



Lucky Child

By Loung Ung
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Introduction

When Loung Ung arrived in America in 1980 as a ten-year-old Cambodian refugee, she had already survived years of hunger, violence, and loss at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. Loung thought she was the lucky child, the sibling Elder Brother Meng brought with him to America because he believed she had the best chance of making it.

In *Lucky Child*, the follow-up to *First They Killed My Father*, Ung's best-selling account of her experiences in Cambodia, she details her assimilation and, in alternating chapters, gives voice to a genocide survivor she left behind, her older sister Chou. With candor and humor, Ung describes how she makes her way in America while surmounting the deep scars of war. Not only must she learn about Disney characters and Christmas trees to fit in with her friends, she must also understand life in a nation of prosperity and peace: that the Fourth of July fireworks are not bombs, and that she doesn't

have to hoard food to make sure she has enough to eat.

By portraying her experiences alongside those of her sister, Chou, Ung highlights the harsh realities of chance and circumstance and celebrates the indomitable nature of the human spirit and the everlasting love of two sisters.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the apartment that Loung and her family move into in Vermont compare to the home Chou shares with her aunt and uncle and their children in Cambodia?
2. What does the closet in Loung's new apartment symbolize to her, and how does its existence offset the effects of living next door to a cemetery?
3. What does Cousin Cheung's encounter with the soldiers who suspect her of being Khmer Rouge reveal about the political situation in Cambodia after the end of the war?
4. What does hunger represent to Loung, and how does it differ from what it represents to her sister, Chou?
5. How would you characterize Loung's experiences in her New England school -- as a non-native English speaker, as a Cambodian, and as someone whose life experiences differ so drastically from those of her peers?
6. To what extent do the traumatic losses that Loung and Chou have experienced continue to affect them years after the war in Cambodia has ended?
7. Loung Ung writes that "living life to the fullest involves living it with your family." How do the domestic arrangements of the Cambodian families in *Lucky Child* differ from those of many families in the United States?
8. How do Chou's efforts to get an education in Cambodia differ from Loung's experiences in America?
9. How does Loung feel about returning to Cambodia as an adult, and what does that feeling imply about how much she has changed since her escape from her violent childhood?
10. Of the many aspects of Loung Ung's assimilation as a Cambodian refugee in America that she recounts, which did you find most intriguing, and why?

About the Author

Loung Ung is a national spokesperson for the Campaign for a Landmine Free World, a program of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation. She lectures extensively throughout the United States and appears regularly in the media.