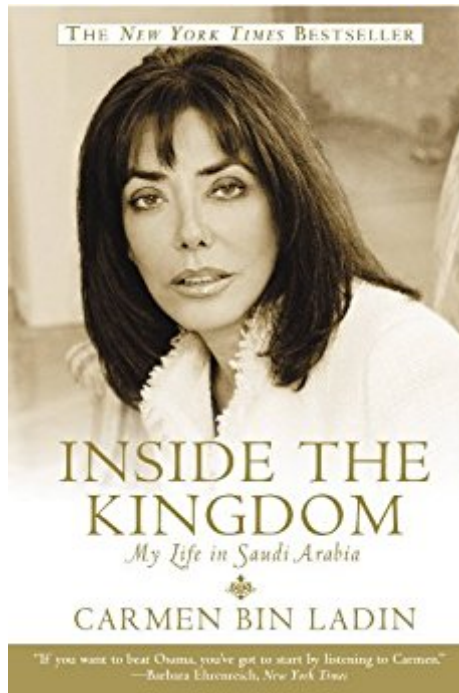




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# **Inside The Kingdom: My Life In Saudi Arabia**



## Synopsis

Osama bin Laden's former sister-in-law provides a penetrating, unusually intimate look into Saudi society and the bin Laden family's role within it, as well as the treatment of Saudi women. On September 11th, 2001, Carmen bin Ladin heard the news that the Twin Towers had been struck. She instinctively knew that her ex-brother-in-law was involved in these horrifying acts of terrorism, and her heart went out to America. She also knew that her life and the lives of her family would never be the same again. Carmen bin Ladin, half Swiss and half Persian, married into-and later divorced from-the bin Laden family and found herself inside a complex and vast clan, part of a society that she neither knew nor understood. Her story takes us inside the bin Laden family and one of the most powerful, secretive, and repressed kingdoms in the world.

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## Customer Reviews

I didn't know what to expect with this book, but I am so happy I read it. Although I cannot in any sense understand how Carmen fell in love with Yeslam in the first place, I do know that love is a powerful feeling. Carmen walks you through a woman's life in Saudi Arabia. I thought I knew their customs, but found out quickly that I didn't. I thank God I was born into a free country. Basically if

you happen to be female, your life is written for you from your first breath. Also, I truly didn't know anything about the Bin Laden and Al Saud relationship and the differences/similarities. I can't imagine keeping the Bin Laden name! I'm sure there is many who would and many who wouldn't. I guess one of the biggest reasons I liked this book is the courage and determination to get what she wanted for her and especially her 3 daughters. She is a lucky one...

a fascinating book, appears to be very genuine. It gives us a real insight into the life and culture of Saudi's. Just another example of the twisted view of the Saudi mind. I feel, as others that Carmen is a heroic character in protecting herself and her precious daughters. Good for her.

I love the book. It gives a great deal of information on how Saudis live and believe. It is hard to believe how the Saudis (the rich ones) could go off to other countries and behave in the ways opposite to the strict ways in which they were taught to believe. It took a lot of courage for Carmen Bin Ladin to teach her daughters in the way she did, especially while she had to live within the family. Her stubbornness in not wanting her girls to grow up and live like Saudi women was commendable. I kept worrying that she would lose her children if she decided to leave Saudi Arabia. This is a hard book to put down.

Fascinating! Their backwards, illogical way of life and thinking baffles me beyond belief. I fear for my beautiful country if Americans don't wake up to the threat that Muslims bring. A friend of mine told me of an area in Colorado called little Saudi. I have always thought that middle eastern people thought they were superior. Inbreds just don't have the mental compacity to think for themselves

Apart from the incredible insight into the culture of Saudi Arabia I was stuck with the mind-numbing courage of Carmen Bin Ladin. If only more people around the world including in the US could read and understand how oppressive other cultures can be perhaps they grow an appreciation of life as we know it. This was a distressing read in that many of the occurrences were never know outside of the closed community of the Royal Family and the Bin Ladin family members. What it grit it must have taken for Carmen to stand up as she did is inspirational. She was always driven to give her girls a life apart from their rootseven when the odds of success we so stacked against her.

