



# **Mother and the Tiger: A Memoir of the Killing Fields**

*Dana Hui Lim*

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In 1969 the small Asian nation of Cambodia was under attack: first by US bombers as the Vietnam war spilled over the border, and then by the Khmer Rouge as they began their brutal reign of terror. Under the rule of Pol Pot, ordinary city folk were driven from their homes and banished to labour camps that eventually saw two million people die. Darkness descended and “Year Zero” had begun.

Mother and the Tiger is the story of one small girl, who struggled to survive one of the most ruthless regimes in human history. Six-year-old Hui Lim was trapped by the madness around her and cast into a seemingly endless nightmare. Her family was cursed as a member of a hated ethnic minority and targeted by the murderous Khmer Rouge. To survive where so many others died, Hui had to tap an inner strength that she never knew she possessed. Despite her youth she was determined to find her scattered family, no matter the odds.

Her memoir of that brutal regime proves that even amidst the blackest depths of human depravity, hope can endure.

## **Mother and the Tiger: A Memoir of the Killing Fields Details**

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Author : Dana Hui Lim

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## From Reader Review *Mother and the Tiger: A Memoir of the Killing Fields* for online ebook

### Tarissa says

I wanted to love this book from the beginning. Immediately it starts unfolding the story of Khmer Rouge and the rough events that Cambodians had to live through in the late 1970s. Constant labor and death surround the people -- most of whom wish to escape the country.

One of the first things I noticed was the opposite of how this young girl started her life, poor and oppressed, yet as adult she wrote well (and beautifully at that), easily conveying deep and personal thoughts to paper. I was drawn in, eager to glean the information about a history I've never really studied. To learn the struggles of this girl, her people, and to find out the things they endured under an offensive regime.

**Cons?** I have to deduct the 2 stars off my review for two reasons -- both of which cause me to not be able to recommend this book to most of my friends. First off, it shares a couple of scenes that are just too "personal" for my liking, even in a raw biography. Second, there's an instance or two of language that went too far. In my mind, these elements in the book greatly deteriorated my opinion of it.

**What I liked?** This is a candid, open book. It's deep and emotional for this woman to share her heart and her story for the world to know.

Overall, the story is a well-put narrative.

*Thanks to the author and Netgalley for the free review copy & for the opportunity to express my honest opinions.*

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### Patricia Reding says

For NetGalley.

Dana Hui Lim, tells her real life story of the “Killing Fields” in *Mother and the Tiger*. Lim was just a small child when the Vietnam War spilled over the border into Cambodia, where she lived with her parents and siblings in the village of Kratie. Shortly thereafter, four young men burst into her family’s home, giving them mere minutes to collect their things. The soldiers sought no explanations, only obedience. Young Dana and her family joined the march from their village, watching as hospitals were emptied and people carried away their sick relatives. The soldiers’ message was clear: those too old or sick to keep up were shot and left on the roadside. They fired their weapons over the heads of the villagers to keep the crowd moving, literally marching many to their death. The soldiers, peasant youths of at most twelve to thirteen years of age, according to Lim, called themselves the “Khmer Rouge.” (Khmer was the term the Khmer people used to refer to Cambodia.) Year “zero” of the new Cambodia, had begun.

Following Lim through the tragedies of her early years may leave one to dub her a “survivor,” and so she is—but she is so much more. Believing that it is important for Cambodians to tell their story for the sake of history, so that those stories are not lost, Lim leaves no stone unturned. She . . .

## **Dorcas says**

Wow.

Words can't really begin to describe this book. Growing up I would hear about the Vietnam war but it seemed a long time ago and my knowledge of it sketchy. And while I distinctly remember the phrase Khmer Rouge I had no idea of what or who they were and what Cambodia experienced during this time.

What. An. Eye opener.

When the Khmer Rouge rounded up the author's village no one knew what to expect or where they were going. They ended up in a series of jungle work camps "supervised " by the cruel Khmer Rouge 'leaders ' (mere boys of 12 or 13 with AK-47s, a lust for power and no conscience.)

During the rule of the Khmer Rouge 25% of Cambodians perished in what came to be called "the killing fields". Survival came down to a matter of personal grit, determination, ingenuity, chance, and will to survive. It is amazing that of the 8 people in the author's family, 7 survived.

The story is so well written and so mindblowingly amazing that for two days I couldn't stop reading it. Every chance I got my nose was buried in my kindle. The story made me appreciate every grain of rice that passes my lips and just filled me to overflowing with compassion for my fellow neighbors in our global village. I have never been reduced to eating cockroaches, rats or tarantulas; nor have i ever had to bathe my infected eyes with urine. We in the western world have NO IDEA.....none.

