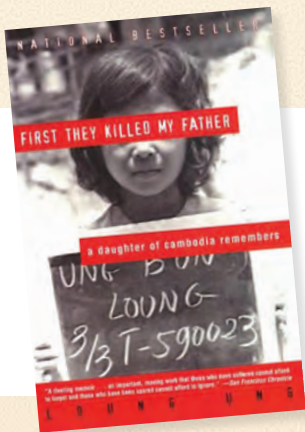




EDUCATE GIRLS

CHANGE *the* WORLD



FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER
A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers
by Loung Ung



REPLACE THIS WITH
YOUR LOGO





WELCOME

to the 10x10 book club!

We are so happy you have chosen the work of author Loung Ung! Joining the 10x10 Book Club and reading Loung's *First They Killed My Father* is a wonderful introduction to our project and to the history of Cambodia.

Loung is writing the story of 10x10's Cambodian girl for the upcoming film that is the centerpiece of our global action campaign: [10x10: Educate Girls, Change the World](#). The film shares the stories of 10 remarkable girls from 10 developing countries, with each story written by an acclaimed female author with important ties to that country. While each story is unique in theme and style, collectively they capture what it is like for girls to navigate adolescence in today's developing world.

The 10x10 film is the central pillar of a campaign that brings together global nonprofit organizations, corporations, policy leaders, and individuals like you from all over the world to support girls.

10x10 is committed to giving you tangible actions that you can take every day to educate and empower girls to break the cycle of poverty. Joining the 10x10 Book Club by reading Loung Ung's *First They Killed My Father* is a wonderful introduction to our project and to the history of Cambodia.

We've given you some tools to aid in your discussion, including historical facts on Cambodia, a biography of Loung Ung, a Q&A with the author, and suggestions for further reading. You can get involved with 10x10 through social media: join us on [Facebook](#), follow us on [Twitter](#), [Pinterest](#), and check out our [blog](#) at [10x10act.org](#)!

Visit [10x10act.org](#) to learn more about our campaign and the actions you can take through our partners, as well as updates from the field, photos of our girls, videos, and more!

Enjoy!



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HOSTING YOUR BOOK CLUB

tips and suggestions

PLANNING

- ▶ Invite participants at least three weeks in advance. Encourage them to read the whole book and come prepared with a few points or questions to share.
- ▶ Let participants (and other friends and family who are readers) know that by purchasing *First They Killed My Father* through [10x10's website](#), part of their purchase will go to support 10x10.
- ▶ For a fun spin on the food for your gathering, try the recipes in this kit ([page 21](#)).

DISCUSSION

- ▶ Choose one or two people in advance to moderate the discussion.
- ▶ Make use of the discussion questions ([page 14](#)) and country report ([page 15](#)) that are a part of this kit.
- ▶ Refer to Loung's [biography](#) and [our exclusive Q&A with the author](#).

TAKING ACTION

- ▶ Conclude the discussion by talking about 10x10's mission to educate girls around the world.
- ▶ Go online together to the [10x10 website](#) to learn how to support girls in Cambodia. The following 10x10 partners work in Cambodia: [Room to Read](#), [World Vision](#), and [A New Day Cambodia](#). Or [click here](#) to take action with one of our NGO partners working with girls throughout the developing world.

STAYING IN TOUCH

- ▶ We want to know how your book club went! Please tell us at bookclub@10x10act.org. We're also available to answer any further questions, and we'd love to know what additional material you would find helpful in this kit.

Thank You!





LOUNG UNG

biography

Born to an affluent Cambodian father and Chinese mother, Loung Ung was only 5 years old when the Khmer Rouge stormed into her native city of Phnom Penh. Four years later, in one of the bloodiest episodes of the 20th century, 1.7 million Cambodians – out of a population of seven million – had died at the hands of the infamous Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge regime. Among the genocide victims were both Loung’s parents, two sisters, and 20 other relatives.

Today, Loung has made more than 30 trips back to Cambodia. As an author, lecturer, and activist, she has dedicated 20 years to promoting equality, human rights, and justice in her native land and worldwide.

Her memoir, *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*, published by HarperCollins in 2000, was a national bestseller and recipient of the 2001 Asian/Pacific American Librarians’ Association award for “Excellence in Adult Non-fiction Literature.” The book has been published in 11 countries and translated into German, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish, French, Spanish, Italian, Cambodian, and Japanese. Loung has been the subject of numerous television programs and documentary films for NHK, ARTE, and Nightline. Her second book, *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind*, was published by HarperCollins in 2005. Both titles are widely used in high schools, colleges, and community reading programs.



In April 2012, Loung debuted the final book of her memoir trilogy, *Lulu in the Sky: A Daughter of Cambodia Finds Love, Healing, and Double Happiness*, also published by HarperCollins.

In recognition of her work, The World Economic Forum selected Loung as one of the “100 Global Youth Leaders of Tomorrow.” She has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *London Sunday Times*, *Glamour*, and more. Loung has also appeared on numerous televisions and radio shows, including *CNN International*, *Talk of the Nation*, *Weekend Edition*, *Fresh Air with Terry Gross*, and *The Today Show*.

Loung has shared her messages of activism and peace at schools, universities, and other forums throughout the United States and abroad, including Taipei American School, Singapore American School, UN Conferences on Women in Beijing, Against Racism and Discriminations in Durban, South Africa, and Child Soldiers in Kathmandu, Nepal.





with
Loung Ung

FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER
A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers

*An Interview with 10x10 Advisor/BookDragon
Terry Hong, March 2011*

For someone who has experienced hell, Loung Ung is a bright, welcoming voice filled with inviting laughter.

She's warm: "I just had dinner with my writing group last night. They're my PenGals. I just love them! I don't know what I would do without them."

