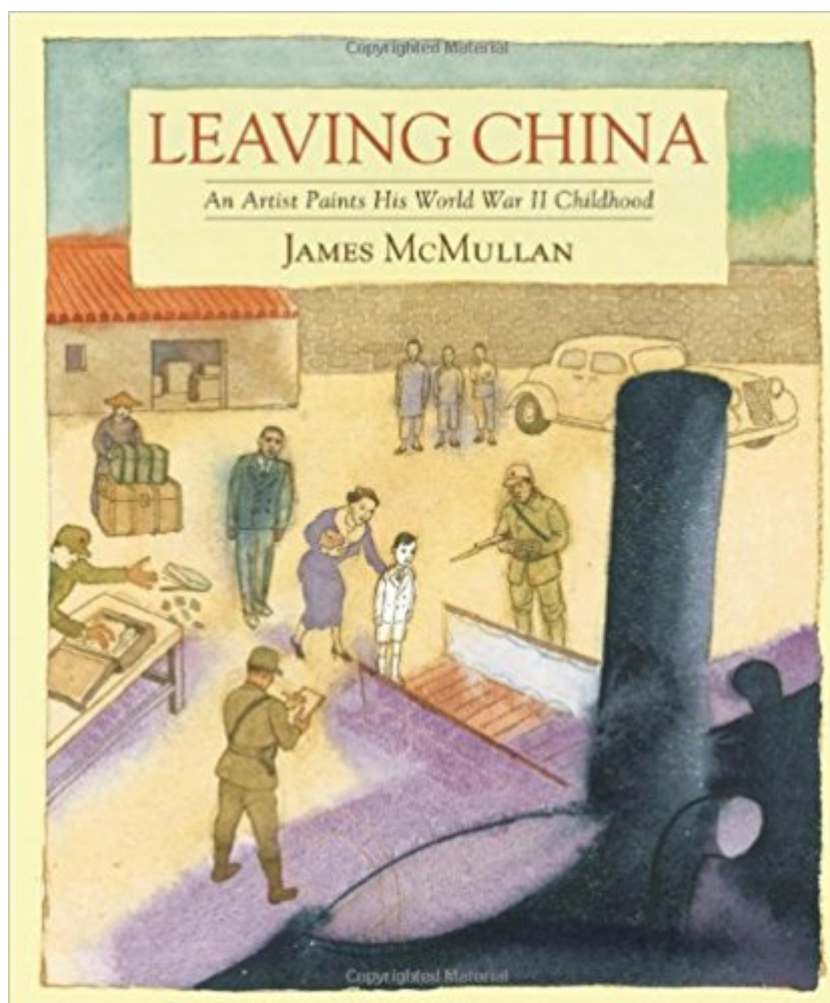


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# Leaving China: An Artist Paints His World War II Childhood



## Synopsis

A memoir in paintings and words by internationally acclaimed illustrator, author, and teacher James McMullan. A Booklist Top 10 Biography for Youth—“It is this dreamlike quality of my memories that I wanted to capture in some way in the paintings that accompany the text—to suggest in the images that the events occurred a long time ago in a simpler yet more exotic world, and that the players in that world, including me, are at a distance.” • Artist James McMullan—his work has appeared in the pages of virtually every American magazine, on the posters for more than seventy Lincoln Center theater productions, and in bestselling picture books. Now, in a unique memoir comprising more than fifty short essays and illustrations, the artist explores how his early childhood in China and wartime journeys with his mother influenced his whole life, especially his painting and illustration. James McMullan was born in Tsingtao, North China, in 1934, the grandson of missionaries who settled there. As a little boy, Jim took for granted a privileged life of household servants, rickshaw rides, and picnics on the shore—until World War II erupted and life changed drastically. Jim’s father, a British citizen fluent in several Chinese dialects, joined the Allied forces. For the next several years, Jim and his mother moved from one place to another—Shanghai, San Francisco, Vancouver, Darjeeling—first escaping Japanese occupation then trying to find security, with no clear destination except the unpredictable end of the war. For Jim, those ever-changing years took on the quality of a dream, sometimes a nightmare, a feeling that persists in the stunning full-page, full-color paintings that along with their accompanying text tell the story of Leaving China.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 18 years