A fascinating tale of women's lives in Saudi Arabia in an Islamic culture. They were separated from men in almost everything they did, and the restrictions placed on them kept them in extreme

isolation from the world around them. Carmen Bin Ladin writes with courageous honesty about her double life -- lived under strict Sharia law and also in Geneva and other western locations. She was determined to prevent her daughters from being raised without education and without being able to participate in the civilized world.

This is a memoir of Carmen Bin Ladin's life as a child growing up in Switzerland; of later meeting her husband Yeslam Bin Ladin whilst a student in Geneva; of then living in Jeddah amongst the Bin Ladins; and finally to her painful divorce. Carmen was born of a Swiss father and an Iranian mother. It was not accepted in Iran for a Muslim girl to marry a Christian foreigner, so her mother had to leave Iran to escape her family's harsh criticisms. But the marriage did not last long, and her mother could not return back to Iran in fear of being looked upon as a divorced woman, a curse in Iranian society. After the divorce, Carmen and her mother remained in Switzerland. It was in Geneva that Carmen first met her husband to be, Yeslam Bin Ladin. She described him as being quiet, well dressed, and smart (later in life he used to compete with other princes on whom dressed better). Carmen soon started dating Yeslam, and humorously, she ends up getting married in a car in a parking lot in Saudi Arabia. Apparently, she was not allowed to enter the ministry building to sign the marriage papers, so the papers were brought to her whilst she sat waiting in the car. Women in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to mix with men, and therefore cannot enter buildings where men work. Getting married in a car was the first of the many culture shocks Carmen was to experience. Carmen relates her life as the wife of a Bin Ladin. Mohammad Bin Ladin, the father of the Bin Ladin clan, had over 50 children and countless wives whom he kept at his compound at Kilo 7 in Jeddah. I think Kilo 7 refers to the Mecca Road, 7 being seven kilometers away from Jeddah, but someone will have to check me on that. It is quite interesting that Mohammad Bin Laden would choose to keep all his wives together in one compound. In Islam, a man can have 4 wives at the same time. Mohammad Bin Laden therefore had to divorce a wife each time he wanted to remarry in order not to exceed the allowed quota of 4 wives. As long as one of his divorced wives did not remarry, she was allowed to stay in the compound together with her kids. It was even rumored that there was a competition going on between King Abdul-Aziz of Saudi Arabia and Mohammad Bin Ladin on who will have more children. King Abdul-Aziz won, with over 60 children and many more wives. Living at the Bin Ladin compound was hard for Carmen. She couldn't go shopping for she was prohibited from mixing with men. Whenever she needed something, such as a bathing suit, she had to send her driver. Eventually Safeway opened in Jeddah, and Carmen was able to go grocery shopping. She relates one instance where a group of British and American expats were all gathering at the