She's practical: "I hate to drive! I have a 1997 beat-up old Toyota so if I get another ding on it, I don't have to worry!"



She's mischievous: "Yeah, just about when everyone is pulling out their boots and scarves, I like to share pictures of me on the beach with my friends at home who are freezing."

She's curious: "I tried to Google you, but I couldn't figure out which Terry Hong you are!"

She's goofy: "When I don't feel like cooking, and my husband doesn't feel like cooking, I just tell him, 'Hey, I moved to Ohio for love! Make me something warm and good! Pour me a glass of wine and I'll sit at the counter and entertain you while you cook for me!'"

Yes, she loves to eat, and she's not even picky: "I can eat anything, and sleep anywhere!" she declares. "I grew up eating out of the garbage cans, so nothing ever upsets my stomach!"

And there she offers a glimpse of her past. Above all else, Loung Ung is a survivor – a survivor who has managed to keep her humanity (and humor) intact in spite of enduring unspeakable atrocity. After living the first five years of her life as a privileged, pampered second-to-last daughter – one of seven children – in a large Cambodian Chinese family in Phnom Penh, she spent the next five years trapped in tortuous horror, trying to outrun destruction, war, starvation, and death. During her most formative years, she experienced both the unconditional devotion and courage of her family, and witnessed atrocious, evil acts of inhumanity.

The United States' evacuation of Vietnam in April 1975 affected not only Vietnam, but neighboring Cambodia and Laos, where the so-called Vietnam War spread. With the U.S. troops out of the way, the

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Communist Khmer Rouge stormed into Cambodia's capital (and largest city) Phnom Penh and dispersed its inhabitants; those who survived were sent to forced labor camps where many would die of starvation, disease, torture, and execution. Over the next four years, Pol Pot and his regime claimed 1.7 million lives – a quarter of Cambodia's then-population.

Half of Loung's immediate family somehow survived. Those horrific years – from ages 5 to 9 – eventually became Loung's debut memoir, *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*, originally published in 2000, which quickly became a national bestseller. Five years later, she followed that success with the critically acclaimed *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind*.

With the same courageous energy that allowed her to survive when so many did not, Loung has spent most of her adulthood enabling, championing, saving other people's lives. As an international activist, Loung was the perfect choice to inaugurate the 10x10 team of exceptional writers.

Loung traveled to Cambodia in December 2010 to meet 'her chosen girl': Sokha is a poised, bright, striking 16-year-old student who has been trained in the traditional Apsara dance form. Sokha grew up living near a city dump where she picked through garbage hoping to earn 25 or 50 cents in a day to help her family buy rice. She is one of five surviving children in a family that once had 11 children; both of her parents died before she was 10, after which she was raised by a loving uncle. Today, Sokha is wise beyond her years, pursuing an education she could never have imagined, a testament to her strength and resilience.

Loung and Sokha's bond, not surprisingly, was immediate, one that will certainly last for decades to come.

What was your initial reaction when the 10x10 team contacted you about getting involved with the project?

What a great idea! What a great concept! I was very impressed with the scope of the whole project – not just of the film, but the action plan, the outreach, the comprehensive look at girls and education in so many developing countries. I was impressed and in awe because the project seemed really big. I just knew I wanted to be a part of something that big with such a huge potential to affect change.



And your fateful trip to Cambodia last December with the 10x10 production team ... what are some of your favorite memories? Some of your not-so-favorites?

My favorite part was meeting the people involved, and working with [10x10 director] Richard Robbins and [10x10 producer] Martha Adams. I really enjoyed getting to know people of like-minded spirit, philosophy, and passion. I'm so privileged and blessed to work with people who believe in their work with such genuine passion, so that was a real joy.

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What was both fun and not as fun was how open and free my role as a writer on this project is! I had to figure out how to tell this magical, mystical, heartfelt story – which would have been so much easier if someone else could tell me what to do! But I had total freedom, so I had nothing to rebel against; I always work best when I'm being contrary, doing something I'm not supposed to!

How did you finally pick 'your girl' Sokha?

I looked at the videos [provided by Richard and Martha, created during an August 2010 initial scouting trip] of four young ladies and went first on visceral intuition, on instinct. I wanted a girl whose story was layered, who had faced adversity and triumphed, not only with the support of others, but because of her own conviction, her own power.

I just loved watching Sokha's face. All the girls had beautiful faces – but Sokha's was vulnerable, beautiful, tough all at the same time. The final detail that made me choose her was that she had been training as a dancer for two years. I have high respect for people who can communicate in all different forms. What Sokha went through in her life, the physical suffering she endured, then to be able to translate that into her body through dance was a remarkable, total transformation.

What is your relationship now with Sokha?

We are now Facebook friends! Even during the filming, I was very conscious of the fine line between being very protective, but also wanting to help her find her own voice, to give her opportunities to speak for herself. She is so smart and brilliant and always open to us.

We were surrounded by so much equipment with a boom stuck in our faces, picking up all our sounds, so I wanted to show her it was okay to say 'no' when she needed to rest. So I would show her how by modeling: 'Just turn our backs to camera!' And then we would play with the crew. We always had an aspect of play during the filming, even though she's so serious. We would make the cameraman and sound guy chase us! 'We're young, we don't have to carry anything, so we'll make them work,' I told her. We enjoyed our girl-bonding time.



This relationship will continue, I think, for a very long time. She knows I will be there; I offered myself to be available for big-sister conversations... especially about how to talk to people and how to tell them 'no.'

What was the process like writing her story?

I had to do a lot of thinking – the hardest part is she is so vibrant, it was hard to capture such a heartfelt life. And I had to tell such a story in 3,000 words or less! That was difficult!

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I had to get in touch with her voice and her spirit, at the same time try and capture her being Cambodian, part of an ancient culture, speaking an ancient language, and bring in a sense of ancient spirituality. It was a lot of fun, a lot of work, but all a good time.

