



*I* was a young, active, happy, ambitious and successful woman. I was proud of myself.

A pilot, an entrepreneur, an insurance advisor and a consultant in two different, large insurance companies in my homeland, and mother of five wonderful children.

Married to a prominent and highly educated judge and lawyer with a degree of Ph.D. in law.

Daughter of an established engineer and architect.

Beautiful and strong with my head held high in a world where fear and failure were unknown feelings and unfamiliar words.

But with the revolution's extensive chaos and destructive forces my plans for future were viciously ruined by a bloody sea that pulled me down to the bottom with all my hopes for my children's future. Thus came to an end the continuation of a happy life.

My wings were clipped in a world of misery. Overnight and in an instant, I had become nothing. My dreams for the future were shattered with the so-called religious and bloody revolution.

Trembling with an immense fear that took a hold of me, I looked for a way to save my children's lives from the hell in Iran.

Although I was ultimately able to save my children's lives, I, sadly, lost many other things that can never be replaced. I lost my husband, my family, my assets, and, worst of all, I lost my country, my identity, and my career. All at once, I was called a foreigner in a country so utterly foreign to me, Sweden. I was so far away from my own country, something that I had wished neither for me nor for my children; that is, to live under such conditions in a foreign country.

Ironically, my beautiful homeland Iran, wherein I was born and raised, gave me everything from the very moment of my birth, and it sadly took all of that back later on in life. Who am I now? What have I done wrong? Why am I being punished?

When I came to Sweden in 1985, I was a broken woman who was tired, unhappy, alone, and almost empty handed. My baggage was full of memories and pride over my background, which could not help me in any shape or form to continue living the same life I had before. All of a sudden, I was nothing more than a pathetic foreigner in everyone's eyes. A poor, single mother who did not know the language, and did not know anything in that new country, Sweden.

Given the huge downfall, I had no time to sit and wallow in self-pity. I did not want to look back and just feel sorry for myself. I had a grave duty and many tasks ahead of me: I had to raise my children well as I had always intended.

At daytime, I did not have time to even cry and let the tears wash away the pain in my heart. At night time, however, after the kids were in bed and I was alone, I would cry myself to sleep. I could allow myself to cry in private and let the tears run endlessly down my dry cheeks like a waterfall, but not in front of my children or anyone else. I found life to be a never-ending, bitter struggle for the sole purpose of survival and nothing else. I felt a deep hatred toward the mullahs who ruined my country and our lives, toward those despicable and rebellious people from the worst social classes who lacked in morality, and whose mob mentality devastated our lives and, worst of all, our country.

Fundamentalism and fanaticism halted the country's progress and success, took away freedom and rights, and wiped out more than 2500 years of history of civilization and culture by reverting back 1400 years to the time of Islamic barbarism.

The defiant people were apparently deaf and blind. They could not hear, see, or understand how the whole population, the nation, and centuries of history are being annihilated. People who, without the awareness and knowledge of the religion's ruthlessness, wanted to capture and dethrone the King (Shah) in order to hand over the power to an insensible, bloodthirsty, and illiterate Mullah (Khomeini). By Shah's order, Khomeini had lived in exile in Iraq for fifteen years. Khomeini himself commented openly and shamelessly that he felt nothing as he was returning to the country.

Then everyone understood that he just wanted to avenge and destroy the country at the behest of his masters, the world powers.

The state of my children's lives as well as mine resembled a ship caught in a horrifying, stormy, and bloody sea of revolution, threatened by sharks and high tides. The ship's captain, the children's father, died whereby, we came ever so closer to be washed up at sea. The only way to save my children's lives was to grab the only line that was thrown to me, that is, to trust a total stranger, a smuggler, which I did apprehensively with the hopes that taking such risk could save the lives of my children from that hell, from war, torture, imprisonment and ultimately death. My children had in fact no future in their own country.

