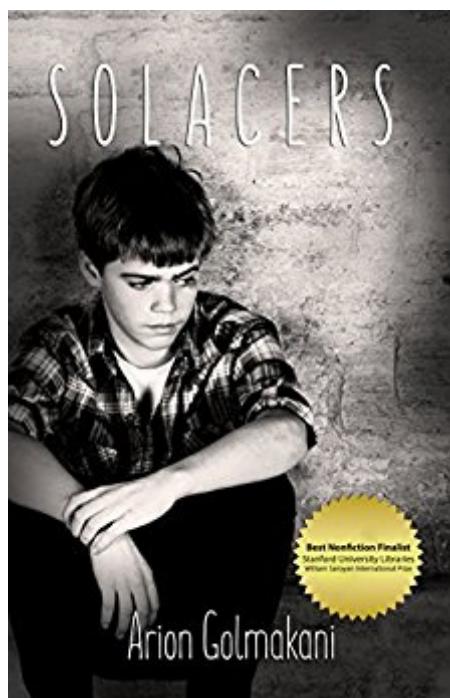


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# Solacers: An Iranian Oliver Twist Story- A Memoir



## Synopsis

\*\*\* Best Nonfiction Finalist, Stanford University Libraries, William Saroyan International Prize

\*\*\*œSometimes when life became too overwhelming for my poor young mother, out of frustration and despair she would say; â ^If I only didnâ ™t have you, I would have surely found a suitor to marry me by now.â ™ I was three then. After she remarried and left town, and I became responsible for myself, and when life got too overwhelming for me, I often pondered the same thought; â ^If I only didnâ ™t have me.â ™â •Solacers tells the touching story of a boy's search for family life and safety following the divorce of his parents in Iran during the 1960â ™s. The first child of a heartless father and a discarded mother is left to fend for himself on the streets of Mashhad, seeking food and shelter wherever he can. His lonely early years are an unbelievable tale of cruelty and betrayal on the part of nearly everyone who might be expected to help, save for one aunt who does her best to keep him from starving. But living a harsh and solitary existence has one advantage for this little boy: other than forcing him to be self-reliant, no one attempts to indoctrinate him on Iranian society's archaic cultural values and religious beliefs. And so he never accepts his wretched state as fate, choosing instead to dream big dreams about getting an education, having his own family, and starting a new life â “ possibly in the faraway land called America. He makes a plan and by the age of 17 he boards a plane to the land of possibilities, where his dreams eventually also take flight. One of "30 Moving memoirs every student should read."-- OnlineCollege.org "He was neither an orphan, nor a street kid but life dealt him such a hand that now, those who hear the story of his childhood in Iran, consider him an Oliver Twist in the streets of Mashhad. His childhood could be summarized in two words: Hungry and Forlorn.â • BBC "If you devoured â œThe Glass Castle,â • vividly remember â œAngela's Ashes,â • and were fascinated by â œDestined to Witness,â • if you loved the colorful descriptions, the oriental storytelling and the ornate language of Khaled Hosseiniâ ™s â œThe Kite Runner,â • you will definitely get your moneyâ ™s worth reading â œBeraubte Wut-- the German edition of Solacers,â • by the American author Arion Golmakani." â “ Joke Brocker, WestfÃ¤lische Nachrichtenâ œCongratulation on such a first class book. One of the most important attributes of this book is its ability to motivate readers to try harder, and guide them to find a better life for themselves.â -- Dr. Ehsan Yarshater, Author of Encyclopedia Iranica, founder and director of The Center for Iranian Studies and Emeritus Professor of Iranian Studies at Colombia University. "A story of hope, determination, and forgiveness, Solacers is a remarkable tale of resilience and optimism, with lessons for us all. Golmakani gives voice to children everywhere who long for nurturing and hunger for security."-- Hans J. Massaquoi, retired managing editor of Ebony Magazine and the author of best-selling book, Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany. "I confess,

when I read the publisher's blurb about your book online, my expectations were low. I feared it would be another "escape from Iran" narrative, in which Muslims (or people "from there") featured as the enemies of reason and civilization. There are so many such Orientalist tales in circulation, and they feed into a politics of fear which I find very dangerous. How wonderful to be surprised by a story that captured the people you encountered in all their humanity" - Eva Sajoo- Research Associate- Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada

## **Book Information**

File Size: 1456 KB

Print Length: 327 pages

Publication Date: December 5, 2013

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B004XDBRG6

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #128,679 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #52

in Books > History > Middle East > Iran #139 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History >

Middle East #140 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Middle East

## **Customer Reviews**

I was not too keen to read this book thinking it would be just too sad. I read a free sample and was absorbed into the story. I loved the book, I am so grateful Arion shared his unbelievable story. Yes it is sad but it awakens many feelings and thoughts of what life must be like as a small boy, abandoned by his parents. His utter determination to rise above his tragic circumstances, to make his life worthwhile and to mend his broken soul with no bitterness is remarkable. SUCH a gentle beautiful book, full of lessons to be a better global person especially in light of the Syrian refugee tragedy.

