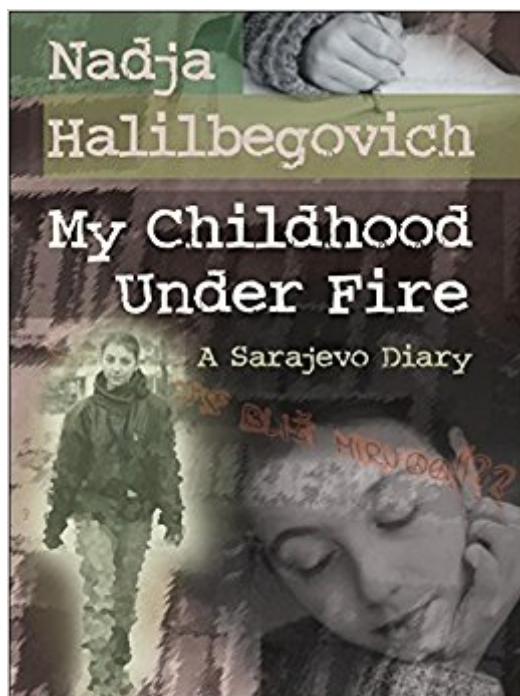


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# My Childhood Under Fire: A Sarajevo Diary



## Synopsis

"Bombs are exploding all over the city. I hide my feelings from everyone, but I am drowning in despair. When will this war end? For how long will my life consist of the dead space between two explosions?" --- June 6, 1995

On the first day of the siege of Sarajevo, 12-year-old Nadja Halilbegovich's life changed forever. In the face of constant tank and sniper fire, daily life in this beautiful, mountain-ringed city was suddenly full of fear. Without reliable electricity, water or medical supplies, the blockaded city ground to a halt. Nadja and her fellow citizens tried desperately to live normal lives while forced to scrounge for even the most basic necessities. *My Childhood Under Fire* is Nadja's diary of the years 1992-95. It is her personal account of becoming a teenager during wartime. It is also a monument to the thousands killed during the siege of Sarajevo and to the millions of children around the world who still live --- and die --- under fire.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Grade 6 Up

"Halilbegovich was just 12 years old on April 6, 1992, when she was told there would be no school that day, not because of a holiday, but because of a war. In her diary, she reveals the hurt, pain, and despair brought on by the fighting within her country and describes the bombings, deaths, and destruction. Through journal entries from her childhood, and looking-back sections written as an adult, readers are exposed to the realities of war. During her teen years, she experienced a life she never imagined — loss of friends, neighbors, and security. In 1995, Halilbegovich was granted passage to the United States. She left Sarajevo through a tunnel, with her mother encouraging her as she went, Remember your dream and keep walking! These words

have stayed with her as she works for peace. This book is similar to Zlata Filipovic's *Zlata's Diary* (Penguin, 1995), but that book begins and ends with the author's words as a young girl. This is an important book as it reveals the effects of a little-known war on innocent people from a personal perspective. --Denise Moore, O'Gorman Junior High School, Sioux Falls, SD Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Gr. 4-7. In 1992, when the bombing started in Sarajevo, Halilbegovich, 12, kept a diary of her terrifying daily life under siege. Her terse vignettes replay the horror of her comfortable home torn apart. Thousands of children are killed, and Halilbegovich herself is hit by a shell. Many black-and-white photos show the girl and her family, before and during the war, including a dramatic view of the tunnel through which she finally escaped, eventually ending up with an American family in 1995. Unfortunately, there's no map, and other than occasional brief notes, there's little background about the Balkans war: Who is involved? Why are they bombing her home? Her message for tolerance and against ethnic divisions is powerful, but it raises questions about generic identity that need to be discussed. Even so, the intimate view of ethnic warfare, the appeal for peace, and the haunting question, "Why did the world allow it to happen?" make the book excellent for the Holocaust curriculum. Connect it to Hanna Jansen's recent novel *Over a Thousand Hills I Walk with You* (2006), about the massacre in Rwanda. Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Nadja's diary is a tribute to her childhood and the children of Sarajevo. Amazingly mature and articulate for her age... Nadja paints a painful portrait of the Bosnian War and the city of Sarajevo. Nadja a normal child's life abruptly ends once Serb forces began besieging the capital city of Sarajevo- suddenly school stops, gun fire starts and Nadja and her family must hide in a cellar. From her cellar while shells drop around her apartment... Nadja pours all of her feelings into her diary. As a college freshman, I found this book insightful and powerful. A short read- but it's a great tribute to a time that the people of Yugoslavia should never forget. Reading a child's fears, hopes, anger, and misunderstanding of the chaos unfolding outside put an eye on intolerable events and the pain of war on its youngest victims. While *Zlata's Diary* (Another Bosnian War Diary) is beautiful/honest Nadja's is more personal.... Zlata who came from a wealthy family and a Croat was not as affected as Nadja seems to have been. Nadja- a Muslim (The Serb Target), living in one of

