

A House in the Sky: A Memoir

By Amanda Lindhout, Sara Corbett

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The spectacularly dramatic memoir of a woman whose curiosity about the world led her from rural Canada to imperiled and dangerous countries on every continent, and then into fifteen months of harrowing captivity in Somalia—a story of courage, resilience, and extraordinary grace.


The dramatic and redemptive memoir of a woman whose curiosity led her to the world's most beautiful and remote places, its most imperiled and perilous countries, and then into fifteen months of harrowing captivity—an exquisitely written story of courage, resilience, and grace

As a child, Amanda Lindhout escaped a violent household by paging through issues of *National Geographic* and imagining herself in its exotic locales. At the age of nineteen, working as a cocktail waitress in Calgary, Alberta, she began saving her tips so she could travel the globe. Aspiring to understand the world and live a significant life, she backpacked through Latin America, Laos, Bangladesh, and India, and emboldened by each adventure, went on to Sudan, Syria, and Pakistan. In war-ridden Afghanistan and Iraq she carved out a fledgling career as a television reporter. And then, in August 2008, she traveled to Somalia—"the most dangerous place on earth." On her fourth day, she was abducted by a group of masked men along a dusty road.

Held hostage for 460 days, Amanda converts to Islam as a survival tactic, receives "wife lessons" from one of her captors, and risks a daring escape. Moved between a series of abandoned houses in the desert, she survives on memory—every lush detail of the world she experienced in her life before captivity—and on strategy, fortitude, and hope. When she is most desperate, she visits a house in the sky, high above the woman kept in chains, in the dark, being tortured.

Vivid and suspenseful, as artfully written as the finest novel, *A House in the Sky* is the searingly intimate story of an intrepid young woman and her search for compassion in the face of unimaginable adversity.

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
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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An Amazon Best Book of the Month, September 2013: Amanda Lindhout's story starts as a breathless travelogue, inspired by *National Geographic*: as a kid in rural Alberta, Lindhout scavenged bottles to buy thrift store copies of the magazine, escaping through its pages from a violent home into a vast, vibrant world. In her twenties, she sought out every amazing place she'd always wanted to see, then kept going, loving the rush of pushing beyond the next border. Travel became her education, and a desire to make it her vocation as a freelance journalist draws her to Afghanistan, Iraq, and finally Somalia, where a hungry young reporter with guts might make a name for herself. Lindhout's hubris can be frustrating: intellectually, she knows Somalia is the "most dangerous country on earth," but she still talks her former lover, freelance photojournalist Nigel Brennan, into coming along. By this time, both of them have moved through so many unpredictable places unscathed that the possibility of real peril is a hazy abstraction, and their abduction by armed extremists comes as a shock. As their captors hold out for a ransom of \$1.5 million, Lindhout and Brennan defensively convert to Islam and try to remain sane through covert communication, but after a botched escape, Lindhout endures severe torture and repeated rape--and survival means drawing on her every reserve. Written with uncommon sensitivity (by Lindhout and cowriter Sara Corbett), *A House in the Sky* becomes a moving testament to her ability to cultivate resilience and a kind of spiritual transcendence, even in profound darkness. Witnessing her experience left profoundly grateful for everything I have, more sharply aware of how I choose to react to circumstances beyond my control. Most of us will never live a day like the 460 Lindhout spent in captivity, but we all have our trials, and we can cultivate our own resilience. --*Mari Malcolm*

Guest Review of *A House in the Sky*

By Susan Casey, author of *The Wave: In Pursuit of the Rogues, Freaks, and Giants of the Ocean*



Growing up in the small town of Red Deer, Alberta, Amanda Lindhout dreamed big. She was a young girl with a curious streak the size of the Rockies, and though her wrong-side-of-the-tracks provenance seemed to promise only a flatline future, Lindhout decided to change her own fate. Out there, she knew, beyond a horizon dotted with oil rigs and trailer parks, magic awaited, a vast map filled with all things "lost or unexplored, mystical or wild."