In writing your own memoirs, how do you ‘remember’? Especially since you were only 5 years old when the events contained in *First They Killed My Father* unfolded ...

Memoir by definition is a collection of memories. I set out to write a story of survival for me and for my family from when I was 5 to 9. A lot of those memories I spent many years trying to forget, but I wasn't successful. Those memories were never silent for me. In translating the memories from my heart to my head, into print and then to book form took a lot of research, including seven trips to Cambodia and many interviews with my relatives. The book told my story, but what really brought it to life was incorporating many others' memories.

How have you responded to your detractors who question the accuracy of your young memory?

I have never put out there that this is a definitive book of history. I've never claimed that my book is anyone else's memory except my own and my family's. We all have different stories – the world has 6.8 billion of us living individual stories! To those who disagree with mine, I tell them to put out their own story, to please share their memories, and I hope they will. This is a memoir of what happened to my family, and to myself.



How have you dealt with the overwhelming feelings of rage, hate, and need for revenge that so haunted you throughout your brutal experiences?

I discovered two things in my healing process that worked. First I had to be introspective, to go inward. Through my writing, I took the horrors of war, the soldiers, the deaths that hovered over my head like dark, thunderous clouds, and pulled out one story, one scene at a time. In this way, I made sense of what happened to me, and faced what happened to me. Through writing, I named the things that haunted me, and reclaimed my power to heal my past.

Combined with going inward, I also had to go outward and figure out what to do with all that pain and horror. Because that doesn't go away, whether you've healed it, faced it, or suppressed it – it's there in some way or some form. So you can choose to ignore it or you can work with

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the horror. For me, I chose to get involved with activism, which started in high school, and then in college. I was out there protesting the first Gulf War, working in shelters, getting involved with campaigns against land mines and child soldiers. I took all those emotions of rage and used them to fight against injustice throughout the world.

What sort of reaction might you wish from your readers?

Reading is such an amazing individual experience. I've received letters from readers who identify with my brothers, or my father, or my sister, or myself. I hope most of all that they get a story of a family's love, hope, and faith.

The media bombards us constantly with horror and war – they never show enough about the survivors and thrivers, the mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters who really make this world very special. I hope that the readers – whoever they might connect to most – will realize how much love was really there, that we're still holding on to each other, even though many of us are not here today.

What happened to the 100-plus pages of family history and details that your second oldest brother Khouy wrote, that you reference in your dedication to *First They Killed My Father*?

I still have it. When I started writing the book, I asked my brothers and sister to put down their memories; my brother Khouy was the one who wrote the most. He's still a really tough, strong man. He's like a tiger – menacing like a tiger, ready to pounce like a tiger. The one time I saw an emotional breakdown from him was when we were talking about [our youngest sister] Geak: his eyes started to flood, they got all red, and the bottom of his lips started quivering. And then his hand instantly moved to light a cigarette, he stuck it in his mouth, and started smoking almost immediately. That was the only time in my life that I have seen emotion in him, but I also saw how quickly he suppressed it.

[Oldest brother] Meng was able to translate some of what Khouy wrote, but there were parts that Meng didn't translate. I can't read Cambodian, so I don't know what it says. Maybe someday I'll have it translated, but I don't know. I think the parts Meng didn't translate were maybe too heartbreaking or were things he didn't want others to know. Meng is the oldest son and the head of our family so we respect his decision. When I got my first publishing deal, I told my brothers and sister that they have total veto power. I told them this book was not my livelihood and if any of them said 'no,' I would tear up the contract.



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In the West, we talk often about closure and healing. But I've come to realize that there are some things we may never heal from and that's okay. I have my brother's writings in a safe now, and someday I may learn all their stories. But if I don't, that's okay, too.

How did your family react to the publication of your books?

They were really supportive. I came to the U.S. at age 10, got a political science degree, and had all these ideas of my own broadmindedness given my exposure to the world and politics. In my mind, I'd hoped that my book would, in some small way, make a small contribution to the betterment of our world. When I told my family about the book, I wanted to explain this view and speak to them about human rights, justice, and advocacy. But I didn't have to – because my family said everything before I could bring any of it up. They understood these concepts even though they had hardly left the village, didn't know much about the rest of the world.

I realized then that it doesn't matter where you come from or your level of education. When there's a wrong in the world, we humans know it with or without being told, with or without some fancy degree, with or without exposure to the Geneva Convention's ruling on genocide. We humans all know when something is wrong. I was very humbled by this experience, and since then, I rarely go into places sitting on my high horse.



How often do you go back to Cambodia? What are your visits like? Do you feel at 'home' when you return?

Yes, Cambodia does feel like home. I'm fluent in Khmer, and also speak fairly decent Chinese. Since immigrating here, I've been back 30-plus times. I go maybe twice a year now. Over the last 12 years, I usually go in November. It definitely feels like home. It helps to have a stomach of steel. I really don't get sick. Plus I can sleep anywhere. I have no barriers to break down when I get there.

Has communication with your family become easier with the internet and other means of instant connectivity?

My family doesn't have Internet but now they all have cell phones. When we first started calling in 1990, the charges were \$6 per minute for a very static connection. There was only one phone in a village of 5,000 people! We would call the one person with the one phone and then hang up quickly while that person had to run and get one of my relatives, and then we would call back in 15 minutes and hope someone would be there.

Now that they all have cell phones, we can talk any time. I just called my family to wish them happy Chinese New Year. I called my sister to tell her I learned how to cook her favorite dish. Everyone in my family, even my brother Khouy, cooks. Everyone except for me! My sister has been trying to teach me to cook, and even though I hate to cook, I learned this dish only for her. So I had to call and tell her about it.