the most besieged parts of the city, and was a victim of the gunfire when a piece of shrapnel hit her leg when she was playing outside her apartment for the first time in 2 months seemed to be a little more emotionally affected by the events that she shares in her diary- perhaps sharing a little more about her feelings than Zalta does in hers....Nadja's triumph is one that should be shared and read and re-read. The contents of her diary at the misunderstanding of the events unfolding around her brought me to tears- bringing up the fact that while men fight- children die. The Bosnian war is a war often misunderstood by Americans to understand the full contents of the conflict you have to realize it was a Civil War that occurred in Yugoslavia... at the end of communism the states of Yugoslavia began to break apart based on their ethnic nationality- Serb, Croat, and Muslim. The powerful Serb ruled- Serbia set out to claim the other states in the country- as they did they forced evacuated and executed Muslim and Croat populations (They also sent Muslim men to forced labor camps). Bosnia the stronghold of the Muslim population became the main target of the aggression and its capital Sarajevo became a city under siege. The Bosnian war was the worst European conflict since World War Two and resulted in nearly 200,000- most of them civilians and displaced 2 million people from their homes. It was a war when children on a playground were considered fair game, and a war where hospitals, airports, and humanitarian buses and bread lines were purposely shot at... It was an ethnically based war based on years of self-hatred. To understand the full horror of any war you must look first at the children- hearing little one's fears always put a brutal eye on the events unfolding around them. The fear little one's have when their own home becomes a prison and they know that their parents cannot protect them from the madness outside. To understand the full horror of Sarajevo and Bosnia you have to read the diary of Nadja. Nadja although sometimes painful, it is a MUST to understand why war- should never be the answer and the pain that falls upon these besieged cities the hunger, the cold, and the obstructive to normal life (getting mail, going to work, walking down your street). Life STOPS in war zones. I think as adults we all forget the actions we make have affects on our children... for that every adult should read Nadja's diary and gain a perspective that children are the ones caught in the crossfire of men's conflicts. It is a true tribute to Nadja's lost childhood and her country- that should NEVER forget their past. Nadja's Diary is a must read for children- but MORE importantly parents and politicians for all the answers lie in the power of her remarkable writing.

You are walking back from school one day with your mom when a shell suddenly explodes a few hundred feet in front of you and kills several people. The smoke from the shell is suffocating, and you aren't able to see anything. You have no protection and cannot get yourself to a safer place to

dodge the flying shells coming from behind the buildings. As you quickly hurry through the empty streets, anxiously hoping to reach home alive, you see stray body parts of people who had been killed and mutated by exploding shells. How would you feel, if everyday you had to constantly worry that any second, a shell could explode or a sniper would shoot at you and you would be killed instantaneously? Nadja Halilbegovich has written a biography called *My Childhood Under Fire*, which beautifully portrays the way her family lived in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia during the Bosnian War with great emotion and description. In this biography, *My Childhood Under Fire*, Nadja Halilbegovich writes about her painful childhood, and how growing up during the Bosnian War affected her as a person. The setting takes place in Nadja's hometown, Sarajevo, Yugoslavia in 1992, when the Bosnian War had just begun. Worried about the dangers outside of their front doorstep, Nadja and her family move to the basement of their apartment for better protection and discover that the life they once knew would be gone forever. Many of Nadja's friends and neighbors were killed throughout the war, but she kept a positive outlook on the future and never lost hope that there would be peace once again. She wrote "Why can't we all live together in peace instead of fighting wars? No country is worth a child's tear, let alone a child's life. Just when peace lures people outside, some monstrous atrocity happens, and I hear a warning voice: Nadja, the war is still here!" Nadja always had a passion for music and performing, and she never let the war stop her from risking her life to go to hospitals and performing for the sickly patients and trying to lift the spirits of her fellow civilians. The war had such an impact on Nadja that she wrote poems and songs in her diary that were broadcast over the radio several times a day. When Nadja turned 16, she was offered the opportunity to leave Sarajevo and flee to America where she would live with another family and start a new life, despite the deep scars that would always be embedded in her soul from the war. By writing the book in diary format, Nadja Halilbegovich has given the story a more personal touch because of all the vivid details and real life situations that she experienced. You can see how Nadja matured throughout the book in her writing as she grew older which evolved into very expressive and powerful writing. Although it is a short book, readers of all ages can read about the impact of war on a child, and the persistence and strength Nadja had to overcome the obstacles of war, which I hope they find as inspiring as I did.

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