



**CenturyCollege**

## ***News Release***

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## **Author Urges Century College Students to Pursue their Dreams**

Author Kao Kalia Yang, a graduate of St. Paul Public Schools, Carleton College and Columbia University, told Century College students recently that writing the first Hmong family memoir was a labor of love fueled by a fierce determination to keep her grandmother's memory alive.

Yang's book, *The Latehomecomer*, published by Coffee House Press in 2008, has received glowing reviews around the world. In a voice that is both lyrical and authentic, Yang narrates her family's struggles while weaving in Hmong folklore and culture. Speaking to a Century College audience on Oct. 28, Yang also made it clear that the book's existence is something of a miracle.

"My father used to tell us that for every one of us standing here today, two other Hmong didn't make it," said Yang, 27. "A third of the Hmong died in the Secret War. Another third were slaughtered in the aftermath. This is the story of how we all came to America to find belonging and a place to call home."

Born in Thailand's Ban Vinai Refugee Camp, Yang remembers lots of hungry people, hungry dogs and a large gate. At age six, she immigrated with her family to St. Paul, where she was a refugee child.

Her family lived in the McDonough housing project, and Yang said books from the St. Paul Public Library Bookmobile fed her imagination. “Of all the institutions in this land, I love the public library best,” she said. Yang filled her time with reading while her mom and dad worked multiple jobs to feed the family.

Yang wrote her book as a tribute to her grandmother. The project took her two years of research and “reading, reading, reading.” While she wrote thousands of pages, the book is only 277 pages because she just kept the parts that made her cry. She focused on finding the strongest words to compose the strongest sentences. “I am a writer because I can play in language,” she said. “The freedom of movement is there.”

Yang advised students to live a life that will make a great story. “Every day, create a future for the next day,” she said. “You are the happy ending your mom and dad have been waiting for.”



Photo: Kao Kalia Yang at Century