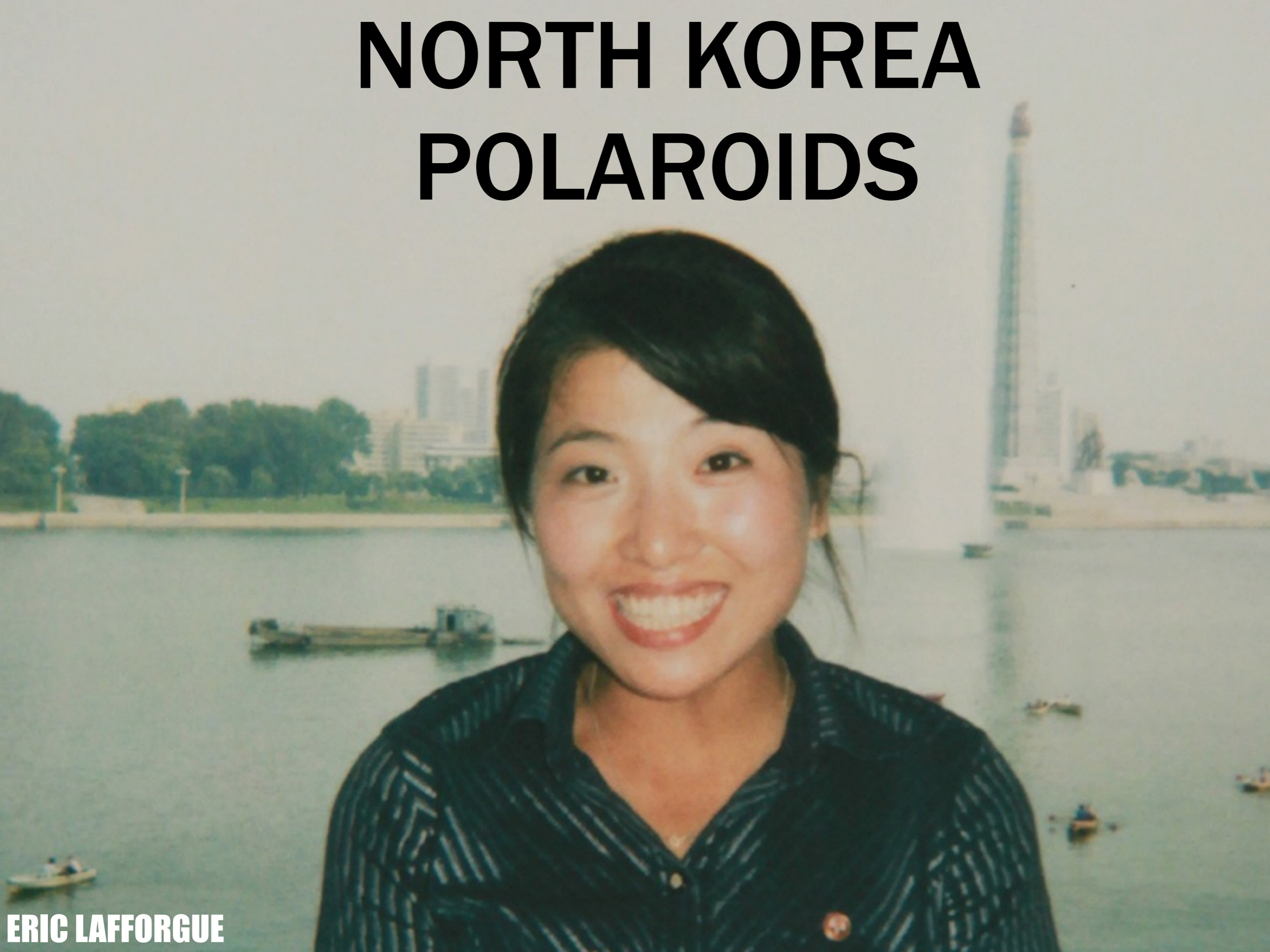


# NORTH KOREA POLAROIDS



My first visit to North Korea was in 2008. At that time, there were no mobile phones in the country. The only chance for taking pictures relied on the official photographers selling photo souvenirs to visitors at the entrance of the main monuments.

At first, the idea of making Polaroids was just a kind of artistic work, to keep the dull colors of this country, but quickly I discovered this camera was the best way to interact with locals and immediately break the ice.

Everytime I took a Polaroid, I made another one as a gift for my North Korean "model".

So many times, this allowed me to see North Koreans in a very different way, and to start some conversations, through my guide, of course. Something that was no allowed in 2008..



Two North Korean guides in the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum (aka the War Museum) in Pyongyang. For two hours they explained with tons of lies the glorious victories of North Korea against the American imperialists, in a very seriously manner. Then when I suggested to make a Polaroid, they gave me shy smiles..



