



Journey of a Thousand Miles: My Story

By Lang Lang, David Ritz

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“Number One” was a phrase my father—and, for that matter, my mother—repeated time and time again. It was a phrase spoken by my parents’ friends and by their friends’ children. Whenever adults discussed the great Chinese painters and sculptors from the ancient dynasties, there was always a single artist named as Number One. There was the Number One leader of a manufacturing plant, the Number One worker, the Number One scientist, the Number One car mechanic. In the culture of my childhood, being best was everything. It was the goal that drove us, the motivation that gave life meaning. And if, by chance or fate or the blessings of the generous universe, you were a child in whom talent was evident, Number One became your mantra. It became mine. I never begged my parents to take off the pressure. I accepted it; I even enjoyed it. It was a game, this contest among aspiring pianists, and although I may have been shy, I was bold, even at age five, when faced with a field of rivals.

Born in China to parents whose musical careers were interrupted by the Cultural Revolution, Lang Lang has emerged as one of the greatest pianists of our time. Yet despite his fame, few in the West know of the heart-wrenching journey from his early childhood as a prodigy in an industrial city in northern China to his difficult years in Beijing to his success today.

Journey of a Thousand Miles documents the remarkable, dramatic story of a family who sacrificed almost everything—his parents’ marriage, financial security, Lang Lang’s childhood, and their reputation in China’s insular classical music world—for the belief in a young boy’s talent. And it reveals the devastating and intense relationship between a boy and his father, who was willing to go to any length to make his son a star.

An engaging, informative cultural commentator who bridges East and West, Lang Lang has written more than an autobiography: his book opens a door to China, where Lang Lang is a cultural icon, at a time when the world’s attention will be on Beijing. Written with David Ritz, the coauthor of many bestselling autobiographies, *Journey of a Thousand Miles* is an inspiring story that will give readers an appreciation for the courage and sacrifice it takes to achieve greatness.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—This world-renowned pianist was born to parents whose lives and aspirations were interrupted by China's Cultural Revolution. Like his entire generation, he was an only child due to his country's population-control policy. This created a kind of perfect storm. In some families, every ambition parents had for their own lives was visited upon their offspring. That was the case with Lang Lang, whose creative and musical parents were delighted when their son showed great interest and talent for piano at an early age. While this is the story of his life, it is also the story of a family's struggle to balance ambition, expectations, and relationships, and it illustrates to the extreme the pressure many young people face to live up to their own and their parents' expectations. The writing is immediate and emotional, drawing readers into a life of hard work, dedication, music, competition, and performance. Lang Lang's life and creative choices demonstrate a willingness to take chances and trust his instincts, honed through years of battling insular established systems.—*Charlotte Bradshaw, San Mateo County Library, CA*

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From [Booklist](#)

Smith spent much of a tumultuous life in one glamorous endeavor, filmmaking, wishing he were in another, writing. How he evolved from thrill-seeking, drug- and alcohol-besotted low man on the Hollywood totem pole to sober, insightful writer is the subject of this moving, gently written memoir made up of 12 loosely connected personal essays, in which he touches on such diverse topics as love of skydiving, ambivalence about his family, and struggling repeatedly with chemical addiction. As the book's title implies, Smith also spends a lot of time discussing the film industry—how he found work in it, whom he met, the niche he occupied, what a key grip does (rigs lights, prepares dolly shots, does last-minute construction), and why he stayed in the field despite long hours, grueling pace, and exploitative producers. Altogether, a wise, intensely readable autobiography that should please those who enjoy reading about transformation-filled life journeys and those who like a spoonful of gossip to make the life lessons go down. --Jack Helbig

Review

“Lang tells the story of his childhood without self-pity or bitterness, making his success, and the book itself, all the more satisfying.” —*New York Times Book Review*

“*Journey of a Thousand Miles* is a fast read, told with the kind of breathless enthusiasm that echoes Lang Lang’s personality . . . Lang Lang’s story, with its trajectory from a chubby prodigy living in a Chinese backwater to a pop star of the classical music world based in America, is full of drama. It’s a tale of astounding talent born to parents who knew and appreciated the arts and recognized their son’s gifts.”
—*Chicago Sun-Times*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lee Rutledge:

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