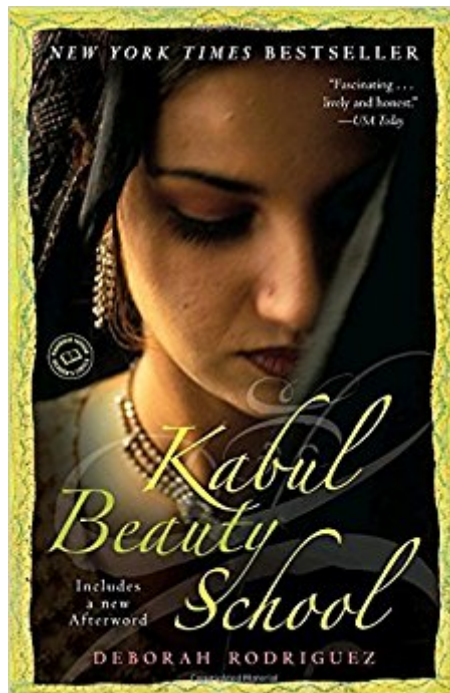




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# Kabul Beauty School: An American Woman Goes Behind The Veil



## Synopsis

Soon after the fall of the Taliban, in 2001, Deborah Rodriguez went to Afghanistan as part of a group offering humanitarian aid to this war-torn nation. Surrounded by men and women whose skills—doctors, nurses, and therapists—seemed eminently more practical than her own, Rodriguez, a hairdresser and mother of two from Michigan, despaired of being of any real use. Yet she soon found she had a gift for befriending Afghans, and once her profession became known she was eagerly sought out by Westerners desperate for a good haircut and by Afghan women, who have a long and proud tradition of running their own beauty salons. Thus an idea was born. With the help of corporate and international sponsors, the Kabul Beauty School welcomed its first class in 2003. Well meaning but sometimes brazen, Rodriguez stumbled through language barriers, overstepped cultural customs, and constantly juggled the challenges of a postwar nation even as she learned how to empower her students to become their families' breadwinners by learning the fundamentals of coloring techniques, haircutting, and makeup. Yet within the small haven of the beauty school, the line between teacher and student quickly blurred as these vibrant women shared with Rodriguez their stories and their hearts: the newlywed who faked her virginity on her wedding night, the twelve-year-old bride sold into marriage to pay her family's debts, the Taliban member's wife who pursued her training despite her husband's constant beatings. Through these and other stories, Rodriguez found the strength to leave her own unhealthy marriage and allow herself to love again, Afghan style. With warmth and humor, Rodriguez details the lushness of a seemingly desolate region and reveals the magnificence behind the burqa. Kabul Beauty School is a remarkable tale of an extraordinary community of women who come together and learn the arts of perms, friendship, and freedom. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. A terrific opening chapter—colorful, suspenseful, funny—ushers readers into the curious closed world of Afghan women. A wedding is about to take place, arranged, of course, but there is a potentially dire secret—the bride is not technically a virgin. How Rodriguez, an admirably resourceful and dynamic woman, set to marry a nice Afghan man, solves this problem makes a great story, embellished as it is with all the traditional wedding preparations. Rodriguez went to Afghanistan in 2002, just after the fall of the Taliban, volunteering as a nurse's aide, but soon found that her skills as a trained hairdresser were far more in demand, both for the Western workers and, as word got out, Afghans. On a trip back to the U.S., she persuaded companies in the beauty industry to donate 10,000 boxes of products and supplies to ship to Kabul, and instantly she started a training school. Political problems ensued ("too much laughing within the school"), financial problems, cultural misunderstandings and finally the government closed the school and salon—though the reader will suspect that the endlessly ingenious Rodriguez, using her book as a wedge against authority, will triumph in the end. This witty and insightful (if light) memoir will be perfect for women's reading groups and daytime talk shows. (Apr. 10) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Adult/High School—In 2002, just months after the Taliban had been driven out of Afghanistan, Rodriguez, a hairdresser from Holland, MI, joined a small nongovernmental aid organization on a mission to the war-torn nation. That visit changed her life. In Kabul, she chronicles her efforts to help establish the country's first modern beauty school and training salon; along with music and kite-flying, hairdressing had been banned under the previous regime. This memoir offers a glimpse into a world Westerners seldom see—life behind the veil. Rodriguez was entranced with the delightful personalities that emerged when her students removed their burqas behind closed doors, but her book is also a tale of empowerment—both for her and the women. In a city with no mail service, she went door-to-door to recruit students from clandestine beauty shops, and there were constant efforts to shut her down. She had to convince Afghan men to work side by side with her to unpack cartons of supplies donated from the U.S. The students, however, are the heroines of this memoir. Women denied education and seldom allowed to leave

their homes found they were able to support themselves and their families. Rodriguez's experiences will delight readers as she recounts such tales as two friends acting as parents and negotiating a dowry for her marriage to an Afghan man or her students puzzling over a donation of a carton of thongs. Most of all, they will share her admiration for Afghan women's survival and triumph in chaotic times.