I am aghast that I never knew this happened. I feel like this book should be standard literature for every highschool student.

Really.

Even though the book is primarily a "trials and tribulations" kind of read it is not without some humor. I especially enjoyed seeing Dana's first hand reactions to technology when she arrived in Australia and her reaction to Western food. Classic! Loved it!

To wrap it up, I'll leave you with a quote. It takes place after arrival in Australia when she was questioned by her classmates about 'what it was really like'....

"I told as best I could what it was like to live in Cambodia during the years of Khmer Rouge reign....I could say that real events had been far worse than any film could possibly portray but I could not make them feel it....I could not show them what it was really like, and in truth I did not really try. No one should ever have to witness such depravity. If I could somehow make them see they would have hated me forever, and they would have been right to. They would never have recovered from the experience. I never have."

Many thanks to NetGalley for my free ecopy to review

CONTENT :

SEX: one rape (not described but mentioned in passing)

VIOLENCE : moderate but not gratuitous or intended to horrify.

PROFANITY : Mild and mostly according to dictionary definition. Not oaths.

MY RATING PG 13

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## **Mel says**

*Mother and the Tiger: A Memoir of the Killing Fields* by Dana Hui Lim is a very important book with much to teach us within its spellbinding beautifully crafted pages, deeply felt, very personal account of one of the darkest episodes in post W W I I history. Before I try to talk a bit about why I admire this book so much, I want to set out briefly the historical background as sadly many or perhaps most do not know it.

In 1975, Cambodia was taken over by a group called the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pat. He had a vision of turning Cambodia into a purely agrarian society, starting over at "year zero". He ordered all residents of cities to vacate. Under armed guard, often by children, millions were forced out of their homes to work in agricultural projects. Intellectuals, ethnic Chinese, business people, those who wore glasses, those who gave the slightest resistance were executed. This continued from 1975 to 1979. As Lim explains in her narrative, it was in large part the destruction, destabilization, and atmosphere of terrible fear and suffering created by the senseless American bombing of Cambodia which created a society where this could happen. About two million, twenty five percent of population, died from disease, starvation, exposure and execution from 1975 to 1979. It ended when the Vietnamese, the traditional enemy of the Cambodians, invaded the country in 1979. One of the most exciting episodes in Lim's book was the time those in her slave labor camp realized the Khmer Rouge guards were all gone and they were free.

As I read Lim's narrative, I of course knew she had survived to write her book and was relocated in Australia. I knew the basic outlines of the history (I visited Siem Reap in 2001 to see great temple. The carved murals there are among the most amazing cultural entities I have ever seen) but as the terrible events of this story begin, I totally mesmerized by a desire to learn her story and find out how she survived.

The story begins at Lim's family home in the third largest city in Cambodia. Her family were Buddhists of Chinese heritage, fairly prosperous, lighter skinned than ethnic Cambodians. The parents, as was normal, had an arranged marriage, the husband was twenty years older. Lim was among the youngest of several children. In 1975 armed men show up at her door and tell her parents to vacate the property in a few hours, they are being moved out of the city. The pretence given is that a huge American air raid is imminent. They, along with 1000s of others were force marched to remote jungle camps where children were taken from parents (and rewarded for informing on them), boys and girls were separated. The children were told their parents were now the leaders of the Khmer Rouge. Lim straight forwardly narrates a horrific account of terrible labor in the rice fields, starvation diets (much of people's energy and thoughts center on the search for food, nothing that might be eaten is overlooked). Many nights after 12 hour plus work days there were "re-education meetings" in which children were singled out for harsh criticism for deviant thoughts and lack of dedication. Many girls were taken from the meetings never to be seen again. What Lim relays is a tale of amazing courage buttressed by a deep love of family. There is too much in the narrative to summarize and I really think this book should become a classic. One day in 1979 a girl notices that the guards are all gone. At first the people are too scared to run, thinking it is a trick and they feel anyone who leaves will be shot in the back. Then one girl gets the courage to run and soon all run. Shortly after this millions of former captives are

on the road. Lim desperately wants to find her family, she is 13 or so. Through incredible luck the family is united. The father can hardly walk and her older brother, a truly wonderful person, looks after the family. The father insists they return to their old home but when they get their another family lives there and they have no proof of ownership. Things are never again as bad as they once were but Lim and her families ordeal was far from over. Lim and her siblings had missed years of school. Lim desperately wanted an education but her parents could hardly pay for lessons. Her mother wanted her children to get out of Cambodia. One of the most joyous and very positive parts if the book lie in the account of how she got to Australia. I can only try to imagine how she felt when she landed. I could not help but feel tremendously proud of the accomplishments of Lim and her siblings.