Grade Level: 7 - 12

## Customer Reviews

Gr 7 Up — In this poignant memoir, McMullan, illustrator of Kate McMullan's bestselling *I Stink* picture book (HarperCollins, 2002) and creator of more than 50 posters for Lincoln Center theater productions, chronicles his childhood during World War II. Born in Tsingtao, China, in 1934, young Jim lived a life of privilege as the son of wealthy Europeans. His grandparents went to China as missionaries. They operated an orphanage for abandoned infant girls and later taught the young women to embroider. Their distinctive cutwork creations became the seeds of a profitable exporting business, the James McMullan Company. By the time Jim was born, his family was among the best known in Chefoo, and his parents were the toast of the lavish social scene. Everything changed, however, when the war began. Jim and his mother traveled from China to Canada and to India while his father served with the British Army. While Jim had difficulty adjusting to new schools and was bullied because of his strange accent, his mother suffered from depression and alcoholism. The book is composed of one-page vignettes that face a corresponding full-page watercolor scene illustrating a pivotal moment in the McMullan family history and/or Jim's childhood. Delicate layers of pale green, soft lavender, and rich ocher tones bleed and blend into deep violet shadows—a subtle visual nod to the themes of nostalgia, isolation, and loss explored throughout the work. McMullan's compositions are both quiet and stirring in their depiction of a lonely little boy struggling to find his place in a chaotic and often unkind world. In addition to McMullan's personal remembrances, the book also offers readers a glimpse into what life was like for children growing up during this time. Fans of memoirs, students studying World War II, and aspiring artists will find much to appreciate. —Kiera Parrott, *School Library Journal*

**\*Starred Review\*** The first nonfiction title in the still new Algonquin Young Readers imprint, this is a memoir of celebrated artist McMullan's early years, from age 2 to 11. His was a hopscotch childhood, thanks to WWII. Born in 1934 in Tsingtao, China, he subsequently lived in Shanghai, Canada, India, then China and Canada again and, finally, in the U.S. My mother and I were now wanderers, he writes, not yet attached to any particular place. His life was not always a happy story; his mother was a deep depressive who abused alcohol, and his strict, British military-officer father died in a plane wreck. Moreover, he had a self-described nervous, timid, introspective personality,

but he found much comfort in the intelligence of his visual surroundings, and, accordingly, his story is informed by a keen sense of place. The book consists of 54 chronologically arranged full-page illustrations, each accompanied by a facing page of text. The exquisite full-color pictures are filled with air and space, reminiscent of the Chinese scrolls that fascinated McMullan as a child. These pictures and the evocative text are a happy exercise in harmony. A fascinating, seamless portrait of a young life and the wartime world that will have appeal not only to young readers but to adults as well. Grades 6-9. --Michael Cart

I haven't bothered to put in a few words on any book (and I've liked many) for many a moon but this lovely little memoir has really delighted me. Gently done however with many dark strokes we enter his fabulous early life. His grandparents enter Yangchow, China in 1887 as missionaries coming from Ballycotton, Ireland. His parents establish an export business (lace) and prosper. Of course, the world will not stay still and upends the McMullan family idyll. War lords from Japan enter the frame and sensitive young boy James absorbs the horrific fallout. 110 pages, the story told on one side and illustrated on the facing page. Beautiful water colors capturing the moment.... BRAVO Jim McMullan and thanks.

A quick and easy read that gives a glimpse into the history of China before, during and after the second world war. It is the journey of a Western family living in China under the Nationalist regime as well as during Japanese occupation and the Communist regime. Although the title is "Leaving China", the theme is "living in China". The writing is simple and clear and the illustrations are masterful.

I love the water colored painted pages of James McMullan and his writings in the book. Each night, I read a few pages. I was sad when I finished reading the book. I will keep the book with my other art books as it inspires me to be a better artist and never give up on your dreams no matter what.

A fabulous visual memoir of the McMullan's childhood in China before and during WWII. Anyone interested in his illustrations will love this book. He writes about incidents in his childhood and illustrates each one page incident so every spread has text and an illustration. It's a moving book to read.

I especially enjoyed the historical events and places that are part of this story. The drawings are an

added jewel in this satisfying read.

I loved the story of the journey of this boy from China to the USA in his young years and his descriptions of that journey and to his career in illustration. It is a history of the time and adults will love it as would children.

This is a very beautiful book. The illustrations and text are mesmerizing. An amazing insight into a tumultuous place and time.

Interesting book about one man's early years in China. Beautifully done. I can almost see the places and feelings come to life. Thank you, James McMullan! Kelly Mueller

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