

BRIGITTE FINDAKLY - LEWIS TRONDHEIM

# COQUELICOTS d'IRAK



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## Coquelicots d'Irak Brigitte Findakly , Lewis Trondheim

Lewis Trondheim et Brigitte Findakly forment en bande dessinée comme à la ville un duo depuis de nombreuses années. Si la bibliographie pléthorique de Lewis Trondheim n'a plus de secret pour personne, celle de Brigitte Findakly, son épouse et coloriste, quoique toute aussi importante, reste pourtant moins connue. De Pif Gadget, à ses débuts, au Chat du Rabbin, des Formidables aventures de Lapinot au Retour à la terre, on lui doit la mise en couleurs d'une centaine d'albums. Avec ce livre à quatre mains, pré-publié en partie dans « Les strips de la matinale » du Monde, Lewis Trondheim délaisse pour la première fois les animaux anthropomorphisés pour raconter l'histoire de celle qui partage sa vie, née en Irak, d'un père irakien et d'une mère française à l'orée des années 1960. Coquelicots d'Irak retrace son enfance passée à Mossoul, ville du nord de l'Irak, à une époque où, bien avant l'arrivée au pouvoir de Saddam Hussein, se succèdent coups d'État et dictatures militaires. Déroulant le fil de ses souvenirs, on découvre alors une vie de famille affectée par les aberrations de la dictature et leurs répercussions sur la vie quotidienne, jusqu'à un inéluctable exil vers la France au début des années 1970. Une arrivée en France elle aussi difficile, une expérience migratoire faite de difficultés administratives, sociales et culturelles. Dans ce récit qui prend pour toile de fond une triste actualité, Lewis Trondheim et Brigitte Findakly brossent en saynètes percutantes et sans ambages, mais pas moins sensibles pour autant, la trajectoire singulière de la coloriste qui, pour la première fois, occupe le premier rôle dans un livre. Ponctué de photos et de parenthèses sur les coutumes, la culture irakienne et les souvenirs de l'Irak de Brigitte Findakly, on partage avec elle la nostalgie de ceux qui ont laissé derrière eux leur pays d'origine, et les liens fugaces qui subsistent, tout à l'image des coquelicots devenus si fragiles une fois déracinés.

## Coquelicots d'Irak Details

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## From Reader Review Coquelicots d'Irak for online ebook

### Stephanie Johnson says

This is the story of growing up in Iraq and subsequently the dispersal of a family over the years due to the turbulent and unstable position of the country. The coloring of the story was vibrant and complimented the autobiographical nature of the story. I found the sections about the customs and history of Iraq part of why the book was so great—the reader isn't only getting the life story of an Iraqi born woman, they are learning the life story of a country and culture that is often negatively pigeonholed today.

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### Dov Zeller says

this is a beautiful graphic memoir by Brigitte Findakly, illustrated by her husband Lewis trondheim. It jumps around a lot in time and space and at first, I found it confusing and disorganized and almost put it down. I'm glad I didn't. Gradually I got to know the characters and the tones and rhythms of the book and what I found was a story about a quirky family trying to survive and even thrive in a confusing and often violent and often beautiful world.

Findaky's family is Christian going back many generations in a largely Muslim Arab world. Somehow, despite or because of their status as "other", the family manages to remain safe in all the political turmoil and violence--at least to some degree, by remaining quietly detached. It might be said they avoided being political, but I'm pretty sure there is no avoiding that. they chose as their politics a kind of "blending in with the woodwork." they chose their words carefully and did their best to fly under the radar during violent coup after violent coup.

there is a lot of funny and wonderful detail about their private and public dynamics. Findakly's Iraqi father is a dentist, he is charming and generous and a bit of a "pushover"? A lot of the time he doesn't charge people for dental work, and so the family isn't nearly as well off as it might be, but he is a gentle soul who doesn't like to see others suffer. He is loved by many, and a lot of those who love him, don't tend to like Findakly's French mother as much (except when she is baking wonderful French cakes, which everyone is delighted to eat). Part of the reason for people's love of F's father is the fact that he asks F's mother to say no for him and set boundaries for him. So, essentially, he never says "no" to anyone unless she is doing it for him. Pretty funny. She doesn't seem to mind, though. I wonder what she would say about it if we spent a bit more time with her. We do learn that she is beloved and trusted too, differently so--as she is grounded, intelligent, generous in her own ways, and a good listener who never shares in public what people tell her in private.

the family stays in Iraq despite the dangers there until, when F is around 13 I think, it becomes too hard to live there and they move to France. F's father makes the choice and her mother, who has happily escaped her life in France and all of her painful history there, doesn't want to go back. But it turns out their timing for leaving is good. they would have been in a lot of danger and had to survive great hardship had they not left. Most of their friends and relatives who stay wind up suffering a lot and end up, as time goes on, emigrating all over the globe.

there is some attention paid to class and class differences in here, but not much. Clearly F's family is comfortable "middle class" in a world where there is quite a bit of crushing poverty and political strife. It's a little unnerving, how many different worlds exist all at once. the layers and diversities of experience. the

instinct to survive and thrive and blend in enough to stay safe and comfortable, even while so many others are clearly suffering. It's nothing new, but it's kind of intense to witness the violence the family is witnessing, as much as it is represented in the book, and to see how they navigate these situations as a family (quietly, I think).

