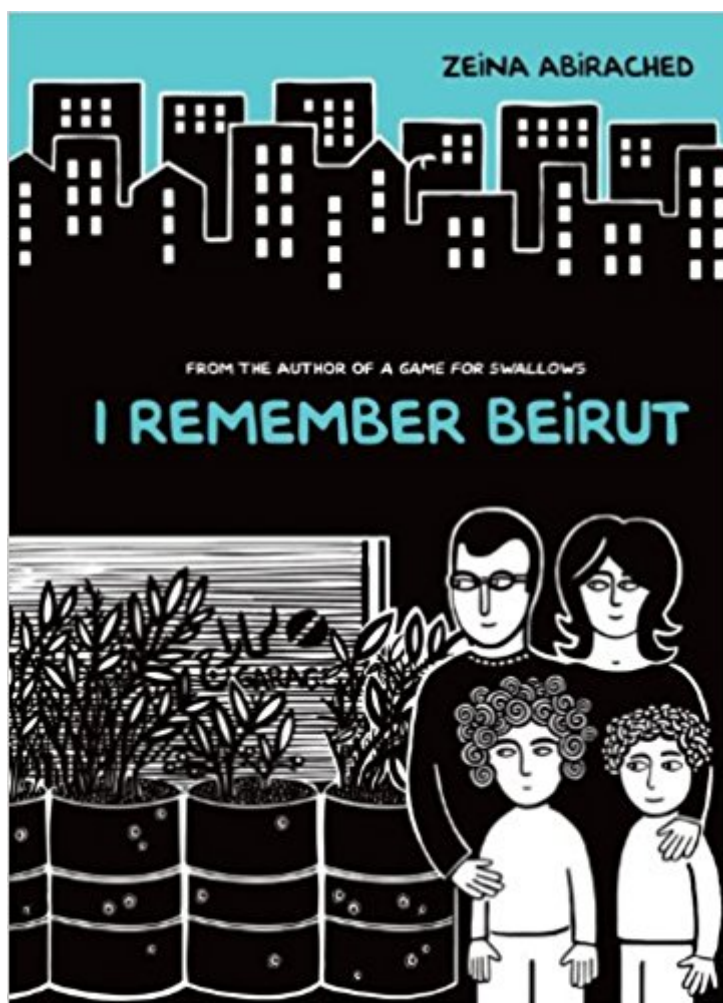


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# I Remember Beirut (Graphic Universe)



## Synopsis

Zeina Abirached, author of the award-winning graphic novel *A Game for Swallows*, returns with a powerful collection of wartime memories. Abirached was born in Lebanon in 1981. She grew up in Beirut as fighting between Christians and Muslims divided the city streets. Follow her past cars riddled with bullet holes, into taxi cabs that travel where buses refuse to go, and on outings to collect shrapnel from the sidewalk. With striking black-and-white artwork, Abirached recalls the details of ordinary life inside a war zone.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 7 Up — Abirached's companion to *A Game for Swallows* (Graphic Universe, 2013) reveals numerous details from her childhood in Beirut during the war from 1975 to 1990. "I remember" is a recurring phrase and provides a personal frame of reference for the effect of war on kids. Some are simple childhood memories of Kit Kat candy bars, bad haircuts, and her father's obsession with recorded classical music. Many are exquisite visual packages of the trauma experienced by a young girl: documenting the series of bullet holes in her mother's car windshield over time, spending a night at the school when it was unsafe for the students to leave, keeping a backpack of her treasured items next to her bed, and collecting war shrapnel the way some collect rocks or seashells. When teachers discuss the ongoing inner-city tensions, only the lower halves of their bodies are visible, allowing readers to experience the event from the viewpoint of children on the

playground. Most evocative are the family images: family members as playing pieces, pawns in a board game of war; holding hands as they cross the street to the "other side" of the city; the gulf between the adult author living in Paris and her family in Beirut. With her signature style of arresting graphic layouts of images in stark white and solid black, Abirached offers a pastiche of poignant memoirs from living in a strife-ridden city. Inclusion of artfully designed maps and diagrams orient the reader and provide additional perspective. — Barbara Moon, Suffolk Cooperative Library System, Bellport, NY

