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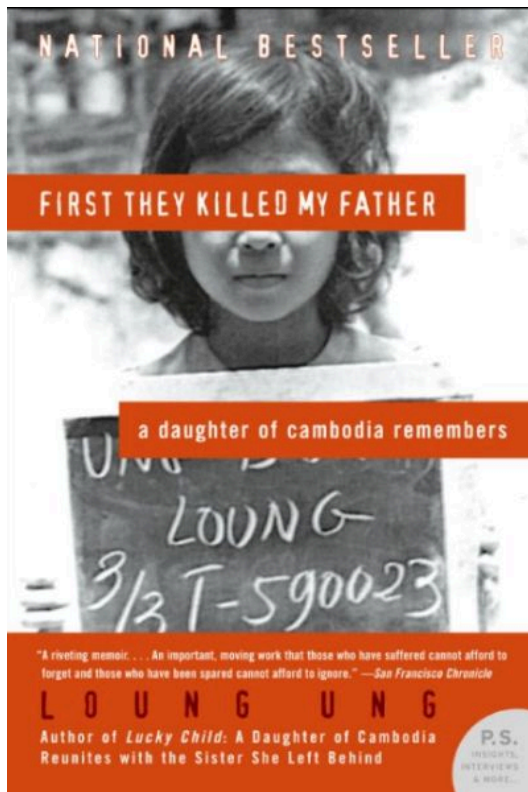


SCII Agenda Newsletter

December 2025 Issue

The mission of the Schoolcraft College International Institute (SCII) is to coordinate cross-cultural learning opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and the community.

Global Curriculum *First They Killed My Father*



During the Fall term, professors [Christina Stansell-Weaver](#), [Errin Stegich](#), [Helen Ditouras](#), and [Colleen Pilgrim](#) incorporated the book and film *First They Killed My Father* into their course curriculum for communication, history, English, and psychology, respectively. Students in these courses explored themes and topics related to their courses as well as engaged in discussions and wrote individual essays and personal reflections.

As reported in a previous newsletter, *First They Killed My Father* is a memoir by Loung Ung a bestselling author, peace activist, and entrepreneur. *First They Killed My Father* was adapted into an award-winning Netflix Original film directed by Angelina Jolie. Loung was five when the Khmer Rouge stormed Phnom Penh. Over the next four years she lost her parents and two siblings, was separated from her family, and trained as a child soldier. In 1980, at age ten, she and her brother escaped to a refugee camp in Thailand before resettling in Vermont.

From 1997 to 2005, Loung served as spokesperson for the Campaign for a Landmine Free World, part of the Nobel Peace Prize–winning International Campaign to Ban Landmines. She has since returned to Cambodia more than fifty times, working with survivors, landmine victims, and communities rebuilding from war. Her voice has reached audiences worldwide. Her story has been featured in The New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, NBC, and ABC News,

and she has been the subject of three international documentaries.

Book Discussion

First They Killed My Father

[Pageturners](#) co-coordinators [Wayne Pricer](#) and [Denise Schell](#) along with SCII faculty, led a student book discussion on *First They Killed My Father* with a historical and psychological focus. Student engaged with each other and explored current events as they related to *First They Killed My Father* by Loung Ung. The focus of the discussion was how the memoir personally impacted them and how they might be agents of change and peace in their own lives.



Campus Visit

Author and Activist: Loung Ung



A highlight of the term for our students was the visit to Schoolcraft College campus by author Loung Ung on Veterans Day 2025. Ms. Ung spoke to a packed auditorium of students, faculty, staff, and community members about her memoir and film. Through her discussion of her own journey, Ms. Ung spoke of the need to find your own personal way to promote peace within yourself and your community. Ms. Ung was generous with her time and spoke individually with faculty prior to the event and after her talk she spoke individually to participants and signed copies of her book.

The ability to host Ms. Ung was a collaborative effort by many individuals from

the Schoolcraft International Institute, [Pageturners](#), the [Student Activities Office](#), and [Marketing](#). Many thanks to the [Schoolcraft College Foundation](#) and the [Center for Experiential Learning](#) for funding this event.



Diwali

by

Anna Maheshwari

Diwali is like Christmas for people of Indian background; it is also known as the *Festival of Lights*. The day is filled with delicious food, laughter, lots of gifts for children, and fireworks. We light up our homes with numerous clay lamps and invite Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, into our homes.

