

SECOND PLACE HIGH SCHOOL PROSE

Through My Mother's Eyes

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Survivor Testimony: Selene Bruk

I stand outside a bleak, gray building, knowing that my grandfather, a colonel in the Shah's army, first helped build the political prison and was then later detained in there, hopeless, during the revolution in Iran. My parents are immigrants from Iran and seeing their home country with obliterated houses changed my perspective on it. As a child growing up in the U.S., I pictured Iran as a country full of beautiful architecture and scenic vineyards. However, when I visited Tehran, my mother reluctantly showed me the dank hiding spots where multiple families hid, packed like livestock being sent to slaughter, when the Iraqi army bombed their houses. I no longer visualized my home country as a place with busy bazaars and colorful mosques, but as a cruel country that stripped women of their rights and destroyed people's communities.

When Selene Bruk, a survivor of the Holocaust, rebuilt her life, she swore she would never step foot into her home country of Poland again. Selene's daughter, intrigued by her mother's heritage, longed to visit Poland to see where her mother grew up. Selene wanted to block these traumatic memories out of her life. However, if her daughter wanted to see Poland, Selene insisted that it was going to be through her eyes. Selene needed her daughter to know that Poland is not the beautiful country it once was, but a country filled with deep wounds of Jewish persecution.

In my mother's eyes, Iran is a place where women are treated as inferior to men. In Selene's eyes, German violence replaced Poland's once lively Jewish community. Selene overcame her trauma to show others what the Jews endured. When she went back to Poland with her daughter, Selene recalled the memories of the smoke drifting out of the chimney as the Jews were burned, wondering each day which one of her family members was rising out of the flames. Now, every chimney she sees burns her soul with remembrance of Nazi atrocities. Reluctantly, Selene opened a wound she had closed for many years. My mother, just like Selene, wanted to show Iran to me through her eyes, so I could understand the depth of the violence our people endured.

My act of *tikkun olam* is a generational call to reveal the deep history of my ancestors and their resilience. Someday, I hope to show Iran to my own children, through my mother's eyes, the history of how it went from a beautiful country full of culture to a bleak dictatorship. Neither Poland nor Iran will ever be the same after these harsh wars swept away their lively communities. However, by transferring these powerful stories to future generations, we can awaken a profound sense of empathy to prevent these tragedies from happening in the future.