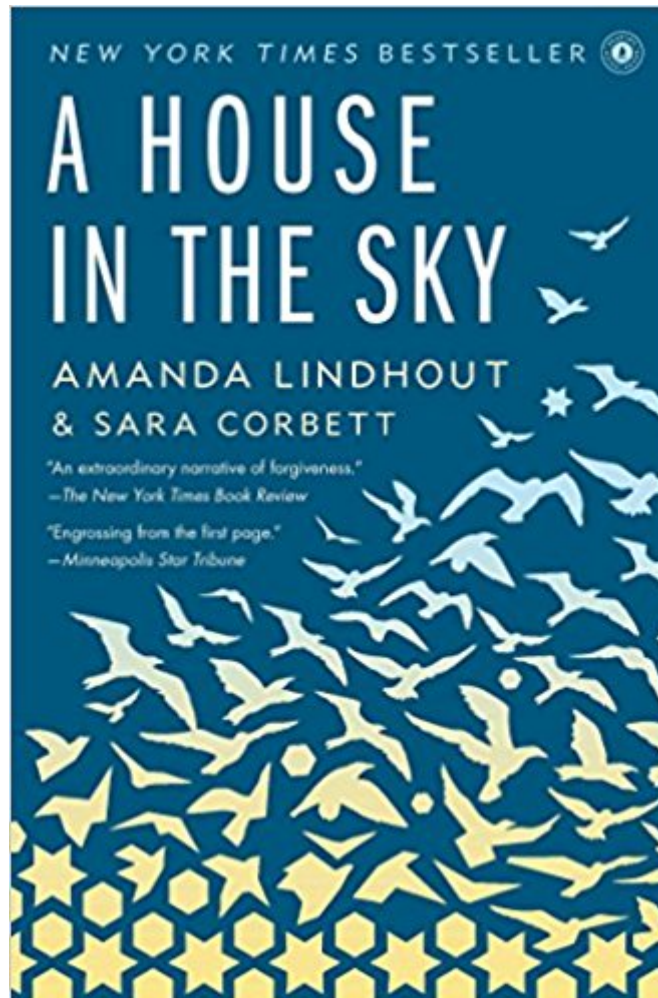




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# A House In The Sky: A Memoir



## Synopsis

**BREAKING NEWS:** Amanda Lindhout's lead kidnapper, Ali Omar Ader, has been caught. Amanda Lindhout wrote about her fifteen month abduction in Somalia in *A House in the Sky*. It is the New York Times bestselling memoir of a woman whose curiosity led her to the world's most remote places and then into captivity: "Exquisitely told" [A young woman's harrowing coming-of-age story and an extraordinary narrative of forgiveness and spiritual triumph] • (The New York Times Book Review). As a child, Amanda Lindhout escaped a violent household by paging through issues of National Geographic and imagining herself visiting its exotic locales. At the age of nineteen, working as a cocktail waitress, 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 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. Vivid and suspenseful, as artfully written as the finest novel, *A House in the Sky* is "a searingly unsentimental account. Ultimately it is compassion" for her naïve younger self, for her kidnappers "that becomes the key to Lindhout's survival" • (O, The Oprah Magazine).

## Book Information

Paperback: 400 pages

Publisher: Scribner; Reprint edition (June 17, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1451645619

ISBN-13: 978-1451645613

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 1,470 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #10,974 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #15 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Social Activists #75 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Political #173 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups

## Customer Reviews

An 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 me 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. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*Starred Review\*** Lindhout, with coauthor Corbett, recounts her 15 months in captivity at the hands of Somali 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 --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

If you only read one memoir this year, make it *A House in the Sky* by Amanda Lindhout and Sara Corbett. Amanda Lindhout is from Alberta, Canada. As a young child living in a turbulent household, she collected and cashed in bottles. And what did she spend her money on? Old National Geographic magazines. Amanda escaped into the pages, dreaming of one day visiting the exotic places pictured. At nineteen she has saved enough money from waitressing to make those dreams a reality. Her first trip abroad is to Venezuela. "I had seen this place in the magazine, and now we were here, lost in it. It was a small truth affirmed. And it was all I needed to keep going." Lindhout repeats the cycle, earning, then travelling. She visits most of Latin America, India, Burma, Ethiopia, Syria, Pakistan, Sudan and dozens more. Her joy in exploring and experiencing new places and people is tangible. But, each trip she takes is a little further off the beaten path. And finally, she's travelling to some of the most war torn countries in the world. In Kabul, Afghanistan she begins a career as a fledgling freelance /journalist/photojournalist - with no formal training, associations or contacts. With some success under her belt, she heads next to Baghdad, Iraq to work as a reporter for Iran's Press TV. Moving on from there she decides to head to Mogadishu, Somalia in 2008 - bigger stories might help her career take off faster. She wonders if an old flame, Nigel Brennan, an Aussie photographer wants to join her. He does.....and four days after their arrival in Somalia, they are kidnapped by insurgents from an Islamic fundamentalist group. And, they are held.... for 460 days. "It was here, finally, that I started to believe this story would be one I'd never get to tell, that I would become an erasure, an eddy in a river pulled suddenly flat. I began to feel certain that, hidden inside Somalia, inside this unknowable and stricken place, we would never be found." *A House in the Sky* is Amanda's recounting of those 460 days. She is beaten, starved, chained up, kept in the dark, raped and tortured. These are the facts. "There are parts of my story that I may one day be able to recover and heal from, and, to whatever degree possible, forget about them and move on. But there are parts of my story that are so horrific that once they are shared, other people's minds will keep them alive." How she survives is a story that had me tearing up, putting the book down and