This year, the Asian Students Association celebrated Diwali on the 1st of November at Schoolcraft College - the evening was attended by almost 200 guests that included our President Dr. Cerny, faculty, students and community members. The evening was filled with Indian music, dance, and a sumptuous Indian dinner!

All proceeds of the Diwali event benefit the Schoolcraft Student Food Pantry, a program that provides non-perishable food items to students and their families who are impacted by financial hardship. If you wish to learn more about the event or the Asian Student Association, please reach out to their faculty advisor English Professor [Anna Maheshwari](#).





Christmas in Greece and the Diaspora by Helen Ditouras



**Jason – head baker at
Hellenic Bakery & Market**

From the time I was a young child, Christmas was a religious holiday rooted in the Greek Orthodox Church and involved family gatherings and community life. Specifically, children who attended Greek school, like me, spent the holidays visiting other Greek homes in Windsor to sing the “kalanda” – Christmas carols – as a festive tradition and to solicit donations for the church. Once I became a parent myself, Christmas transformed from a distinctly Greek community experience (aside from the extended family gatherings) and became a commercial holiday with the arrival of Santa Claus – an anticipated annual event for my child and all North American children for that matter.

While Christmas in the Greek diaspora included a 40-day Nativity fast for the observant and community gatherings in the church basement, Christmas in Greece couldn't be more different and spectacular. Aside from the beautiful lights that adorn metropolitan cities such as Athens and Thessaloniki, other fixtures mark the holidays such as the presence of “karavakia” – little boats. According to folklore, the Greek tradition of *Karavakia* is the decorating of small boats during the Christmas season and is reflective of Greece's ancient

seafaring days. Because sailors were gone for extended periods, women and children took care of the home until their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers returned. When Greek women saw their men's ships return safely to harbor, they would welcome them home with a celebration, festively decorating small wooden boats. This became a joyous maritime custom that became ingrained in the holiday season and still lives on symbolically today (Cosme).

The one thing that unites Greece with its diasporic communities worldwide are the desserts associated with Greek Christmas: melomakarona and kourabiedes. Kourabiedes, almond short bread cookies dusted with powdered sugar, are staples of holiday gatherings and plentiful in the homes of families in Greece and the diaspora. However, my favorite Christmas cookies are melomakarona, made of honey and walnuts. The origin of melomakarona have cultural and religious symbolism and come from the word "makaria," a ceremonial dish associated with funerals. In the Byzantine period, the recipe evolved with the addition of honey, an ingredient that symbolized the sweetness of life and prosperity, adopting spices, such as cinnamon and cloves that were brought by the Greeks of Asia Minor. Gradually, melomakarona became an integral part of Christmas, associated with family, hospitality and the festive mood ("Melomakarono"). Every Greek woman in my life mastered these cookies during the holidays including my mother, my aunt, and my Godmother (whose cookies were just a tiny bit superior in their shape and presentation).

While I am fortunate to still have all three of these women in my life and access to their delicious melomakarona, many of you may be wondering where you too could experience these festive cookies. For those of you in the Livonia area, make it a point to visit the [Hellenic Bakery & Market](#) at 33308 7 Mile near Farmington Road. Established in 1972 in Livonia, Michigan, founders John Liogas and his wife Katina have brought Greek baking and pastry recipes to the community of Livonia and greater Michigan. In addition to an array of baked goods, Hellenic Bakery is also my one stop shop for Greek cooking staples and a wide selection of premium olive oils imported from Greece. For those of us in the diaspora, Hellenic Bakery provides the tastes of home that we crave during important religious and cultural holidays. In anticipation of December 25th, I want to wish you all Chronia Polla (many years of good health and prosperity) and Kala Christougenna (Merry Christmas)!

Works Cited:

Cosme, Erika. *The Greek Maritime Holiday Tradition of Karavakia!*, The Mariner's Museum and Park, 16 Dec. 2020,

www.marinersmuseum.org/2020/12/the-greek-maritime-holiday-tradition-of-karavakia/.

Melomakarono: The History and Tradition of an Iconic Dessert, Efessos, 2022, efessou.gr/en/melomakarono-istoria-kai-paradosi-enos-emvlimatikou-glu/.



Web Resource: UN International Days



United Nations

**Peace, dignity and equality
on a healthy planet**

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