Continued



Have more family members been able to immigrate to the U.S.? Do many more want to?

My brother Kim came to the U.S. in 1999, after being in Paris. No one else has come. The rest of my family has never visited. My sister – who just became a grandmother for the second time; she’s 42-and-a-half and she loves being a grandmother! – would like to visit, but it’s difficult.

People in the U.S. think that given the opportunity, everyone wants to move here, but my Cambodian family is doing really well there, they’re happy, they have everything they need. My sister has all her kids right there, many of her friends and other relatives nearby, she can walk anywhere she needs to, she can just go down the street for the exact spice she needs to make dinner. She has everything she wants right there. The only reason they want to visit is because they know Meng’s life and my life are here in America.



My husband and I recently opened Bar Cento, an Italian restaurant with another partner. I know what al dente means and I know what good pasta is! We also opened The Belgian Bier Markt, and our bar has one of the largest selections of Belgian beers in Cleveland. In May [2011], we will open The Market Garden Brewery, our own microbrewery. I’m loving all this. Being a businesswoman allows me to have a more flexible schedule to live the life of a writer, activist, sister, daughter, and partner.

In all these new ventures, I’ve also realized that to be an activist, I don’t have to only work as an activist all the time. I can be an activist and a restaurateur, an activist and a writer. Anyone can be an activist and something else – a student, lawyer, chef ... whatever you do in your life, you can continue to do and be an activist!

Even our restaurants are part of our activism. We use the space to host public programs, for readings and special gatherings. We use local ingredients, we support the local economy. My husband is awesome about that.

He loves food, and he’s a great businessman. He knows his numbers – he could tell you how much a spoonful of olive oil costs! Besides me, his greatest love is his Excel spreadsheets!

Continued



I know you've been working furiously on your next book ... could you share a little preview about it?

It's DONE! The working title is *Lulu in the Sky* and it should be out early this fall [published April 2012]. It's another memoir with stories about going back to Cambodia, not only as an activist but as a sister, an aunt, a daughter. I'm coming full circle from being a Chinese Cambodian which I wrote about in *First They Killed My Father*, then becoming an American which became *Lucky Child*, and now I'm writing about being an international citizen of the world. I've loved having all these roles.

Writing this book helped me learn so much about Cambodia on a spiritual and emotional level. It's also very much about my mother. *Lulu* came into being one morning when I woke up and found myself crying and cleaning the floor – something I rarely do – and something I've never done together! It took me awhile to figure out why I did that: why I was crying when I have such a great life? What I finally realized then was that in one year I was going to outlive my mother; she died when she was 39. And in my mind, I'd always thought that as long as she was alive at this age, at my age, she could exist in another place, living out her life perhaps in a parallel universe. And in this way, we could still be connected, talk to each other, be in each other's lives.

But what happens to this connection when her lifeline ends? As a daughter, I feared I would lose her all over again, so I began to dig into her story, to learn about her life not only as my mother, my father's wife, but as a woman, a fully formed human person.

The search for my mother really drove me to explore more about the role of who we are as women, who we are as part of the human race. It turned out to be a fun project that I really enjoyed. I think *Lulu* reflects this; so it's a lighter story, more hopeful, and humorous. I went into it because of pain, a delayed separation anxiety about losing my mother again. I came out of this journey full of hope and gratitude for a mother's love, the human heart, and the generosity of people to assist one another in our times of need.





DISCUSSION

questions

- ▶ How much did you know about Cambodia before you read this book? How much did your perceptions change now that you've finished?
- ▶ Before even opening the book, readers immediately know from the title that not only will Loung lose her father, but his death will be violent. How did knowing that outcome affect your reading?
- ▶ Memories are often faulty, and can vary tremendously even between people who shared the same experiences. Loung herself has been questioned about the accuracy of her young memory. Did you find Loung to be a reliable narrator? Did it matter if details were exact?
- ▶ Loung's father often praised her for her rebellious ways. Her mother couldn't understand why she was so unlike her sisters. How else did her relationship with her parents differ? Were such differences solely gender-based?
- ▶ Loung is obviously a survivor. What are some of her traits that allowed her to survive when so many others did not?
- ▶ At the book's end, Loung is chosen to accompany Meng out of Cambodia, eventually to the U.S., with the reason that only she "is still young enough to go to school, get an education, and make something of herself." Might other factors have been involved in that choice?
- ▶ Loung and her family's story continues in a second memoir, *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind*. Do you think you will read it? Why or why not?
- ▶ Parts of this book are truly horrific, especially imagining such a young child living through such terror. Certainly in times of war, the innocent suffer most. But sometimes, exposure to the worst inhumanity can cause us to become numb and inured to such atrocities. How important is it for us to read such accounts? What can we do – what should we do – with such dire information?





CAMBODIA

country report

Cambodia's full name: “Preăh Réachéa Nachâk Kâmpŭchéa,” which means “Kingdom of Cambodia”

Population: 14,805,000 (2010 United Nations estimate)

Capital and largest city: Phnom Penh

Official language: Khmer

Government: Constitutional monarchy/Parliamentary representative democracy

Currency: Riel (1 US\$ = 4,050.00 riel in March 2011)

GDP per capita: US \$1,035

Life expectancy: 62.5 years (2010 World Bank estimate)

Drives on the: Right

CAMBODIA BACKGROUND *from Room to Read*

When the Khmer Rouge seized power in April 1975, the rebels immediately abolished currency and private property and sent Cambodian city-dwellers into the countryside to work in the fields. Under the leader Pol Pot's three-year, eight-month, and 20-day reign, out of a population of 7 million, over 1.7 million Cambodians died of torture, execution, disease, exhaustion, and starvation.

