient; don't feel frustrated with your cat. Avert your gaze, as cats find eye contact threatening. Keep your body language relaxed and calm. Make soothing noises and, if he hasn't suffered any head injuries, you can scratch around his ears and under his chin to help calm him down.

#### 2) MOVE YOUR CAT GENTLY

Once your cat has calmed down, you can pick him up gently. Drop a large towel or blanket over your cat, especially the head and front paws. Pick your cat up in your arms, supporting the shoulders and the hips at the same

time. Move slowly and carefully; you don't want to make his injuries worse.

#### 3) CLEAN ANY OPEN WOUNDS

You can skip this step if you're able to rush your cat to the vet right away. However, if you can't get to a vet immediately, you'll want to carefully clean any open wounds your cat may have sustained. Use clean, warm water to rinse away debris. Wrap the wounds in sterile bandages.

#### 4) MINIMIZE YOUR CAT'S MOVEMENT

If your cat has suffered one or more fractures, you'll want to minimize his movement as much as possible. At home, you can do this by wrapping your cat firmly in a towel. If the fracture has occurred in one of the legs, you can immobilize it by binding it to your cat's torso with a towel.

#### 5) SEEK VETERINARY CARE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

Your cat will need veterinary care to treat his fracture. Your cat may very well be suffering from shock, and this condition requires medical treatment. Your vet will administer anesthesia and set any fractures your cat may have sustained. Some fractures may require



surgical intervention, especially fractures of the skull and jaw.

Use an animal carrier to take your cat to the vet. Remember, your cat can't be counted on to behave normally; an injured cat is already frightened and may panic if placed in a car without a carrier.

#### 6) HOME MANAGEMENT FOR FRACTURE RECOVERY

Once you're back home again, make sure your cat doesn't bite or chew at the casts or bandages he may need to wear while he recovers. An Elizabethan collar might be useful for this purpose. When bathing your cat, wrap the

bandaged area in plastic so it doesn't get wet.

Be vigilant during the recovery process; your cat is prone to secondary infections of the fractured area. If any medical symptoms manifest, contact your vet right away.

Hope this info helps  
Till next week  
Dr Ruan

**Ask the Vet:**  
**Royal Veterinary Centre**  
**Tel:** +853 28501099, +853 28523678  
**Emergency:** +853 62662268  
**Email:** royalveterinary@gmail.com