Paper Two: First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers

**Summary**

It is April 1975 and Loung Ung is a five-year girl is who is brought up in the city Phnom Penh in the capital of Cambodia. Loung, is the daughter of a wealthy government worker and who resides in an apartment that is big enough to house nine, which includes her Pa and Ma well as her three sisters, Keav who is fourteen, Chou who is eight, and Geak who is three, and her three older brothers, Meng who is eighteen, Khouy who is sixteen, and Kim who is ten. On April 17, 1975 Loungs’ life is forever changed. Loung, her parents, and her six siblings must flee there home in order to survive the takeover of the Khmer Rouge that has invade their city. With little to no warning the Ung family is to grab anything they need that is small enough to carry along with them. Forced to leave all of their memories and belongings behind. They are to only take things such as pots, pans, and food that they can survive on for the time being. With no destination ahead the Ung family travels through the city in their truck with the little belongings they have. They are forced to stay outside in an abandoned field and wait it out until the morning time where they will walk until they arrive at their first base called Kom Baul base. Once they arrived at the camp they are to lie and leave their old life behind and pretend to be a family who farms. Eventually they were sent Krang Truop, the first of the many work camps they were to endure. After arriving in Ro Leap, Loung and her family are forced to work long miserable hours in the scorching sun and only fed twice a day with the food rations continuously reduced/ing. Due to the camps getting worse the army started recruiting boys from the camps to join. Loung’s teenaged brother, Khouy was forced to marry Laine in order to reduce the chances of being recruited into the military, but both Khouy and Meng were sent to labor camps. Loung’s sister, Keav, is also sent to Kong Cha Lat, an adolescent work camp. Shortly after Keav’s arrival at the camp she became ill and was sent to the infirmary where she was to die sad and alone. Then two soldiers showed up and took Loung’s father and after that day he never returned home. Loung’s mother forced Loung, her sister Chou, and her remaining brother Kim to run away. They were to leave for Ro Leap and part ways with one another. They were to go in a different directions, and once they arrived at a camp they were to change their name and tell the leaders that they were orphans. Leaving only herself and her daughter Geak behind. Loung and Chou arrived at a child work camp where they stayed together until Loung was sent to a different camp to be trained as a child soldier. Soon, after Loung got a day permission to head to Ma’s camp. When she arrived to Ma’s hut she found their it to be empty and a woman informed her they left with the soldiers and they were never to be seen again. In January of 1979 is when the Youns invaded the country. After Loungs camp was invaded she was fight her way out and search for sister Chou. After making the journey to Chou’s camp, Loung was all alone but wandering the streets, as she sat and waited she was surprisingly greeted by her brother, Kim and her sister Chou. As they traveled with the many others survivors they walked towards in the hopes of heading to Pursat City, where they anticipated finding their two older brothers Meng and Khouy. They walked for days and slept under the stars for several nights until they arrived at a refugee camp. That is where their first foster family took them in. When they were introduced to their new family, Loung has noticed something very familiar; it was the boy from her solider training camp. As they were let in they were to help the family with chores. Chou and Loung were to help collect firewood, cook and mend for the children and Kim was to help with fishing and hunting. One day Loung, Chou, and their new friend, Pithy set out to go into the woods and collect firewood, the girls were resting under a tree when a Youn solider approached the girls. The girls were thirsty so they asked him to show them to water, but he only wanted to show Loung. Going on her own she walked with the solider until he pointed to bushes that she was to go into and the second the she turned around he pushed her to the ground. He yells at her in Vietnamese to lie down but she refuses so he pushes her to the ground once more where he takes off his pants and rips her pants of as well in the effort of raping her. Filled with such anger and hatred she forces him off of her and escapes.

After living with the family for over a month in Refugee camp, in February the Khmer Rouge has once again invaded their village. Kim, Chou, and Loung are now relocated to be with a new family and now have experience another attack by the Khmer Rouge. After this invasion it leaves Kim, Chou and Loung stranded for months and still hoping to find their brother Meng and Khouy. In April Kim took off to the Youn camp in hopes of finding his brothers and when he returned to the camp he greeted Chou and Loung with their two older brothers. They were all reunited with one another and they were to set out to Bat Deng, their mother’s childhood hometown. After arriving in Bat Deng, Meng was to marry Eang, who was separated from her family. With the help of Eang parents, Meng only had enough to bring Loung. After they said their final goodbyes to their family they were headed for Vietnam. In October of 1979 Loung and Meng were smuggled into Vietnam and stayed with Eang and her family. In December they are moved to Long Deang to live on a houseboat with Eang and her family. In February of 1980, after a long haul across the Gulf of Thailand, they finally arrive at Lam Sing Refugee where they are to wait for a sponsor to take them to American. On June 5, 1980 Loung and Meng got the exciting news that in a week they would be arriving in America.