The Khmer Rouge eliminated most of the educated and business class as enemies of the state, and by doing so, destroyed the economy. No intervention was made to stop the effects of the genocidal “killing fields” until Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978, ending the Khmer Rouge's rule. In 1991, the United Nations sent 26,000 peacekeepers, police, and civilians to construct a temporary government and organize elections.

GENERAL FACTS ABOUT CAMBODIA *from UNICEF*

- ▶ Around 50% of Cambodia's population of 12 million are under 16 years old.
- ▶ 45% of children – nearly 2.5 million – suffer from malnutrition and lack of medical care.
- ▶ 66% of children do not have access to clean water.
- ▶ In 2001, Cambodia had 50,000 AIDS orphans.
- ▶ By 2010, Cambodia had an estimated 142,000 AIDS orphans.



Continued





EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA *from Room to Read*

- ▶ According to the United Nations Development Program, 80% of Cambodians attend primary school; however, only 19% continue on to secondary.
- ▶ Between the ages of 10 and 13, 10% of Cambodian children are engaged in primary levels of labor. Between the ages of 14 and 17, the rate climbs to 42%. The vast majority of child workers in Asia work on family-owned farms in the rural areas, although child labor can be found in virtually every type of occupation – begging, scavenging for recyclables, baggage-carrying (porters), rickshaw driving, garment manufacture, carpet weaving, mining, commercial sex, fishing, brick-making, and construction work.
- ▶ Half of all young girls and one-third of boys work.
- ▶ For every three boys attending secondary school, only one girl attends. Some reasons for this discrepancy are that families consider a boy's education to be more economically rewarding, that over-educating a girl can be a handicap to marriage prospects, and that the likelihood of a girl's abduction while commuting to secondary school is great.
- ▶ Only 5.4% of Cambodian villages have a lower secondary school.
- ▶ Only 2% have an upper secondary school.



CAMBODIA

a historical overview

In 1965, Cambodia was a peaceful nation of seven million Buddhists under the rule of a monarch. By 1975, Cambodia had transformed into a nation of bloodshed, hunger, and horror. Over the course of a decade, the war in neighboring Vietnam had burst its borders and spread to Cambodia. Vietnamese communists used Cambodia's ports to ship in supplies while U.S. forces bombed Viet Cong hideouts in Cambodia.



Not simply a victim of Vietnam's civil war, Cambodia found itself in the midst of its own civil war: the Cambodian national army versus the communist Khmer Rouge. In April of 1975, the capital city of Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge and the group's leader, Pol Pot, instituted "Year Zero." As haunting as it sounds, this year razed everything in Cambodia down to nothing. A quarter of Cambodia's population – 1.7 million people – died under the Khmer Rouge's brutal policies.

Reminiscent of Maoist China, Pol Pot attempted to violently restructure the country as an agrarian, communal society with no religion and no music. In the process, the educated and business classes were eliminated; today there are over 20,000 mass gravesites throughout the country. For those who survived the "killing fields," many were forced to work as slaves in labor camps.

Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978, ending the Khmer Rouge's rule. However, a 13-year civil war between Vietnam and Khmer Rouge holdouts lasted through the 1980s, eroding Cambodia's cultural, economic, and social life. In 1999, Cambodia experienced its first full year of peace in over 30 years.





CAMBODIA

today

INTRODUCTION

Nearly three decades after Cambodia emerged from the violent reign of the Khmer Rouge, it remains one of the 50 poorest countries in the world. Today, Cambodia stands at a juncture in which its younger generation is beginning a search for new values and a new way of life that differ dramatically from the horrors that still haunt their parents and grandparents. On the one hand, Cambodia remains in the midst of poverty, violence, and disease. On the other, this new generation symbolizes boundless hope and opportunity.

While the current situation in Cambodia is drastically better than previous decades, a third of Cambodians still live below the poverty line, and roughly 78% live on less than \$2 a day. Though the economy has an average growth of 5.5% (2010 estimate), it is not sufficient to meet the needs of over 14 million people. Economic growth has been limited primarily to urban areas, creating a large income gap between rich and poor communities. With most of the economic growth in the cities, the remaining 75% of the population still engages in subsistence farming. In rural areas, communities still live in desperate poverty and struggle to meet even the most basic needs of food and clean water.

Decades of war also damaged Cambodia's healthcare system, which is struggling to cope with malaria, dengue fever, typhoid, diarrhea, and dehydration. The health status of Cambodia's children is rated as one of the worst in the world. Over 40% of children under 5 are malnourished. The mortality rate for children under 5 is also one of the highest in the region, with an average of 124 deaths for every 1,000 births. Poverty remains the root cause of these health problems. Meanwhile, the prevalence of HIV and AIDS has improved in the 2000s, but will continue to wreak havoc on communities until education can encourage greater prevention.



Continued



STATUS OF GIRLS

Cambodian culture sets out specific rules for both women and men. Men hold a higher status than women, both in their families and in society. A girl is taught to aspire to be the key to all her husband's accomplishments, and to support him always and to question him never. Young girls begin preparing to be a good wife and mother at an early age, taking care of younger siblings and the family house and business. Other traditions encourage women to stay inside their houses, particularly after they have reached puberty. Some argue that these strict gender roles are an important part of cultural regeneration, which is a major concern in a nation that feels as though its culture may disappear. Based on these confined general roles, there is a corresponding divergence in the perception of male and female sexuality. Cambodian culture places a high value on virginity, which is seen as a necessary condition for marriage. Meanwhile, multiple partners for men are seen to enhance masculinity, as well as physical and mental health. These cultural norms play a role in the acceptance of a thriving commercial sex industry and the prevalence of violence against women.



