



Prisoner for Peace

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Aung San Suu Kyi was born in 1945 to a rich and important family in Burma (now Myanmar).

Her father was killed when she was only two years old. But her young life was happy and comfortable. When she was fifteen, the family moved to India. Suu became very interested in her mother's political work there.

She understood the power of politics from an early age.

While studying in Oxford, Suu met Michael Aris, a handsome, young Englishman. Michael soon fell in love with Suu's Asian good looks and her bright intelligence. They married, and then traveled and worked in Asia for a few years together. Finally, they returned to England to live a simple, happy life with their two sons. But Suu could not forget her history, her family, and her people in Burma. She understood now that her father was killed during his fight for Burma's freedom. During the 1970s and 1980s, too, there were many problems in Burmese politics. As she read the newspapers, Suu remembered her father's courage.

In 1988 Suu visited her sick mother in Burma. It was a very difficult time for the country because the army wanted to form a new government. Many people were afraid of the future. Thousands of people, young and old, came into the streets to make their opinions known. But the army wanted power—they did not want to listen. They were ready to fight. Later that year, the army killed thousands of ordinary people. Suu knew that she had to choose between her comfortable, happy life with her family in Oxford and a difficult and dangerous life in Burma. Her mother was dying. Suu decided that she must continue her father's good work.

Suu understood a lot about international history and politics. She wanted to use the ideas of people like Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi.

In the United States and in India, these two men fought peacefully for the freedom of their people. She knew that the Burmese people wanted to choose their own government. They did not want the army to choose for them. She traveled around the country, and thousands of people listened to her speeches. The army watched Suu closely. She knew that her life was always in danger. But she believed that her country's freedom was more important. Suu was ready to fight—with intelligent words and ideas, not with guns.

In September 1988 the army took power. Suu and other politicians immediately started planning a way to return the government to the people. Then one morning early in 1989, a large group of soldiers came to Suu's home. "You must go back to England and stop your work in Burma," they told her.

But Suu refused to leave. "If you don't go, you can't leave this house," they continued. "You are

now a prisoner in your own home."

Suu continued to organize her political group from her prison home. The army watched her almost every minute of the day, but she carefully wrote secret letters and made secret phone calls. Every day was a lonely, dangerous fight for freedom. She could not move freely even in her own home, and her family could not visit her. But the terrible loneliness made Suu stronger and braver.

In 1990 the people of Myanmar voted for their country's government. Suu's political group, the NLD, won 82% of the votes. But the army refused to listen. They kept Suu in her home as a prisoner. And they refused to give power to the NLD. Myanmar's hopes for a better future were destroyed.

But Suu continued to work for her country. Her call for peace and understanding became famous around the world. In 1991 she won the Nobel Prize for Peace. Her two proud sons traveled to Norway and received the prize for her. She did not see them until a year later, when she was finally given permission for visits from her family.

But her life as a prisoner continued.

Prison life made Suu stronger, the army thought. So they decided to let her go. In 1995 Suu finally left her house. She traveled around the country, calling for change. The army watched her very closely. Every new speech and every new trip was dangerous. But Suu did not lose her courage.

Early in 1999 Suu's husband became very sick. "Go and see him in England," the army suggested. But Suu did not trust them. "If I go home," she thought, "the government will tell me not to return." She knew that her husband loved her. She knew that he understood. When he died in March that year, her heart broke.

Television, radio, and newspapers in Myanmar are not free-reporters must always agree with the army's ideas. But Suu's speeches were full of different opinions. The army was nervous, and they asked her to stop traveling. She refused. In 2000 Suu became a prisoner of the army again. After her husband's death, she felt even lonelier than before. But she kept busy with political work, study, exercise, and piano playing.

For more than fifteen years, most of them as a prisoner, Suu has not stopped fighting. In 2002 she was freed again, but in 2003 the army attacked the NLD and many people were killed. Is the army beginning to listen more closely to Suu's ideas? Some people think so. After many years, Suu's courage still gives hope to her country's people-a hope for a future of peace and freedom.

- THE END -

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