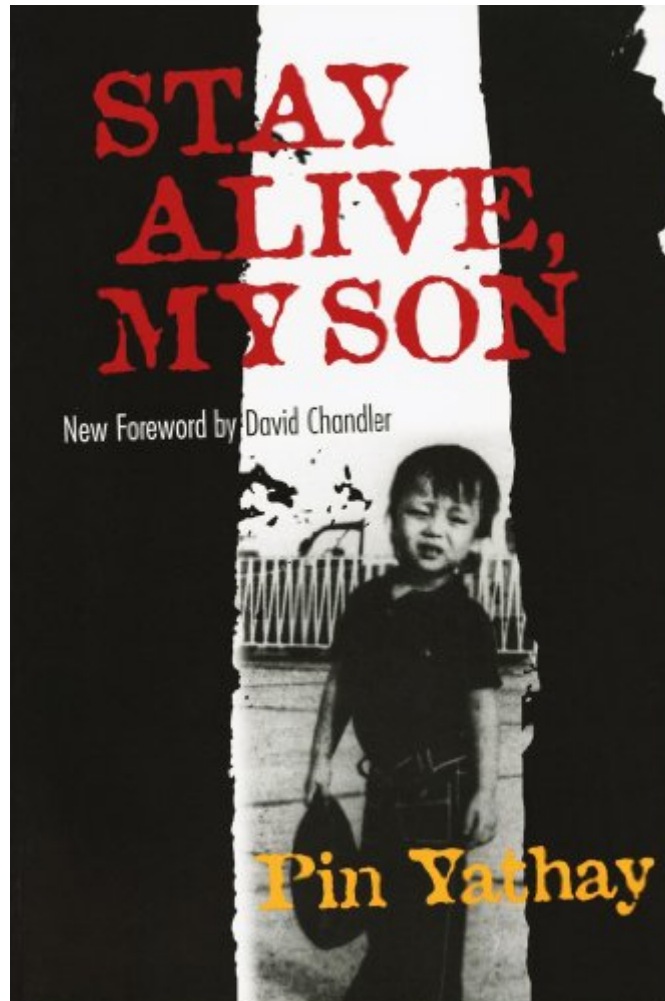




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Stay Alive, My Son



Synopsis

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh to open a new and appalling chapter in the story of the twentieth century. On that day, Pin Yathay was a qualified engineer in the Ministry of Public Works. Successful and highly educated, he had been critical of the corrupt Lon Nol regime and hoped that the Khmer Rouge would be the patriotic saviors of Cambodia. In *Stay Alive, My Son*, Pin Yathay provides an unforgettable testament of the horror that ensued and a gripping account of personal courage, sacrifice and survival. Documenting the 27 months from the arrival of the Khmer Rouge in Phnom Penh to his escape into Thailand, Pin Yathay is a powerful and haunting memoir of Cambodia's killing fields. With seventeen members of his family, Pin Yathay were evacuated by the Khmer Rouge from Phnom Penh, taking with them whatever they might need for the three days before they would be allowed to return to their home. Instead, they were moved on from camp to camp, their possessions confiscated or abandoned. As days became weeks and weeks became months, they became the "New People," displaced urban dwellers compelled to live and work as peasants, their days were filled with forced manual labor and their survival dependent on ever more meager communal rations. The body count mounted, first as malnutrition bred rampant disease and then as the Khmer Rouge singled out the dissidents for sudden death in the darkness. Eventually, Pin Yathay's family was reduced to just himself, his wife, and their one remaining son, Nawath. Wracked with pain and disease, robbed of all they had owned, living on the very edge of dying, they faced a future of escalating horror. With Nawath too ill to travel, Pin Yathay and his wife, Any, had to make the heart-breaking decision whether to leave him to the care of a Cambodian hospital in order to make a desperate break for freedom. "Stay alive, my son," he tells Nawath before embarking on a nightmarish escape to the Thai border. First published in 1987, the Cornell edition of *Stay Alive, My Son* includes an updated preface and epilogue by Pin Yathay and a new foreword by David Chandler, a world-renowned historian of Cambodia, who attests to the continuing value and urgency of Pin Yathay's message.

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Customer Reviews

Very sad, perspective publication, good reading, reading it for Advanced Literature High School class.

It has actually been years since I read this book but I cannot forget it. I was a student during the time of the Khmer Rouge overthrow of Cambodia and had little time for current events. I was only vaguely aware of the effects of the horrific events in southeast Asia at that time. Only later did I learn what became of the people in Vietnam and Cambodia when the US pulled out of the area. I read this book perhaps 20 years later, and it prompted me to do further research. This book is written in a simple style, easy to understand, heartbreaking in its reality. I could not put it down. Coupled with a later reading of "The Killing Fields", and documentaries like "The Last Days in Vietnam" and "Cambodia: Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge" the pieces of history have fallen in place and I have a better sense of the madness of that time and the attitudes that led to the slaughter of millions of people. It amazes me that with such excellent first person historical documentation of nations gone crazy, we still have not answered the moral and political questions of the 50s and 60s, and there are still those today who would fall into the misguided thinking traps that led up to these humanitarian disasters. Should be required reading for high school/college students. Anyone with a curiosity about the time will find this an indispensable work to understand the struggles faced by developing countries falling prey to charismatic despots and the regimes that back them. An utterly staggering work.

An extremely well written account of the terrible tragedy that befell the Cambodian people during the years the Khmer Rouge ruled over the country. A heart wrenching story of a man who lost everything, but still somehow managed to find the will to survive...a story no doubt familiar to every single survivor who came through that terrible period. Having read many books on this subject previously, I find Pin Yathay's account provides an incredible insight into the events leading up to the Khmer Rouge taking power and the mindset of the innocent civilians at that time who were deceived into thinking this change of government would bring about a peaceful new era of prosperity and hope, after years of corruption and war. I pray Pin Yathay may one day find his remaining missing son and eventually be reunited peacefully with his family once again..

Stay Alive, My Son is an emotional, yet profound, true account of the author's struggle to stay alive during the Khmer Rouge rule of Cambodia. The novel commences in April 1975 with the fall of Phnom Penh, when Khmer Rouge guerrillas moved into Phnom Penh. In three years, more than two million people died and an ancient culture was stripped bare. The author, Pin Yathay, has a wife and three sons. An engineer with a good education, he was reduced to a labourer in the fields and rice paddies of his district, to join the peasants, the 'Ancients'. Moving as the Khmer Rouge dictated, he became one of the 'New People,' a deported person in the refugee camps of Cambodia--"a lower and despised order ... no one complained. We were all paralysed by fear of the Khmer Rouge ..."

Banished from households was disharmony. Husbands were forbidden to beat wives. Insults were barred. Children were not meant to be scolded. But "tension emerged in other ways" as children were encouraged by the Khmer Rouge to denounce parents whose behaviour fell short of the ideal. "You had to be made of stone, to stay deaf and mute, and blindly obey orders if you wanted to survive." "It was not long before the dying started. Even in the first week ..." First his youngest son, two years old, dies of fever. A month after the fall of Phnom Penh his oldest son, 9 years old, dies after fainting at work, his leg infected and infested. He plans his escape to Thailand. Simple in his diction, but powerful in his story-telling, Yathay tells of life, struggle, loss and death, but also of freedom.

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