

A Flight To Freedom

Life is, how you live, what you make out of it. All easy expressions, to read and listen to, but what if one encountered extreme mental, emotional and physical pains and emerged alive and healthy? One can only imagine or read about such a life, here is a chance to meet the person who has actually experienced life in its fullness. Marina Nemat, author and a true hero.

1. How would life have turned out for you if you had decided not to write Prisoner of Tehran?

I have no idea, but I know that I would still have been trapped in the silence that had held me captive for many years, being the shadow of the person I had been before Evin. I would still have been living a lie.

2. How did the memoir happen? And most importantly why?

It astounds me that some people believe that one can step out of an extremely traumatic experience and immediately talk about it or write a book on it. Extreme trauma can easily lead to Post Traumatic Stress disorder and other psychological problems that are very difficult to overcome. Especially when you are very young when experiencing trauma, you put the trauma in a bubble, you put it on your shoulder, you walk through your life, and you avoid anything that threatens to burst that bubble, and, as a result, you avoid life and all it offers. You avoid any extreme emotion or anything that might remind you of the past. As a result, you never truly love, hate, or enjoy anything and live in a state of emotional numbness. Another good metaphor to describe this situation is to say that the traumatized person is a marathon runner who cannot stop and has no finishline. The runner keeps on going until she either dies or trips. I finally tripped. After being released from prison, my family never asked me about my ordeal. Not that I was ready to talk about it, no, but it would have been helpful if someone had said, 'When you're ready to talk, we're ready to listen.' However, this invitation never came, and, like my family and friends, I believed that the past could be thrown away and forgotten. I was wrong.

For years, I tried to look ahead and live a normal life. I married the man I loved, Andre, who was the organist at my church in Tehran, and we eventually managed to leave Iran. Once we made it to Canada, we struggled and worked very hard to build a new life even though we had no money. We had kids and raised a family and began to feel like real Canadians, sending our boys to good schools, watching them play sports and the piano, making friends, and taking advantage of all the things Canada has to offer. That was when my mother became ill with cancer. My mother and father had followed us to Canada in 1993. My mother died in March 2000, and I realized that she never knew the real me. No one knew the real me. The truth was that I had lived a lie for 16 years. That was when I began suffering from flashbacks and nightmares about the prison and the symptoms of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder began to surface in me. Many victims of trauma never show symptoms of psychological disorders until years later. Examples of this situation are the victims of the Holocaust who avoided talking about the camps for many years. After my mother's death, I had a few psychotic episodes during which I locked myself in the bathroom and began screaming and banging my head against the wall. That was when I realized I had to face the past or it was going to kill me. I either had to jump off a bridge or tell. I decided to tell.

3. As a powerful writer of facts what is your approach towards fiction writing?

I have written some fiction, but I haven't published it. I'll publish it one day. Any kind of writing is important. Fiction has the ability to tell about the human condition. Even though it is imaginary, it still needs to have a spirit of truth to be considered as a good writing. I have learned a great deal about the world by reading fiction.

4: We would like to know a little about your life in Canada.

Canada gave my voice back to me. It is where I can be myself without being afraid of being arrested. I have written about my life in Canada in my second book, *After Tehran*, which will be published in September by Penguin Canada.

5: What tools do you think is a prerequisite for aspiring writers?

Read and read some more. And then write and write some more. Never give up. Being successful as a writer is not easy. Take writing courses, and learn from your mistakes. Don't let criticisms upset you too much. Move on.

6: If Evin had not happened...

I am not a 'what-if' kind of person. I would rather use my energy dealing with reality and learning from it.