



Childhood Memories

Ingrid Habib

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Childhood Memories is a slim and introspective memoir of a Lebanese childhood.

Ingrid Habib's brief, sweet memoir, *Childhood Memories*, recalls growing up in Lebanon.

The people, food, and places of Habib's 1960s childhood in Beirut are lovingly remembered. The special black seed cookies her aunts prepared as part of the Easter dinner are recalled, as are racing snails with her older brother and the French and biology lessons that were held in the woods at her nonreligious school. The people around her are a mix of many cultures—her relatives speak, variously, Armenian, Turkish, French, and Arabic. More than a dozen color drawings featuring the author as a young girl accompany the text, which maintains childlike wonder.

The narration is simple yet expressive, with detailed observations coming through the eyes of Habib's younger self. The prose is succinct and informative, covering quiet and extraordinary days perceptively and evocatively, like swimming in a fancy hotel swimming pool in a nearby resort town.

Hers comes across as a peaceful life, punctuated by normal events such as attending regional cultural festivals like the Feast of Flowers and the Bologna Feast. Everyday moments become nostalgic in retrospect. She remembers the clothes that her great-aunt crocheted for a wedding, for example, and how they were later repurposed for the couple's children; this "circle of life" reflection also applies to items like the intricately designed carpets that her father's mother, Teta Marie, had hanging on her walls and that Habib so admired—and that she now owns.

Poignant and brief, each memory is allotted its own chapter. This collection of vignettes flows smoothly in a fairly chronological path; each bit helps form the patchwork sampling of Habib's early experiences.

Habib's relatives are a major presence and influence in the text; most of the memoir centers on them, and they come alive thanks to concise, visual portraits. A few unfamiliar names interrupt the narrative's flow; some characters are not fully explored until after their first introductions. Lebanese words are often helpfully italicized and defined, though not all unfamiliar language receives this treatment.

Habib's family eventually leaves Lebanon for Nigeria; the memoir follows them and reaches a bittersweet conclusion. Four pages of photographs showing details of Habib's nature collages are included at the story's end; there is no explanation for their appearance, and their placement is puzzling.

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ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (June 26, 2018)

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