

*Tree Girl* is a novel, based on a true story, that tells the story of a young woman's journey through womanhood and a tough struggle. They call Gabriela "Tree Girl" or Laj Ali Re Jayub in her native language of Quich'e. Gabi climbs trees to be within reach of the eagles and watch the sun rise into an empty sky. She is at home among the outstretched branches of the Guatemalan forests. Then one day from the safety of a tree, Gabi witnesses the sites and sounds of an unspeakable massacre. She sees a rape and murder - the ravages of guerrilla warfare. She vows to be a Tree Girl no more. Earth bound, she joins the hordes refugees struggling to reach the Mexican border. She has lost her whole family; her entire village has been wiped out. Yet she clings to the hope that she will be reunited with her youngest sister, Alicia. Over dangerous miles and months of hunger, thirst, and the threats of more violence from soldiers, Gabriela's search for Alicia and for a safe haven becomes a search for self. Having turned her back on her own identity, can she hope to claim a new life?

This novel is based on a true story told to the author one night by the real Tree Girl in a secure safe house in Guatemala.

Recommended for 6th grade and older.

The story of *Tree Girl* is centered on the Mayan genocide that occurred during the [Guatemalan Civil War](#) from 1960 to 1996. The war was fought between the [Guatemalan](#) government, and leftist rebel groups. The military had taken total control over Guatemala and ordered the purification of Guatemalan *Indios*. Soldiers destroyed more than 626 villages and more than 200,000 were killed. Once Mayan people realized this and escaped to safety, many joined the rebels in the fight against the government. The Civil War ended when peace talks were held between the leader of the rebels, [Rolando Morán](#), and president [Álvaro Arzú](#).

The main character is Gabriela Flores, a 15-year-old girl. When her town is burned and everyone is killed except her sister, she then has to find a way to survive the world around her.

- Mamí - Gabriela's mother takes care of Gabriela and her other siblings.
- Alicia - Gabriela's younger sister that is reunited with her.
- Jorge - Gabriela's older brother, who is taken away by the soldiers after defending Gabriela during her **quinceañera**.
- Antonio - Gabriela's younger brother, who gets shot when the soldiers take over the town.
- Julia - Another of Gabriela's siblings, Julia is her younger sister who also killed by the soldiers who take over the town.
- Lidia - Gabriela's younger sister.
- Lester - Gabriela's younger brother.

- Papi - Gabriela's father who prays for them.
- Manuel Quispe - Gabriela's teacher, who is killed when soldiers beat him until he dies, with his students watching.
- Victoria - Gabriela and Manuel's student, who is killed when running away from the soldiers who are trying to massacre the children Manuel and Gabriela taught at school.
- Lisa - Gabriela and Manuel's student, who is killed as well at the same massacre as Victoria and the rest of the children.
- Ruben - Gabriela and Manuel's student, who is killed at the massacre with the rest of the children that go to the school who also get killed.
- Federico - Gabriela and Manuel's student, who is killed at the school massacre.
- Pablo - Gabriela and Manuel's student, who is killed at the school massacre.
- Rosa - An older woman whom Gabriela meets at the refugee camp and befriends. She later dies of natural causes.
- Carmen - An older woman whom Gabriela meets at the refugee camp and befriends, and also is the closest thing to family she has in the camp until her sister shows up.
- Milagro - A baby whom Gabriela helps bring into this world. Her name means 'Miracle'.
- Maria - A woman who finds Alicia and Milagro, whom she takes care of temporarily.
- Mario - A man Gabi finds at the refugee camp. He tells stories of America's Government.