

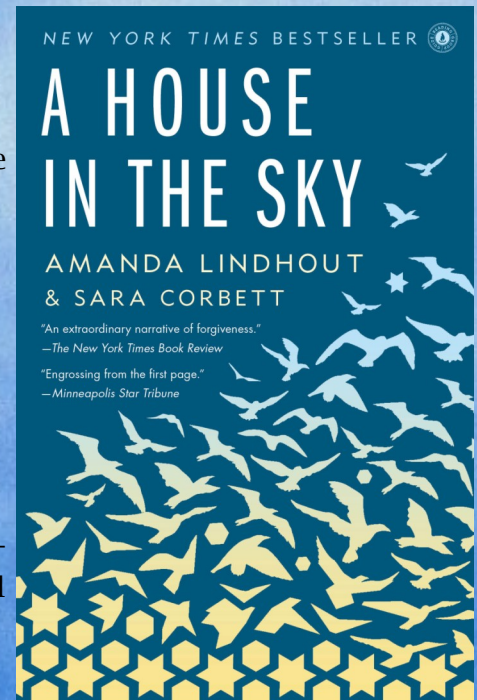
A HOUSE IN THE SKY

Amanda Lindhout and Sara Corbett

Executive Book Summary — Bailey Henderson

SUMMARY

Lindhout’s memoir explains her growing up poor in Sylvan Lake, Alberta. In her early-twenties, she moved to Calgary, Alberta, where she started to travel the world. By her mid-twenties, she became a freelance journalist in the Middle East. Lindhout took on a one week work assignment to Somalia with her former lover Nigel. While in Mogadishu, Somalia, they would be abducted. The memoir recounts the horrific events and decisions made while being held captive for fifteen months. These decisions were to **humanize** themselves and convert to Islam in hopes to prolong their survival until their ransom was paid.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sara Corbett is a long-time contributing writer to *The New York Times Magazine*. Not long after Lindhout was released from captivity, Corbett met Lindhout to collaborate on this memoir. Corbett co-founded a non-profit writing centre for children, known as *The Telling Room*.



Amanda Lindhout moved to Red Deer, Alberta, to Calgary, Alberta, where she began to travel to over 50 countries across the world. Once she was released from captivity, she became an active public speaker, award winning humanitarian, social activist, writer, and Founder of *The Global Enrichment Foundation*.

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Humanization
- Connections
- Emphasizing
- Understanding
- Empowerment

MESSAGE OF THE MEMOIR



Through many interviews with Lindhout, it seems like there are several messages in her memoir. Each message takes precedence at different times. One message described in an interview at Studio Q (2013) was that it was a lesson about survival. Lindhout goes on to answer questions on why and what led her to Somalia, including the days she spent in captivity.

At the beginning of Lindhout and Nigel's captivity, Lindhout expressed how "Nigel almost immediately feel into depression" (Shaw, 2014). In some way, this helped her take on a leadership role out of necessity because someone needed to be strong for them both. This was done by simply keeping their spirits up (Shaw, 2014). As the days went on, both Nigel and Lindhout would change and adapt their leadership styles by humanizing themselves and converting to Islam.

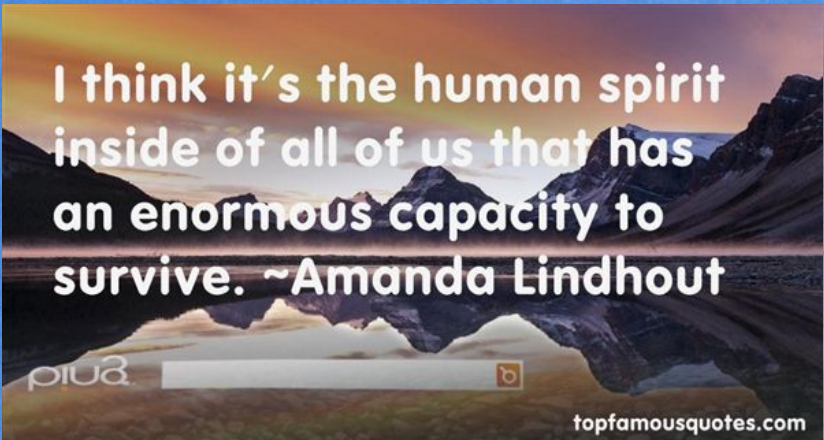
Lindhout would humanize herself whenever her captors entered the room. She would ensure that they would acknowledge them and try to hold and maintain conversations. At times, she managed to get to know them personally, like discussing how expensive a wedding could be (Lindhout & Corbett, 2013, p. 154); helping them learn English (Lindhout & Corbett, 2013, p. 187); and would receive small gifts like food, cigarettes, small luxury items (e.g. toothpaste) or spend a short period of time outside (Lindhout & Corbett, 2013, p. 238).



Once Lindhoutre was completely restrained she started to think more about what she would do once she was released. The promise she made was to "devote [her] life to making the world a better place for those in Somalia" (CTV Calgary, 2012).

KEY MESSAGE

There is one key message that can be seen within the memoir. Lindhout's message is the importance of seeing **humanity** in others, including yourself. This can be done by connecting with people and **emphasizing** with what each individual has in common.



