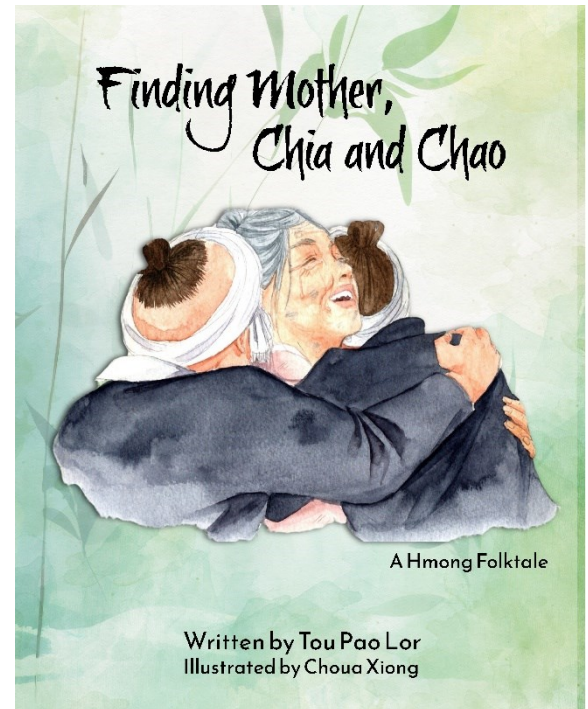

***Finding Mother, Chia and Chao* exhibits the Hmong cultural beliefs and why most modern Hmong still follow and practice the traditions today.**

Finding Mother, Chia and Chao, exhibits the Hmong cultural beliefs and why most modern Hmong still follow and practice those traditions today. For example, whenever the Hmong have a ceremony, and the food is cooked, we invite the souls of our parents who have already died to come and eat first. We ask them to protect and bless us. We then eat later by setting a new table of food.



Pictured: Chiang Kham Refugee Camp, 1990. Tou Pao Lor is a Hmong refugee who was born in Laos in 1971. In May 1979, his father and three children, including Tou, fled from Laos to Thailand because of the Secret War. His mother, second older sister, and younger brother died during their escape. After arriving in the refugee camp, his father did not want to make resettlement plans to any foreign country because he hoped that they would soon be able to return to a peaceful Laos. His father wanted to remain in the camp as long as they could. They lived in three refugee camps in Thailand for sixteen years: Ban Vinai, Chiang Kham, and Phanat Nikhom. While living in the camps, Tou studied Thai, Lao, Hmong, and Chinese for about six years. He also studied English.

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By Tou Pao Lor
Illustrated by Choua Xiong
Size: 8x10
Page Count: 40 pages
Publication Date: August 8, 2023
Paperback price: \$19.95
Paperback ISBN: 978-1-955541-19-0
Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-955541-20-6
Printed in the United States of America
Published by FuzionPress
FuzionPress.com
Bulk orders are Available on: Ingram
Retail Available on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and several other online retailers

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Tou Pao Lor is a Hmong refugee who was born in Laos in 1971. In May 1979, his father and three children, including Tou, fled from Laos to Thailand because of the Secret War. His mother, second older sister, and younger brother died during their escape. After arriving in the refugee camp, his father did not want to make resettlement plans to any foreign country because he hoped that they would soon be able to return to a peaceful Laos. His father wanted to remain in the camp as long as they could. They lived in three refugee camps in Thailand for sixteen years: Ban Vinai, Chiang Kham, and Phanat Nikhom. While living in the camps, Tou studied Thai, Lao, Hmong, and Chinese for about six years. He also studied English.

His family finally arrived in Saint Paul, Minnesota, in 1995, when he was about 24 years old and married with two children. He went to an adult school named Hubbs Center for Lifelong Learning to study English and received his adult high school diploma in six months. Going to school as an adult learner was an uphill battle for him, but he made it. In 2012 he completed his doctoral degree in education and leadership from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota in the Twin Cities. Since then, he has been a psychotherapist in the Hmong and Karen communities.

He is writing a few books on his life experiences in Laos, refugee camps in Thailand, and his time in the United States. He likes writing and recording for his family, and he hopes his stories will encourage people to record their life experiences. He remembers the happiness of being together in the village, refugee camp, and the United States, the sadness of leaving, and the joy of reunions that his family has experienced.

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Finding Mother, Chia and Chao

By Tou Pao Lor
Excerpt

One day, Chia and Chao each brought a chair and sat near their mother, Gao Shay. Their mother said, "Oh! Heaven, Chia, and Chao! Why did you two come to find your mother?" Chia and Chao described all the mysterious things that had happened to them and asked their mother to tell them what was happening. The mother said, "My dearest sons, you two must kill a chicken or a pig and cook rice. Once everything is well cooked, set up a table and put the food on it. Get a chair and put it in the front of the table, and then older brother Chia will invite the spirit of your father, Ta Khoua Toua, to come and sit there. You two should sit on the opposite side of the table and then give the spirit of your father a spoon to eat with.





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