**Quotes and Applications of Class Materials**

“Pol Pot is sending soldiers into villages and towns and taking all children eight years and older from their homes, including base children. Depending on their size and age, children are given different jobs and training. They are put in camps to grow food, make tools, as porters, and train as soldiers on bases like ours” (Ung, 2000, p. 135).

Children that are involved in the war must be to some benefit to keep around. It does not matter the age of the child every child must pull their own weight and if that child can not pull their own weight then the must be punished. Every child must be exerted to their full potential, whether they die trying or get the job done. They have to be of some aid in fighting for the war.

In the class reading, the convention on the rights of the child in Article 3 it states that the best interests of children must be the primary concern in making decisions that may affect them. With the government in control of these children during this war, the best interest of the child is never considered; they are just for the effort in helping the Khmer Rouge fight off the Youns. These children are very young and scared and they are being forced to contribute their time and energy to benefiting someone else. By being forced into camps to grow food and make tools, their best interest is not taken into consideration. In having to grow food for the war and the Khmer Rouge these children are the ones who are doing all of the work and in return they are only receiving reduced rations of their hard work. Also, children are meant to live and innocent life, they should not be learning how to train like soldiers and how to kill off their enemy. Including learning how to shoot a rifle or how to kill someone with any form of weaponry. They should not have to defend themselves, someone should be protected their innocent lives.

“We have to make preparations for the worst. We have to send the kids away, to live somewhere else, and make them change their names. We must make them leave and go to live in orphanage camps. They must lie and tell everyone that they are orphans and don’t know who their parents are. This was, maybe, we can them safe from the soldiers and from exposing one another” (Ung, 2000, p. 102).

Loung’s father continues to insist on separating the family and someone or all of the family is assured to survive, but if they keep the family together, they are all sure to die. Even though Loung’s father does not make it to the end he still fought and insisted that separating the family will only benefit the Ung family. With having to make the decision to send their children off to be separated it actually ended up allowing the children to have a better chance of surviving.

In the class reading, Family Stress Theory in the criteria that affect the degree to which a stressor will impact a family, the second criteria is based on whether a stressor is focused on one member of the family, or all members of the family, can make a difference. In this situation the family as a whole is being affected. For example Loung’s father has to make the ultimate decision that is going to affect the entire family. He has to make the decision to either keep his family together and jeopardize his family’s life or he can make the decision to separate his family but in the end may be the best decision for everyone to survive. The life altering decision has been made for the Ung family, they must separate in order to keep fighting and keep on surviving.

**Personal Reflections**

In choosing this book, I read over the summary that was provided and to me the book summary really caught my attention. When choosing books I become fascinated with things that I don’t have much experience or knowledge in. I choose this book for a couple of different reasons, one being the time period of the events occurring. Secondly because of the summary and how much it interested me, and lastly because of where the events occurred. The information in this book has confirmed my knowledge about children in a sense that even know children are young and still growing such intense impacts on their life can live with them forever. They can go to a place in their mind and dig deep and pull out those memories and recall every single one of them. They remember everything, whether good or bad children have a sense of carrying those thoughts and memories with them for a very long time. Also, the fact that something this traumatic can happen to a child, and he or she can overcome it and in the end turn out to be a strong-willed individual. Loung Ung is now a national spokesperson for the Campaign for a program of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation.

For me if I had to assign or recommend this book to someone, it would be everyone. This book is very touching in so many ways, it gives experiences that do not happen every day and it really allows you to take a step into Loung’s life and experience a small glimpse of her life and what she went through. If I had to recommend it to a certain person or group I would say it would due to the graphic details explained in the book I would say adults or adolescents who have experienced a traumatic experience in their life. Not in the same context, but they may have experienced something similar such as rape, torture, or starvation in the way that Loung experienced it. The purpose would be to allow the reader to understand that there are others out in this world that have experienced such traumatic experiences, and they have overcame and risen above the hardships that come along with trauma. They have now become a stronger person and can go out into the world and fight for such campaigns and to really get people involved in what is going on. With their help and other who join the can make a difference in others lives and fight for others rights.