“I thought maybe if I HUMANIZED myself to these young men, most of them teenagers, these masked men; that they might let me go if they realized that both Nigel and I were in the country because we cared; genuinely cared about humanitarian crisis that has been unfolding in Somalia for two decades. But that was not the case.”

- Shaw, 2014



“She was the only other woman other than myself in the mosque, the first one I had seen in five months since I had been abducted. This woman embraced me and begged my kidnappers to go.”

- Shaw, 2014

Lindhout demonstrates that she is a true example of adaptive leadership. In an interview with Shaw, in 2014, Lindhout explained that “[o]n the 11th day of our captivity we converted to Islam, which was one of my ideas because I had spent those days living in the Middle East. I knew that if I made that request to convert to Islam they would likely honour that and in fact they did.” Converting to Islam gave her and Nigel hope for survival by humanizing themselves. She would even change her name to an Islamic name, Amina. The Arabic meaning is “suppose to be faithful and trustworthy” (Lindhout & Corbett, 2013, p. 174). Changing her name gave her similarities to her captors by illustrating to them that she is not a threat; she is one of their sisters.

“I was a possession; I was held by their right hand, in a Godly way and they owned me. And that meant all the things that you could imagine it to be, I was their property.”

- Shaw, 2014

CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

Lindhout realized that her captors held an ethnocentric view. Northouse describes ethnocentrism as “the human tendency to place one’s own group at the center of one’s observations of others and the world” (p. 464). Lindhout used this to her advantage because she managed to humanize herself with her captors in an attempt to find a way out (Lindhout & Corbett, 2013, p. 169). By learning ways to communicate and understand them was through the Koran. Lindhout had a special Koran that had English on one and the Arabic translation on the other. She would point to the Arabic meaning to hold conversations that eventually become “more than just religion. It became daily needs as a tool to convey with them” (Shaw, 2014).



TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

A promise made to herself while in captivity, has shown Lindhout to be a true transformational leader. This promise was to help make Somalia a better place. The transformational leadership approach “stresses that leaders need to understand and adapt to the needs and motives of followers” (Northouse, 2016, 190). Before and during her captivity, Lindhout gained an understanding of how these women hope for change in Somalia. She has humanized herself and has made a connection with these women based on her personal experiences while in captivity. When she was released, she started *The Global Enrichment Foundation*. This foundation is a “scholarship program aiming to educate women in the community that are interested in taking leadership roles” (CTV Edmonton, 2010). Lindhout has expressed that the program is to help oppressed women in Somalia and hopes to expand the program around the world. A year after she was released, Lindhout received a message over Facebook from one of her captors. “The leader was congratulating [her] for the work [she] was doing to helping the Somali sisters” (Studio Q, 2013).

“We have a strong focus on supporting Somali women. In large part honour the memory of the woman at the mosque. The one who may have lost her life; who risked her life; certainly, trying to save me.”

- Shaw, 2014



ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES

While in captivity, Lindhout and Nigel were constantly changing from one environment to the next. When they finally become separated, they quickly found ways to communicate. This was done by talking through windows, leaving messages in the bathroom, or underlining certain verses in the Koran to form secret messages. After their attempt escape, Lindhout was put into horrible living conditions. She would live in rooms with mold and no lights. She was even restricted to her bed and was not allowed to move. In order to escape from these harsh conditions, Lindhout found “a safe place to survive where there was no violence being done to [her] body; where [she] could reflect on the life [she] had lived and the life that [she] still wanted to have; there was peace. It was a place that [she] had created in [her] mind” (Studio Q, 2013).



GLOBAL
ENRICHMENT
FOUNDATION

**When you educate a woman, you
are educating a whole family.**

- CTV Edmonton

- An organization created to focus on education
- Currently has reached over 20,000 people inside Somalia
- Aimed at sending 100 Somali women through university or enroll into University over four years
- Supporting survivors of gender-based violence with medical care
- Funding school-based food programs



READING 
TO LEADING



Empowering Somali women
through education to live
and lead well

Join our Reading to Leading campaign!
www.ReadingToLeading.com



Will you donate to *The Global Enrichment Foundation*?

Were the decisions she made while in captivity prolong her survival?

Should Lindhout not have returned to Somalia once she was released?



Can others survive abductions by humanizing themselves?

Could we change the world by trying to find other means of communication and understanding with radical groups?

“I feel a sense of responsibility as long as we have opportunities to offer help and support and empowerment to the people in that country then I need to continue doing this.”

- Studio Q, 2013



CONCLUSION

A House in the Sky is an emotional and challenging read. It sucks in the reader by getting them to relate with Lindhout at the begging, but then quickly changing focus towards captivity and the desperation to be free. We see pain, suffering and the thought process of an individual who has been held captive for 460 days. It's sad to see how Lindhout thinks she is a burden to her family while she is held in darkness. But, once she is free and returns home to Alberta her first thought is to help those Somali women, who face insurmountable hardships in their own country. Lindhout is a truly inspirational woman that has let a negative experience be turned into something positive. She did this by keeping a promise to better the lives of others, particularly, Somali women. What is more incredible is that on June 11, 2015

one of her capture Ali Omar Ader was arrested in Ottawa under Section 279 of the Criminal Code in Canada (Spears, 2015). Lindhout's reacted by stating "my freedom and my happiness are not contingent on his future. I don't require him to be in prison for me to move on and heal myself" (CBC, 2015).

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