“Building is the most important art of life on Earth,” says Abu Salim, a mason hired by author Anthony Shadid to rebuild and restore his great grandfather’s home in Lebanon. In the *House of Stone*, Shadid, a third generation Lebanese American and former *New York Times* journalist, offers a detailed account of the personal and professional experiences that inspired him to restore and rebuild his family’s home or *bayt* in Arabic. The theme of building in the memoir assumes multiple meanings. Shadid discusses the physical rebuilding of his ancestral family home dilapidated by time and war in the town of Marjayoun in southern Lebanon. There are also subtler references throughout the narrative to the building and rebuilding of Shadid’s Lebanese and American identities through his interactions with distant cousins and family acquaintances.

The memoir is organized into chapters that offer two narratives simultaneously – a linear account of the home’s reconstruction and several interspersed recollections of how Shadid’s family, the Samaras, came to acquire and build the property that became *bayt* to generations. He devotes one year to living in Marjayoun and renovating the home. In the process, he traces his family’s history, legacy, and memory through conversations over coffee, sometimes whisky, with new and old friends.

Through tasks of the everyday, from harvesting olive trees to trips to Friday shopping markets, Shadid uncovers the histories that connect and boundaries that distinguish individuals and families of Marjayoun. As a community composed of multiple ethnic groups, including Christians, Shia and Sunni Muslims, and Druze, a long record of co-existence and co-survival prevailed in the town. These relations have changed as the physical borders shifted after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Shadid reflects on his own family’s emigration from Lebanon to the United States, a journey that must be understood as connected to the violent social changes and pressures introduced by longer histories of border drawing following the creation of French and British mandates in the 1920s and of Israel in 1948.

Shadid’s memoir asks the reader to consider how complex histories shape identity formation in the present. The stories he discovers in conversation about his family and the town within which they live(d) illustrate how memory, often deemed abstract, has an undeniably material quality. Textures, smells, and tastes inform our memories of place and purpose. The physical resurrection of his family home is for Shahid a way of exploring collective memory and how it has changed in a town where violence has been an unwelcome guest for over a century.

This violence about which he wrote as a journalist in his ancestral Lebanon as well as in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya ultimately claimed his own life in February 2012 while he was covering the ongoing civil war in Syria. His ashes were spread in the garden of the home he rebuilt in Marjayoun, a final testament to the ways that memories and identity transcend borders and life itself.