chocolate aisle and filling their trolleys with chocolate boxes. Carmen later realized that the chocolates contained liqueur. Alcohol is prohibited in Saudi Arabia, but somehow the liqueur chocolates must have slipped by the customs officials. Carmen's life was a reasonably happy one in the beginning. She describes her relationships with the other Bin Ladin wives; the relationship of her husband with his brothers; and of course, she talks about Osama Bin Ladin. Apparently, Osama was a quiet man and very pious. Unlike his brothers who at first lived a lavish life and were known for their promiscuity and for being playboys, Osama never embraced the western liberal way of life. Carmen says that rumors of him having been a playboy in his younger days are just false. Even pictures allegedly showing him partying in Europe are not of him, but of his brothers who resemble him somewhat. Interestingly, she says that his brothers do not believe that he could have been capable of masterminding the 9/11 attacks on the United States. Since the Bin Ladin family was the only family given exclusive rights to renovate the two holy sites, Mecca and Medina, the family was given preferential treatment. For example, if a policeman or a member of the religious police stopped one of the Bin Ladins, all they had to say was Bin Ladin, and they were quickly released or given right of way. No one asked for their IDs. This however was not good policy, for it allowed a group of Islamists, hidden in Bin Ladin trucks (which were never searched), to attack and seize the holy Mosque in Mecca in 1979. In fact, one of the Bin Ladin brothers was arrested as a suspect in the attack, but was soon released because he was a Bin Ladin. When Mohammad Bin Ladin died in a plane crash he was piloting, the eldest son was still in his twenties. The king therefore appointed a trustee to run the family fortune. Eventually, as the brothers grew up, they took full control of the family business. According to Carmen, her husband Yeslam was the smartest of the brothers, and this gave rise to envy and jealousy. His brothers frequently downplayed his decisions, and publicly offended him. They also took credit for many of his savvy deals that added to his family's wealth and fame. Eventually, Yeslam quit his family business, was given 300 million dollars as his share of the family wealth, and moved to Switzerland. However, his brothers, eventually recognizing his value to the family business, asked him to return. Carmen relates how she longed to travel outside Saudi Arabia, and how she enjoyed her freedom during her trips to Switzerland and the United States. One thing I liked about Carmen is that she is a bibliophile. She piled books on her travels to read while literally imprisoned in the Bin Ladin compound in Jeddah. She read all subjects, from philosophy to politics. Carmen describes the state of mind of the Saudi Royals during the downfall of the Shah of Iran, and the rise of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Before the Ayatollah, Saudi Arabia was moving in the right direction, becoming more liberal and westernized. However, after the Iranian revolution, with fear of it spilling to Saudi Arabia, religious fanatics gained power and turned the

country into a strict religious monarchy, very much like during the Taliban in Afghanistan. Women were not allowed to drive; had to be completely covered; were discouraged of going to school; were discouraged to go in public places; were forbidden from working; were not allowed to join any health clubs or do any sports; and were raised to be subservient to their future husbands. The country suddenly moved hundreds of years backwards! Carmen, who had high hopes of living in Jeddah, had her hopes collapse. Her life was becoming unbearable in Jeddah. She longed to go back to Switzerland. Trouble between her and her husband first started during her third pregnancy. Her husband did not want the baby, and Carmen eventually had an abortion. She describes the psychological pain she had to endure after the abortion. When Carmen was pregnant again, her husband once more asked her to have an abortion. This time she refused, and she knew that it would be over between them. To make matters worse, she learnt that her husband was cheating on her, and she even caught him leaving one of his mistress's homes in the middle of the morning. Carmen gives us a lot of insight into the life of her husband Yeslam. Apparently, later in his life, he acted strange, was often depressed, and complained of imaginary illnesses. He also had a fear of flying, and refused to fly alone. Like his father, his brother Salem also died while piloting his own aircraft in Texas. I did not like the last chapter which talked about the Bin Ladins. The chapter seemed more like an attack on the Bin Ladin family, as if Carmen wanted to get back at her ex-husband. She says that the Bin Ladin family should make their secret dealings open to public scrutiny, and that their present relation with Osama should be revealed. These statements somewhat weakened her book. If she knows something we don't she should just tell us, or better still, let the CIA know. I am sure she is genuine in her last chapter (chapter 19, conclusion), but I think it is more personal and revengeful than anything else. By the way, an additional chapter was added in later editions. The book I read had the added chapter included. Overall, this is a good read for those who want to know about Saudi society in the 70s, 80s, and early 90s, and especially those wanting to learn about the Bin Ladin family. The reader should note that since King Abdullah gained the throne, Saudi Arabia has been moving forward at a tremendous speed, and the country is becoming more open, tolerant, and westernized. And kudos, women now outsmart the guys. Well done!

Interesting read, but something put me off just a bit.

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