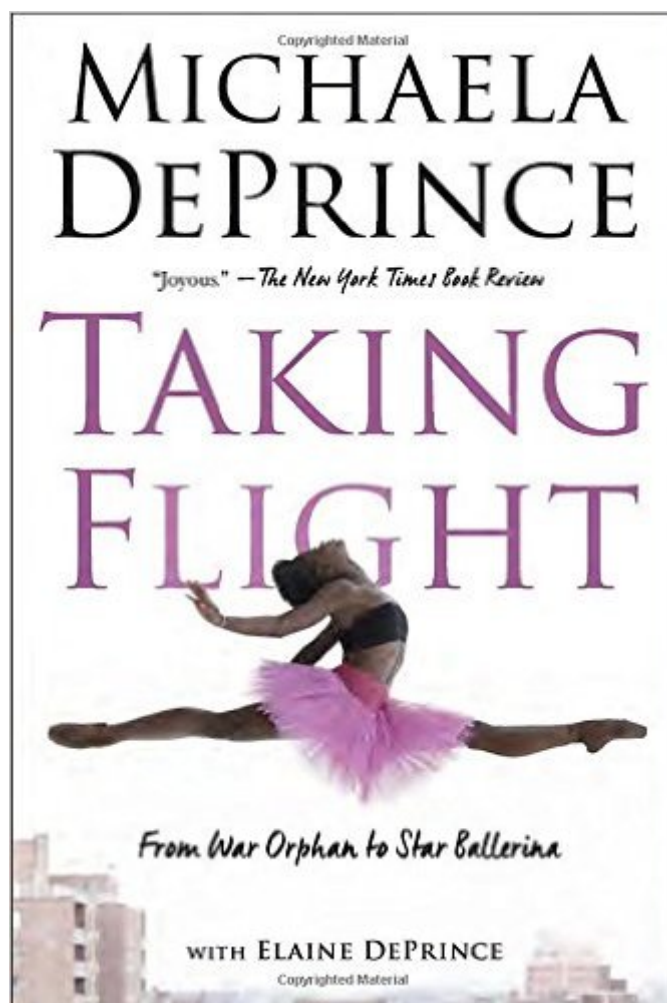


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Taking Flight: From War Orphan To Star Ballerina



Synopsis

The extraordinary memoir of an orphan who danced her way from war-torn Sierra Leone to ballet stardom, most recently appearing in Beyoncé's *Lemonade* and as a principal in a major American dance company. "Michaela is nothing short of a miracle, born to be a ballerina. For every young brown, yellow, and purple dancer, she is an inspiration!" —Misty Copeland, world-renowned ballet dancer

Michaela DePrince was known as girl Number 27 at the orphanage, where she was abandoned at a young age and tormented as a "devil child" for a skin condition that makes her skin appear spotted. But it was at the orphanage that Michaela would find a picture of a beautiful ballerina en pointe that would help change the course of her life. At the age of four, Michaela was adopted by an American family, who encouraged her love of dancing and enrolled her in classes. She went on to study at the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School at the American Ballet Theatre and is now the youngest principal dancer with the Dance Theatre of Harlem. She has appeared in the ballet documentary *First Position*, as well as on *Dancing with the Stars*, *Good Morning America*, and *Nightline*. In this engaging, moving, and unforgettable memoir, Michaela shares her dramatic journey from an orphan in West Africa to becoming one of ballet's most exciting rising stars. A story of great courage that all women "young and old" should read.

