

The Unveiling

Kristin Decker's brush with Saudi royalty and her eye-opening year in the Middle East

When a powerful Arabian princess secretly opens a private school, Kristin Decker and her husband, Randy, travel abroad to teach the princess' children. After one year of devoting their time and love to the royal family, Kristin and Randy are suddenly accused of insulting Their Highness and insulting Islam. Faced with imprisonment, the couple is detained and coerced into signing false statements. Ten years after being expelled from the country, Kristin reveals her story in *The Unveiling*.

"*The Unveiling* is about coming to understand, really, quite a few different things," said author Kristin Decker. "Initially, I was learning about Saudi Arabia, Islam, and the life of women. ... Seeing how they live was really an eye-opening experience.

"But also, it was an unveiling of seeing my husband for who he was," said Kristin. "We were really able to connect to one another. The book is a love story in a way."

Kristin dedicated *The Unveiling* to her husband Randy, who passed way from cancer on May 15. "I wanted to honor him because he had so much integrity, and he was so strong for me," she said.

Profile photo



Bowman Middle School teacher Kristin Decker unveils her experiences in Saudi Arabia.

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Arriving in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia’s capital and largest city, Kristin and Randy were amazed at what they saw. Palm trees stood poised along the entrance of the residential community. Mediterranean-style homes rested on manicured lawns. A business center housed a restaurant with a spectacular pool and large fountains. There was a grocery store, a hair salon, a cleaners. ... “Is this Saudi Arabia or Palm Springs?” Randy joked.

Settling into their villa was easy, but the Arabian customs and culture took some getting used to. Five times a day, shops and businesses shut down as the *muezzin*



Kristin and Randy traveled to Saudi Arabia from 1996 - 1997. This is their opulent compound in Riyadh.

called through a loud speaker for believers to recite a *salat*, or prayer. Policemen, or *mutawwa*, would “scour the premises for offenders who were neither attending prayer nor covering their hair,” writes Kristin in her book.

Women covered their hair in public and dressed in long black cloaks called *abayas*, or else they would receive lascivious looks from men. Men wore white robes called *thobes* and red-and-white-checked scarves called *ghutras*.

Women lived very separate lives from men. They were not allowed to drive, nor were they allowed into certain shops; some shops included separate entrances for women. “There were all these limitations,” said Kristin. “I began to feel like a second-class person, and I had to reclaim that when I came back to America.”

Over time, Kristin grew to admire Arabian women for coping with such a confined way of living. “They had a strong support system among themselves and really looked out for each other. I think that’s one thing that American women can learn from them, their sense of support and community.”

Randy and Kristin supported each other on their journey, not only as husband and wife, but as professionals. As devout Christians, they respected that Islam and the Qur’an were the core values of the Saudi educational system.

While Saudi schools focused on memorization, Princess Noura wanted her children, Majid and Samira, to be exposed to different ideas. She requested that they learn *how* to think but not question their values. The children needed to be able to converse intelligently if they were to be future leaders of Saudi Arabia.

“Their mom kept telling them, ‘Lead Saudi into the future,’ ” said Kristin. “So, we really wanted to get them involved in a creative thinking curriculum and help them learn how to think critically.”

Thinking critically, though, would be a challenge. “They had a real hard time telling the difference between fact and fantasy,” said Kristin. “That’s what teachers in America teach all the time:

fact versus opinion, the skills of persuasion, and comparing and contrasting. But they believed everything they read.”

Kristin has been teaching since 1973, so Majid and Samira responded well to her experience and to her teaching style. However, when the students grew too close to their American teachers, this offended members of the royal family. Eventually, Kristin and Randy would be betrayed.

All Kristin has now are memories of Majid and Samira. “They were strongly embedded in their Saudi culture,” she said, “but they also respected the Western culture. This is the kind of leadership Saudi Arabia needs, leaders who understand both cultures.”

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“The world seems fatherless.”

Randy held my hand tightly. “Perhaps, but it’s not without love.”

The lingering silence between us wove a deeper connection than any we’d experienced before. Somehow, my grieving was liberating, and I didn’t regret what it took to break through my defenses. I knew we had everything of real importance with us. ...

I then wondered whether parts of my own life had really been any different than I imagined an Arabian woman’s might be. Had I avoided the anxiety and pain in my own life because it was overwhelming? Perhaps my appearance of strength had only been a cover for my emotional wounds. Perhaps it was my own trauma that I sensed when I saw veiled *Bedouin* women.