

At the same time, Hussein's government stepped up their campaign for the "Arabization" of Kurdish areas.



As villages were destroyed and residents forcibly removed, Arab Iraqis from the south were moved in to change the demographic makeup of these areas.



The Kurds may have taken back control of many of their cities in 1991, and the NATO no-fly zone protected them from further airstrikes, but these wounds are recent.



And that's not even taking into account the Kurdish civil war that erupted in the '90s, which Sebastian told us is a bit of a touchy subject here.

Here, the Peshmerga are taking a Saddam tank.



Were you in the Peshmerga?

Not me.



My brother, he fight with Peshmerga.

Ah.



You know, I fought in Iraq too. In the American army.



Okay.



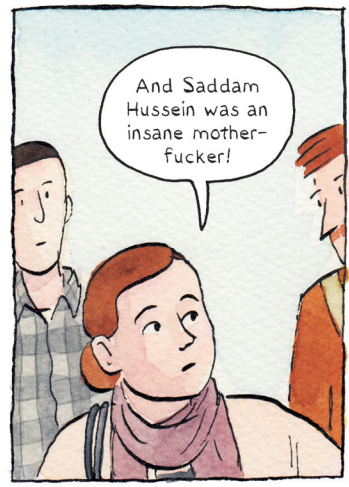








And then some civilians who die, it's like, "Well, there was a good reason for that." You know? And it feels pretty political to me how that's decided.



And Saddam Hussein was an insane mother-fucker!



But there are really crazy fucked-up dictators all over the world and we chose this one.



Hey, so I'm going to go downtown to try and find a Western Union.

Don't you want to come to Sam's interview with us?



I don't want to be in the way.

You won't be in the way. It's really fine.



Nah, that's all right. But if he has any more of those honey buns...

Tell you what...



I'll trade you a honey bun for an interview tonight. Seven o'clock?

Sure. See you guys later.



I think we need to be more careful about what we talk about in front of Dan.





Actually, it is a bit of a tragedy, this room.



This is the upper story of my parents' house.

There are two bedrooms and a living room.



Now we are sitting in that living room.



The bedroom behind me, that's the place where I lived with my previous wife.



My deceased wife.



So it has a lot of memories for me.

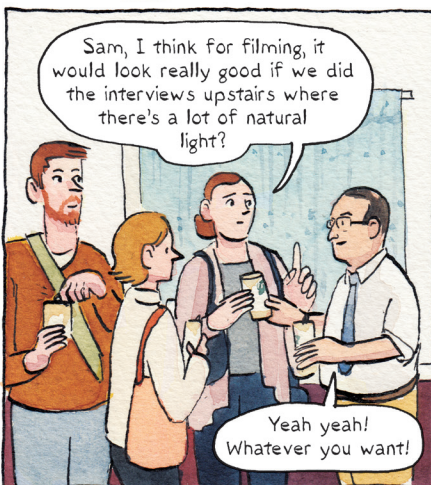


Sam has agreed to be interviewed in this empty place.

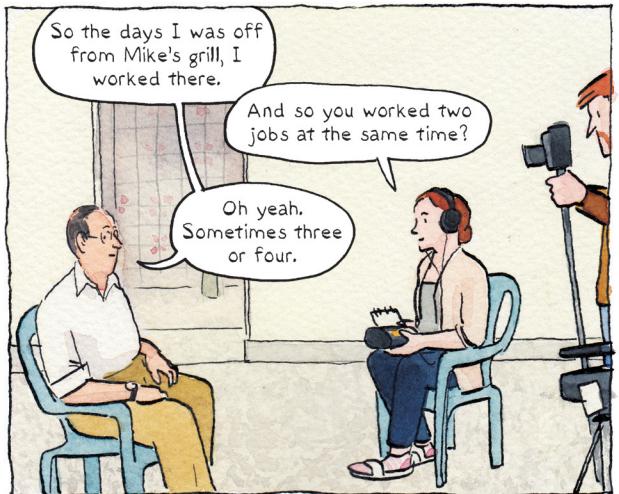
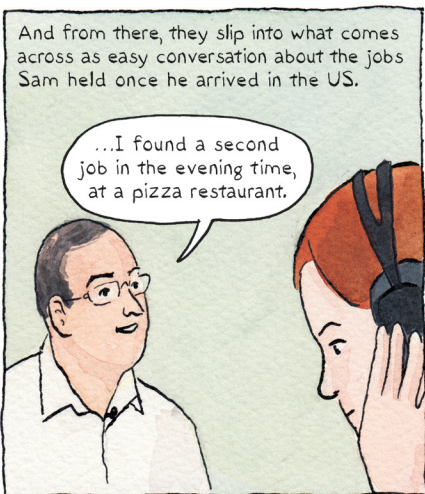
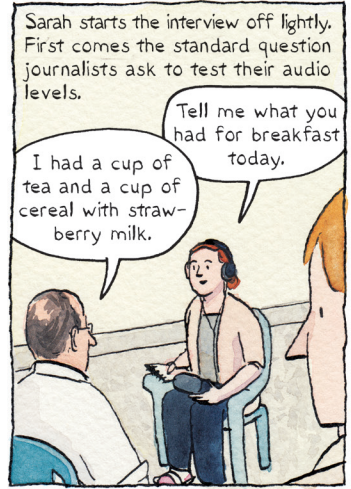
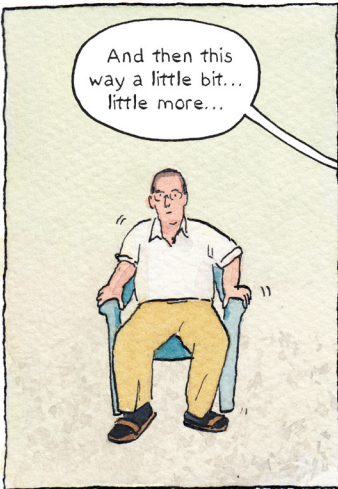


