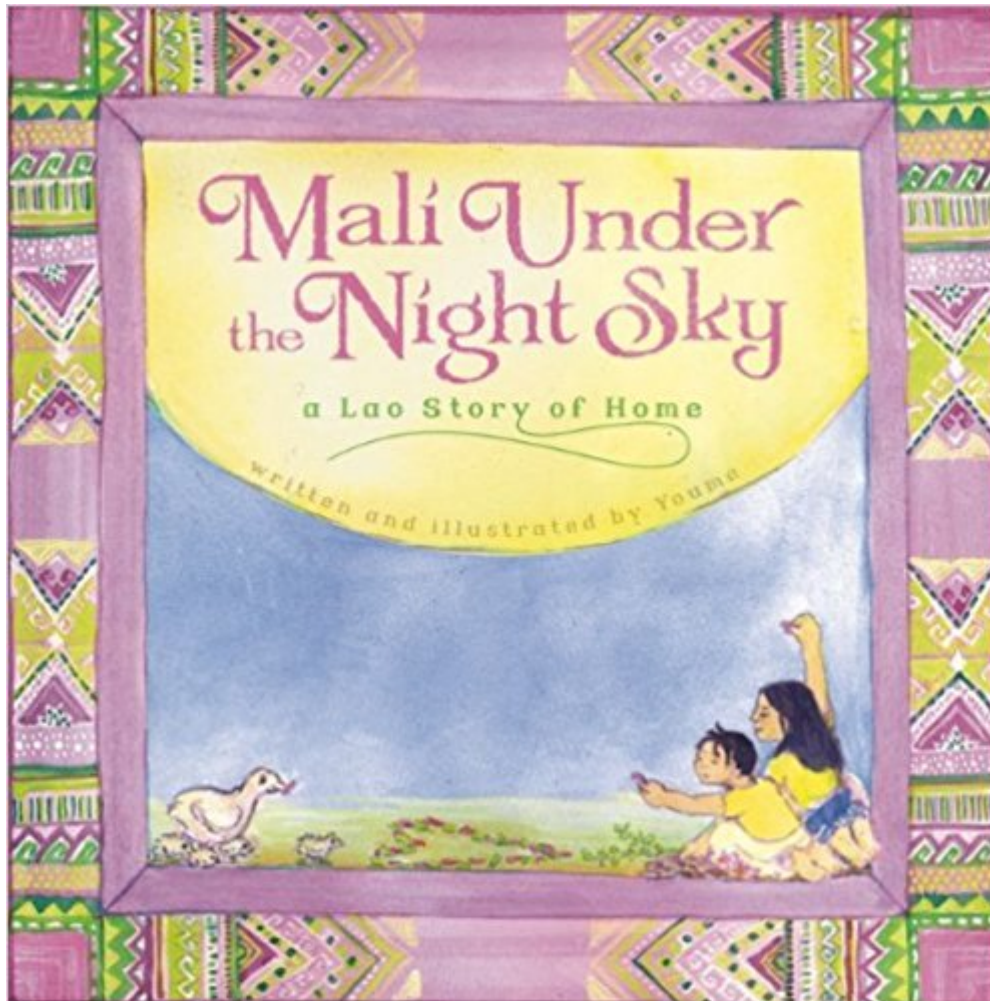




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# Mali Under The Night Sky: A Lao Story Of Home



## Synopsis

Mali Under the Night Sky, a 2011 Skipping Stones honor book, is the true story of Laotian American artist Malichansouk Kouanchao, whose family was forced by civil war to flee Laos when she was five. Before the war began, Mali lived an idyllic life in a community where she felt safe and was much loved. But the coming war caused her family to flee to another country and a life that was less than ideal. What did she carry with her? She carried her memories. And they in turn carried her across the world, sharing where she is from and all that she loves with the people she meets. Terry Hong of the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program *BOOK DRAGON*, giving context to Youme's remarkable book, said, "Today, December 7, marks the 69th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, a date which will live in infamy, Seven decades later, infamy lives on, stealing childhoods, families, homes, lives. Now as another year comes to a close, we pray for peace again and again again and again [Mali Under the Night Sky] is another hopeful, urgent prayer. And the Midwest Book Review calls it "a soul-stirring picturebook about the difficulties faced by wartime refugees, and deserves the highest recommendation. Youme Landowne is an energetic and joyful painter, book artist, and activist who thrives in the context of public art. Youme has lived in and learned from the United States, Kenya, Japan, Laos, Haiti, and Cuba. In all of these places, she has worked with communities and individuals to make art that honors personal and cultural wisdom, creating community murals, illustrating tiny books, and teaching poetry in schools."

