

Ashes

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Teacher: Margaret McDonnell
Survivor Testimony: Selene Bruk

They set her city aflame
Selene Bruk's beautiful Jewish community was gone
Turned to chaos
The weddings
The synagogues
The births and deaths
The children dancing and spreading their contagious laughter
The memories...
Burned to but a cinder.
She sifted through ash in search of anything to suggest the slightest hint of what once stood
Her search was in vain
Not dwelling a minute longer, she fled the chaos
She lived for weeks in an attic
They called it a haven
She felt captive
There were so many beautiful souls that she had seen disappear
With a troubled heart, she said 'Surely it gets better'
From some perspective- perhaps it was true.
But only after a long period of suffering
They took her to Birkenau
The countless nights she spent watching that chimney exhale the souls of the innocent
Where was God? Where was justice?
Beneath a quiet sky, she expected no response.
In reply, she heard the screams of the innocent
But this time she felt no shock
They had broken her
They ripped her from her daydreams
She had been numbed by the brutality
Drained of any determination
She felt that her hope was in vain
She was defeated
Lost, Broken
Abandoned
But liberation was a long awaited promise kept by her God
But how many beautiful souls had she seen disappear...
Where was he then?
No living soul will ever know what she had been through
No history book
No photograph will ever be capable of capturing her pain
So many years later, she visits Bialystok
When others see a populated city teeming with life,
She sees the graveyard of broken souls and unkept promises
She says Kaddish for the dead Jewish community that once stood there