Accordion Classroom at Mangyongdae Schoolchildren's Palace in Pyongyang. The visit that every tourist makes. After the guide opened the door, inside you can see accordion, dance, singing and calligraphy...For only 30 seconds! Then the guide kept on rushing us, "We are late, we are late..."



I had the chance to meet some Triplets in Nampho orphanage. There are a lot of twins and triplets in orphanages. The official reason is that parents cannot afford to raise 2 or 3 kids at the same time. Some say that they represent a kind of magic for the Leaders and that the parents do not have the choice to keep them at home. I took a Polaroid of the triplets and asked the orphanage director to give the picture to the parents, but I understood they were living very far away and that there was little chance they could receive the picture of their children..



Women working in a highway restaurant near Pyongyang. They got to see very few people all day long. It is a boring job. At first, I thought they were flight attendants. This was the first time they saw a Polaroid, so I had to make one for each girl..



A colonel on the DMZ. He was speaking about peace, about oppression of the Americans, and the day after the meeting, North Korea made a nuclear test! He asked to have one Polaroid in front of the South Korean building, to show her wife where he was working..



Her job is to sell flowers, which the visitors (including tourists) will lay in front of the Leaders statues in Mansudae hill in Pyongyang. 3 euros for the flowers. As soon as you put the flowers on the monument, an old lady would come right after to take the flowers back, and resell them!!





In 2008, there was just the statue of Kim Il Sung in Mansudae hill, then they put the Kim Jong il statue after he died.



Sunday afternoon on the Taedong river in Pyongyang, the North Koreans came for BBQ and picnic, a very different atmosphere, with a lot of Soju (rice alcohol) and a lot of smiles..



A North Korean colonel with a soldier on the DMZ, from where you see South Korea through binoculars. At first, he refused to pause, but when he saw the Polaroid of one soldier, he ordered me to take one of him too..



Two different views from the Yanggakdo Hotel in Pyongyang. In 2008, you could sleep with the window open, there were no cars at that time in town..



North Korean army parade in Pyongyang. It was a rehearsal. Each man had a number on his uniform, with the officer shouting orders to the ones not in good tempo..



In In the countrysides, only bikes and farms. No cars, nothing else



When visiting some houses, I asked the people what background they wanted for the pictures. Everybody answered "Below the dear Leaders' portraits". One time, I had to do the Polaroid again as the Leaders portraits were cut. Unacceptable..



A cook in a restaurant in Pyongyang with a Hello Kitty apron. She did not know about this character, she thought it was from North Korea.





Decoration in the bowling in Pyongyang. A good place to see North Koreans having fun and dating. Tinder is not yet in North Korea.



Miss Kim, she was a perfect French-speaking guide in the War Museum. I met her 5 times during my trips, she had been telling me she studied French in Pyongyang University. Until later, I discovered the fact that she spent her childhood in Algeria where her father worked as a diplomat. However for the propaganda, it was better to say that you can learn perfect French in North Korea!!



Photo taken during a visit in a kindergarten of Hamhung, a lady in the kids' sleeping room. The nurse was dumb and could not speak.



Every new couple come to Mansudea hill to pay respect to the dear Leaders' statues in Pyongyang on the day of their weddings. From their faces, it seemed that this was not a happy moment! They looked very serious. The guide told me that they were moved to visit the statue of the Leaders. But after they looked at their faces on Polaroids, they started to smile and even laugh, forgetting the etiquette!!



A woman working in the mineral water factory of Nampo. The guide was so proud to show us this factory, because President Mitterand made a visit here before he was elected in France. But in fact, the sound of the machines was incredibly aggressive, and everybody was sorry for this young worker who had to stand there during our touristic visit. She was forbidden to leave her position to fetch the Polaroid photo I did for her. She only took it after her mission was finished..



Guards inside the subway taking care of the arrivals and departures of the wagons. Usually they acted like little robots. In front of the Polaroid, they suddenly became humans!



A picture taken in the countryside. In Pyongyang, depending on the mood of the Leaders, riding a bike is impossible for women, since it is not aesthetic. In the countryside, there is no choice to move from one place to another.



In Pyongyang, I took the Polaroids of the girls working in a restaurant, then the owner came and asked for one in English! She was the wife of a high-rank North Korean diplomat. She had lived in NYC for 2 years. She found the Americans very fat but nice people. She became very talkative because she was so happy with her picture..





My guide asked me to throw away this Polaroid as I took the picture from the back. It is strictly forbidden to take pictures with this angle in North Korea. Not respectful for the bronze heroes.



The DMZ from the North Korean side. As there were neither South Korean soldiers nor American soldiers on the other side, the guide explained that they were afraid to be seen. "Cowards", he said.

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