In 1960s staunchly patriarchal Iran, there is only one thing worse than having a dead father, having

an alive father who refuses to support you. At the tender age of 5, after his mother remarries and gives birth to his stepfather's first child, young Alireza is expelled from his mother's home and given over to an abusive father who does not want him, for the simple reason that his father refuses to pay Child Support. What follows are 12 years of bouncing between foster families and mostly unsympathetic relatives with intermittent periods spent wandering city streets and surviving by wit alone. Again and again he ran back to the only home he knew and wanted to find himself unwelcome and sent away back to whatever sordid fate his father's actions have caused. Battered, bruised, injured, lonely, starving, etc. It does not matter. Everyone looks at him with disgust or pity, but no one is willing to bare his father's burden and so often unwashed and on the brink of starvation, Alireza wanders about, crisscrossing his motherland, on an endless quest for welcoming open arms and a brighter tomorrow. Set against an authentic and vivid portrait of 1960s&1970s pre-revolutionary Iran, Solacers is a hauntingly beautiful story to read and remember.

This sad tale of a little boy's abandonment at an early age kept my interest throughout. How could those who should have been nurturing and caring for this small child forget their obligations? I felt his mother in particular was very wanting. She revealed herself to be a weak willed woman who regarded her second marriage to be more important than protecting her son. His step-father Mansoor Aqa, was no better. He complained constantly about the expense of keeping his step-son Alireza and wiped his hands of all responsibility. Mansoor Aqa thought his natural father should be responsible for the child, but how could he abandon all compassion when the father failed to do his duty? Cast adrift so young, Alireza was defenceless to cope. In his desperate plight, he depended upon a few kind humans for solace. Ill treated, beaten, starved and sleeping rough, it is a miracle he survived. He was rejected and beaten by his natural father, but his will to survive surmounted all odds even though there were few who felt pity for his plight. Alireza even raided garbage bins for bread to eat, but mostly had to go hungry. It was a real rags to riches story with him finally being accepted into America as a migrant. He certainly deserved a happy ending. The book of a little boy's suffering and survival is well written and interesting and told without seeking sentimentality. The conditions for children in Iraq where so many are expected to work at an early age are so different from Western countries. It reminded me how children were treated in Victorian times. Lets hope attitudes have changed for the better in Iraq today. I think most people will find this book shocking and sad but also inspiring, and one you will remember for a long time.

After reading Solacers, the reader will come away with the realization and validation for the

justification in believing in a better tomorrow; this appears to be a recurring theme throughout the memoir. From the very opening pages, I found myself captivated by the ensuing narrative of Golmakani's extremely hard and difficult existence in the back villages of Iran. Every page afforded me the opportunity to witness the author's trials and tribulations--from the opening page to the last. So enmeshed do we become in this memoir that it becomes difficult to not feel the personal pains that the author descriptively lays out before us. We also find ourselves cheering for him during those fleeting periods in his life when things appear to be going his way (as with his new-found relationship with Molouk, a ten year old light years ahead of her physical age--and later Sarah who befriended him on the river's edge). Throughout all the hardships he endures while growing up, he never once gave up on the notion that his tomorrows would justify the many sacrifices encountered along the way. We soon learn that it was those never-ending thoughts of tomorrow, coupled with a number of helping hands along the way that enabled him to realize his youthful dreams. Even with those helping hands, however, it was his inner desire for a better life that catapulted him in his survival against great odds. Solacers effortlessly records his youthful struggles to find a better life for himself and, above all, to be loved, unconditionally. Golmakani convincingly demonstrates throughout the memoir that in spite of external forces forever attempting to beat us back, there is a light at the end of the tunnel for those that maintain a sense of faith and hope. Even though we learn upfront in his Prologue that "This is not a book about Iran or the Iranian people," we nevertheless gain a wealth of knowledge of the prevailing culture of Iran and its people during the sixties and seventies leading up to the Iranian Revolution--a revolution which eventually toppled the long reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1979. It was interesting to note that in spite of those that sought to beat him back, he bears no animosity towards them. As he sought the forgiveness of others, so too did he openly forgive. A must read for those looking for inspiration in overcoming personal hardships.

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