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence is crippling girls throughout Cambodia. And, the widespread availability of violent pornography is exacerbating the problem. CARE attempted to work with video parlors to show less violent pornography, but found it extremely difficult, as customers openly demanded hardcore pornography of the most extreme kind (ex. bestiality, killing the rape victim). The impact of these videos is evident in both the rape of young girls under the age of 10 and the rising number of police cases of young children indulging in sexual violence, “repeating what they saw.” However, the most widespread violence against women is found in the home. Domestic violence is widely accepted by both men and women, especially by husbands against wives: 58% of the population thinks that deadly violence can be acceptable in the case that a wife does not pay respect to her husband.

In addition to poverty and a lack of education, this widespread acceptance of violence against women leads thousands of girls to be trafficked within Cambodia. Traffickers use false promises of jobs and educational opportunities to recruit their victims. Girls as young as 10 are forced to work as sex slaves, domestic servants, or beggars. Cambodia has been labeled by various international organizations as a key transit and destination point in the global commercial sex trade. Many mistakenly believe that sex with virgin girls will cure HIV/AIDS, which further compounds the HIV/AIDS problem. Husbands who engage in sex with multiple external partners transmit the disease to their wives who pass it along to their children. Wives suffering from strict gender roles are restricted by threat of violence from questioning their husbands' actions or asking for contraception. Given such practices, that the level of modern contraceptive use is only 28% is disturbing, but not surprising.





CAMBODIA

menu



STARTER

Cambodian Summer Rolls

Cambodian Summer Rolls are a Cambodian snack food that consist of either pork or shrimp (or sometimes both), fresh lettuce and herbs, and rice noodles, all wrapped up together in rice paper and served cold or at room temperature.



MAIN COURSE

Elephant Walk Sweet Beef Stew

Khar Saiko Kroeung

from the award-winning Boston-area restaurant,
The Elephant Walk

Elephant Walk Sweet Beef Stew (*Khar Saiko Kroeung*) is a superb combination of flavors – a little spicy, full of coconut sweetness, and mixed with the tangy flavor of tamarind.



DESSERT

Apricot Parfait

Apricot Parfait is a surprisingly light and simple dessert; Parfait can be made with any fruit. It is similar to an ice cream and is perfect for a summer dinner party.





RECIPES

CAMBODIAN SUMMER ROLLS

Ingredients

*1 pound medium shrimp
(cleaned, deveined)*
6 ounces uncooked rice noodles
*12 round sheets rice paper
(8-inch size)*
¼ cup hoisin sauce
*3 cups thinly shredded red
leaf lettuce*
¼ cup thinly sliced fresh basil
¼ cup thinly sliced fresh mint

Dipping Sauce

⅓ cup low-sodium soy sauce
¼ cup water
2 tablespoons sugar
*2 tablespoons chopped fresh
cilantro*
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
*1 teaspoon minced
peeled fresh ginger*
*1 teaspoon Thai chili
paste with garlic*
1 garlic clove, minced



Directions

Chill shrimp until ready to use. Place rice noodles in a large bowl; cover with boiling water. Let stand 8 minutes; drain. Add cold water to a large, shallow dish to a depth of 1 inch. Place 1 rice paper sheet in water. Let stand 2 minutes or until soft. Place rice paper sheet on a flat surface. Spread 1 teaspoon hoisin sauce in the center of sheet; top with 2 to 3 shrimp, 1/4 cup lettuce, about 1/4 cup rice noodles, 1 teaspoon basil, and 1 teaspoon mint. Fold sides of sheet over filling, roll up jelly-roll fashion, and gently press seam to seal. Place roll, seam side down, on a serving platter; cover to keep from drying. Repeat procedure with remaining rice paper, hoisin sauce, shrimp, lettuce, rice noodles, basil, and mint. To prepare the dipping sauce, combine soy sauce and remaining ingredients in a small bowl; stir with a whisk.

Number of servings: 12





RECIPES

ELEPHANT WALK SWEET BEEF STEW *(Khar Saiko Kroeung)*

Ingredients

2 pounds boneless top round beef, cut into 1½-inch cubes

½ cup peeled thinly sliced ginger root (about 2 ounces)

For the paste

3 dried New Mexico chilies, soaked, seeded, and deveined

3 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped

1 large shallot, coarsely chopped

½ cup water

For the stew

5 tablespoons vegetable oil

3 tablespoons sugar

2 tablespoons fish sauce

1 tablespoon mushroom soy sauce

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon fresh ground pepper

1 cup chicken broth

1 cup green coconut juice

¼ cup tamarind juice

fresh cilantro stem, for garnish

cucumber slices



Directions

Put the beef in a medium bowl. Grind the ginger slices with a mortar and pestle, adding them a few at a time until you have extracted most of the juice, or use a mini-chop to make a wet paste.

Squeeze the juice from the fibers (you should have 1-1/2 to 2 tablespoons) and stir it into the beef; discard the ginger solids. Let the beef marinate for at least 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the paste: Blend all the ingredients in a blender until smooth, 2 to 3 minutes.

Heat the oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add the paste and cook, stirring occasionally, until the flavors are released, about 2 minutes. Stir in the beef, sugar, fish sauce, soy sauce, salt, pepper, and broth. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to low and simmer, partially covered, until the liquid is reduced by half, about 40 minutes.

Add the coconut and tamarind juices and cook for another 20 minutes. If the sauce is too thin at this point, increase the heat and reduce further; the sauce should be fairly thick. Garnish with cilantro sprigs and serve with cucumber slices and rice.

Number of servings: 4





RECIPES

APRICOT PARFAIT

Ingredients

1 pound canned apricots

11 ounces vanilla ice cream

1 ounce ground almonds

*6 ounces curd cheese
(quark or cottage cheese)*

*6 ounces raspberries
(fresh or thawed frozen)*

*1 tablespoon flaked almonds
or almond slivers*



Directions

Drain the apricots, reserving the syrup, and set aside 2 apricot halves for decoration. Place the remaining apricots in a food processor and process until smooth. Transfer the pureed apricots to a mixing bowl, together with the ice cream, ground almonds, curd cheese, and 2 tablespoons of the reserved syrup, and mix well. Divide the raspberries between 4 serving glasses, top with the apricot mixture, and decorate with the remaining chopped apricot halves and flaked almonds or almond slivers. Serve immediately.

