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Two Poems: Chanda Says; Dropping Chanda Off at Nursery School

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Creative and Literary Works

Two Poems

Bunkong Tuon
Union College

Chanda Says

“You’re the greatest daddy
in the whole wide world.”

Her arms wrap tightly
around my neck as she plants

A big fat juicy kiss on my cheek.
For a minute, I almost forgive

The Khmer Rouge. Then I remember
my daughter would never know

Her *Lok-Yiey* and *Lok-Ta*.



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Dropping Chanda Off at Nursery School

Tiny legs wrap around my waist,
tears streaming down her flushed cheeks,
and the wailing “Daddy, Daddy, Home!”

Then the door shuts behind me.

I still hear her crying as I walk by
the classroom window and carry
her cries as I get in the car,
drive to the college to teach
the American/Viet Nam War.

The wailing continues in the cries
of soldiers missing their girlfriends,
wives, and families at home,
wishing to spit at their fathers
who talk about doing the things
men must do in a world of evils,
wanting to burn their town’s city hall
and vandalize the draft board
because no one there knows
what they are going through.

The wailing is heard in the little girl
stripped naked by the flaming
fingers of napalm as she runs
with other villagers.

The wailing is felt in the trembling
silence of the boy in My Lai
who hides underneath the warm
bodies of his aunt, younger
sister, and mother.

About the Author



Bunkong Tuon, a Cambodian-American writer, critic, professor, and, most importantly, father. He is the author of *Gruel* (New York Quarterly Books, 2015), *And So I Was Blessed* (New York Quarterly Books, 2017), and *Dead Tongue* (with Joanna C. Valente, forthcoming from Yes Poetry), as well as a contributor to *Cultural Weekly*. Nominated for the Pushcart numerous times, his poetry recently won the 2019 National Nonfiction Poetry Prize. He has completed a book of poems about raising his daughter in contemporary America. He is an associate professor of English and Asian Studies at Union College in Schenectady, New York.



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