

Tomorrow I'm Dead: A Memoir

Bun Yom

iUniverse (Apr 28, 2015)
Softcover \$16.95 (200pp)
978-1-4917-5850-2

The incredible true story of a young survivor of the Killing Fields who became a leader to those around him.

A gripping firsthand account of survival against all odds, Bun Yom's *Tomorrow I'm Dead* is the story of the courage, strength, and compassion of a young boy caught up in the insanity of war.

After the withdrawal of American troops from their country in 1975, the Cambodian people were ravaged by Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. Fourteen-year-old Yom and his family, along with many thousands of other Cambodians, were forced from their homes at gunpoint and driven into the steaming jungle to be killed outright or made to endure unimaginably horrific conditions, deprivation, and degradation as slaves in Pol Pot's infamous "Killing Fields."

The author provides a rare and intimate glimpse into the fate of some of the more than two million people—one-fifth of Cambodia's population—who lost their lives under Pol Pot's regime. He details how he and other enslaved workers, many mere children, were made to live in open fields and labor long hours, starved and forced to drink water contaminated by rotting human bodies, and how they suffered at seeing their friends killed, often just for being ill or exhausted. Yom's harrowing escape from his captors, his rise to leadership in the Cambodian Freedom Army, his work to liberate thousands of his countrymen, his time in two refugee camps, and his immigration and struggle to build a new life for himself and his family in America all illustrate the power and resilience of the human spirit.

Graphic descriptions of the physical and emotional tortures the author suffered in captivity are tempered by his irrepressible wit. Gifted with the ability to use everything that did not kill him to make him stronger, he became a leader to those around him. Despite what he endured, Yom never lost his sense of compassion. Believing his family to be dead and that he had nothing to live for, he adopted as his motto the phrase, "Tomorrow I'm dead." Rather than symbolizing a withdrawal into hopelessness and despair, the motto reminded him of the nearness of death—a portal to freedom—and inspired him to become a fearless fighter for the liberation of his people.

Yom's first book is well written in a style that is matter-of-fact and uncomplicated; moreover, it demonstrates a good grasp of English grammar and syntax. The cover art, with its photo of the author on his last day as a Cambodian freedom fighter, illustrates the message that even a boy can stand against evil and triumph. While the interior photos are of interest, many of them are small, grainy, and dark. The layout and font are easy on the eye and the book is well organized overall. The back cover matter is informative and compelling.

The author dedicated his book "to every human being," and offers this simple teaching: "Be peaceful and kind to one another, always, no matter the circumstance." Having lived by this wisdom, he shows us how it is possible to transform the most hellish experiences into something that uplifts and inspires.

KRISTINE MORRIS (June 24, 2015)

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