Number of servings: 4





CAMBODIA

music playlist chart

LISTEN TO OUR CAMBODIAN PLAYLIST

Cambodia 10x10 Book Club Playlist: <http://open.spotify.com/user/joylmnop/playlist/6t1v7yRDKqUfUX5LKBPJIH>
– just download Spotify and listen for free!

SONG

ARTIST

“Baay Tlahng”

Rak-smey Khemera

“I’m Unsatisfied”

Cambodian Space Project

“Roeung Supheak Leak”

Sam-Ang Sam Ensemble

“Bam Pe (Lullaby)”

Master Yun Theara

“Pamina Devi”

Sophiline Cheam Shapiro/
Khmer Arts Ensemble

“Mou Pei Na”

Sinn Sisamouth and Ros Serey

“On Stream”

Sothea Khmer

“Khmer Ladies Virtues”

Master Kong Nay and Ouch Savy

“Ptai Slok Khmer”

Various Artists

“Sleepwalking Through
the Mekong”

Dengue Fever





MORE INFO

Loung Ung

Loung's [website](#)

Loung on [ABC Nightline](#)

Loung on [NPR](#)

Excerpt of Loung's "Given a Chance" presentation

Great six-minute clip of [Loung and the history of Cambodia](#)

HarperCollins: [Loung on *Lucky Child*](#)

Vermont Public Radio: [Lucky Child: interview with Loung](#)

Feminist.com: [Conversation with Loung](#)

PRAISE

“ I encourage everyone to read **Lucky Child**, a deeply moving and very important book. Equal to the strength of the book is the woman who wrote it. ”

– **Angelina Jolie, actor and UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador**

“ **First They Killed My Father** is a story of triumph of a child's indomitable spirit over the tyranny of the Khmer Rouge ... Despite the heartaches, I could not put the book down until I reached the end. Meeting Loung in person merely reaffirmed my admiration for her. ”

– **Queen Noor of Jordan, author and humanitarian**

“ **First They Killed My Father** left me gasping for air. Loung Ung plunges her readers into a Kafkaesque world – her childhood robbed by Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge – and forces them to experience the mass murder, starvation, and disease that claimed half her beloved family. In the end, the horror of the Cambodian genocide is matched only by the author's unbreakable spirit. ”

– **Iris Chang, author of *The Rape of Nanking***

“ **Lucky Child** is a tender, searing journey of two sisters, two worlds, two destinies. It is about the long-term consequences of war – how it changes everything, annihilates, uproots and separates families. And it is about how humans triumph, building lives wherever they land and finding their way back to each other. ”

– **Eve Ensler, activist, author, playwright of *The Vagina Monologues***





MORE INFO

articles, videos, policy briefs + more

ARTICLES ON CAMBODIA

BBC: [Cambodia's Land Mine Victims](#)

BBC: [Timeline of Cambodian History](#)

CNN: [Cambodia's Sex Industry: 50,000+ girls](#)

New York Times: [Harry Potter in Cambodia](#)

New York Times: [Human Sex Trafficking, in Cambodia and America](#)

VIDEOS ON CAMBODIA

ABC Nightline on Pol Pot (10-minute clip)

ABC News: [American Schools Supporting Cambodia Schools](#) (2.5-minute clip)

ABC News: [The Sex Trade in Cambodia: Why are parents willing to sell their kids?](#)

POLICY BRIEFS

Population Council, ["The Adolescent Experience in Cambodia"](#)

UNESCO, ["Secondary Education in Cambodia"](#)

World Vision Cambodia, ["Child Workers in the Informal Economy"](#)

Continued



FILMS



Holly (2007)

Trailer: [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

An American gambler finds true meaning in his life as he frantically searches through both the beautiful and sordid faces of Cambodia, risking everything in a desperate attempt to save the life of a prostitute named Holly, whose family sold her to a trafficker.



The Killing Fields (1984)

Trailer: [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Winner of three Academy Awards, this film tells the true story of the relationship between *New York Times* reporter Sidney Schanberg and his Cambodian assistant Dith Pran, the latter left at the mercy of the Khmer Rouge after Schanberg failed to get him safe passage.



Rice People (1994)

Trailer: [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Acclaimed Cambodian director Rithy Panh reveals the neverending struggle of Cambodia's rice farmers through the eyes of a widow who struggles to take care of her seven daughters in a culture that places little value in girls. *Rice People* was the first Cambodian film ever submitted to the Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film.



Small Voices: The Stories of Cambodia's Children (2009)

Trailer: [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

This 83-minute documentary by Heather E. Connell captures the struggles of garbage dump children in Cambodia, the first generation of children born to survivors of the Khmer Rouge.

Continued



OTHER FILMS SET IN CAMBODIA



City of Ghosts (2002)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Trailer: [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

City of Ghosts was filmed in many locations around the country, including Phnom Penh and the Bokor Hill Station.



Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Trailer: [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider was shot on location around Angkor, and its star Angelina Jolie became so enamored with the country that she adopted a Cambodian boy and spent time in the country with 10x10 author Loung Ung.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS



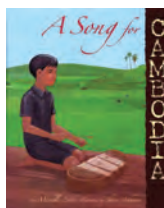
Half Spoon of Rice: A Survival Story of the Cambodian Genocide

By Icy Smith

Learn more: [BookDragon](https://www.BookDragon.com)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

This stirring picture book is based on the story a 9-year-old boy who is driven from his home, separated from his family, and ends up in a Thai refugee camp.