—Tina Brown

From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Taking Flight: From War Orphan to Star Ballerina tells the unlikely story of Michaela DePrince's journey from an orphanage where she was ranked as the least liked child to the stage as one of the world's most recognizable ballerinas because of her amazing story that was first brought to the world in the documentary First Position. I really enjoyed this memoir and found myself unable to put it down. Michaela's story reads as uplifting even at its darkest and the only time I felt a bit teary was at the very end (and it was smiley tears). It's a quick and fast read that young dancers (and those who enjoy reading about dance) will find enjoyable and be inspired by. The second half of the book has quite a bit of ballet jargon that may confuse non-dancers (although it's easy enough to just imagine something beautiful). I as the mother of a tiny ballet dancer did not have enough knowledge to imagine many of the steps she spoke of (it would have been nice to have a glossary of ballet terms at the end). The prose is simple and very easy to read and there's a nice set of pictures in the middle to help connect the reader to Michaela. Appropriateness: Michaela and her mother Elaine did a fantastic job writing about her early life in a way that young readers could handle without feeling that it was too traumatic. I would have no problem letting a fourth or fifth grader read this book and it's written in a way that would encourage kids to want to learn both about ballet and about war in Africa. I recommend this book for readers 10-16 (it's a bit simple for adult and older teen readers unless they're already invested in her story).

I love to read stories of how people overcome adversity, and Taking Flight is one of the best I've ever read. Of course I look at the story from the point of view of Michaela's adoptive mother and I'm stunned at Elaine DePrince's unselfish choice in adopting so many children with such all-consuming needs. Before Michaela and her 'sister' were adopted from war-torn Sierra Leone, the DePrinces' raised 5 sons, two of which had died of AIDs (they were hemophiliacs), with another to suffer the same fate. Taking on two, sick, malnourished four year-olds puts this woman on the level of sainthood in my book. As Michaela relates her life, I can only shudder at how hard it must have been to quiet the two young girls fears of everything from dogs to men with loud voices. Beaten with a switch at the orphanage, never given enough food, never mind being nutritious to a growing child, and dealing with the language barrier, Michaela was growing up with some very bad habits. She had to be taught not hit, kick and bite others, and learn English. There is not comparison to raising a child born to the privilege of the United States. With great compassion, Elaine mothers these two children and accepts another young girl when her adoptive American parents to don't work out. She fills these girls lives with dance lessons, swimming lessons, music, good food and stability. Her

sacrifice is stunning and truly inspirational. Michaela appreciates all that she now has and works hard to give back some of what she's given. She not only wins prestigious ballet scholarships, but wins at swimming and does her school work with honors. Michaela wants to be an inspiration to young girls in Africa, but frankly, she should be giving talks to American kids who have so much and still feel as if they have nothing. What a grand spirit this young girl has and what a lovely and talented adult she's become. And bravo for parents like the DePrinces' who spend their lives taking care of the unfortunate, they too are an inspiration.

This book was such a joy to read from cover to cover. It was a page turner and fairly quick read without being too short, but left me wanting more, which is always a good thing for a book. It goes through Michaela's early childhood in Sierra Leone up to her current life as a professional ballerina; and all the tidbits in between culminate to paint such a vivid and inspiring picture. This is a story of strength, heartbreak, perseverance, and passion to achieve a lifelong dream in spite of having the cards stacked against her from the very start. Although the book is largely about Michaela's journey, there is another star in the book, and that is her American mother. It is without a doubt that Michaela had the fortitude and determination to make things happen for herself, but the support of her parents (all four of them) afforded her many opportunities she likely would not otherwise have had. The brief details about her American mother make me want to know so much more about this remarkable woman, I hope she writes her own memoir as I would love to read it. I won't spoil anything for you readers, but I will just say the quiet impact this woman has had on the lives of her children and in turn, humanity, is breathtakingly admirable. It is true that there is a fair amount of ballet jargon in some of the book that might be over the heads of people not in the dance world, but there is so much more to her story than that and it shouldn't detract from a larger, non-dance enthusiast readership (it may even serve to inspire readers to learn more about the art of ballet). The book is first and foremost a memoir and ballet is an important backdrop to the overall story of overcoming the odds to achieve your dreams. I think this book will appeal to anyone who likes to read about any one or several of the following: the unwavering human spirit, feminism/gender equality, breaking racial barriers, family (the one you're born in and the family you choose), adoption, grief and loss, challenging fears, ballet, bridging cultural gaps, early childhood trauma, paving new paths, friendship, what it takes to succeed, and at the heart of it all...love.

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