



Bamboo Among the Oaks

Mai Neng Moua

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Of an estimated twelve million ethnic Hmong in the world, more than 160,000 live in the United States today, most of them refugees of the Vietnam War and the civil war in Laos. Their numbers make them one of the largest recent immigrant groups in our nation. Today, significant Hmong populations can be found in California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Michigan, and Colorado, and St. Paul boasts the largest concentration of Hmong residents of any city in the world. In this groundbreaking anthology, first- and second-generation Hmong Americans--the first to write creatively in English--share their perspectives on being Hmong in America. In stories, poetry, essays, and drama, these writers address the common challenges of immigrants adapting to a new homeland: preserving ethnic identity and traditions, assimilating to and battling with the dominant culture, negotiating generational conflicts exacerbated by the clash of cultures, and developing new identities in multiracial America. Many pieces examine Hmong history and culture and the authors' experiences as Americans. Others comment on issues significant to the community: the role of women in a traditionally patriarchal culture, the effects of violence and abuse, the stories of Hmong military action in Laos during the Vietnam War. These writers don't pretend to provide a single story of the Hmong; instead, a multitude of voices emerge, some wrapped up in the past, others looking toward the future, where the notion of "Hmong American" continues to evolve. In her introduction, editor Mai Neng Moua describes her bewilderment when she realized that anthologies of Asian American literature rarely contained even one selection by a Hmong American.

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Randy Champion:

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