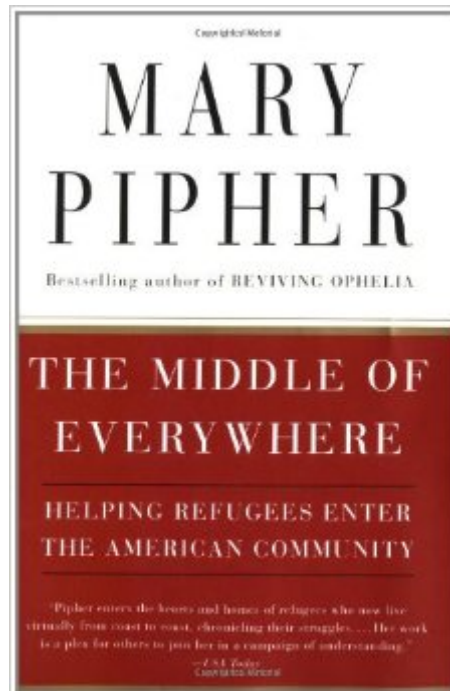


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The Middle Of Everywhere: Helping Refugees Enter The American Community



Synopsis

Over the past decade, Mary Pipher has been a great source of wisdom, helping us to better understand our family members. Now she connects us with the newest members of the American family--refugees. In cities all over the country, refugees arrive daily. Lost Boys from Sudan, survivors from Kosovo, families fleeing Afghanistan and Vietnam: they come with nothing but the desire to experience the American dream. Their endurance in the face of tragedy and their ability to hold on to the virtues of family, love, and joy are a lesson for Americans. Their stories will make you laugh and weep--and give you a deeper understanding of the wider world in which we live. The Middle of Everywhere moves beyond the headlines into the homes of refugees from around the world. Working as a cultural broker, teacher, and therapist, Mary Pipher has once again opened our eyes--and our hearts--to those with whom we share the future.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Mary Pipher's "The Middle of Everywhere" is a marvelously wise book that encompasses the tales of people of many lands who come to Lincoln, Nebraska, and her personal story as a "cultural broker" who appreciates and respects them. The world has come to my town, also. Pipher writes, "Most of my friends were of European background. As I've made friends with people of Mideastern, Latino, African, and Southeast Asia backgrounds, I've changed a great deal. I've stopped seeing myself as a member of a majority culture. Instead, I see myself as a member of a world culture that flourishes in my hometown." That has been my experience exactly. Especially interesting is her

chapter on how American-style psychotherapy is not the method many of the refugee peoples use to heal from past traumas. She quotes a saying of her mother's: "There are three cures for all human pain and all involve salt--the salt of tears, the salt of sweat from hard work, and the salt of the great open seas." (She points out that, while once she interpreted the "seas" as an escape from family or memory, now she sees it as the beauty of the natural world.) Pipher believes that young people adjusting to the American lifestyle should carefully choose to incorporate the best of their cultural heritage with the best of what America offers. (The pervasive media advertising and marketing, and all types of sleaze, for example, should be rejected. Family and community, shared meals, fun, love and laughter, should be cherished.) She celebrates the energy and the optimism of these newest Americans. In a carefully reasoned discussion, she upholds the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and firmly maintains we are not practicing cultural bias when we seek to implant these basic rights all over the world. Hats off to Mary Pipher, one of our own culture's wise women, a down-to-earth midwesterner who eats a lot of pie, and a world citizen whose heart is open to all. This book may stir you to become a cultural broker yourself, and you'll find your life enriched beyond measure. This book deserves the highest recommendation.

This terrific book seeks to convey the life experiences of a multitude of refugees, from a variety of countries, who somehow found their way to Lincoln, Nebraska. It helps us understand how truly gigantic culture shock can be, and how unbelievably lucky we all are to live in this protected Disneyland that we call America. Most of these amazing people have lived through things that would make other Americans ashamed, to complain of the things in our lives that we consider "major problems." One African refugee describes how his father was literally forced to applaud, while 14 year old "soldiers" killed some of his own children right in front of him. Others are fleeing starvation so terrible that they were forced to eat grass, dogs, or worse. Yet here these people are, smiling hopefully at their new neighbors, hoping to start a better life as fellow Americans. What is the internet? They don't know. What is an "atom bomb"? Many people around the world are apparently unaware that it exists. What is money? Refugees from primitive tribes don't really "get" the concept. Will voting for a certain political candidate endanger their children's lives, if the opponent wins? Their lives have led them to think so. You have to root for these incredible people. It makes you want to go out and meet some refugees, and talk to them for yourself. One might suspect that some of them are fearful of what is happening in our country right now (lawful FBI surveillance, etc.) but the fact is, people from cultures with different alphabets literally can't even spell ACLU, FBI, CNN, or even ABC. They're so lost it boggles the mind. They need friends to help them understand. They

need you. Mary Pipher has divided her inspiring testament into three parts. The first part, "Hidden in Plain Sight," deals with the initial arrival of refugees, and their efforts to make sense of America. The second part, "Refugees across the Life Cycle," walks us through a collection of vignettes based upon the experiences, respectively, of children, teens, young adults, and parents in refugee families. The third part, "The Alchemy of Healing -- Turning Pain into Meaning," helps us see how incredibly strong these people are, and how their strength, compassion, and wisdom are guided and tempered by their experiences. Finally, there are three VERY helpful little appendices, giving specific, detailed advice about real ways that readers can get involved, and make a difference, in our own hometowns. Would you like to get a quick visual sense of just how "white bread" the Lincoln, Nebraska area is, to understand the preposterous homogeneity in which these lost, bewildered, global refugees must find a place? If so, I'd like to recommend that you see the 1999 Reese Witherspoon/Matthew Broderick film "Election." It was filmed just a few miles down route 80 from Lincoln, and not only is every single face visible in the film of European extraction -- I think they are literally ALL of NORTHERN European extraction. I'm serious. Don't get me wrong -- they're perfectly nice people (often incredibly nice, actually, as Mary Pipher makes clear), but not necessarily too well-prepared for diversity in their community. That's what these refugees need to face. If you enjoy this book, I would like to recommend that you seek out "The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down," by Anne Fadiman, which is about Laotian refugees in Massachusetts. Also, look online for the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) website, which has a lot of nice features to keep you informed about refugees worldwide.

This carefully researched and beautifully written account of Pipher's experiences getting to know and understand the diverse refugee community in Lincoln, Nebraska is both heartbreaking and inspiring. The stories of poverty, loss and resilience she shares help to personalize the people and places most of us think of as not really pertaining to us. Because Pipher is not just an observer, but an active participant in the process of helping her town's refugees, her book and its practical suggestions carry much weight. I highly recommend it, particularly to anyone in reasonable health, living above the poverty level, who has a complaint of any kind about the quality of their life.

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