



LOUNG UNG - BIOGRAPHY

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FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER [Netflix Original Movie Trailer](#)



"For me, writing is an internal journey where you go in deep, you reflect, you try to heal your inner child and pains. As an activist, it's an outward, going wide journey, where you realize that you are connected to a much larger world. And that the story you tell isn't about you. It's about a culture, a people, a nation, a family." ~ Loung Ung

LOUNG UNG is a bestselling author, activist, and co-screenwriter of the 2017 critically acclaimed Netflix Original Movie, *First They Killed My Father*. This powerful film, based on her memoir, *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*, was produced and directed by Angelina Jolie and is currently available for streaming worldwide on Netflix. In recognition of its excellence, the movie was honored with the "Hollywood Foreign Language Film Award" at the 2017 Hollywood Film Awards.

EARLY LIFE IN CAMBODIA

Born in 1970 to a middle-class family in Phnom Penh, Loung Ung was only five years old when Khmer Rouge soldiers stormed into her city on April 17, 1975. Along with millions of other Cambodians, Loung and her family were forced out of their homes in a mass evacuation to the countryside. From 1975 to 1979, two million Cambodians – out

of a population of seven million – died at the hands of the infamous Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge regime.

Loung's memoir, *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*, details her survival in Cambodia's killing fields, one of the bloodiest episodes of the twentieth century. Under the Khmer Rouge, Loung was separated from her family, lost both her parents and two sisters, and was trained as a child soldier in a work camp where she was taught to hurt and hate. Miraculously, of her family of nine, five siblings survived. Harrowing yet hopeful, Loung's story is an unforgettable account of a family shaken and shattered, yet sustained by courage and love in the face of unspeakable brutality.

When the war ended, Loung and her older brother escaped to Thailand, where they spent five months in a refugee camp before emigrating to America as refugees. Loung's life is a testament to the power of resilience, the importance of storytelling, and the transformative potential of activism. Through her compassionate leadership and heartfelt narratives, Loung's story serves as a powerful reminder that, no matter how dark the past may be, it is possible to find healing, reclaim one's voice, and build a brighter future.

Loung now calls Cleveland, Ohio, home. When she's not writing or traveling, you can find her riding a bike in the city with her husband, Mark Priemer, or at the Ohio City establishments they co-own: Market Garden Brewery and Bright Side Restaurant.

ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

Driven by a deep-seated commitment to justice and peace, Loung began her activism work in 1993 as a Community Educator for a domestic shelter in Maine. In 1995, after attending a memorial service in Cambodia for her family, Ung was shocked and saddened to learn that 20 of her relatives had been killed, and thousands of the survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide were still being maimed, injured, and killed each year by antipersonnel landmines. Returning to America, Ung served as the spokesperson for the Campaign for a Landmine Free World from 1997-2005, a project of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which was co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize. She has since made over forty trips back to Cambodia.

LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

First They Killed My Father was a 2001 recipient of the Asian/Pacific American Librarians' Association Award for Excellence in Adult Non-fiction Literature. The book has been translated into 15 languages, including Khmer, German, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish, French, Spanish, Italian, and Japanese. Loung's second book, *Lucky Child*, chronicles her life as a refugee in America and, in alternate chapters, her sister Chou's life in Cambodia after the war. Her latest book, *Lulu in the Sky*, follows her returns to Cambodia to reunite with her family and work with survivors of the genocide and victims of landmines. Loung's books are widely taught in high schools and universities

across the U.S. and internationally, and have been selected for numerous community and all-campus One Read programs.

GLOBAL INFLUENCE AND RECOGNITIONS

Named one of the "100 Global Youth Leaders of Tomorrow" by The World Economic Forum, Ung is the subject of an hour-long documentary for the German ARTE, Japanese NHK, and U.S. NECN. She is also a contributing writer for the groundbreaking film "Girl Rising," which profiles nine girls from nine countries, including Cambodia, who are struggling against odds to achieve an education. She has been featured in the New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, Boston Globe, London Sunday Times, Biography and Ms. magazine. In addition, Ung has shared her story on The Diane Rehm Show, Talk of the Nation, Fresh Air with Terry Gross, and has appeared on ABC NEWS Nightline, CBS, NBC, CNN, and Fox News. She is a recipient of the "Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kil Medal of Honor".