F. also makes a few mentions of Jewish related stuff in here, which I appreciate, but which isn't really contextualized and just seems a bit random. I am glad, though, that there is some acknowledgment of the extreme hatred and dehumanization of Jews in Iraq, and a mention of the last known Jewish person in Iraq being executed. I'm not sure people realize that Arab and Mizrachi Jews were forcibly expelled from all Arab majority countries in the 1950s and 60s (many Jews were killed--their homes and business looted and bombed. various sources say from 800,000 to nearly two million people were forced out of their homes and homeland). Most of the exiled Jews, as far as I know, went to Israel.

to a large degree this is a book that asks questions about home. What is home? What is exile? is the home we dream of or fear in exile ever as it was before it lived in our imaginations? How do we survive the ache that comes from leaving a life we've built, or re-built? Leaving our friends, neighbors, family members, and the version of ourselves we knew in that place, who we may never fully know or meet again. What are all the interweaving, overlapping realms of experience that exist in any one place at any one time? And for how long is it possible to go about one's "daily business" as both an outsider and an insider in an unstable and violent country...

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### **prettybooks says**

19/20

J'ai adoré cette BD autobiographique qui montre l'Irak telle qu'elle l'est, vue par une femme qui y a grandi. Il y a un goût de paradis perdu, de beaux souvenirs, mais aussi un regard sincère sur l'oppression et les violences qui y existent. Une BD enrichissante et très belle.

Ma chronique : <https://myprettybooks.wordpress.com/2...>

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### **Megan says**

This is a really great and accessible look at life in Iraq over the lifetime of the author. The choice to present it as a graphic novel makes the content accessible and interesting to a YA audience... and also for adults. My only complaint is the way the timeline jumps around. I did find that confusing. Overall, it was a great read and I look forward to putting it in my school library.

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### **Michelle says**

I've read some of the lower rated reviews of this comic and I completely agree with the criticisms against it (the stories are disjointed, the b&w pictures interwoven throughout the work are too small, hard to see, and could have greatly benefited from being labelled), but I can't deny that I greatly enjoyed reading this quiet little book.

Findakly's vignettes do feel a bit disjointed, but to me, they equated to something that was greater than the sum of its parts. The stories are quiet and only show a tiny part of a greater portrait of what it must've been like to live in Iraq, but they were very illuminating to someone like me - a middle-class white girl who's only ever lived in Canada.

The art was surprisingly to my taste too. It's very cartoony but I was impressed that Trondheim was still able to make characters very visually distinct, despite having very minimalistic features. My only critique is that I found the text and art didn't always seamlessly work together - I had a few pages where I simply read the text and realized I hadn't even looked at the art, or read the art + text together (as I usually do when I read comics). This wasn't always the case though - sometimes the art spoke volumes without the text having to spell things out for the reader.

This isn't on par with works like *Persepolis* or *The Arab of the Future*, but this is still a fun and accessible work for people who want to have a glimpse of what contemporary life could be like for people in the Middle East.

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### **Stewart Tame says**

Brigitte Findakly was born in Iraq, in 1959. Her mother was French, her father Iraqi. Her family lived in Iraq until 1973, when they moved to France. *Poppies of Iraq* is a series of autobiographical scenes from her life. It jumps around in time a bit, giving the book something of a disjointed feel.

On the whole, the book is pleasant enough. Even when horrible things happen, Brigitte's childhood perspective and Lewis Trondheim's clear line style serve to blunt the tone considerably. It's nice to get a sense of recent Iraqi history, and Brigitte has certainly lived an interesting life. Parts of this book are fascinating, but I found myself wishing it were ... I dunno. Better organized or something. It's a good book, but it somehow feels less than the sum of its parts.

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### **David Schaafsma says**

*Poppies of Iraq* is a pretty good title for this book, it seems to me. The anecdotes the author shares with us and which her artist husband Lewis Trondheim illustrates are loosely organized, roughly chronological, and is an attempt to highlight where possible the "good memories" of her growing up in Iraq. Findakly's family summered in France, but as political circumstances worsened, they finally moved there.

