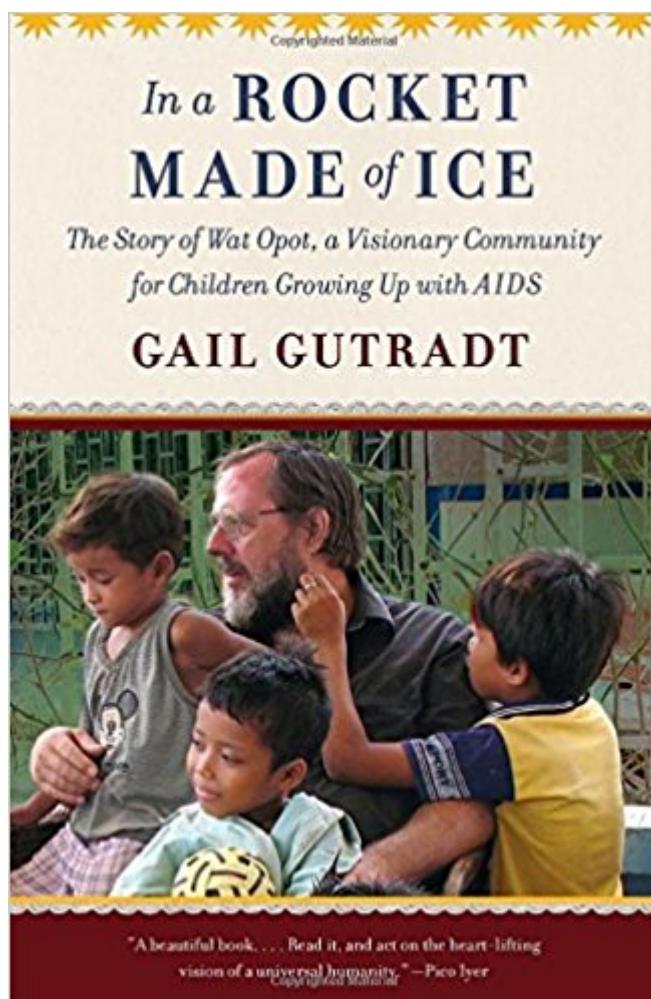


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# In A Rocket Made Of Ice: The Story Of Wat Opot, A Visionary Community For Children Growing Up With AIDS



## Synopsis

In 1997 Wayne Dale Matthysse, a former Marine Corps medic who served in Vietnam, returned to South East Asia offer his service . With Vandin San, a brilliant young Cambodian aid worker, he transformed Wat Opot, a haunted scrubland behind a ruined temple, into a place of healing and respite. Here children with or orphaned by HIV/AIDSâ€”the first generation of children to grow up with AIDSâ€”could find a new family, and live outside of fear or judgment. Disarming, funny, deeply moving, *In a Rocket Made of Ice* gathers the hopeful stories of children saved and changed by this very special place; the story of a war veteranâ€s redemption; and the story of the authorâ€s transformation in her contact with the powerful life force of Wat Opot.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

â€œA wrenching memoir of the time Gutradt spent volunteering at Wat Opot, a residence for Cambodian children and teens living with HIV and AIDS.â€ Sarah Meyer, O, The Oprah Magazineâ€œA testament to the thriving life in Wat Opot can be found in Gutradtâ€s powerful book. With patience, compassion, and an eye for the poetic, Gutradtâ€s memoir of her time as a volunteer at Wat Opot beautifully captures the heart behind the heavy circumstances that bring the communityâ€s residents together.â€ Joe Muscolino, Everyday eBookâ€œThis might have been one of the saddest stories ever told. Instead, it is an interesting and often uplifting one [that] also offers universal lessons in compassion. The book is based on the personal journal of Gutradt, an American who has worked over the years as a volunteer at a tiny orphanage in rural Cambodia. . . . Much of *In a Rocket Made*

of Ice is devoted to sketches of the many children the author has met and grown to love, the stories enhanced by photos taken by the author. . . . Gutradt writes sensitively, sometimes lyrically. . . . As director of the community, Wayne Matthysse is a constant presence that binds together both Wat Opot and Gutradt’s narrative. He is a complicated man [who] considers his work atonement for the deaths of two children he witnessed [while he was] in the Vietnam War. He has a highly individualistic moral sense. . . . In a Rocket Made of Ice concludes on an up-note, with stories of children who are now in their teens or early 20s. Wayne is helping them obtain educations, find jobs and learn to live —on the outside, — separate from their Wat Opot family. Compared with the early days of the orphanage, these are welcome challenges. Some people need to travel far from home to find their calling — Gutradt appears to be one of them. — • Melanie Kirkpatrick, *The Wall Street Journal* — “Affecting and deeply felt. . . . Part journalism, part memoir, — In a Rocket Made of Ice — is Gutradt’s story of her four stays at Wat Opot from 2005 to — 2012, and the empathy, selflessness, humor and willpower she was met with at every turn. Where once Wat Opot’s purpose was to — see HIV+ children and adults through to their inevitable deaths, the compound has since — hummed to life. . . . Despite the tragic circumstances that bring people to Wat Opot, the community roars with positivity and laughter. — • Joe Muscolino, *Biographile* — “An extraordinary book about an extraordinary place. . . . Gutradt, a Maine native who has spent several stints volunteering at Wat Opot, paints an achingly beautiful portrait of [Wat Opot], which may not have many material resources, but is imbued with a much-needed sense of family for children who have been orphaned by AIDS. . . . The ultimate goal of Wat Opot is not just to get kids healthy, but to instill in them a belief that they can live and thrive among other Cambodians, where the stigma of HIV and AIDS lingers. Many of the children go on to university, a testament to the powerful work being done on a shoestring and a prayer. Gutradt has given us an inspiring, unforgettable book. — • Amy Scribner, *BookPage* — “Neither sentimental nor solicitous, Gutradt’s memoir of her work in a small Cambodian community is a compassionate window into both their lives and hers. — • Bruce Jacobs, *Shelf Awareness* — “Gutradt takes readers into the Cambodian community of Wat Opot, where children who suffer from HIV or have lost their parents to the virus are cared for by a dedicated group of volunteers. Led by charismatic Vietnam veteran Wayne Matthysse, Wat Opot is recognized by UNICEF and other international agencies for the work it does on this most human of scales: by making sure otherwise overlooked children are fed, clothed, educated, and loved. Gutradt is clearly enamored with the work done here, and her deep affection and admiration for Matthysse are

