

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

Harper Perennial

By Loung Ung

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### Introduction

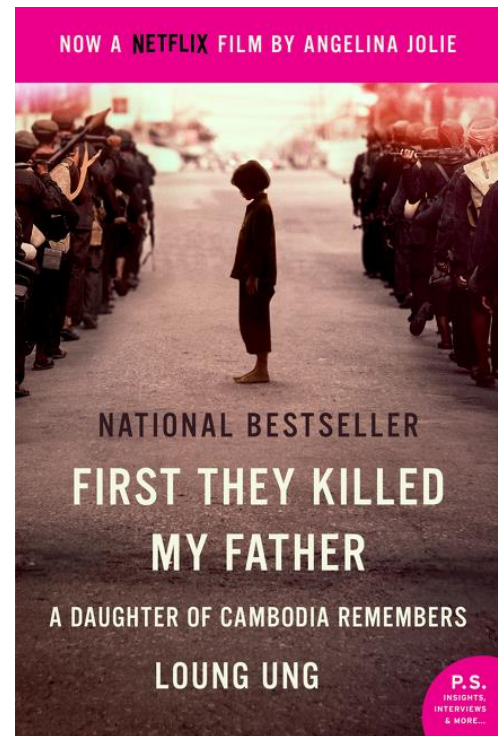
From a childhood survivor of the Cambodian genocide under the regime of Pol Pot, this is a riveting narrative of war crimes and desperate actions, the unnerving strength of a small girl and her family, and their triumph of spirit—now a Netflix film by Angelina Jolie.

Repackaged in a new tie-in edition to coincide with the Netflix film produced and directed by Angelina Jolie, a moving story of war crimes and desperate actions, the unnerving strength of a small girl and her triumphant spirit as she survived the Cambodian genocide under Pol Pot's brutal regime.

Until the age of five, Loung Ung lived in Phnom Penh, one of seven children of a high-ranking government official. She was a precocious child who loved the open city markets, fried crickets, chicken fights, and sassing her parents. While her beautiful mother worried that Loung was a troublemaker—that she stomped around like a thirsty cow—her beloved father knew Loung was a clever girl.

When Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge army stormed into Phnom Penh in April 1975, Ung's family fled their home and moved from village to village to hide their identity, their education, their former life of privilege. Eventually, the family dispersed in order to survive. Loung trained as a child soldier in a work camp for orphans, while other siblings were sent to labor camps. As the Vietnamese penetrated Cambodia, destroying the Khmer Rouge, Loung and her surviving siblings were slowly reunited.

Bolstered by the shocking bravery of one brother, the courage and sacrifices of the rest of her family—and sustained by her sister's gentle kindness amid brutality—Loung forged on to create for herself a courageous new life. Harrowing yet hopeful, insightful and compelling, this story is truly unforgettable.



## Questions for Discussion

1. What fundamental problems existed in the Khmer Rouge's plan that caused the destruction of so many lives? Were there any values that the Khmer Rouge claimed to hold that you share?
2. What impact did the narrator's child's voice have on your experience as a reader? How would you characterize the transformation that takes place in her narrative voice throughout the story?
3. How did it affect your reading of the book that you were aware of Loung's father's impending death long before she was?
4. Would you describe Loung as a feminist? How did the experiences of the Ung family members differ during the war because of gender?
5. What was your impression of the final separation, both geographic and cultural, that Loung had with her surviving family? Did you sympathize with her eventual desire to assimilate into American culture, or had you expected her to be more aggressive about pursuing her family relationships earlier on?
6. Loung saw herself as a "strong" person, as did many other people in the book, and was eventually drafted into a soldier training camp as a result. What are the qualities of a survivor? How does one reconcile compassion with a will to survive? What qualities enabled her gentle sister Chou to survive as well?
7. With armed struggle a reality of life for people all over the world both past and present, how does one draw the line as to which means are ethical and unethical for coping with it, such as the author's current campaign against the use of landmines? Are there other tools of war that you believe should be broadly banned?