Zeina Abirached was born in Beirut in the middle of the civil war. She studied graphic arts in Lebanon but moved to Paris in 2004, where she attended the National School of Decorative Arts. In 2006, she published her first two graphic novels with publisher Cambourakis, Beyrouth-Catharsis and 38, Rue Youssef Semaani. Her short animated film Mouton was nominated during the fifth international film festival in Tehran. *A Game For Swallows* (Graphic Universe, 2012) has won numerous awards, including being named an ALA Notable Children's Book and a YALSA Great Graphic Novel for Teens. *Je Me Souviens Beyrouth* (I Remember Beirut), the follow-up to *A Game For Swallows*, was published in French by Cambourakis in 2008.

Zeina Abirached writes of her experience during the war in Lebanon. The deliberate choice of using black and white brings out the tragedy that she lived. She never knew the Beirut that used to be known as the Paris of the Middle East, her memories are all of the war and nothing else. This is very sad but it also is an eye-opener about the effects of war on children.

My childhood friend's daughter wrote this book

Baby Zeina, who knew nothing about the Lebanese Civil War, was gently tossed into the middle of it when she was born in 1981. Of course she remembers nothing about that event, but perhaps her mother did. Zeina remembers all kinds of things like the darkness around them when her mother hugged her and her little brother. "Promise me you'll always look out for each other," she asked them. She remembered all those little holes in her mother's Renault and the windshield that wasn't always there. It left four years in a row so why bother? Instead of replacing it, "she would wear sunglasses when she drove to shield her eyes. Whatever works!" Zeina remembered learning her colors (that was easy) and then later all about going to school. The school bus

wasn't going to stop near their house because they were in the zone. West Beirut was to the west near the demarcation line and they were too close to No Man's Land. The bus picked them up at Ward's Ice Cream Parlor instead. Mr. George was the taxi driver who drove them to the bus. This Zeina remembers and later he taught her to drive. "Slow down! Slow down!" She smiled, but he certainly did not. There were the "giant robot cartoons, the times when utilities were out, RC Cola, fairy tales, and Sabah. Zeina loved to dance to her song "Ayyim el Loulou. Helicopters filled up the skies during the war and her father would sit, arms and legs crossed, listening to Wagner. Way too loud "in order to drown out the chaos outside. There were lots of fun things and her brother loved to collect shrapnel for his collection. And then there was Zeina's backpack. All kinds of cool things in there, she explains, "everything I wanted to take with me, if we had to run. Beep, beep! Beep, beep! It was time to run. This is an amazing tale of Zeina Abirached's childhood during war-torn Beirut. This is a book of childhood remembrances as seen through the eyes of the author when she was a child. Far from negative, they reflect the joys of a childhood that could have been lost, but was not. Yes, the war raged around Zeina, but the happy things swirled around her as well. There were the stories, songs, laughter, and fun woven in the fabric of a most unusual time to be a child. Memorable "scenes" include a Candy-land like board depicting places where the family "took refuge during the war. The illustrations in this graphic novel are in high contrast black and white, making the mini-autobiography even more poignant. Marvelous look at life in East Beirut during the Lebanese Civil War from the eyes of a child. This book courtesy of the publisher.

'I Remember Beirut' by Zeina Abirached is her memoir of growing up in Beirut during the Christian and Muslim war in the 1980s. The art is fantastic, but I kind of wanted something more. Then again, she was just a child, so perhaps my expectations were a bit high. She talks about living in what the school thought was the neutral zone, so they had to be driven out of their neighborhood to a bus stop. Her brother collected shrapnel. There were blackouts and fuel shortages. Along the way, the family got to do normal family kinds of things. Life in a warzone isn't much fun and that's mostly the feeling you get here. But the artwork is stunning, and really why anyone should read this. It's black and white with clean lines and beautiful patterns. I love young Zeina's wavy hair, and the map with fish where water should be. It's really great and I'd like to see more graphic work by this author. I

received a review copy of this graphic novel from Lerner Publishing Group, Graphic Universe and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. Thank you for allowing me to review this beautiful graphic novel.

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