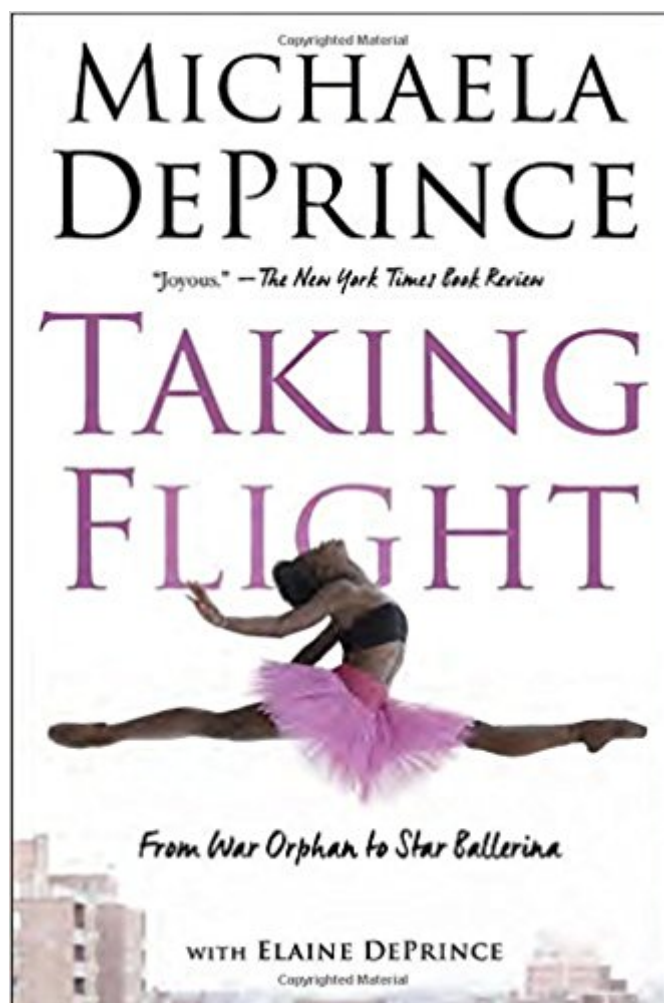


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Taking Flight: From War Orphan To Star Ballerina



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

Gr 6 Up— In this moving memoir, DePrince, who in 1995 was born in war-torn Sierra Leone but went on to become an acclaimed professional ballerina, tells her story. Her struggles started early: it was discovered that she had vitiligo, a medical condition that results in blotchy, irregular patches of skin, and her biological parents both died when she was only three. DePrince was sold to an orphanage, where she was starved and abused and where she witnessed the brutal murder of her pregnant teacher, a memory that would forever haunt her. After the orphanage was bombed, DePrince and the other orphans fled to a refugee camp. When she was four years old, she and her best friend, Mia, were adopted by the same family and taken to live in the United States. Just before leaving, DePrince found a magazine photograph of a ballerina, and her dream of becoming a dancer was born. Her supportive family did everything they could to help her attain her goal, but the girl still encountered challenges, including prejudice from those who believed African American dancers to be less suited for the craft ("Black girls just shouldn't be dancing ballet. They're too athletic. They should leave the classical ballet to white girls."). However, she persevered and succeeded, becoming the youngest principal dancer for the Dance Theatre of Harlem and joining the Dutch National Ballet. Though the text is accessible and engaging, there are events that are glossed over or not fully fleshed out, such as details of her adopted sister's medical problems. Overall, though, DePrince is an inspiring narrator, wise beyond her years. An uplifting story about overcoming the odds.—Stephanie Farnlacher, Trace Crossings Elementary School, Hoover, AL --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Starred review, Publishers Weekly, August 11, 2014: "A compelling narrative . . . The book's strong thread is Michaela's lifelong passion for ballet and her candid depiction of the physical and emotional struggles of becoming a black classical ballerina. There is plenty of ballet detail for dance lovers to revel in, and the authors achieve a believable, distinctive teenage voice with a nice touch of lyrical description." — "Readers will find her life story gripping whether or not they are dance fans...the heart of the journey resonates in this mother/daughter collaboration. A revealing and absorbing journey through dance classes and competitions to success." — Kirkus Reviews — "From her earliest days as an orphan in Sierra Leone to the stages of world-renowned theaters, Michaela's incredible determination to not only

survive, but triumph in the face of unthinkable adversity is an inspiration to anyone who has fought for a dream. Her grace and strength bleed through in each of her breathtaking performances. This is a story of great courage that all women—•young and old—•should read. •

—Tina Brown —“Extraordinarily written. Hardship adds to the strength of the people and artists we become and 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

From the Hardcover edition.

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.

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 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 and dance 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.

The most beautiful of stories. A loving compassionate family solves their grief over losing sons by adopting 2 young girls from Sierra Leone Orphanage. I think the mother, Elaine DePrince, herself just as fascinating a story as Michaela - how she copes with all the problems that present themselves - helping these children learn to speak English, bringing them back to health, guiding them gently into the ways of life in a completely strange society and atmosphere the girls have never seen before, how she helps them deal with the fears and the tragedies of their past and overcome them. Michaela has become a very successful and exquisite Ballerina in addition to becoming a well-balanced joyful and beautiful young lady in every way - inside and out. This is a success story that has only barely begun. And the book so well done once I picked up it is one I just couldn't put down until finished.

I enjoyed reading this book. Even though it's for children, the book is well written and captivating. Michaela's depictions of her life in Sierra Leone are vivid without being too detailed when describing

some of the grisly subject matter. I read her story I imagined what her life would have been if she had grown up in Sierra Leone as compared to her life now. Michaela's was a little girl who needed a miracle. I am amazed, excited, thankful and even relieved that she adopted by parents who helped each one of their children prepare for their future no matter the cost: physical, emotional or financial. It's always wonderful to read about someone who made their dream come true and when Michaela describes the magazine cover that ignited her dream, it's even more thrilling. I like that she included photos in her book and they remind me of how much has happened to her in such a short time. I look forward to her next book that will perhaps be a bit more complex.

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