We clung on to the line without knowing where it would take us. Now my goslings were on the run from a stormy sea. The beacon from a distant light-house guided us to a calm and peaceful shore in a completely unfamiliar country on the other side of the world, Sweden.

When I came to Sweden, I started out on my own and from scratch; a single mother with four young sons, and a daughter whose fate was unknown and uncertain. She went alone from one country to another, all the while, trying to join her mother and her brothers. But, she hit a dead-end at every turn and eventually, she ended up in Canada. A young and beautiful eighteen-year-old girl was forced to live alone and far away from her family. Fate wanted her to build her future without anyone's help. Against all odds, the looming fiasco turned into success for her. Gradually, she was able to break the downward spell.

Now I was a lone captain at the helm in an unknown country, Sweden. Now I had to do my very best to land properly. I could not afford to be afraid of the head or the side-winds. I did not want to waste a minute to mourn, or to reflect on the misgivings that wrecked our country and our lives, or to think about the flames that burned down all our dreams to ashes.

Now, I had my children to take care of. Now, I had to be a good example and sound advisor for my own children. With so much life experience that I had gained at an early and young age, and with all my skills in dealing with life's adversities, I did not allow myself to search in vain in the depth of the darkness.

Without help from anyone and without support from anywhere in a completely foreign country called Sweden, where I had no knowledge of the labour market and policies, I started working in a Småland bakery packaging bread at night.

Those wonderfully, sweet-smelling, and freshly baked breads with a fresh taste that people enjoy at their breakfast time or lunch.

It did not take long before I stopped working the night shift when I felt like a night owl in those dark, damp, foul yeast-smelling, and narrow corridors in that bakery. It was only two months of sleepless nights that dragged on, but nonetheless, it went as it went. We had to package the hot loaves that were taken straight from the oven on to the band. There, we were not even allowed to talk with colleagues, or ask a job-related question. The foreman, who had a heavy deep voice and was brusque, would pound his fist on the table hard and shout, "Do not talk! Keep working." I felt exactly like being in an interrogation room by the revolutionary guards who do not allow suspects close their eyes; hence torturing them by means of sleep deprivation until they confess their sins. He was a heavy man with red, curly hair who had strange looks. No one liked him. No one liked being around him, not because of the way he looked, but because of his contemptuous attitude toward the workers. I guess he could not understand that, or he simply did not want to change his rowdy behaviour.

Now, I had worked there in my new country and had earned the right to borrow from the bank to invest in purchasing a pizzeria. Life's irony: the pilot who baked pizza. It was entirely fine. I wanted to stand on my own feet. I was independent and could never let anyone else control my life. I was too proud of my background to ask for help.

It lasted only nine months, much like a pregnancy term, to run the little restaurant by myself and keep the wheels turning. I often got help from my sons though. They came after school to help their poor, little, tired mother.

I felt like a seed that with strong winds rolled in the air between the mountains and valleys, fell and fell a bit more until it finally landed on the Swedish soil. The air filled with solitude in a miserable life full of longings, cold and dark winters, snowy and slippery grounds, thick, black clouds, rain, and cold and damp weather did not scare me at all. On the contrary, those things that could have had negative effects and could bring one's spirits down made me try to spread my roots in the ground, raise my head up again, and stand on my feet. I had to open my eyes to a completely different life with a completely new perspective.

Khomeini destroyed Iranians' lives like plants that are cut down to their roots, but now we bloom again in small plant pots at the windows in different countries. Nothing was like my then rainbow-coloured life in a completely clear, blue sky. Beautiful, multi-coloured, fragrant flowers, the greenery, the high fountain in our garden, the new model cars and the big, beautiful house; they all belonged to my past. Now, it was all about buses and a small rental apartment with three rooms, which was in bad shape and needed renovation, in Oxnehaga, an area between Huskvarna and Jönköping. The sky was empty of rainbows; instead, it was full of gray and thick clouds. My tears kept rolling down and landing at my feet; my head was heavy, filled with many thoughts that were not easy to think about. A thousand times I asked myself why I had fallen into such awful and harsh situation. Whose fault was it? Was it caused by the King (Shah), poverty, people's illiteracy, ignorance, lack of knowledge, faith, the country's natural resources, minerals, oil, gas, the meddling of the Western policy makers, the world's greed to take everything that rightly belonged to us, or the wretched fate? Who had betrayed or deceived us? Intellectuals and academics who stood side by side the religious people on the streets, Communists, Mujahedeen or dissenting politicians? Unfortunately to this date, I have not been given any sensible answers to my questions.

