



First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers (P.S.)

By Loung Ung

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One of seven children of a high-ranking government official, Loung Ung lived a privileged life in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh until the age of five. Then, in April 1975, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge army stormed into the city, forcing Ung's family to flee and, eventually, to disperse. Loung was trained as a child soldier in a work camp for orphans, her siblings were sent to labor camps, and those who survived the horrors would not be reunited until the Khmer Rouge was destroyed.

Harrowing yet hopeful, Loung's powerful story is an unforgettable account of a family shaken and shattered, yet miraculously sustained by courage and love in the face of unspeakable brutality.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Written in the present tense, *First They Killed My Father* will put you right in the midst of the action--action you'll wish had never happened. It's a tough read, but definitely a worthwhile one, and the author's personality and strength shine through on every page. Covering the years from 1975 to 1979, the story moves from the deaths of multiple family members to the forced separation of the survivors, leading ultimately to the reuniting of much of the family, followed by marriages and immigrations. The brutality seems unending--beatings, starvation, attempted rape, mental cruelty--and yet the narrator (a young girl) never stops fighting for escape and survival. Sad and courageous, her life and the lives of her young siblings provide quite a powerful example of how war can so deeply affect children--especially a war in which they are trained to be an integral part of the armed forces. For anyone interested in Cambodia's recent history, this book shares a valuable personal view of events. --*Jill Lightner*

From Publishers Weekly

In 1975, Ung, now the national spokesperson for the Campaign for a Landmine-Free World, was the five-year-old child of a large, affluent family living in Phnom Penh, the cosmopolitan Cambodian capital. As extraordinarily well-educated Chinese-Cambodians, with the father a government agent, her family was in great danger when the Khmer Rouge took over the country and throughout Pol Pot's barbaric regime. Her parents' strength and her father's knowledge of Khmer Rouge ideology enabled the family to survive together for a while, posing as illiterate peasants, moving first between villages, and then from one work camp to another. The father was honest with the children, explaining dangers and how to avoid them, and this, along with clear sight, intelligence and the pragmatism of a young child, helped Ung to survive the war. Her restrained, unsentimental account of the four years she spent surviving the regime before escaping with a brother to Thailand and eventually the United States is astonishing--not just because of the tragedies, but also because of the immense love for her family that Ung holds onto, no matter how she is brutalized. She describes the physical devastation she is surrounded by but always returns to her memories and hopes for those she loves. Her joyful memories of life in Phnom Penh are close even as she is being trained as a child soldier, and as, one after another, both parents and two of her six siblings are murdered in the camps. Skillfully constructed, this account also stands as an eyewitness history of the period, because as a child Ung was so aware of her surroundings, and because as an adult writer she adds details to clarify the family's moves and separations. Twenty-five years after the rise of the Khmer Rouge, this powerful account is a triumph. 8 pages b&w photos.

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From School Library Journal

YA-Ung was a headstrong, clever child who was a delight to her father, a high-ranking government official in Phnom Penh. She was only five when the Khmer Rouge stormed the city and her family was forced to flee. They sought refuge in various camps, hiding their wealth and education, always on the move and ever fearful of being betrayed. After 20 months, Ung's father was taken away, never to be seen again. Her story of starvation, forced labor, beatings, attempted rape, separations, and the deaths of her family members is one of horror and brutality. The first-person account of Cambodia under the reign of Pol Pot will be read not only for research papers but also as a tribute to a human spirit that never gave up. YAs will applaud Ung's courage and strength.

Katherine Fitch, Rachel Carson Middle School, Fairfax, VA

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Holly Flynn:

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