## Book Information

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Best Sellers Rank: #840,414 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #86 in *Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Emigrants & Immigrants* #91 in *Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > Modern* #180 in *Books > Children's Books > Growing Up &*

## Customer Reviews

Gr 1-4—This story of a life disrupted by war is told in a simple, straightforward manner, from a child's point of view. Mali loves her country: the markets, rice fields, bamboo forests, and the tradition of tying strings around the wrists of loved ones to show that their hearts are together. This element ties together the two halves of the book: the tradition is introduced in the happy setting of weddings and family gatherings, but then Mali receives strings before her family is put in jail, and they become an important symbol —“that tied her to her beautiful home.” While in prison, the child raises the spirits of her fellow captives with memories of home. Politics are not addressed, and there is no good/evil dichotomy. The focus remains tightly on Mali's experiences and feelings, keeping it accessible to young readers. An endnote introduces the real Mali, Malichansouk Kouanchao, an artist upon whose experiences the book is based, and an additional endnote by another Laotian artist provides historical context. Laotian vocabulary is incorporated in a natural way, and the illustrations include Laotian script. The watercolor illustrations, while naive in style, convey a real sense of place. Intricate borders surround every spread, and the bright/dark color schemes reflect the emotions of each scene. The book will be best appreciated by children when read with an adult to help them process the troubling elements of Mali's life. While not a fun story, it is an important well-told one.—Heidi Estrin, Feldman Children's Library at Congregation B'nai Israel, Boca Raton, FL Â (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

With a spare first-person narrative and affecting watercolor-wash illustrations, this biography by the author of *SāfĀlavi*, *That Is Life: A Haitian Story of Hope* (2004) tells of a family's escape from civil war in Laos. The opening images celebrate family roots with pictures of a young girl, Mali, playing safely in a forest, in her community, and at home. A glowing spread framed with traditional patterns shows the custom of tying strings around loved ones's wrists at festivals and partings to celebrate always being together. In abrupt contrast, the images move to scenes of Mali alone on a tense, empty street. War is near, and the family flees at night across a wide river to —“another country,” where they are arrested —“for not having a home.” A view of the family behind bars in a crowded jail is juxtaposed with a double-page close-up of the

strings around Mali's wrist as she remembers her rich connections. The small child's viewpoint will move young readers, and a final photo shows the real Mali, an artist and activist, today. Preschool-Grade 3. --Hazel Rochman

Such a great way to help others understand different cultures! I bought for my cousin to explain to his classmates what he did as apart of my husband and I's wedding. He loved it!!

Beautiful illustrations. The story is nice, but does seem a bit incomplete and abrupt at the end. Minus one star for the ending.

Always a pleasure to find books that are suitable for a church library and that are geared toward children and/or youth.

Great book!

Super cute book. My daughter loves it.

I choose to take this book out of the library for my 7 year old daughter on the basis of the reviews from School Library Journal, Booklist, and Midwest Book Review. The images are evocative and the language is simple and direct. It handles a troubling topic well, raising questions without being too disturbing or frightening for young ones. However, as my daughter noted, "it doesn't end." The book just comes to an abrupt stop when Mali tells stories of home to her fellow refugees. I had hoped that the two endnotes would provide more context and closure. Instead they are interesting tidbits of autobiography from the point of view character, Malichansouk Kouanchao, and a friend of hers, Thavisouk Phrasavath. This good book would have been excellent if the story arc had been completed.

Mali Under the Night Sky: A Lao Story of Home is not an ordinary picturebook - it tells the true story of a little girl named Mali, who had to journey with her family from Laos to Thailand when she was five to escape the deadly toll of a war without borders. When they finally come to a different country, they are imprisoned. As heartrending as the story is, it also offers a glimmer of hope in the love people have for their homeland and each other. Mali Under the Night Sky is a soul-stirring picturebook about the difficulties faced by wartime refugees, and deserves the highest

recommendation.

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