For years, I tried to write this book, but getting choked with tears every time, I had to walk away from my computer, turn it off and stop writing.

Slowly but surely, I got the courage. The grief, the sleepless nights, a sea of tear-drops, and feelings of longing had been too many and too much. But now that I put all that mourning behind me, I feel free and invigorated. The taste of loneliness, longing, and setbacks is bitter; neither I nor anyone else would like to have to taste it. If life can go on for everyone, why not for me?

What is done is done; unfortunately, no one can turn back the time and give me everything that I lost over thirty years ago (i.e., 1979). Even though I feel free from all that misery, the feelings of nostalgia and longings are always there. I am labeled a foreigner for the rest of my life. Isn't it really heartbreaking to be a citizen of two countries and yet have no country?

May 2000

The phone's handset felt like ice in my hand. I went completely out of my mind for a few minutes that seemed like an eternity. Time stood still and I could not hear a single word. I was in shock. I did not know where I was. It did not feel like I was in my home. My room looked unfamiliar to me. I felt dizzy at the turn of recent event. My heart stopped pounding for a second and in the next second, it started to palpitate. Tears began to flow incessantly. My face was soaked with tears. Oh, my God, Oh, my God, this could not be true. I could not believe my ears. No it was not true. I was completely beside myself. My heart dropped.

I sank into a chair and began to sob, quietly at first and then, crying out loud. My face was flaming red, I could not stop crying, and my shoulders were shaking. My grief knew no bounds.

My life and my dreams were shattered like a crystal bowl that breaks into pieces and gets scattered all over the floor. The room began to spin and it seemed like I was in a tornado. How could it be? Why was this happening to me? Why was destiny fighting with me all the time? How could I take this? How could I accept that once more I had lost a near and dear person in my life? My mother was gone?! She was gone and buried! The news of her death was a massive shock, and I knew that there was no chance for me to meet her, or at least talk to her on the phone in this life. It was hard for me to collect my thoughts, I just kept crying as did my sister at the other end of the telephone with eight thousand kilometers distance between Sweden and my homeland, Iran, far, far away from me and my everyday life. No it was not true. Based on our last call, I knew that she had not been feeling well lately. But no one thought she would die from being just a little tired as she put it. I would usually call her every three weeks or once a month and talk to her. But toward the end, I had an uneasy feeling inside me that prompted me to call her a little earlier and more often. I am glad I went by my instinct. When I feel terribly stressed, get nervous, and become restless and impatient, I know something awful is about to happen. In addition, I get horrible nightmares that speak to me and wake me up shaking and sweating in the middle of the night and alert me of an impending danger or a tragic event. I see these awful events in my nightmares, which rob me of my sleep and leave me startled and sweating. They make me frightened. Many sleepless nights, I have paced back and forth in my bedroom all night long, worrying about what may come. My mother was surprised. Puzzled and concerned, she asked me if anything had happened that had made me call her earlier than usual. "No Mom," I said, "I just felt like calling; I wanted to hear your voice and see how you feel." I did not dare tell her about my nightmares about her. I could not very well tell her that I see my father in my nightmares as he comes home to her and packs her bags and takes her on a trip she always wanted to go in all the years that I had been away from her. He comes to take her to Sweden to see me. I also did not tell her how delighted I was in my dreams when they came to visit us at my home in Husby, a suburb north of Stockholm. I did not say to her that I wake up at night with heart palpitations, trembling with fear, sitting up in my bed, feeling frozen, wrapping the blanket around my body, worrying about what may happen to her while mumbling to myself "God please keep my Mom safe." No, I did not want to tell her about my horrible nightmares. Instead, I just asked her, "How are you Mom?" As usual, she began to complain about her health, her heart, and her swollen leg. She went on to say that she also slept too much and did not have as much energy as she once did. How foolish of me for not taking her words seriously and rather, advising her to keep busy with things that might interest her, and to stop complaining and sleeping too much.

