



Song of the Buffalo Boy

Sherry Garland

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When American soldiers departed Vietnam, many left children behind—like seventeen-year-old Loi, whose fellow villagers ostracize her because she is *con-lai*, a half-breed and a reminder of her country's tragic civil war. Only Khai, a young buffalo tender, shows her love and respect. Promised in an arranged marriage to a cruel older man, Loi flees to Ho Chi Minh City. Along with thousands of others, she applies for the chance to leave for the United States through the Amerasian Homecoming Program, and faces the most important decision of her life: Should she leave her beloved country, her family, and her gentle, loving Khai?

Includes a reader's guide, an author's note, and a glossary of Vietnamese words.

Song of the Buffalo Boy Details

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From Reader Review Song of the Buffalo Boy for online ebook

Madalena Elshoff says

We need more books like this that tell the story of "half" children who are caught between lines of race, society, identity, told from their own eyes (even though Garland is not mixed herself). I knew the Vietnamese word for "half-breed" was *bui doi*, "dust of life," but I had not realized the extent to which those children had been ostracized in Vietnam, nor how the American government established the Amerasian Transit Center to help them immigrate to the US. The concept that mixed race children are symbols of the remnants of war is not an unfamiliar one - reading this book brought back memories of being asked by strangers whether my American father had purchased my Chinese mother.

Although I love this book for giving (more of a) voice to mixed people, I'm afraid that the book might feed into other stereotypes and misconceptions, besides the "war baby" stereotype, surrounding mixed race children. (1) The protagonist is mixed white and Vietnamese, not mixed African American and Vietnamese - the less socially acceptable "otherness" - and is described as "beautiful," having curly, light hair and freckles. This plays into the mixed race beauty myth. It's the same dangerous idea that we see in media today - that mixed race is somehow aesthetically superior, even though this is absolutely ridiculous. Even in the novel, Loi lets American tourists (the same American tourists who are portrayed as saviors, later offering to sponsor her out of the country) to take multiple photos of her, in exchange for which she gets a pack of cigarettes. It seems perfectly acceptable somehow that they do this. Doesn't this just scream of exploitation? The kind of subtle, seemingly innocuous exploitation that newer generations of mixed race people face today? I would love it if Garland had instead chosen to write this novel from the perspective of a male African American Vietnamese *con-lai* and challenged herself to retell a less romanticized story of mixed children. (2) The novel oversimplifies how Loi will address prejudice in the future. She states simply that she has to change her own attitude and have a "go-get-'em" attitude, which will solve all of her problems being discriminated against. Unlikely. (3) Finally, the US is portrayed as the ultimate solution for all Vietnamese. To go there is to find wealth, prosperity, and fortune, and all other problems will disappear....

If only.

Iskreads says

Song of The Buffalo Boy by Sherry Garland, is a book about a vietnamese girl whose dream is to meet her american father who fought in the war. However to do so it was not easy. The book narrates the challenges she goes through to over-come her fears and dreams. The book narrates the mother as an antagonist, however she is really a good lady trying to protect her daughter from getting into trouble. by the vietnamis government, since it was illegal to have an american parent. At the end of the novel the girls leaves Vietnam to live with another family rather than finding her father. I would recommend this book to people who enjoy reading love and adventure novels. It is a great book because it is so imaginative and gave me many thrills while reading it.

Mia Bloomfield says

During the war between Vietnam and America, children with a mix of both races were left behind, like Loi. Determined to find out about her father, Loi undertakes the journey to go to America but is forced to leave everything she once knew behind. Including the truth. Traveling to Ho Chi Minh City to go to America through an Amerasian Homecoming Program, she battles through the harsh world she grew up to know. Loi begins to learn and understand what love and loss can be like. Accompanied by the beloved Khai, who would stop at nothing to be with his love, she takes on whatever comes her in her path.

Cecilie Rystad says

When the American soldiers left Vietnam – many children were left behind including Loi she is a Chon-lai, she is half American and half Vietnamese. Loi is in search for her dad and wants to go to America to find him. When Loi was little she remembers fleeing from her home and being brought to a new village with her mother. Now they live with her mother's uncle. At a later age Loi fell in love with a boy named Khai.