He doesn't usually come to this part of the house.











Before long, Sarah is ready to dig in...

I was thinking about your life and your story, Sam...

and I was thinking about how many times politics have intersected with your life...

When was the first time you remember politics affecting your life?

You mean in the US?

No, in your life here.

Being born Kurdish meant that Sam could not avoid being surrounded by conflict.

My dad was always listening to the radio station that belonged to the PUK...\*

We heard it secretly because we didn't need the neighbor or some secret officer of Saddam to hear it.

But he never considered himself to be a political person. Sam remembers his university days in Baghdad where he studied drama as some of the happiest of his life.

Before the Iraq-Iran war, Baghdad was very, very beautiful. It was peaceful.

It looked like a Western country.

The life, it was really comfortable, nice, safe.

You come back at 2:00 a.m., midnight, and safety was not a problem.

So life was good?

Life was good...as long as you were not involved in politics against Saddam.

Everything changed when tensions between Iraq and Iran bloomed into a conflict that would become one of the longest and bloodiest wars of the twentieth century.

Sam served his first two years of mandatory service in the drama section of the Iraqi army. He entertained troops, much like the American USO.

\*One of two Kurdish political parties



But as the brutal war wore on, the Iraqi military needed more soldiers on the front lines and Sam was called up.

There were three things that could happen: you get killed, become a prisoner of war, or be handicapped.

And I didn't want any of them.

So I decided to run away and come back to Sulay, back to this house.

What did your wife think about your decision?

Sam was a newlywed at the time.

When I ran away from the army, she was so happy because I spent more time with her.

And before long, the couple was expecting.

She didn't care about the war or political stuff.

She just wanted me beside her.

We were in love from our young lifetime, from teenagers.

Rumors started to spread that Hussein's forces were going to start searching door to door for Kurdish deserters. Sam would have to flee.

I told her we had to leave the country, that we were going to Iran.

She didn't like that, to be separated from her family.

But I told her I cannot stay here because if they capture me, I'll end up in Saddam's jail or maybe killed.

She didn't want that either.

So she followed me.









Sarah is interviewing Dan alone tonight in hopes that he'll loosen up a bit with less of a crowd.



I hang back at the hotel and read a book Sebastian lent me about Iraqi Kurds.



Their history is complicated and involves twisting allegiances and an alphabet soup of political parties and factions.

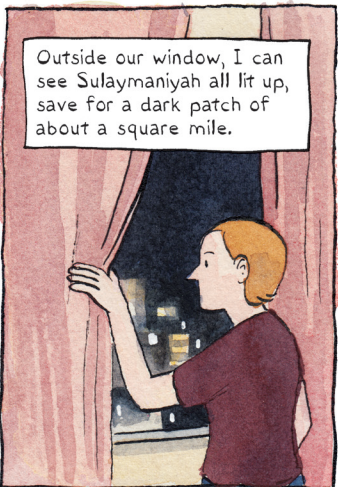


We aren't here to report on the Kurds or their history, but I still feel like I should know what happened here.

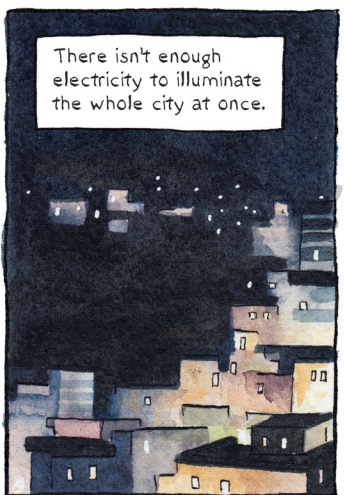


Maybe finding out what happened still doesn't tell you anything about why people are the way they are.

Why they do the things they do.



Outside our window, I can see Sulaymaniyah all lit up, save for a dark patch of about a square mile.



There isn't enough electricity to illuminate the whole city at once.



Rolling blackouts are used to ease the strain on the grid and keep things functioning.



I watch and wonder how long it will take for the lights to turn out here.