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Autobiography & Memoir

Solacers
Arion Golmakani
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The memoir opens as five-year-old Alireza is returned to a foster home by his stepfather. Alireza is considered an orphan, although both his parents are alive and living in the same town.

The boy loves his mother and stepfather, yet Iranian society in the early 1960s requires that he look to his birth father for financial support. And his father wants nothing to do with him. After Alireza's parents divorce, his mother struggles to support them. Things seem to get better when she marries Mansoor Aqa, the man Alireza calls Baba. But money remains tight and Mansoor Aqa announces that he cannot be expected to raise another man's son. Alireza's mother tries to get money from her ex-husband, who beats her in front of her son and sends Alireza to a foster home.

When he is seven, Alireza is taken to yet another home. He had been to dozens of homes in the past two years, and he assumes that this one, like the others, will be temporary when his father fails to make the agreed-up support payments. The family opens their home and opportunities. Kia, the fifteen-year-old boy, treats Alireza as a younger brother and helps enroll him in school. Momon Bozorg, Kia's mother, shelters Alireza even after her son leaves home and her own circumstances are reduced. Although occasional periods of living on the streets follow, Alireza manages to attend high school and joins the Iranian Navy, which brings him to the United States.

Despite his hardscrabble life, Alireza never succumbs to self-pity or blame. He acknowledges the many "Solacers" who helped him, particularly Kia and Momon Bozorg. The book offers a glimpse of daily life in Iran in the 1960s from a child's point of view. The story is stronger than the writing, which is sometimes repetitious and clichéd. The book would benefit from a reflective prologue from the adult author.

At the end, Golmakani writes, "Everything that I yearned for as a child I came to have as an adult: a home and a family of my own and all the resources that I needed to take care of them

…” As readers, we admire his persistence and his generous heart.

Karen Ackland