How did Lindhout know this? *National Geographic*. Paging through worn copies of the magazine, she was transported to every spectacular place she'd never been: "The world arrived in waves and flashes, as a silvery tide sweeping over a promenade in Havana or the glinting snowfields of Annapurna. The world was a tribe of pygmy archers in the Congo and the green geometry of Kyoto's tea gardens. It was a yellow-sailed catamaran in a choppy Arctic Sea."

And so, fueled by waitressing wages and determination, Lindhout's travels begin, at first in idyllic ways, then accelerating and acquiring a degree of difficulty that would daunt any seasoned explorer. In short order, Lindhout—working as a freelance journalist—ventures into places like Kabul and Baghdad, Addis Ababa, the back alleys of Cairo, and then, finally, Somalia, where the stakes become nothing less than life or death.

Lindhout's story is exhilarating and harrowing and several other brands of extreme, and it would be riveting however it was told. But in *A House in the Sky*, readers will find a rare and beautiful alchemy: writer Sara Corbett captures Lindhout's voice and spirit with utter mastery on the page, and a kind of ferocious grace that I found breathtaking.

I know that's a strange phrase, *ferocious grace*. Lindhout's desire—her need, even—to live on all cylinders burns bright in this book, but Corbett deftly reminds us that even when chipping away at cement, "covered in grit and cobwebs," while attempting a desperate escape from her prison, Lindhout is still that unassuming and hopeful girl from Red Deer, Alberta. The one who wrote to her mother from India, "I am going to Jodhpur. It is a city in the desert, called the Blue City, as all the buildings are painted blue! I am having the BEST TIME EVER!"

In fact, it's Lindhout's contradictions that make her such a rich character. She can be naïve and driven, generous and opportunistic, ambitious and fitful, sometimes all at once. At the same time she's heading for danger, she's making friends. And even after she is taken hostage by an extremist group, and her situation descends into darkness, she finds small measures of beauty and even optimism in her captivity. And within that simple, brutal paradox, Lindhout manages to stay alive.

What Lindhout endured during her 460 days in captivity is difficult to absorb, but Corbett is brilliant with the telling detail, and her writing is so strong that she can paint readers a vivid picture with only a few brush strokes.

A House in the Sky is a true story of a young woman's radical adventures. It is absorbing and inspiring and textured. It is terrifying. It illuminates. It is the best book I have read in a very long time.

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Lindhout, with coauthor Corbett, recounts her 15 months in captivity at the hands of Somalian kidnappers in this harrowing memoir. Growing up in Alberta, Canada, Lindhout used her spending money to purchase old issues of *National Geographic*. As a young woman, she yearned to venture to the exotic places she saw on its pages and soon found she could save up enough money waitressing to fund months' worth of travel. Starting with Venezuela at age 19, she eventually journeyed to India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Deciding to pursue a career as a journalist, she ventured first into Iraq and then convinced Nigel, a former lover turned friend, to join her in Somalia. Four days into their visit, they were taken hostage

by Somali bandits, most of whom were young teens. The kidnappers demanded outrageous ransoms from their parents, and began to treat Lindhout, far more than her male counterpart, with increasing brutality. Writing with immediacy and urgency, Lindhout and Corbett recount the horrific ordeal in crisp, frank, evocative prose. But what readers will walk away with is an admiration for Lindhout's deep reserves of courage under unimaginable circumstances. --Kristine Huntley

Review

"Exquisitely told...[*A House in the Sky*] is much more than a gonzo adventure tale gone awry—it's a young woman's harrowing coming-of-age story and an extraordinary narrative of forgiveness and spiritual triumph....There's no self-pity or grandiosity in these pages. In the cleanest prose, she and Corbett allow events both horrific and absurd...to unfold on their own. Lindhout's resilience transforms the story from a litany of horrors into a humbling encounter with the human spirit." (Eliza Griswold *The New York Times Book Review*)