walking away from it so many times. It's a difficult read, but is such a testament to the human spirit and will. Amanda names each of the houses they are held in - Bomb-Making House, Electric House, Tacky House and more. But it is the House in the Sky that had me freely sobbing - at the worst of times she builds a house in her mind, filled with the people she loves and the memories she treasures, the future she dreams of. "I was safe and protected. It was where all the voices that normally tore through my head expressing fear and wishing for death went silent, until there was only one left speaking . It was a calmer, stronger voice, one that to me felt divine. It said, 'See? You are okay, Amanda. It's only your body that's suffering, and you are not your body. The rest of you is fine.' " The journey to their release is gut-wrenching, incredibly powerful and impossible to put down. I stopped many times to look at the smiling author picture of Amanda on the back, wondering how in the world she survived. Survived and forgave. And as I turned the last page, I just sat. Sat and thought. This is a book that will stay with you, long after that last page. Read an excerpt of A House in the Sky. Amanda Lindhout is the founder of the Global Enrichment Foundation - "a non -profit organization that supports development, aid and education initiatives in Somalia and Kenya

One of my roommates in college was a girl who had a long standing obsession with National Geographic Traveler. The walls on her side on the room were often plastered with photos from this magazine and from her various trips. While I spent my spring break exploring Amsterdam and Belgium, she was backpacking through Ecuador. Having returned from two weeks spent sleeping in a hammock on the beach, she lofted her bed and strung a hammock underneath with a large picture of a lagoon hung next to it. When I read the first sentence of the description of Amanda Lindhout and Sara Corbett's A House in the Sky, which referenced the author's pageing through issues of National Geographic and imagining herself in its exotic locales, I immediately thought of my friend and purchased the book. Lindhout was raised in Alberta, Canada in a family that scraped by financially. What little spending money she had was often used to purchase backdated issues of National Geographic, which she savored over. Once her schooling was finished, Lindhout became employed as a cocktail waitress, saving as much as possible in order to travel. She started with trips to Latin America before venturing further afield, to Pakistan, India, and Iraq. Ultimately, she meets a photographer called Nigel, who introduces her to camera and the possibility of making a living off of her travels. She begins a career as a journalist and convinces Nigel to accompany her to Somalia, which was war-torn and extremely unstable at the time. Not long after they arrive the pair is kidnapped by Somalis, who hold them for ransom. The story chronicles the time she spent in captivity, the conditions, her own mental strength and anguish, her

evolving relationships with her captors, and her struggle for survival and escape. I found the book to be an incredible memoir. Though neither is a particularly close parallel, I actually found it somewhat reminiscent of Emma Donoghue's *Room* as well as the motion picture *Captain Phillips*. I really liked Donoghue's novel, which tells the story of a woman who was kidnapped and eventually bears the child of her captor. This is a work of fiction, told from the point of the boy, whose mother shelters her son from the horrors of their existence, attempting to protect his childhood and his innocence. What was particularly striking about this book was the descriptions of the conditions, conveyed so clearly that it was as if the reader was there as well. Additionally, it was the incredibly strong voice and tone that really carried the narrative in *Room*. I felt as if *The House in the Sky* was similarly strong in terms of the ability to paint the scene, to create a very visual image through description of what the room in which Amanda was kept was like. I thought that it seemed like a very honest portrayal of her evolving mental and physical state as time progressed. Whether you agree with her choices and her voluntary entry into these extremely dangerous countries and situations (I recognize that the summary might be enough for some to say "forget it, she sought out danger and that's what she found"), the voice that comes out of the darkness is one that I found to be incredibly relatable. Perhaps it was the Somalia connection, but I also thought back to the *Captain Phillips* movie that came out in late 2013. Having had the visual experience that came with watching that movie, I felt I had a clearer picture, or at least some general portrait, of the Somalis who took Amanda and Nigel. Given that that story also chronicled a kidnapping and release, I think there were definite parallels. But *Phillips* was taken and recovered in a much shorter period of time, and his capture became an international incident and the government stepped in to aid his recovery; in Lindhout's case, Canada was unable to step in and negotiate, and her family ultimately had to raise the money that the Somalis demanded. Nevertheless, if you've seen / read and liked either *Room* or *Captain Phillips*, I think this memoir will resonate. A note for those more sensitive, there is physical and sexual violence in the book. In the end, I thought *A House in the Sky* was well written and compelling, and I enjoyed reading it.

This is a harrowing story about the abduction of a pair of journalists in Somalia. The experience of each (one male, one female) is clearly very different from the other, though you don't get the sense that there's any resentment when there certainly could be. I enjoyed reading the background chapters so I understood how they ended up in the situation they were in. I also really appreciated the fact that she doesn't go into gory detail about the terrible things that happened to her. She explains it all so you know the whole story, but she leaves the most intimate/brutal parts to mere

identification rather than extreme detail. It's much easier to read that way. Sometimes less is more. Overall, I was left with a very positive impression of this young woman who went through so much and lived to tell about it. I found myself looking her up and doing my own research after I finished the book. Incredible bravery and strength, reminding us all what doesn't kill us makes us stronger.

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