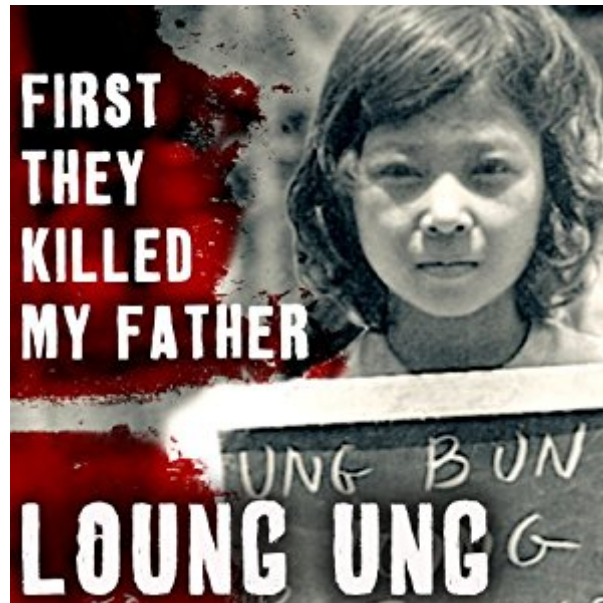


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# First They Killed My Father: A Daughter Of Cambodia Remembers



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Loung Ung's book *FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER* is an intimate, personal account of life under Cambodia's genocidal Khmer Rouge. Its emotion and urgency give the reader a sense of what it was like to be there -- to suffer as Ung and her family suffered and to see the horrors that they saw. The book thus provides a crucial supplement to drier, more academic accounts of the Khmer Rouge regime, which typically are written at a distance in order to preserve an aura of objectivity. Ung is not in the business of providing a dry, historical account of what happened to her country; rather, her purpose is to share the raw, often brutal, story of what happened to her. Ung's book provides a human framework for coming to terms with the madness of the Khmer Rouge. Instead of remaining decontextualized victims -- remarkable only for their suffering and identical to the victims of countless other tragedies -- Ung's family and the people she meets gain the dignity of personal

qualities and individuality. Through the eyes of the child that she was at the time, Ung forces us to see her family and acquaintances not just as statistics or haunted faces glimpsed on television, but as people with lives that began before the tragic period of the book and that, at least in a few cases, continued after the events described in the book were over. *FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER* is part confession, part therapy and part urgent mission to share a story with the world. It is often painful to read but it is profoundly rewarding. Ung's story is heartbreaking but her own persistence, fortitude, and ultimate triumph inspire. Furthermore, in an age where tragedy and genocide have seemingly become commonplace, Ung's ability to heal after such a harrowing childhood is encouraging evidence that others, recovering from tragedies elsewhere, can do the same.

I've had a low-level interest in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge since I saw "The Killing Fields" a few years ago. I've read a few things and was basically familiar with the history. However, I had no real appreciation for the brutality the Cambodian people endured for those 4 years until I read this book. As somebody stated in an earlier review, I wondered (at first) how a 5 year old child could remember all of this. As I got further into the story, it occurred to me that no one could ever forget this sort of thing. In addition, Ung gives one of her older brothers credit for filling in some gaps. This book is VERY believable. Ung writes about horrific events in a matter-of-fact style. She occasionally changes the point of view of the narration, which can be a bit confusing. But, overall, it's easy to follow the story. It's even easier to become drawn in to the story. I put another book aside to read this. I'm glad I did.

Having traveled extensively in Asia and keenly recalling the tragedy of Cambodia from media accounts and as depicted in the movie "The Killing Fields," I was attracted immediately to this subject matter. However, even then I was unprepared for the enormous impact this book would have on me. Anyone with respect for human dignity will surely be affected by this insider chronicle of the unspeakable atrocities committed against average, ordinary, and innocent Cambodian families and individuals. And yet, despite the enormity of the physical and psychological terrors, in the end, the triumph of a child and her siblings' bravery, perseverance, and spirit leads to a story of ultimate survival and confirmation of light over darkness. This is an important book, not only in detailing the author's incredible individual ordeal, but also reminding us of the terrible consequences of a fanatical totalitarian fringe gaining power in any society. And finally this is a tough story, but also one to celebrate and learn from. It should be recommended reading in Universities around the world in the hope that the architects of tomorrow's societies be well aware of the dangers of fanatical

extremism.

Luong Ung's story held my attention completely. I have many friends who survived the killing fields of Pol Pot and their stories match hers in many ways. Seeing the author interviewed on television recently caused me to seek out this book. I was particularly focused on certain points of her story: how wedges of class envy and racial differences were driven between people to help fuel the killing, how the children endured forced political indoctrination, the detailed, vivid description of starvation from a child's point of view, and the spirit to survive often being fueled by hate. Loung used her hate for Pol Pot and what had been done to her family as a source of strength to survive, but the hate she developed never extinguished her love for her family. As Americans, do we really think we are immune from having a killing field happen here in America? We need to read this story and learn from it. Human history is filled with holocausts and will continue to be filled with holocausts because that is as much part of human nature as it is human nature to forget the lessons offered to us by these survivors. Loung Ung presented the crucible of human frailties for us to examine and for her to find a way to heal herself of some of the pain of her losses. I am indebted to her for her courage and care to share this with me.

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