

# Lest we forget: remembering dark years of conflict

Munira Khayyat  
Daily Star staff

Because most people's daily lives are not front-page news, it is not well known that most people's common memories of the civil war are of playing cards and eating pumpkin seeds.

Throughout the thick of what they call "the events," lives went on because people living in a war zone have to live precisely that — live.

Springtime would come and go, people would fall in love, children would go to school.

In the middle of the madness there were instances of kindness and cooperation, caring and sacrifice. But above all, there was the hope that one day the war would end.

"The extreme circumstances of the war threw people together and forced a kind of intimate cooperation not found in the everyday life of peacetime. This kind of closeness is what most of us who lived through the war miss," said Christine, who grew up in Achrafieh and was 10 years old when the war started.

"My memories of the war? I remember how I used to love," said Ahmad, who was a teenager and lived in Ras Beirut at the beginning of the war.

"I was 17 and I fell in love with a girl who I met in the bomb shelter. We started to wait for the shelling to start to go to the bomb shelter to sit close together and talk. The grown-ups were afraid, but we were happy.

"At one point there was a



Life goes on: the future and the past face each other across a street

cease-fire that was honored — for a change — but that meant that I stopped going to the shelter. So in order to see her again, I bought several stun grenades that make a really loud bang without releasing shrapnel and I tossed them one after the other near the balcony of her family's house. They thought that the shelling had started again and rushed to the shelter, and I got to see her again," he remembered.

Suha was in the transition stage between school and university during the summer of 1976, one of the bloodiest summers of the civil war.

"We were young and immortal, and the war was still a novelty," she recalled.

"I used to go on joyrides with my friend on his motorbike past the snipers on the Fouad Chehab overpass, otherwise known as

Death Alley," she said, smiling at the memory.

"We would drive all the way up to the actual wall separating east and west Beirut, challenging the snipers to get us," she said.

Marwan, a Palestinian who fought in several militia groups during the war, shared his memories. "Every morning at 6am the young women of the refugee camp where I grew up would go fill water at the communal well because the water was cut off from their houses," he said.

"After a night of fighting I would go there, my eyes blood-shot from lack of sleep, and hang about the well to meet the young women there.

"They were a breath of fresh air compared to the dangerous atmosphere of the night. I would offer to carry the heavy gallons of water for them," he said.

"I remember the endless hours of just waiting for the fighting to stop," recalled Sami, who lived in Tariq al-Jadideh and was four years old when the war started.

"There was nothing to do, nowhere to go. People had to sit together, talk, do anything to get their minds off the shelling. My family would gather around my father while he played the *oud* and sang old Abdel Wahhab songs by candlelight," he said. "Now, there's cable television."

It has been 25 years since the civil war began and almost 10 years since it ended. There is a generation too young to remember the dark years of conflict, yet the war lives on in the hulks of bullet-riddled buildings that have not yet succumbed to Beirut's reconstruction and stand in the scarred memory of every person old enough to remember the fighting.

"Swiss-cheese" buildings are becoming less prevalent, and there's water and electricity and paved roads again. But certain dangerous things haven't changed, like sectarianism and the continuing power of warlords," said Ghada, who along with her family was displaced from her village of Ramia, in the occupation zone, during the war.

"That's why even though the war is over, it must be remembered, especially by those too young to remember, as a reminder to all Lebanese of something horrible that should never happen again," she said.

*\*Some names have been changed*