

No Memories At All

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Brown, E. M. (1997). No memories at all. In A. Bogomolny (Ed.) New To North America: Writing by U.S. immigrants, their children and grandchildren. New York: Burning Bush Publications. (pp. 334-335).

I listened to others talk about their childhood,
sharing what they had lost in the War

about cousins no longer there
and families that never laughed... again

about his father who walked into the forest,
only to fall in a knot of black bullets
about his mother who did not come back from
Theresienstadt,
without a record of her death, he searched for her still

about hiding in convents, closets, cubby holes
not like games of "hide and seek" but for hours, days,
years...
one woman, who was placed in a convent at six and left at
ten,
simply said "And then I was adopted,"
not... "I lost my parents."

the first time I heard their stories
I did not ask them what had happened to their grief,
kept silently to themselves, no,
they had leapt over their pain
to get on with their lives

the first time I heard their stories,
I did not ask
because I could not find my words

I had no stories to tell about what I had lost in the war
somewhere between earth and sky, in my mother's arms,
then someone else's and someone else's again, an infant, I
lived through Kristallnacht, but I had no words,
lived through the race across Europe, but do not remem-
ber

orphanages and explosions in France

only this...

one day my mother came

one day my father came

one day we got on a boat to Casablanca to Martinique and
then America

we were children

we were children

ALL OF US

how could this happen to children?

how could this happen to parents?

how could this happen to the world?

why did no one stop what was happening in the world?

how come it is happening, again?

happening to other children—now?

look at today's explosions...

I may not have had words, then

but there is an echo to the past,

hear it and listen to the words of my echo, the words of
their stories

so that another generation of children will never

have to tell stories filled with suffering,

losses, murders, and starvation again.