

Review of Esther Amini's Memoir Concealed By Fredric Price

All too often, memoirs are ginned up self-indulgent call-outs by those who, it is oftentimes true, have overcome long odds to participate in the American dream, frequently cataloging financial or political success. Power to them. But it's a misery to have to suffer through their thinly-disguised boasts and accolades from third parties (frequently, sycophants).

Fortunately, none of this was in play when I read Esther Amini's brilliant (yes, that's NOT hyperbolic) memoir *Concealed* (<https://amzn.to/35b7YC8>). The daughter of severely flawed parents whose personalities were shaped by unbearable lives in Iran, Esther has penned a memoir that is beautifully written, highly informative as to the history and culture of 'hidden' Jews in Iran, illustrates the difficulties of immigrants to finding their way in American culture, and draws a picture of the tensions that these immigrants have with their Americanized children.

I must confess that while I have a reasonable knowledge of the crypto-Jews — those Jews who chose to remain in Spain after the issuance of the Alhambra Decree on March 31, 1492 by appearing to be Catholics while practicing Judaism in secret — I was not aware of the Mashhadi Jews of Iran who outwardly professed Islam while secretly practicing Judaism. Esther parents were part of this group. She describes their tortured lives (including those of the entire Mashhadi community) in words that will break your heart, and should give pause to those here in the US who think they understand Iranian/Persian culture from reading of news dispatches, editorial columns, Facebook posts, or Tweets. Simply stated, such people don't even know what they don't know.

It's hard to imagine how a reader would have reacted if placed in a Mashhadi household other than with paranoia, distrust, and fear being a part of their everyday lives. And the decision to leave ... and how to execute the escape route ... and to decide where to go ... and how to learn the 'rules' of another culture without giving up their attachment to Judaism is at the heart of this story.

Enter Esther, outwardly an American, but trapped in a home that for all intents and purposes is back in Iran. With a father who believes that his daughter will be corrupted by every temptation in American culture, he stifles her personal growth

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just as lack of proper nutrition could reduce a person's height and weight. Scream-fests followed by silence are the norm for this man, who today would be labeled an abusive father if not by a legal court then surely by the court of public opinion. Her mother is manic and socially inept, yet can also be charming and endearing, not unusual in someone with such a volatile personality. Esther's brothers escape much of this family torture due to their not being girls, having been allowed the typical freedoms that most young American boys enjoy.

Esther paints these pictures as a French Impressionist would put them on canvas: vibrant, with great perspectives, yet with a bit of mystery ... *is this what I'm really seeing, does she mean for me to take this away from this event?*

What makes this memoir even more satisfying is that Esther not only escaped from this background unscathed, she became a therapist, and uses her training to analyze her every move, action, and failure to react in a most honest manner. Wow! Simply stated: how refreshing. How candid. She asks questions of herself that third parties are thinking, rarely missing a beat, even when she drills down on her own behavior, questioning her every move or failure to change.

In the end, you'll start to think about your own upbringing, analyzing what you did or didn't do under a variety of different circumstances.

Thought provoking and entertaining, this is a book that you will likely fill with highlights, to which you'll go back to re-read and to savor.