SOUGHT-AFTER SPEAKER

As a distinguished speaker, Loung Ung has captivated audiences with her inspiring message of resilience, healing, and activism at prestigious institutions and events around the globe. Her powerful presentations have resonated with diverse audiences, from students and educators to corporate leaders and international organizations. Some notable venues include:

- Educational Institutions: Stanford University, Boston College, Yale University, Phillips Academy Andover, Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre
- Corporate and Professional Organizations: Cathay Pacific Airlines, U.S. Coast Guard, the Young Presidents' Organization, The Million Dollar Round Table Plenary, Linkage Inc., Crowe Chizek and Company, SONY
- Leadership and Empowerment Conferences: Omega Women's Leadership, Women's Travel Wisdom, Women in the World Summit
- International Conferences: UN Conference on Women in Beijing, UN Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, Child Soldiers Conference in Nepal

With her engaging storytelling, profound insights, and commitment to creating positive change, Loung inspires and empowers audiences worldwide, fostering resilience, promoting healing, and encouraging activism for a more peaceful and equitable world.

“Loung Ung’s presentation is mesmerizing. She paints pictures with her words and draws the audience into her story. Her positivity, strength and determination shine through, inspiring the listeners to recognize that they can make a difference with their own actions. Even days after the program, members of the audience continued to contact us to thank us for bringing this powerful speaker.”
 ~ Ilana Cone Kennedy, Chief Operating Officer, Holocaust Center for Humanity

“Loung was personable, engaging, and thoughtful, and her interactions with my students was tremendously touching and authentic. The evening presentation brought in a full house (on a weeknight!) and the audience hung on her every word – you could have heard a pin drop. I would strongly recommend a visit by Ms. Ung – the impact she had on us as a school and as individuals was deep and moving.” ~ Aya Murata Advisor to Asian and Asian American Student, Phillips Academy

SPEAKING TOPICS & DESCRIPTIONS:

First They Killed My Father: An Eyewitness Account of the Cambodian Genocide (Themes: Cambodia, Genocide, War, Children in War, Refugees)

From 1975 to 1979, 1.7 to 2 million Cambodians, a quarter of the country’s population, died under the Khmer Rouge regime. Loung Ung was only five when the soldiers stormed into her city, forcing she and her family to flee their home. By age seven, Loung was orphaned, separated from her siblings and trained as a child soldier. From an innocent chatty girl to a silent child of war to a bewildered refugee in America, Loung shows that your past does not have to predetermine your future. Through her work, writing, and activism, Loung shares how she was able to reclaim her voice, redeem herself, and help others learn of their own stories.

Transformative Storytelling: Harnessing the Healing Power of Personal Narrative (Themes: Writing, Creativity, Journaling, Health)

As a young child grappling with unspeakable pain, Loung was given a book that changed her life: Viktor Frankl’s *Man's Search for Meaning*. Inspired by Mr. Frankl’s work on logotherapy, Loung began journaling her innermost thoughts and feelings in her diary. Years later, those pages evolved into her critically acclaimed memoir, *First They Killed My Father*. Through the process of writing, Loung discovered the profound healing that comes from rewriting one’s narrative – from viewing oneself as a victim to embracing the role of a survivor and advocate for peace. In this lecture, Loung shares the therapeutic benefits of storytelling to help find your voice, cultivate resilience, and understand how rewriting your narrative can profoundly change your life.

Ordinary Citizens, Extraordinary Leader: Creating Change Through Activism and Volunteerism (Themes: Activism, Volunteerism, Leadership)

Peace is not merely a wish or a dream – it is an ongoing commitment and a life-time of deliberate actions. Drawing from over three decades of experience as a student activist, her work on campaigns to end violence against women, landmines, and child soldiers,

and writing, Loung Ung offers inspiring insights and practical strategies on how each of us can become catalysts for change in our communities and beyond. Whether you're a seasoned activist or new to the world of volunteerism, this lecture provides a unique opportunity to gain valuable perspectives and tools for becoming an extraordinary leader in your own life and community.

Resilience in Action: Strategies for Thriving Amidst Challenges

In this empowering presentation, Loung Ung shares her journey from surviving the genocide in Cambodia to becoming a globally recognized author and activist advocating for peace and justice. Through compelling storytelling and practical strategies, she inspires audiences to embrace their inner strength, cultivate resilience, and navigate life's challenges with courage, hope, and determination to build a life of purpose and meaning. This engaging and uplifting talk offers invaluable lessons on resilience that resonate with individuals and communities striving to thrive amidst adversity and create positive change in the world.