The song of the buffalo boy by Sherry Garland clearly shows if you really love someone you will do anything to be with them. Khai and Loi's love story is a fantastic tale of two who cannot be together. They want to be with each other despite what everyone thinks and means. Despite the rushed ending the book has a powerful love story that shows it is worth waiting for your true love, even if it takes some time.

Kim says

3 1/2. I like reading the books my kids are required to read for school. His was an interesting choice and tells the story of a Amerasian girl that was conceived during the Vietnam war when American soldiers where there. The books spans her life and tells her story from a few years old to being 17 and trying to discover who she is.

There are many good discussion points and I can see why the teacher is having them read this for class. Themes included are coming of age, dealing with hard decisions, hunger, war, war aftermath, mother/daughter relationship, prostitution, learning about a different culture, love, loyalty, duty, suicide, and many other things.

Marjolein says

It is 1989. Loi is a half Vietnamese half American girl, an Amerasian, (wich means for her snarky comments from people who look down on her)living in a small village in rural Vietnam. Her mother doesn't want to talk about the painfull period of when she met Loi's father, an American soldier during the Vietnam war.Loi is forced to marry Hiep, an abusive officer of the village commitee. Loi has her eyes on Khai, a buffalo tender.He really understands Loi and they create a plan to escape the village and to go to Saigon. Because previously they met two American men who where looking for the lost daughter of one of the men, a former

soldier during the war. They tell Loi about the Amerasian Homecoming program and that she has a serious chance to be accepted for it because the picture she has of her mother with the American soldier. She tells her mother but she doesn't agree that Loi applies. Loi and Khai go on with their plan to go to Saigon, even if that means Loi will never see her family again..

But because of a few unexpected circumstances, Loi and Khai lose each other out of sight and Loi is alone in Saigon where she doesn't know anybody, and then some guy named Joe steals her bag with her few belongings and the picture of her mom and the soldier. Will everything turn out right and will Loi get to America to find her real father and will she ever see Khai again?

I was so impressed by this book. Wow. The story was just right in any way and it was so realistic. I could totally imagine how hard the life in Vietnam is. I really felt sorry for all the tough decisions Loi had to make and I got real respect on how she survived all alone in Saigon and made the best of it. Fictional books about Vietnam are one of my favorites, although they are a bit hard to find. This one was just amazing in every way. READ IT!

Wendy Kyaw says

A seventeen-year-old, Amerasian (American and Vietnamese) girl named Loi, lived in a village in Vietnam where most of the village treated her with disrespect, except for her family and a buffalo boy named Khai. Soon after being forced to marry an abusive officer, Loi decided to escape from the village and go to Ho Chi Minh City to continue onto America where she could possibly find her American father.

With more plot twists coming up and more people coming into Loi's life, the storyline continues to grow. The struggles that Loi faced, the way she adapted, and how she never gave up were things in the novel that readers can relate to. After all, this book is great and is very inspiring because of the romances and the struggles of Loi.

Okyere Peace says

good

Amari says

This story had a lot of love, betrayal, and making wise decisions. This story talks about a girl who wants to marry her true love. But, she can't because it would be a disgrace to her and other people's family. Other people don't like her because she is mixed with Asian and American. So, that means that they really don't allow "Mixed People" to get married. Whether it's their decision or not. She goes through tough decisions but, she knows what's best for her.

A. says

Loi didn't ask to be different. Yet, the people of her small village in Vietnam treat her like an outsider because

she's the daughter of a Vietnamese mother and an American soldier—a human reminder of the Vietnam War. Only Khai, a buffalo tender, sees her for who she really is. But when he professes his love for Loi, his parents disapprove of the match.

When she is promised to a violent middle-aged man instead, Loi escapes to Ho Chi Minh City where she plans to reunite with Khai, marry, and go to America. After months of waiting and no sign of Khai, she is granted passage to the United States—but if she leaves Vietnam alone, will she ever find her beloved Khai? If she stays, will she miss the chance to meet the father she has dreamed of for seventeen years?"

I'm not much for romances, but I was enthralled with *Song of the Buffalo Boy*. Not only was the relationship between Loi and Khai incredibly sweet, but Sherry Garland kept us guessing up until the very end. America or Khai?