"Lindhout manages to tell her story and to transcend it. Her account stands as a nonfiction companion to Emma Donoghue's shattering, haunting novel about captivity, *Room*." (Emily Bazelon *Slate*)

"A poetic, profound, and thrilling exploration of one woman's misadventure set against the backdrop of global terrorism...Elegant and evocative." (Rebecca Johnson *Vogue*)

"A great book...The lesson [Amanda Lindhout] taught me and others who know this remarkable young woman is: What matters is not how you got there, but what you do once you've arrived." (Robert Draper *ELLE*)

"[A] harrowing, beautifully written memoir....The wide-eyed optimism and unflappable determination that led [Amanda Lindhout] to danger also kept her alive...A brave, compassionate and inspiring triumph." (Korina Lopez *USA Today* (4-star review))

"A riveting memoir..." (*Good Housekeeping*)

"A searingly unsentimental account...Ultimately, it is compassion—for her naïve younger self, for her kidnappers—that becomes the key to [Lindhout's] survival." (Holly Morris *O, the Oprah magazine*)

"Keenly observed and sprinkled with arresting details, *A House in the Sky* is more than one woman's heartbreaking tale of captivity. The book sheds light on a conflict area not often painted with nuance. It dares to explore the outer reaches of human empathy. A stunning, haunting, and redemptive read, Lindhout's story is one that stays with you long after the book has been closed." (Grace Bello *The Christian Science Monitor*)

"An elegant and wrenching memoir..." (*The Daily Beast*)

"[A] remarkably keen-eyed, honest, and radiant memoir...Moving and informative reading for everyone." (Barbara Hoffert *Library Journal*)

"Writing with immediacy and urgency, Lindhout and Corbett recount the horrific ordeal in crisp, frank, evocative prose. But what readers will walk away with is an admiration for Lindhout's deep reserves of courage under unimaginable circumstances." (Kristine Huntley *Booklist* (starred review))

"A vivid, gut-wrenching, beautifully written, memorable book..." (*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review))

“A well-honed, harrowing account...” (*Publishers Weekly* (starred review))

“A vivid and moving account of how Amanda kept alive the inner light and the spirit of forgiveness even as she found herself in the heart of darkness.” (Eckhart Tolle, author of *The Power of Now* and *A New Earth*)

“*A House in the Sky* is a stunning story of strength and survival. It is sometimes brutal, but always beautiful as Amanda Lindhout discovers that in a fight for her life, her most powerful weapons are hope and compassion.” (Jeannette Walls, author of *The Glass Castle* and *The Silver Star*)

“This is one of the most powerfully-written books I have ever read. Harrowing, hopeful, graceful, redeeming and true, it tells a story of inhumanity and humanity that somehow feels deeply ancient and completely modern. It is beautiful, devastating and heroic—both a shout of defiance and a humbling call to prayer.” (Elizabeth Gilbert, author of *Eat, Pray, Love* and *The Signature of All Things*)

“In this lyrical and inspiring book, Amanda Lindhout describes humanity's capacity for cruelty. Yet she also brings to life the deep compassion and courage that resides in all of us. A story of grace, insight and tenacity, *A House in the Sky* shows us the power and importance of perseverance, hope and forgiveness.” (David Rohde, Reuters columnist and Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *A Rope* and *a Prayer and Beyond War*)

“*A House in the Sky* is the riveting story, exquisitely told, of a young woman's passionate quest to create an uncommonly large life, against all odds. Amanda Lindhout's journey is a singular one, an epic adventure that ranges from colorful to gripping, in which the stakes are nothing less than absolutely everything. With stunning honesty and clarity, Lindhout and Corbett have made certain of two things: No reader will ever forget this book—or be able to put it down.” (Susan Casey, author of *The Wave: In Pursuit of the Rogues, Freaks, and Giants of the Ocean*)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Richard Hunt:

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Sherry Hansen:

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