From Memoir to Movie: The Making of 'First They Killed My Father'

In this cinematic presentation, Loung shares the captivating behind-the-scenes look of the Netflix Original movie, directed by humanitarian-actor-director Angelina Jolie and co-written by Ms. Jolie and Loung Ung. This journey began when Angelina Jolie called Loung Ung with a proposal to turn her book into a film. This initiated Loung's three-year adventure of learning to write a screenplay and producing a big-budget movie in Cambodia featuring Khmer actors and 20,000 extras. With exclusive film clips and photographs, this engaging discussion and Q&A session offer a unique opportunity to delve into the heart of storytelling, from page to screen.

Lucky Child: A Refugee's Story of Resilience and Renewal

(Themes: Refugees, Trauma, Activism, Volunteerism)

At ten, Loung, dubbed 'the lucky child,' was given a lifeline when her adult brother, Meng, and his wife, Eang, chose her to emigrate from Cambodia to America as refugees and start their second life. In America, Loung overcame trauma, displacement, racism, and cultural and language barriers to build a successful new life in America.

Throughout her journey, Loung discovered that her heroes were not the well-known leaders of the world, but the ordinary people who performed extraordinary acts of kindness and generosity on a daily basis. Their compassion and humanity restored her faith in the goodness of people and taught her the true meaning of resilience and hope.

Memoirs Unlocked: Six Keys to Crafting Your Compelling Memoir

(Themes: Writing, Creativity, Art, Health)

With three powerful books that chronicle her own life, Loung is a seasoned storyteller with invaluable insights to share. In "Memoirs Unlocked," she will guide you through six key creative writing tools designed to enrich your narrative. Discover how to paint vivid scenes, infuse your story with authenticity, and captivate your readers with a tale that resonates on a deep emotional level. This workshop is a must-attend for anyone

passionate about harnessing the power of words to promote healing, and express creativity. Whether you're a novice writer or a seasoned wordsmith, Loung's expertise will inspire and empower you to bring your memoir to life with authenticity and grace.

"Loung was brilliant! From our standpoint, the visit was perfect in every way. She is a riveting speaker, and the visits to individual classes added a great deal of depth." ~ *Richard A. Hartzell, PhD, Principal of Upper School Taipei American School*

"Outstanding! She connected with students, staff and parents. Her sense of social justice and humanity have touched the minds, hearts and souls of our community. Although she is now gone, her influence will continue to resonate for many people. On a pragmatic level, her experience as a survivor and a humanitarian have provided us with insights and shifts that will shape the way we think about and support service learning for our students in our school." ~ *Mark R. Boyer, Assistant Superintendent for Learning, Singapore American School*

"Loung Ung's presentation was truly inspirational. Her ability and disarming use of humor took the audience with her, no doubt surprised to find themselves sharing laughter along the way. Loung's life-affirming energy represents a triumph of the human spirit over adversity." ~ *John Watson Programme Director Amnesty International*

"Loung delivered a powerful, moving and yet very human story. People watched in total rapt attention, many with tears in their eyes. To this day many still talk about the event and the impact she made. Loung is not just an inspiring and powerful speaker; she also comes across as so totally genuine. She manages to mix emotion and a compelling story with great enthusiasm. Her infectious charm and sense of fun is so much part of the experience. Once you have heard Loung speak, you are captivated, drawn in and left feeling good and wanting to do something positive with your life." ~ *Tom Wright, General Manager, India, Middle East, Africa & Pakistan Cathay Pacific*

"Loung Ung taught me how to view life in a different way. I realize that I am fortunate to be living the life I live. Loung's presentation inspired me and influenced me to change my way of existing." ~ *Brittany, student*

"Speaking before our entire school community, she had the undivided attention of the room throughout her remarks on justice, compassion, strength and making the world a stronger place. In small groups and classroom visits, she brought that same intensity to each conversation, earning the respect and admiration of all she encountered. Truly one of the most memorable author visits we've ever had." ~ *Cris Harris Writing Center Director, Hawken School*

"Words fail to explain the amount of courage, resilience, and passion Ms. Loung has inspired in us. Her experience serves as a call that we and the community as a whole must answer." ~ *Matthew Kwok, student, Case Western Reserve University*