

March 2009



The Boston Globe

Shelf Life

By Jan Gardner

September 21, 2008

Pick of the week

Kat Goddard of the Bookloft, in Great Barrington, recommends "Weeping Under This Same Moon," by Jana Laiz (Crow Flies): "This strong debut novel is based on a true story of two teenage girls - one a Vietnamese refugee, the other an unhappy but passionate American high school student. When their paths cross, it changes both of their lives. This story speaks to the teenagers of today about the power of love and the spirit of volunteerism."

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Berkshire Living

Scenearound: Bookmarks -

Although yet unproven, it seems as if there are more writers per square mile in our region than in any other place in the country.

Three recent books provide more evidence to this ongoing claim...

... and finally Weeping Under This Same Moon by Southern Berkshire author Jana Laiz has made a quiet splash in recent months as well. The story chronicles the eventual collision of two seemingly dissimilar teens from disparate cultures: a Vietnamese refugee artist, Mei, and an angry American high-school student, Hannah, making for a young adult novel with adult crossover appeal about a culture clash that leads to some positive, heart-warming results.

Chris Newbound

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The Hero's Crossroads: That Fateful Moment of Decision by Todd Mercer

Better young adult fiction eclipses old-hat conflicts of domestic disobedience and school strife. It forces heroes into agonizing choices, then spins out consequences with a wider range of outcomes than the last generation grew up expecting. One doesn't have to be eighteen years old to have a lasting impact on others' lives for good or ill, or to choose a permanent trajectory. That reality may not be fair, but savvy teen readers quickly discard idealistic fantasies.

Protagonists among these books wrestle with exploitation, imprisonment, and abandonment issues we wish teens would never have to face. They must commit to a side during wartime, without an obvious default position, and struggle to embrace their destinies. The teen years are composed of a seemingly endless series of exclusive choices, few of which are adequately addressed by small-minded public service announcements.

Struggles Within Living Memory

After the fall of Saigon, nineteen-year-old Mei Phuong escapes Vietnam on an overloaded boat with her younger brother and sister in tow, destination unknown. Conditions onboard deteriorate until Mei sees a woman prepare to leap to her death: "We watch her as if we are watching a play, no one moves to stop her, no one really believing she will do what she obviously is about to do." *Weeping Under This Same Moon* by Jana Laiz (Crow Flies Press, 978-0-98149100-4) contrasts Mei's uncertain life with that of Hannah, a privileged but unhappy teen from Westchester, New York, who blossoms as a volunteer helping Vietnamese newcomers in the Bronx. Hannah's affection for photography parallels Mei's passion for painting, but art is a luxury and refugees deny themselves nonessentials.

Todd Mercer is the senior editor of the Dunes Review. He judged the first Amazon Breakthrough Novel Awards, was a juror for Poets' Night Out and won the William Shaw Prize for Poetry. His chapbook Box of Echoes (2007) was co-winner of the Michigan Writers Cooperative Press contest





Jana Laiz

Author of *Weeping Under This Same Moon*

(from Crow Flies Press - www.crowfliespress.com)

Read the review here:

http://foreword.texterity.com/foreword/20081112/?pg=22&search=weeping&per_page=5&results_page=1&doc_id=33811

When did you start reading, and what did you like to read as a kid?

I actually didn't like reading until I was nine years old when the wonderful librarian in our town library introduced me to Penelope Farmer, a wonderful British author. My favorite book of hers was called *The Summer Birds*, about a group of British children who learn how to fly. Then *A Wrinkle in Time*, by Madeline L'Engle, which I have read dozens of times. I have not been without a book since.

When did you think about becoming a writer?

When I six, my mother gave me her old marbled notebook from when she was a kid. My grandfather, who was a dentist, used to give out little trinkets to his kiddy patients and he gave me a miniature pencil. With that notebook and that pencil, I became a writer. It was destiny.

Was there someone who got you interested in writing?

I think I just had stories to tell.

How do you write?

I used to write longhand, but now I must use my keyboard. My thoughts flow much more easily that way.

Do you have a daily routine?

I try to, but I also work outside of my writing, but I try to write something every day.

What's good about it?

The more I write, the better I get at my craft.

Is there any particular story to tell concerning the writing of this book?

Weeping Under This Same Moon came from years of contemplation. If you've read it, you will know that it's based on a true story, which happens to be my own story. One day, I was deep in thought about writing this story down, when out of the blue, I received a phone call from the Vietnamese friends I was going to write about. It had been many years since we'd been in touch. They said they were all together for a family gathering eating carrot cake and that it reminded them of me. I had forgotten that I had introduced them to that decadent pleasure, but they reminded me of that and many other things we did when I befriended them back in 1977 when I was a teenage volunteer. I took it as an omen to get started and began writing immediately.



What's some good advice that you've received concerning writing?

