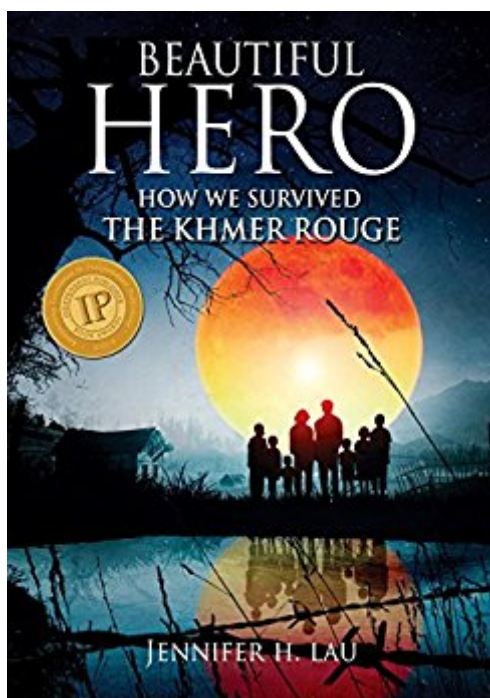


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Beautiful Hero: How We Survived The Khmer Rouge



Synopsis

PLOT SYNOPSIS: With only half a canteen of water and one baby bottle, a family of eight fought for their lives in the killing fields and land mines of Cambodia. Surrounded by unimaginable adverse forces, one strong woman would ultimately lead her entire family to survive. Beautiful Hero is an autobiographical narrative told from a daughter's perspective. The story centers around Meiyeng, the eponymous Beautiful Hero, and her innate ability to sustain everyone in her family. Meiyeng's acumen in solving problems under extreme circumstances is thought-provoking and awe-inspiring. She shepherded her entire family through starvation, diseases, slavery and massacres in war-torn Cambodia to forge a new life in America. Over two million people—a third of the country's population—fell victim to a devastating genocide in Cambodia. The rise of the Khmer Rouge posed not merely a single challenge to survival, but rather a series of nightmarish obstacles that required constant circumvention, outmaneuvering, and exceptional fortitude from those few who would survive the regime intact. The story eerily and suspensefully unravels the layers of atrocity and evil unleashed upon the people, providing a clear view of this horrific and violent time of the Cambodian revolution. The book highlights the most basic impulses of man: good vs. evil, individual vs. group, democracy vs. tyranny, and life vs. death. It is the ultimate story of love, sacrifice, survival, and redemption. It reaffirms the good in humanity by showing how one family lived and survived with grace and dignity despite being pushed to the limits. (No details were spared from the narrative, but the language of the text and all of its most graphic scenes have been filtered for all audiences.)

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Customer Reviews

Beautiful Hero is the memoir of Geng (Jennifer) in Cambodia from 1975 to 1981. It is the time of the Khmer Rouge in 1975 when Geng's parents and family are forced from their home in Sadao (where her father was a photographer and her mother was a hairdresser) to forced labour in Phnum Sress. She is five years old, and her brothers and sisters range from 6 months to 13 years. However, the memoir focuses on her mother, Meiyeng (which means 'beautiful hero') and her relentless struggle to keep her family alive. It is interesting to note what, at short notice, they take with them and what they leave behind. For example, her nine-year-old brother carried nothing but his cherished slingshot and clay balls and her father bundled up his cameras. Little did they know that it would be a death march. Not only did the family endure the brutality of the Khmer Rouge soldiers, but also malaria, diphtheria, lice, leeches, worms, snakes, malnutrition and tuberculosis. When the Khmer Rouge regime ended in 1979 due to Vietnam's victory they had no home to return to. Of her extended family of 45 people, 15 died, but there were more deaths in the years afterwards as they fled to Thailand. The writing and style is clumsy and irritating at times. However, it is the truth of her family and her country's ordeal that kept me reading. The chapters are logically sequenced and clearly dated, so the events are easy to follow. I was rewarded at the end as the chapters became more impactful and riveting. This was particularly evident in Chapter 30, Out of the Frying Pan and into the Fire (April 1979), about Uncle Rain, Big Daughter aged 13, and Sida aged 7, and their attempt to reach Thailand through the border jungle full of mines, trip wires, and concealed pits. Months later Geng's family attempt the same journey. Chapter 32, Dangrek Mountains (June 1979), is harrowing, and Chapter 33, Down the Mountains from Whence we Came (June 1979) is equally heart-wrenching. Lau adds family photographs and maps of the region. Overall it is a book well worth reading as a personal account 40 years after the horrific events in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge.