A Song for Cambodia

By Michelle Lord, illustrated by Shino Arihara

Learn more: [BookDragon](https://www.BookDragon.com)

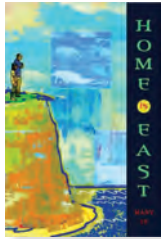
Buy it on: [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

At 8, Arn Chorn-Pond was torn from his family in 1975 as the Khmer Rouge invaded Cambodia. He survives unimaginable atrocities with only rare moments of music to soothe his suffering soul. He comes to the U.S. at 14 as an adoptee, and again turns to music to quell his nightmares. The book's afterword offers a look at Arn's courageous adult life.

Continued



MIDDLE GRADE/YOUNG ADULT



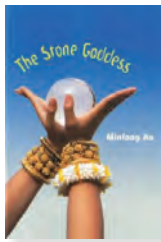
Home Is East

By Many Ly

Learn more: [BookDragon](#)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](#)

After her mother suddenly deserts the family, Amy and her father are left alone to create a new life across the country in California. A heartbreaking coming-of-age tale about growing up Cambodian American, losing a parent, losing community, and discovering new strength and independence.



The Stone Goddess

By Minfong Ho

Learn more: [BookDragon](#)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](#)

Goddess tells the story of a young dancer-in-training and her family living in Phnom Penh as the Khmer Rouge take over Cambodia. Eventually, they will travel across the oceans to America, and start once again, piecing their lives back together as a family in a strange new land.

ADULT NONFICTION



A Blessing Over Ashes: The Remarkable Odyssey of My Unlikely Brother

By Adam Fifield

Learn more: [BookDragon](#)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](#)

An intricate, remarkable memoir that weaves the story of two unlikely brothers – one American, the other a Cambodian refugee who joined the family on a “snow-blurred night, a few weeks after the Christmas of 1984.”

Continued



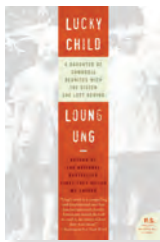


Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields

By Dith Pran

Buy it on: [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Dith Pran, the Cambodian photojournalist portrayed by Haing S. Ngor in the award-winning film, *The Killing Fields*, compiled this collection of eyewitness accounts to the genocide perpetrated by Pol Pot's regime from 1975 to 1979. All of the survivors who recount their stories here were children when the Khmer Rouge took power, and the horrific images from a time when an estimated third of the Cambodian population died of disease, starvation, and execution remain fixed in their minds to this day.



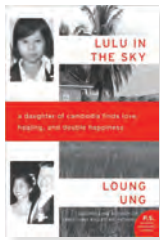
Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind

By Loung Ung

Learn more: [BookDragon](https://www.BookDragon.com)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Loung Ung continues her family journey, chronicling her adjustment to life in the U.S., and the experiences of her surviving family members in Cambodia during the ensuing warfare between Vietnamese troops and the Khmer Rouge, from 1980 to 2003.



Lulu in the Sky: A Daughter of Cambodia Finds Love, Healing, and Double Happiness

By Loung Ung

Learn more: [BookDragon](https://www.BookDragon.com)

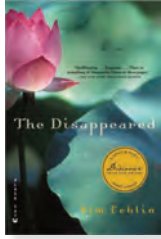
Buy it on: [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

In the third and final installment of the memoir trilogy, Loung Ung is all grown up. Attending a small liberal arts college in Vermont, she begins to navigate her life as an adult, away from the “No dating, no boys” family rules she lived with from age 13. When she meets an easy-going, tall, handsome young man from Ohio, she thinks “Kismet! ... I, a brown girl living in the whitest state in America, met the only Caucasian person on campus who had been to my part of the world.” How could she not fall in love with this happy Midwest boy who had spent a year in the Philippines teaching English in a refugee camp? Kismet indeed. But falling in love – even having that love abundantly returned – is not enough to keep Ung’s fears, nightmares, and bouts of depression away. For 10 uncertain, peripatetic years, Ung will struggle to find peace in her soul and her place amidst her traditional family both near and far. Meanwhile, she needs to discover what fulfills her in the world, and how to reconcile the inhumanity she’s witnessed with the unconditional love she’s been offered.

Continued



ADULT FICTION



The Disappeared

By Kim Echlin

Learn more: [BookDragon](#)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](#)

One Halloween night when Anne Greves is 16, she goes with older friends to a jazz club and falls in love for the first time. Serey is an older man from Cambodia, the only member of his family to escape the vicious Khmer Rouge genocide. Through the tragic love story of two lost souls, Echlin adds an urgent human dimension to the unbearable numbers of history's inhumanity.



Dragon Chica

By May-lee Chai

Learn more: [BookDragon](#)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](#)

Having watched her father die in her native Cambodia under the vicious rule of the Khmer Rouge, young Nea and her surviving family are no strangers to hardship. After struggling to make a life in Texas, the family is surprised with the miraculous news that they have relatives in Nebraska who invite them to begin a new life together ... but sometimes a shared past is not enough to keep a family together.

DRAMA



Eyes of the Heart and The Silence of God in

The Silence of God and Other Plays

By Catherine Filloux

Learn more: [BookDragon](#)

Buy it on: [amazon.com](#)

Cambodia's history of atrocity looms large in both *Eyes of the Heart* and *The Silence of God*. In the former, a newly arrived Cambodian immigrant suffering from psychosomatic blindness caused by witnessing the atrocities of the "killing fields," helps her American eye doctor as much – if not more – to "see" as they come to share their lives with each other. In the title play, an American journalist travels to Cambodia to interview Pol Pot and learns too much about her own country's complicity with the monstrous despot.





10x10: THE FILM

host a screening

Sign up to host a screening of the 10x10 film. Just send an email to screenings@10x10act.org and we'll add you to the list.