One of my Australian Facebook contacts, a writer, recently posted a status report on Facebook about a festival event she attended. Her post said, "where do all these f\*\*\*ing immigrants come from?" I think if she read Lim's book, she would feel a deep sense of shame and mortification when she learned the answer.

Mother and the Tiger: A Memoir of the Killing Field is a tribute to to the power of the human spirit. The true wonder of Lim's marvelous book is letting us see the incredible hard times she went through without becoming hard. Her prose is simple and beautiful. Anyone who ever hated someone for their skin color, the birthplace, their language or religion should be required to read this book.

Bio of Dana Hui Kim (from publisher, Odyseeey Books)

Dana Hui Lim was born in Cambodia and was only six years old when the Pol Pot regime seized power. She survived the rule of the Khmer Rouge through a combination of good luck, and a determination to survive that she had not previously known she possessed.

Dana arrived in Australia when she was eighteen years old. She was unable to speak English and had virtually no formal education. She began high school in Year Ten, went on to complete a university degree and began a career in the Australian Public Service.

Dana wants to share her story with others to encourage them to persevere in the face of adversity. She would also like to urge her countrymen to discuss their experiences, or set down their own stories so that they are not lost forever. Her book serves as a warning to people of all nations and races, to be wary of the danger than can occur when ideology is not subjected to reason.

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## **Kathryn says**

I received this book as an ARC from the publisher through NetGalley, in exchange for an honest review.

Excellent book! I knew very little about Cambodia, Khmer Rhouge, and the killing fields. It is very well written and although it is a sad if not terrible topic, it was well written and fascinating to read. What she and her family, as well as thousands and probably millions of Cambodians, lived through is shocking. How they persevered and survived those awful years and the years following them is miraculous or as her mother would probably say is because of "karma". This book will stay with me, since the author is only a year older than myself. While, I was learning to read and write, she was doing work that most of us in the western world will never do in our lives and surviving in ways that we could not even attempt to imagine.

This book starts out a couple years before the Khmer Rhouge took power and follows the family throughout

the time they were in Cambodia, Thailand and then to a new life with freedom in Australia. The last chapter is much less detailed than the rest of the book, but it includes enough of how their life was in Australia and between that last chapter and the epilogue, one finds out how each of the family members made out in their new lives.

I definitely recommend this book. It is informative in that little is or at least was taught about this period in history, as well as this family's perseverance, "karma", and miraculous survival against the odds. I believe it said at least a quarter of the population of Cambodia was killed during that time, so for a family of (I believe) 8 or 9 to have survived with only one family member dying during that time of genocide is nothing less than a miracle, especially when one takes into account that the family was of the hated ethnic minority and also a member of the business class.

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### **Debbie says**

Thank you for letting me read your heartbreaking account of the atrocities you, your family and your country faced. I liked your writing style – I was captivated from the first sentence. Your story was moving, funny in parts, tender, brave and dangerous. You touched both my heart and my soul by your emotional candidness. You vividly portrayed how Cambodia became a mass labour camp of execution, torture, starvation, disease and overwork. My reaction to the book was one of anger, joy and tears and then I cried all the way through your interview. I couldn't stop thinking about the book – it stayed with me for days and I have since purchased several copies to give to friends to read. I cried for you and your family in your battle for survival and then later in the book, the obstacles faced by refugees - you have an inner strength that is amazing. I am particularly in awe of your mum and brother Khay for their resourcefulness in keeping your family alive and together. I think your brother's story needs to be told but understand the intensity and emotional angst it too would bring to your family – an author writing on their experiences during the holocaust said though, that the 'privilege of surviving comes with the responsibility of sharing the story of those who did not' – you were brave to open up old wounds. A haunting story.

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### **Sabrina says**

Before reading this book, I had no knowledge of this event that had occurred in Cambodia in 1969. This is a first-hand account of the horrific conditions and confusion that those who lived through it experienced. The endurance and courage of those people is astounding. I recommend this book to anyone who enjoys reading true-life memoirs with an underlying theme of resilience.

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### **Karen Beg says**

This was such a good book. It was so inspiring, but sad. It was such a well told story. I just couldn't put it down. The things this girl and her family went through were atrocious, but they kept strong and brave. This book truly makes me want to be a better person. I wholeheartedly recommend this to everyone.

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## **Liz Neale says**

This book is about her time living in the Killing Fields of Cambodia.

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