My advice to her was, "Pick up a hobby Mom and keep yourself busy! Do not think about your aches and pain! They are not that serious. At your age, it is not unusual to

feel discomfort now and again.” My mother was 72 years old. It was silly or maybe selfish of me to preach to her and give her advice on what to do and not to do. At the end, I asked her, “What can I do for you? Do you need any special medication that is not available in Iran that I can send to you? Or if you want, I can send you an invitation so that you can get a visa and come to Sweden to visit me and my children whom you have not seen for sixteen years.” “No,” she said; of course, this was simply her way of assuring me that she did not need anything. A trip to Sweden was surely impossible for her to consider.

“No,” she said; “unfortunately, I cannot travel. You have no idea how weak I am, I cannot manage. All I want is for you to be well and happy. Give my love to the kids.” It was always the same answer I got from her. But this time, the conversation ended with a new phrase. It felt strange that with a certain tone in her voice she begged my forgiveness. She said, “Forgive me if I was not a good mother to you. That I did not come to visit you in so many years.” Then I burst into tears and said, “Oh, Mom what are you saying? Why are you talking like this? Why should I forgive you? You were the kindest mother in the world and I love you.” It was a difficult moment, I did not know whether to cry or to use humour with her so as to cheer her up and get her thoughts away from my father’s passing. I could not believe how anxiously she wanted to join her beloved husband, my father, and how much she missed him. Life after my father, her lifetime partner of fifty-five years, seemed to be meaningless for her. She felt alone and abandoned. I could not believe how much she longed to meet him in life after death. May 1985 was the last time we met. When my youngest son of eleven-years-old and I escaped from Iran, my mother told me, “You sent all your kids away and I know I am not going to see them again. And now, you are leaving the country for good without thinking about me and how much I will miss you.” I replied sympathetically, “Mom, you have my Dad, your other children, and other family members around you. But my poor children are alone in a totally strange country, in Sweden. They do need me. It is my responsibility to take care of them and be with them in these hard times of transition until they settle down in Sweden. You look after yourself and rest assured that I will come back to visit.” Now, she was gone and all my dreams and hopes to see her no longer existed; they got buried with her passing. The Iranian revolution, Khomeini, and his damn supporters destroyed not only my family's life but the lives of forty million Iranians. I try to forget everything that happened to us, but I still cannot forgive the people for their idiotic, senseless actions.

The conversation between my sister and me ended with her saying, “Take care of yourself and try to cope, that’s life, we only live a short time on earth. She will never come back. She always thought about you and your children! She always prayed that you would be well and happy. Live your life as best you can and think about your health too!”

My sister was quite right, but I could not find any comfort in that. My sister was with mother all her life; she was with mother in her last minutes; she shared her joys and sadness with her. My sister is seventeen years younger than me, and she was the apple of my mother's eye. What did I get? Nothing. My mother gave me up so that I could succeed in my life. However, my little sister has her husband, her children, and a whole family around her; she can visit mother’s grave, and get all the support she needs from everyone around her. Who do I have around me? Who will support me in my time of sadness? How often can I visit her grave?

I felt extremely hurt and abandoned. I sat alone in my room, deep in thoughts. Pages upon pages of my life story began to emerge and take shape in my head. It was like watching a movie. My recollections and memories of my life started to appear in front of my eyes.