



Tangled Threads: A Hmong Girl's Story

By Pegi Deitz Shea

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For the Hmong people living in overcrowded refugee camps in Thailand, America is a dream: the land of peace and plenty. In 1995, ten years after their arrival at the camp, thirteen-year-old Mai Yang and her grandmother are about to experience that dream. In America, they will be reunited with their only remaining relatives, Mai's uncle and his family. They will discover the privileges of their new life: medical care, abundant food, and an apartment all their own. But Mai will also feel the pressures of life as a teenager. Her cousins, now known as Heather and Lisa, try to help Mai look less like a refugee, but following them means disobeying Grandma and Uncle. From showers and smoke alarms to shopping, dating, and her family's new religion, Mai finds life in America complicated and confusing. Ultimately, she will have to reconcile the old ways with the new, and decide for herself the kind of woman she wants to be. This archetypal immigrant story introduces readers to the fascinating Hmong culture and offers a unique outsider's perspective on our own.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 6-9-Mai, 13, is practicing her English in eager anticipation of leaving the crowded Thai refugee camp where she and her grandmother have lived for 10 years. Her parents were killed in Laos and her grandmother carried her across the river to Thailand. As their departure for America nears, Grandma is withdrawn and always stitching away at her pa'ndau (story cloth). Mai yearns for the life her cousins write about, a land of skyscrapers, Coke, and plenty of food, but her arrival in Rhode Island brings mixed reactions. Her cousins have become rebellious, Americanized teens. Her aunt and uncle half-heartedly embrace Hmong tradition while feeling indebted to Christian charity. Grandma's confusion over the day-to-day navigation through social-service agencies, stores, even church bazaars, makes her increasingly reliant on her granddaughter. Mai's efforts to respect her beloved grandmother and all she represents are at odds with the allure of new friends and an exciting lifestyle. This bittersweet story balances social and intellectual pursuits against the strained relations of a family tapping roots into a new homeland, and it shows the emotions behind weighing cultural affiliations against the sway of progress and prosperity. Adding to the growing ranks of contemporary novels about today's diverse immigration experiences, it would work well in conjunction with Fran Buss's *Journey of the Sparrows* (Dell, 1993), Linda Crew's *Children of the River* (Laurel-Leaf, 1991), and An Na's *A Step from Heaven* (Front St., 2001). A good choice for classes studying refugees, multicultural diversity, immigration, Hmong Americans, Laos, and the Vietnam War.

Alison Follos, North Country School, Lake Placid, NY

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 6-8. Thirteen-year-old Laotian Mai Yang and her grandmother have survived the war that killed Mai's parents and 10 years in a Thai camp for Hmong refugees, so Mai is excited when immigration to the U.S. appears imminent. They fly to Providence, R.I., to join a family who emigrated five years earlier. Excited and confused by her experiences with American culture, Mai worries about her cousin Heather who challenges her father's authority. With the help of a compassionate teacher and sympathetic new friends, Mai becomes comfortable with American ways even as her grandmother isolates herself and fears assimilation. As seen through Mai's eyes, the wry observations of American habits are amusing and insightful. Her explanations of Hmong culture fit so naturally into the narrative, most readers will not need the appended glossary and information. Respectful and dutiful, yet resilient and independent, Mai wrestles with peer pressure and family expectations in a story that will resonate with immigrant students and enlighten others.

Linda Perkins

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Review

"deftly traces the physical and emotional journey of a 13-year-old orphan...author creates a delicate, credible balance between sorrow and joy" **PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, STARRED REVIEW** Publishers Weekly, Starred

"Shea's text successfully portrays the turmoil, excitement, and heartbreak that come with repatriating...satisfying conclusion." **KIRKUS REVIEWS** Kirkus Reviews

"Mai wrestles with peer pressure and family expectations in a story that will resonate with immigrant students and enlighten others." **BOOKLIST** Booklist, ALA

"bittersweet story...of a family tapping roots into a new homeland...shows the emotions behind...today's diverse immigration experiences" SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL School Library Journal

"Shea captures the complicated emotions of a thirteen-year-old girl in the midst of enormous personal changes....multiple curricular possibilities" THE BULLETIN OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

"engaging...a delightful protagonist...adeptly uses...first-person narrative...important because it is the first YA novel...with a Hmong protagonist" VOYA (VOICE OF YOUTH ADVOCATES) VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Manuel Coury:

Often the book Tangled Threads: A Hmong Girl's Story has a lot of knowledge on it. So when you read this book you can get a lot of help. The book was authored by the very famous author. McDougal makes some research just before write this book. This kind of book very easy to read you will get the point easily after perusing this book.

Delores Moretti:

Precisely why? Because this Tangled Threads: A Hmong Girl's Story is an unordinary book that the inside of the book waiting for you to snap the item but latter it will zap you with the secret the item inside. Reading this book adjacent to it was fantastic author who else write the book in such incredible way makes the content within easier to understand, entertaining technique but still convey the meaning entirely. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this ever again or you going to regret it. This excellent book will give you a lot of rewards than the other book get such as help improving your expertise and your critical thinking method. So , still want to hold off having that book? If I were you I will go to the guide store hurriedly.

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