Do it everyday, and cut, slash and burn anything extraneous. Don't take yourself or your writing too seriously. And of course, when it comes to getting published, never ever give up!

What advice can you offer newer writers?

I guess the same thing.
Here's a saying an Irish musician once told me that I keep very close - "don't give up five minutes before the miracle!"

How did you find the publisher for this book?

Perseverance.

What has your experience with the process been like?

Very exciting!

In a time when the publishing industry is going through unprecedented change, please identify developments you find encouraging.

Small, independent presses are becoming very respected and accessible.

What have you learned about human nature that isn't common knowledge?

Wow, that's a question! But something interesting happened when people started reading my novel. Readers related to Hannah, my angry, passionate protagonist, which really surprised me. It made me realize that no one really knows what goes on deep inside a person. I never thought anyone could relate to her, but it seems everyone did. That pleased and moved me.

Which books should people be sure to read if they want to know get to the essence of what life is about?

Weeping Under This Same Moon, of course. I love the *Ladies Number One Detective Agency* series. They are very much about human nature and the simple essence of life. Anything by Elizabeth Berg too! And of course the bard himself, Shakespeare. If he doesn't go right to the essence of life, I don't know who does!

The irresistible dinner-party guest(s), living or dead

Samuel Clemens, Robert Burns, Alexander McCall Smith, Carl Hiaasen, Madeline L'Engle, Charles DeLint, Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen! Oh yes, Will Shakespeare, definitely!

What are you working on at the moment?

I am editing my next novel, *The Twelfth Stone*, and working on a series of historical children's books with Ann Elizabeth Barnes about African American heroes and heroines from The Berkshires, Massachusetts.

What are you reading?

I am reading a few books at once. *Tales of A Female Nomad* (Gelman), *The Misremembered Man* (McKenna), *Money and The Law of Attraction* (Hicks)

For more information on this author and her projects, please click here: www.janalaiz.com

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The ties that surprise

Reviewed by Jody Kordana, Special to the Eagle
Updated: 03/14/2009 07:43:23 AM EDT
http://www.berkshireagle.com/books/ci_11912224

Sunday, March 15
"Weeping Under This Same Moon"

By Jana Laiz

Crow Flies Press, 288 pages, \$14

"Weeping Under This Same Moon" is a touching young-adult novel by Berkshire author Jana Laiz. Based on true events, it outlines the eventual meeting of two teenage girls as they navigate the social fallout of the end of the Vietnam War. We follow several months of their lives as fate slowly draws them together, and along the way discover the value within their unassuming presences in a turbulent time.

Mei is the eldest daughter of a large Chinese family that is forced out of their home in Vietnam. Her parents choose her to be the first to escape. She takes one younger brother and sister with her and joins the stream so-called "Boat People," beginning a journey they hope will eventually lead their entire family to safety.

Mei's trip aboard the boat and subsequent stay in a Malaysian refugee camp as they await approval to continue to America is colored with descriptions of the abysmal conditions of the journey. Her observations, both of beauty and despair, feature a delicate nuance of thought that assures us Mei's gentle, loving, artistic nature stay intact through these brutal experiences. She takes her responsibility as the self-sacrificing sole caretaker for her younger siblings with maturity and grace until they move.



Hannah is an unhappy American teen, ostracized at school and misunderstood by her family.

But she is not a stereotypically disgruntled and spoiled teen, as we learn she is exceptionally empathetic, and her emotions run deep. Her frustrations stem not from self-pity — instead, surrounded by the aimlessly destructive habits of her peers and inattentive adults, she has no true outlet for her burgeoning environmental and social beliefs.

Hanna experiences an epiphany when she sees a television news story about the Boat People. She feels strongly drawn to the cause, and immediately begins to research possibilities to help Vietnamese refugee assimilation. This takes her to an office at the International Rescue Committee where she finally finds her calling, and we follow her inspiring transformation from confused, frustrated teen to passionate refugee advocate.

Laiz shows impressive adeptness in presenting Mei and Hannah with distinctly different voices without taking away from the seriousness of their situations. As an examination of one girl's struggles with the loss of the only life she knew, and another girl's struggles to find a purpose to a life that is secure yet unfocused, the novel serves as a reminder of the smaller points of life that often tie people together. They ironically share certain sufferings that, despite being vastly opposite in origin, result in similar levels of psychological strain.

For example, while Mei experiences excruciating hunger during her journey, Hannah develops an eating disorder. Avoiding presenting Hannah's problems as ungrateful superficial angst in comparison to refugee hardship and falling into common guilt-laying parental lecturing, which could easily happen, Laiz skillfully opens Hannah's sensitive soul to us.

We truly feel the longing within her to gain some control in her life and make a distinctive difference in the world, and the depth of her low self-esteem that strips her of appetite in an effort to make herself, at least outwardly, more conventionally appealing.