This is the story of a family surviving unimaginable horrors dodging daily efforts to destroy them while they are next to starvation and worked to death. The Khmer Rouge came to power and practiced genocide (2 million lives destroyed, 1/3 of population) in Cambodia on their own kind (intellectuals and educated first, then anybody unable to be worked to death) in the 1970's as a result of America's bombing Cambodia and destabilizing the whole region in an effort to halt communism in Vietnam. The mother of this family was "stone-hearted" according to her very young daughter (5 at the time of being forced from their home) that authored this incredible book, the mother's name translates to "Beautiful Hero" and she earned both names by her actions and superhuman energy and resourcefulness. The first half of the book describes surviving the 4 years that the Khmer Rouge held power, then a hazardous trek to Thailand, barely escaping atrocities at the hands of Thailand soldiers, then many more months trekking back through Cambodia to freedom. There are never enough books that show man's inhumanity to man, show how communism may be perfect in theory but is never fair or just when practiced by humans, and it has always been enforced by sadistic brutal power-hungry monsters. Read "From Colonialism To Communism-A Case History of North Vietnam" by Hoang Van Chi for methods of brutality used by Ho Chi Minh copying Mao's Chinese blueprint. But, the star of this story is that mother with the unquenchable spirit. I have read hundreds of works of fiction and non-fiction over the decades, none have touched me more than this story. "Angela's Ashes" (Frank McCourt), "The Girl With 7 Names" (Hyeonseo Lee), "Desert Flower" (Waris Dirie), "Infidel" (Ayaan Hirsi Ali) and "Devil At My Heels" (Louis Zamperini) are comparable as unforgettable autobiographies, impossible to stop reading, but they were personal journeys. This is about a whole family, actually a whole nation, torn apart by unspeakable deeds. A story told with brutal honesty and excitement of the best novels. I would recommend making this into a movie except I don't think the camera could do justice to the images and human emotions described on these pages, just stunning, page after page. Also, the movie would have to be 12 hours long. It should be a depressing tale of how human life is valued so little in much of the world, and it IS depressing, but at the same time is so uplifting with human spirit; maybe there is hope for humanity someday. That is the goal so many aim for, seldom achieved.

"Beautiful Hero" is the heart-wrenching true story of the author's survival as a young girl during the evil, horrific reign of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. This time of Cambodian genocide is rarely given much attention, whether in history classes or just general cultural awareness. But, like the death camps during the Holocaust, the stories of the killing fields in Cambodia need to be told. Not only were millions of lives destroyed, but the pursuit of the

“perfect ideological society” came at the expense of the severe, degrading treatment of humanity. Lau is a gifted storyteller. Her mother, the “Beautiful Hero,” leads and protects her family as they live through a supposed “utopia” of corrupt leadership, atrocities, and abuses. Lau is 5 years old when the story begins. Her innocence as a child contrasts the vast injustices taking place and creates a unique perspective that is both very painful and hopeful. As a mother of young children, I cannot fathom the hell Lau’s parents went through with their young family. I am thankful for survivors like Lau who are willing to share their harrowing experiences so I can more fully understand the depths of human depravity and the suffering of innocent souls, while appreciating the freedoms and liberties granted to us today.

An amazing story of a families and a peoples survival and death in Cambodia during the most fearful and dangerous times during the Khmer Rouge rule over the population. A easy to read well written account of a mother’s struggle and what they were all forced to endure throughout those years. A five star book I highly recommend to anyone who is interested in learning more about the torture and mass killings that took place in Cambodia right after the Vietnam war ended.

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