Song of the Buffalo Boy gave me some eye opening insight to life after the Vietnam war. Mrs. Garland must have done a ton of research... the detail of the simple farming life and the hustle and bustle of Ho Chi Minh City were vivid and compelling. The landscape, the country and its culture become an integral part of the novel.

The characters are easy to relate to and I became very attached to the main characters and the outcome of their lives. I put myself in Loi's shoes and asked myself what I would do in her situation.

The book shows Loi's journey to find answers outside herself and also within. The relationship with her mother is poignant and shows how children often judge their parents without truly understanding the paths their parents have journeyed and the reasons behind the choices they have made.

All and all, *Song of the Buffalo Boy* is a great book that keeps a steady pace and your interest. It's a quiet story with depth and meaning, that touches on prejudice, cultural beliefs, family loyalty, acceptance, forgiveness and of course love. It's a novel with a lot to offer.

Alden says

Song Of The Buffalo Boy is a touching story of Loi, a Vietnamese daughter of an American soldier. She has her eyes on Khai, a buffalo tender. Khai really understands Loi and they create a plan to escape the village and get married. Promised in an arranged marriage to Officer Hiep, a hard-hearted older man and an abusive officer in their village, Loi flees to Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City. Along with thousands of others, she applies for the chance to go to the United States in search of his biological father. But should she leave her beloved country, her family, and her beloved Khai?

My favorite character in this book was Joe. Joe was a street-smart kid, a Vietnamese boy trying to immitate Caucasian physical characteristics so that he may finally get a chance to go to America to live his dream of living the American life. Without him, Loi would have never made it as far as she did. Loi would have had absolutely no sense of direction in a big city like Ho Chi Minh, but with the help of Joe, she had visited many places and learned from it. Some of Joe's memorable lines that got stuck in my head were:

"Big sister, gimme five!" "Give Mr. Phuoc five!"

"Ten thousand, thousand thanks, Mr. Phuoc. You're the nicest man in all the foreign office. We'll send you lots of blue jeans from America."

"You know, I would give up my whole future days on earth for just one month in San Francisco, USA. Don't you feel like that sometimes?"

"Goodbye, sister. Don't worry. I will find this American father of yours and tell him you're a number-one-good-looking daughter. I'll send you a tape player and lots of Madonna tapes. And blue jeans for the buffalo boy." (then Loi replied...) "And don't forget to eat one popcorn in my name and think of me."

One word: Amazing. It was a perfect blend of history and romance. A kind of book that you wouldn't hesitate to flip the pages once you started reading because it was definitely a page-turner. The way **Sherry Garland** uses descriptive words and the throwing in of some Vietnamese words were really informative. Plus, it reminded me why history/geography was one of my favorite subjects in school. One of the few books that is absolutely worth re-reading.

To sum it all up, **Song Of The Buffalo Boy** is definitely unputdownable and a highly recommended historical novel. It was a perfect read while having a *pho* (rice noodles) and of course, my favorite *ca-phe da* (iced coffee). Okay, now I'm talking Vietnamese! How about that? Gimme five!

Beth says

This book highlighted the plight of a girl who is bi-racial in a time and place where that was not accepted. There was good characterization, and even though there were a few sappy parts, it was a pretty enjoyable story.

Poeme says

Loi's life was a bit devastating, having forgotten her father's presence and being looked down as she is half American, she relied mostly on her mother, uncle, and Khai, her mother used to be soft and soothing, but since their escape, she became cold, her uncle saved her mother and her herself from the soldier, since then he also became cold. The only person she could talk to, and express her feelings, is Khai, a buffalo boy who is kind, and who went as far as to escape to Ho Chi Minh City, to go to America. She was forced to marry with a disdainful brute, which ignored the ceremony, his mind only full of meeting his only need, which was, to ravish her. Fueled by fear and anger, Loi and Khai planned to fake her death. Sadly as Loi had waited for Khai to follow her on bus, Khai's brother stopped him, as she faced her journey of survival, she was saved by a Street-Smart boy named Joe, who she met by his witty theft. My favorite part was when she had to decide to either leave her family or go to America, where she might meet her father.

