

by Shole Pakravan, Steffi Niederzoll
Piper Verlag
January 2023 / 272pp
Biography and Memoir

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How to Become a Butterfly: the short, courageous life of my daughter Reyhaneh Jabbari

Wie man ein Schmetterling wird: Das kurze, mutige Leben meiner Tochter Reyhaneh Jabbari

review

A mother's memoir about the imprisonment, conviction and execution of her daughter Reyhaneh Jabbari, a young Iranian woman who was executed for killing her rapist in self-defence. *Wie man ein Schmetterling wird* was written in conjunction with German filmmaker Steffi Niederzoll to accompany the documentary *Seven Winters in Tehran*, which premiered at the 2023 Berlinale and won the festival's Peace Film Prize.

Reyhaneh Jabbari was nineteen years old, an ambitious student who also worked as an interior designer, when she met a man named Morteza Sarbandi in a coffee shop. She was delighted when he commissioned her to design the interior of his plastic surgery practice, but when she arrived to look at the rooms, she found he had tricked her. What awaited her was a shabby apartment and Sarbandi's attempt to sexually assault her. Reyhaneh stabbed him in self-defence and fled the scene.

Not only did Sarbandi die that night, he turned out to be a secret agent with Iran's Ministry of Intelligence. Reyhaneh was subsequently

detained and tortured, framed by her captors as a liar and terrorist. For seven and a half years, her family went through an emotional roller coaster, with her mother, Shole, trying everything she could to obtain justice for her daughter. The case made waves internationally, but Reyhaneh's trial was rigged and she was sentenced to death by hanging. After her execution, her mother and two sisters managed to flee to Germany, though her father remains trapped in Iran.

Shole Pakravan is an activist who fights for the rights of prisoners on death row in Iran, and she continues to publicise her daughter's story. As an accompaniment to the film *Seven Winters in Tehran*, but a memoir that stands in its own right, *Wie man ein Schmetterling wird* is an extremely powerful and humbling book that alternates between Shole's and Reyhaneh's voices. The latter is presented as transcripts of phone calls and letters smuggled out of prison; the book also includes photographs. Pakravan offers plenty of insight into the often baffling contradictions of life under the Iranian regime, with footnotes to explain details of politics and culture with which some readers may be less familiar.

In light of recent events in Iran, this clear-sighted memoir is extremely timely, yet also unique in its presentation of the intimate perspective of a mother in what is already a highly publicised story. Emotional yet understated, profoundly courageous and deeply affecting, *Wie man ein Schmetterling wird* is an important and inspiring read.

Read more on the publisher's website here: https://www.piper.de/buecher/wie-man-ein-schmetterling-wird-isbn-978-3-8270-1370-5

press quotes

A propulsive, compelling and deeply moving story of courage in unbearable circumstances that provides insight into life under Iran's theocratic regime.

Emma Rault, translator

Not an angry reckoning, but a homage to the countless women in Iran raising their voices against oppression and thereby risking their lives.

Buchkultur

Shole Pakravan's book demonstrates how solidarity can set a shared fight in motion and, despite the horror, offer some hope.

Bayern 2, Zündfunk

about the authors



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Shole Pakravan was born in Kermanshah, Iran, in 1964. She spent twenty-eight years as an actor and head of a cultural collective. In July 2007, her oldest daughter, Reyhaneh, was arrested and subsequently sentenced to death by hanging. Pakravan fought the conviction publicly, gaining the attention of the international media. When the sentence was carried out in 2014, she and her youngest daughter fled to Germany, where they were joined by her middle daughter in 2021. In 2019, Pakravan toured Germany with a play based on the stories of Iranian mothers whose daughters

were executed by the regime.



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Wie man ein Schmetterling wird was written with Steffi Niederzoll (b. 1981, Nuremberg), an acclaimed German filmmaker, who met Shole Pakravan in Turkey in 2017. She has told her story in the prize-winning documentary *Seven Winters in Tehran*, a German-French co-production that premiered in 2023.

rights information

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