

*Ashes*

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Teacher: Margaret McDonnell  
Survivor Testimony: Selene Bruk

They set her city aflame  
Selene Bruk's beautiful Jewish community was gone  
Turned to chaos  
The weddings  
The synagogues  
The births and deaths  
The children dancing and spreading their contagious laughter  
The memories...  
Burned to but a cinder.  
She sifted through ash in search of anything to suggest the slightest hint of what once stood  
Her search was in vain  
Not dwelling a minute longer, she fled the chaos  
She lived for weeks in an attic  
They called it a haven  
She felt captive  
There were so many beautiful souls that she had seen disappear  
With a troubled heart, she said 'Surely it gets better'  
From some perspective- perhaps it was true.  
But only after a long period of suffering  
They took her to Birkenau  
The countless nights she spent watching that chimney exhale the souls of the innocent  
Where was God? Where was justice?  
Beneath a quiet sky, she expected no response.  
In reply, she heard the screams of the innocent  
But this time she felt no shock  
They had broken her  
They ripped her from her daydreams  
She had been numbed by the brutality  
Drained of any determination  
She felt that her hope was in vain  
She was defeated  
Lost, Broken  
*Abandoned*  
But liberation was a long awaited promise kept by her God  
But how many beautiful souls had she seen disappear...  
Where was he then?  
No living soul will ever know what she had been through  
No history book  
No photograph will ever be capable of capturing her pain  
So many years later, she visits Bialystok  
When others see a populated city teeming with life,  
She sees the graveyard of broken souls and unkept promises  
She says Kaddish for the dead Jewish community that once stood there