The audience for this book would seem to be people who are curious about people who grew up there and left (as opposed to those who stayed), those who opposed some of the more extremist government/religious policies. Findakly, while an emerging feminist, is not an intellectual, she is not particularly politically-oriented (nor were her parents). This is not Riad Sattouf's *Arab of the Future* or Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, two works that might beg comparison, elaborate and highly detailed narratives and politically sensitive stories of the move from the middle east to Europe and back. Living in the breach, or bridging the divide.

Yet it is about that struggle for Findakly, too; her writing is more conversational than carefully shaped. It feels informal, personal, dropping in weird (or abusive) cultural Iraqi practices she experienced over decades.

An anecdote here and there, not a coherent narrative. We get a feel for her and her parents, we get a feel for how it was for her, increasingly impossible, but she also has "poppies" to share, as well.

Findakly was born in Iraq in 1959. Her mother was French, her father Iraqi. They lived in there until 1973, moved to France, and regularly returned to visit family there. Trondheim's colorful cartoony style creates a sense of intimacy, warmth, in spite of some of the horrors she describes.

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### **Irene McHugh says**

The vast majority of this graphic novel memoir worked for me. The author was born in Iraq in 1959, her family spent summers in her mother's home country of France, and the family eventually moved to France in the late 1970s as Iraq became increasingly politically unstable.

While most of the anecdotes are told in chronological order, some are told to introduce other people in Brigitte's life to help understand the conflict and her sense of frustration. Her return visits to Iraq from the 1980s forward become heartbreak for her. The changes in her country and her cousins reinforces for her and eventually her father that they made the right decision to leave Iraq when they did.

Sprinkled throughout the memoir are pages covering traditions in Iraq. Toward the end, she shares some of her fondest childhood memories of living in Iraq.

She covers horrific events, but her overall message focuses on her mourning the country of her childhood.

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### **Krista Regester says**

Brigitte Findakly does a good job of expressing how it felt to live in a place while it was under chaos. Sometimes the story was disjointed, perhaps because the timeline was jumpy.

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### **Tatiana says**

A lesser version of The Arab of the Future: A Childhood in the Middle East, 1978-1984: A Graphic Memoir.

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### **Elizabeth A says**

This graphic memoir shares "memories of her middle class childhood touching on cultural practices, the education system, Saddam Hussein's state control, and her family's history as Orthodox Christians in the Arab world."

It should have worked, as it's not often that we get such a close up look into the lives of people only seen as a problem or collateral damage here in the Western news. It didn't work because it felt too disjointed in the

telling, and while there were some really illuminating anecdotes, for the most part this read more like a book written for family records than an outsider like me. The art is cutesy, which I didn't love, and there were family photos interspersed throughout the book that were too small and dark and not labeled, so I'm not sure why they were included, other than as proof that these events described did indeed take place. An OK but not memorable read.

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### **Elizabeth? says**

A graphic novel that tells the history of a woman's family in Iraq. Her family is Christian in a region that is largely Muslim. Findakly traces the history of Iraq and her family's place in it.

The drawings are simply, but contain good details.

I enjoyed the story, but found myself confused by the non-linear timeline.

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### **Rod Brown says**

Despite many good vignettes and anecdotes, this autobiography is too random and unstructured for me, skipping around through the upbringing of the co-author in Iraq and France. The intermittent inclusion of real family photos drove home the impression I had of sitting on the sofa in a stranger's house as she flips through pages of a family scrapbook telling occasionally humorous stories about a bunch of people I don't really know. While it isn't painful, I'm mostly going to nod politely until I can find an opportunity to leave.

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### **Elizabeth says**

I've been hearing good things about Poppies of Iraq for the last few months, and I was able to check out this copy as soon as my library had gotten it in. It definitely didn't disappoint.

The art is cute, and it drives home the fondness of some memories, and the seriousness of others. The colours really brought the whole thing to life. The story itself was wonderfully told. I feel like I learned a lot about Iraq's history and culture (of which I knew very very little), and Findakly's personal story was captivating. I mainly wish that it had been done in a more chronological order. I thought the translation was well done, and smooth.

Overall I definitely enjoyed this. I would recommend it to anyone looking for a good memoir, a good graphic novel, or more information about Iraq.

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### **Esteban Parra says**

Estamos acostumbrados a ver descripciones de la guerra desde los ojos de soldados, comandantes, muertos, enfermeras y dirigentes. En "Las amapolas de Irak" quien nos cuenta todo es una pequeña de una familia acomodada que si bien no sufrió la guerra tan en carne propia como solemos ver, la conoció de frente y tiene

todos los argumentos necesarios para mostrarnos sus efectos. Tierno y devastador. Un libro ilustrado precioso.

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