

*The Cat I Never Named: A True Story of Love, War, and Survival* by Amra Sabic-El-Rayess.

The cover caught my eye, as it does so often for so many of us. “A cat book!” I thought, and then added, “Oh, another book about WW II.” I caught that impression from the cover, but didn’t observe too closely – the rubble on the cover includes a minaret. Right cat, wrong war – the conflict in this true account occurred in 1992 in Bihac, Bosnia. I personally lived through this war, but only through headlines, though I was closer than most Americans, since I was teaching English in a high school that year in Hungary, a close neighbor.

The account sounds all too familiar, as the teen narrator tells how her friends suddenly shunned her and others along ethnic lines that had never mattered before in her young life. Bombs begin to fall, everything gets expensive and hard to find in the market, and going to the market becomes deadly. Yet a small calico cat follows her home and takes up residence in her life, and despite all odds, Amra’s education and the familiar outlines of friendship and young love continue, as the conflict ominously worsens.

Reading this book reminded me that the headlines I hear or read are all too present and important to someone – and also to their cats and dogs. An enjoyable though sad book: Amra survives, but her teen years are bombed away early. This is a YA book, but I’d recommend it for adults as well as teens, though the scenes described are often horrific. Life too often is, at least for some, including their pets.