



Carmen today (above); with Yeslam and her daughters in 1986 (left)

The Truth About Radical Islam

In some Islamic nations, women have no rights, Carmen Bin Ladin—Osama's sister-in-law—tells what that's like.

By Michael Callahan

■ Since 9/11, we've learned a lot about fundamentalist Islam, which promotes an almost medieval way of life.

But 30 years ago, the severe restriction of women's rights in extremist Islamic society came as a shock to Carmen Bin Ladin, who grew up in Switzerland, wed her husband Yeslam in 1974, and moved with him to Saudi Arabia. She had no way of knowing then that his half-brother Osama would commit such atrocities.

Over the years, Carmen watched radical Islam's influence grow. And in 1985, she took her two daughters on a visit to Switzerland, and then refused to go back to Saudi Arabia. Her husband eventually returned without them.

After 9/11, Carmen felt compelled to speak out. Her memoir, *Inside the Kingdom: My Life in Saudi Arabia*, exposes the scary world in which many women are still trapped.

Q What was it like when you first went to Saudi Arabia?

A When I arrived for my wedding, Yeslam said, "You need to put on the abaya," which is like a burka. I didn't make a big deal of it, because I had seen women wearing them in Iran—they were made of silk and beautiful. But this one was black and thick. After I put it on, everything seemed so dark. I kept looking at my feet so I wouldn't

Q What were the women like?

A They had no opinions about anything. That is how they were brought up. Then they pass it on to their daughters. So the cycle never breaks.

Q You write that there are no books, concerts, TV, or movies allowed. How did you survive?

A When you are in love, you make sacrifices. I visited home, which helped. If I had thought it would be that way all of my life, I don't think I could have coped. But I thought things would change.

Q When did you decide to leave?

A I knew if I stayed that my daughters would have to be submissive. I couldn't let that happen. I threw a birthday party for my daughter Wafah, and her young cousin came veiled. And it hit me: Soon *it will be my daughter whose face will have to be hidden*. Earlier, my daughter Najia came to me and said "Mommy, you are going to hell." I was startled and asked her why. She said, "Because you don't pray five times a day." That's what she was being taught. There was fear in her eyes. That was the moment it all became difficult...and unbearable.

Q You write that young people there frighten you most. Why?

A In Western culture—especially in America—we think the next generation will look more toward the future. But in Saudi Arabia, young people want to grab onto the past and not let go. If anything, they're going backward. ■

Silent Victims

In several fundamentalist Islamic countries, women can be murdered by their own families with few repercussions for such offenses as having a boyfriend and even being raped.

SOURCE: WWW.AMNESTYUSA.ORG

(from left) Marie Balido. Courtesy of Carmen Bin Ladin.