There are numerous other surprising subtleties as we see additional unexpected parallels between Mei's and Hannah's emotional experiences. Whether it is the fear they experience when facing unfamiliar situations or learning to move on from the pangs of first romantic infatuations, these two young women are indeed weeping under the same moon.

Laiz's novel is a standout in its simplicity. Being a true-life young-adult novel set in the seventies, there is a noticeable absence of the juvenile glitz and glamour of teen vampires, youthful wizards, fantastical romantic scenarios and technological distractions. Each interaction, accomplishment and goal is completely within reach of every individual reader regardless of class, race, geography or era.



Reader reviews

"Through the story of these Vietnamese children and the American girl who befriends them, Jana Laiz shows us how faith and courage can overcome the worst hardship. One comes out of this beautifully written book feeling uplifted, reminding us that hope always springs eternal for all the children of the world."

-Emmanuel Dongala, Author of *Little Boys Come From The Stars* and *Johnny Mad Dog* (now a major motion picture, winner of the prize of hope at Cannes Festival 2008)

"*Weeping Under This Same Moon* by Jana Laiz is a stunning achievement written with uncanny sympathy from the complementary perspectives of two teenage girls - one a Vietnamese refugee, the other a passionate yet unhappy American high school student - the book vividly portrays very different yet intersecting worlds. It is a moving, heartwarming, even inspiring book. I recommend it enthusiastically to readers of all ages and in particular to young adults."

-George Rupp, President, The International Rescue Committee

"Volunteering can spark an inner joy as Jana Laiz so aptly demonstrates in this compelling and uplifting story. We, at Landmark Volunteers have documented this phenomenon thousands of times: high school volunteers deriving fulfillment and self-respect while serving the greater needs of others. I would recommend *Weeping Under This Same Moon* to any adult or young person wishing to see what can happen by the simple act of volunteering."

-Ann B. Barrett, Executive Director, Landmark Volunteers



Unsolicited Book Award Nominations

- **Notable Books for a Global Society award** (International Reading Association)
- **CYBIL award** (children's and YA literary internet award)
- **One Book One Region** (Mystic Connecticut)
- **YALSA best book of the year**
- **St. Croix Valley Minnesota Community Reads**

ForeWord

M A G A Z I N E

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Book of the Year

Award Winners

2008 Book Of The Year Award Finalists



The Author

Jana Laiz



- Graduate NYU - Asian Studies
- Master of Education
- Educator for over 20 years
- Publisher of Kids' Onion newspaper
- Author of numerous picture books & young adult novels
- Chinese Linguist/Instructor
- Refugee caseworker
- English-As-A-Second Language Specialist

Jana Laiz has been writing for as long as she can remember. Fascinated by other cultures, Jana studied Anthropology and Chinese language at NYU and Middlebury College. Jana has taught all grade levels including University. She is passionate about the environment and endeavors to incorporate her earth friendly philosophy as she teaches young people to explore and experience their world through the joy of writing.



Events



From Harm To Home

A Conversation & Book Signing With Jana Laiz
Author of the award-nominated book,
Weeping Under This Same Moon

Thursday, February 19, 2009
12:00-2:00pm

International Rescue Committee
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168

RSVP

T) 212.551.3148
Email) ellen.o'connell@theirc.org

Jana worked for IRC as a volunteer in 1977 when she was only 17 years old. She worked with five Vietnamese refugee families in the Pelham Parkway area of the Bronx for many years until she was hired as a resettlement caseworker in 1985. Unfortunately in 1986 budget cuts forced her to leave her job.

Weeping Under This Same Moon is based on Jana's experiences as a teenage volunteer and that of Mei, the Vietnamese artist she befriends.

Jana will be appearing with Cathleen "Hoa" Landers, the little girl on the cover, and they will discuss their personal experiences as volunteer and refugee and how the International Rescue Committee changed and influenced both their lives.

For more information about Jana Laiz or *Weeping Under This Same Moon*, please go to www.janalaiz.com or www.crowfliespress.com

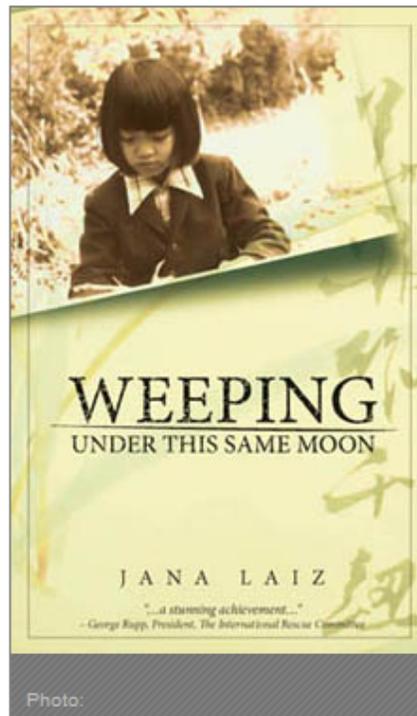


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