Mallerie says

This is a very wonderful, well written story. Best book ever! This book changes you which is why I like it so much. Every time I read it I reflect back on it all the time, and then I have to go back and reread it because it's so good. Very quick easy read!

Alan Chen says

If you've seen the play *Miss Saigon*, then you'll be prepared for the kind of emotional turmoil that goes on in this book. *Miss Saigon* made a certain term popular for describing the Amerasian children left behind after the War: *bui-doi*, the dust of life. *Song of the Buffalo Boy* lends a different, harsher phrase: *con-lai*, half-breed.

The author has done an outstanding job of scattering small references of life in post-War Vietnam that don't hold back. Early on, we hear about a woman prematurely giving birth to a child. The child is stillborn with two heads, because while the woman didn't eat the foods of or travel to the provinces where the Americans dropped pesticides/herbicides/other mutagenic chemicals, her husband came from one of those provinces. He is described as a strapping young man except for his thumb, which is badly swollen and has two distinct thumbs. A few days later, she ends her troubles by being the latest to throw herself into the village well. As another horror befalls the village because of the Americans, Loi and her mother have to endure as the village takes it out on those who are irreversibly marked by American blood.

And all of that is treated as being normal, albeit a normal tragedy! The author wanted to show that the effects of war ripple on long after the fighting stops, and she did a pretty good job. Many of the characters are still suffering years later

* Loi, the main character, was taught to always hide the hair that marked her as half-American. Shunned by everyone, she didn't go to school because the whole time would've been marked by her peers' ridicule and her teacher's glare.

* Loi's mother came to her situation through a series of increasingly hard choices. Her brothers went off to war for different sides, she sold all the belongings, and was living with Loi's grandmother in a shack. When she got sick, Loi's mother was forced to sleep with an American for money to buy medicine. In the first of many cruel twists, she got the medicine but got kicked out when the grandmother discovered she was pregnant at the same time her in-law found a place for them to stay. Of course, Loi's mother was not invited, so she gave birth to Loi on the side of the road, where a different American soldier took care of them. Loi carries a photo of the three of them together, all the time assuming that the second American soldier is her father.

* Uncle Long eventually took Loi and Loi's mother in, and suffered collateral damage for it. Though he fought for the victorious North, he fought not in the regular army but for the Vietcong. Years after, he remains bitter to both sides: to the South who fought for a puppet government, and to the North who brought so little for those who sacrificed so much. His rant to a party colonel engaged to Loi in the middle belongs in a screenplay and is notable for the point where he goes on about how the Vietcong fought under much worse conditions than the regulars, but isn't bitter about that. They willingly fought under worse conditions because they believed in their leaders and believed they were fighting for freedom, only to come back to destroyed villages and a Party that took ownership of everything and did little to help rebuild.

When the action shifts to Saigon, er... I mean Ho Chi Minh City (several characters warn about calling the city by its previous name), the story takes a turn for the proverbial worse. In the first hour, Loi meets an old man who has lost his legs. His granddaughter asks her for a cigarette (smokes being as, or more valuable than money). Quickly, the kid runs off and the man reveals that he has no granddaughter. There's the ghostly-looking man who became that way after too much opium. Bribing the officials is worthless, as the custom official opens a drawer to store his newly offered cigarettes and reveals a stash of cigarettes, watches and jewelry. The people waiting for processing to go overseas sleep outdoors, homeless.

But what's most fascinating is that despite all the hardship, no one really wants to leave. Offered the chance to leave Vietnam for a life in America, multiple characters repeatedly turn down the offer. As one character says, "My birth cord is buried here". One of the most surreal scenes occurs in the customs office. All through her life, Loi only met people who cursed her American blood. At the customs office, Loi is amazed to see people who are so desperate to have what she detests. This is part of a greater transition, where Loi is shunned by her neighbors in the beginning, only to be swamped by people asking her to send messages to relatives when word gets out that she's leaving.

My only complaint would be that the book wraps up too neatly and too quickly to be plausible. Everyone gets a happy ending, though to be fair, this book is targeted at those 12 and up. It's an excellent read, with the only negative being that the reality is likely much worse.