obvious. . . . The good work being done at Wat Opot is admirable and to be emulated, and Gutradt writes effectively about how she's been transformed by her association with this important place and the many delightful children who live there. •Colleen Mondor, Booklist “Moving, insightful. . . . The story of a tiny community in Cambodia where children whose lives have been shattered by AIDS are cared for, educated and raised to live full lives in the outside world. . . . Gutradt first volunteered in Wat Opot in 2005 and returned there multiple times. . . . Her many photographs of the youngsters are appealing; her warm stories generally avoid sentimentality: the needy children are not angels, and as they grow, they sometimes present truly tough problems for those concerned about their welfares and futures. Gutradt also discusses the problems created by unreliable government agencies and well-intentioned but uninformed do-gooders. A refreshing account of generous people devoting their time and energy to doing something right. •Kirkus “Wat Opot is a community that not only saves the lives of its residents but enriches our lives through its lessons in generosity, empathy, and resilience. Before I read Gail Gutradt’s moving account, I had never heard of it. Now I will never forget it. •Anne Fadiman, author of *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* “It’s hard not to fall in love with the author, the subjects, and the message of this beautiful book of stories and photographs. The warmth, the thoughtfulness, the writerly craft Gail Gutradt brings to an orphanage in Cambodia—and the stories and people she finds there—teach us not only about wisdom and compassion, but also about how to give our lives meaning, right now. Read it, and act on the heart-lifting vision of a universal humanity it brings so movingly home to us. •Pico Iyer “This is an inspiring, first-hand account of personal sacrifice to help dying children, an insight into courage, and a vivid portrait of life in rural Cambodia. •Alan Lightman, author of *Einstein Dreams* “Much more than a story of hope in the face of grim news and chronic disappointment, Gutradt makes a compelling case for the efficacy of ingenuity, imagination, and a commitment to human dignity in accompanying each other through adversity. •Dr. Paul Farmer

Gail Gutradt has volunteered at the Wat Opot Children’s Community in Cambodia since 2005. Her stories, articles, and poems have appeared in the Japan-based Kyoto Journal, as well as in the Utne Reader and Ashf<sup>©</sup> Journal. Her first Kyoto Journal article, “The Things We’ve Gone Through Together,” was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She lives in Bar Harbor, Maine.

This is a well written, inspirational book that changed my life. I actually hired a tuktuk and visited Wat Opot last month (October 2014) and brought them supplies. I was met by delightful group of children and young adults who live at Wat Opot. There are about 50 children living at the community and they are a bundle of joy: They are obviously loved and well cared for despite overwhelming odds and loss. I was impressed by the clinic, the school, the music and art program. During my visit, I had a chance to visit with Wayne Matthysse, a U. S. Marine Corps Medic, who, with co-founder Vandin San opened Wat Opot as a hospice for people with AIDS in the years before antiretroviral medications were available in Cambodia. Through Wayne's love, personal sacrifice, and attention to detail, the community has grown and thrived. This book confirmed once again that one person can make a huge difference in this world. I am forever in debt to Wayne and the author, Gail Gutradt, and most importantly, the children of Wat Opot for reinforcing my belief in mankind and the power of love. I've been a member of a bookclub in Florida for many years and this book will be number one on my list of recommendations for year 2015. The author has graciously offered to teleconference when we review the book.

Written in a very ego-less fashion. A glimpse into the complexities and simplicity of our ability to give life, light, respect, love and dignity to ourselves and others.

A wonderful lesson in humanity at its very best. Ms Gutradt has written a hauntingly beautiful account of love and compassion.

I love reading stories about such amazing people. It makes me want to do more to improve the lives of those we so often forget. It reminded me of the AIDS work I'm doing with the Nyanya Project in Africa.

A most relevant read. Not only does it give an accurate account of what orphanages are here in Cambodia, but it sheds light on a very immediate situation with HIV/AIDS.

This is a really great book. If you need this for college talking about Aids then this is your book

Great book. Moving, inspiring, heartwarming and heartbreakng. It's about love and hope. (Have the tissues handy.)

This is an amazing story of people stepping out in faith to help others. An amazing story of people's lives affected by Aids.

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