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First off, I read the NY Times article after reading the book. I bought the book one day when the Kindle version was on special. However, after reading the Times article AND the book, I can only surmise that people throwing fits about inaccuracies are making claims that she didn't start the Kabul Beauty School or Beauty Without Borders are upset that she didn't write about them more. She tells that she had an idea, and after she started getting donations, she found out that someone had already started a similar project. She tells these things in the book. Is it possible that she talked a lot about herself and what she did and not about what the other founders or organizers did in great detail because she was telling her story, maybe she had a falling out with these others and instead of talking trash about them she just minimized them without excluding them? Yes. Does the book leave the reader with the feeling that Debbie did everything by herself? Not this reader. It just left me with a sense of her stories, her experiences, and her feelings. I think it's valid. I think I have to say that I was honestly impressed with how well the author was able to be completely oblivious to the cultural differences of the men and women in Afghanistan, as compared to her concept of norms, and her ability to own her own accidental insensitivity to them and try to get it right and do better in the future. Seriously, one of the biggest screw-ups I see with people working with people from different cultures is a judgement all insensitivity to others, as though one culture is right and one culture is bad or stupid. Her focus on doing something to empower Afgani women, and then allow them to own that power and do with it what they felt right about within their own lives. I hope that the author was careful with the stories she shared from other people, and will trust that she has been. I don't know, and I never will, I'm sure. What I can say is that the story flows well. I don't understand the comments some made about incongruous flow. The only time I didn't feel completely within the sequence of the overall story, the internal time line of the book, was when the wedding at the start occurred in relation to other events, but I don't really think it made a huge difference when it occurred in relation to other stories in the memoir. What I care about more than any of the stuff above is that women in Afghanistan are getting empowered, I care that the book is really pretty well

written, and I care that an interesting story is being told. I'm sure there are people who were left out, but that's the nature of memories and people telling stories. I can honestly say, though, that I really enjoyed it, I'm glad I bought and read it, and I'm recommending it to friends and family. I hope you check it out and that you enjoy it, too.

In some ways, it was a relief to read about a humanitarian who is also deeply flawed. I don't honestly believe that anyone does anything for any reason if it doesn't benefit them in some way, shape or form. Maybe it's for religious reasons, maybe it's simply for the reason that it makes them feel good, but, in the end, they are doing it for themselves, and though Debbie's motives are not traditionally selfless, the fact remains that she did do something selfless. However, anyone with a modicum of knowledge about Middle Eastern culture and the treatment of women in that part of the world in general, cannot fail to realize that she endangered the life of her alleged best friend simply by writing the unadulterated version of what happened on that friend's wedding night, as well as events that took place before. That's nothing to say of the other women whose lives she put in danger. Karmically, I wonder if the betrayal of her friends cancels out any good she did there for the women not directly mentioned in her book. Certainty, it is not illogical to conjecture she has made further attempts at providing women in that area significantly more difficult and undermined their trust. Overall, that makes me feel vaguely guilty for having bought her book, in that I put money in the pocket of someone whose discretion could only be called questionable at best.

This book really touched me as I am a missionary and see such need for women around the globe. I cried when the girls were beaten and I laughed at the cultural faux pas. Throughout the book you can feel Deborah's love and compassion as she herself is being reinvented after an abusive marriage. The love from the Afghan women runs deep as does Deborah's love for them. May these women continue to grow in self-sufficiency and may their lives continue to heal from their various abuses.

The author of this true story, that she actually lived/lives is absolutely, in my humble opinion, FANTASTIC!!! It's FULL of daily dramas, to say the least! With lots of tears and lots of laughter and scary moments in this living there! The author was very courageous with going to an unknown foreign country, without any language but English, and learning (usually by "hard knocks" and by accidents) these particular peoples' culture w/in their society is VERY different from Americans' culture. She relates some extremely heart-breaking stories from various native women from

Afghanistan. Yet, her heart would reach out to try to help in the only way she knew how, sometimes it worked well, sometimes it would "back fire" because of unknown, for her, cultural differences. She dreamed of beginning a Beauty School to help the Afghan women. She had no money but resourcefully was funded by the generosity of beauty manufacturers and other contributors. A life with memories that she will treasure forever!! "lived" vicariously through her book. Do I recommend reading it? Oh boy! Do I ever!!!

The reasons why I liked this book so much are that it was written by someone very, very different from myself but still coming from the heart. I would never, for example, even wear makeup, and have not visited a beauty salon in decades because I don't cut my hair. Yet I have a fascination with other cultures and highly appreciated her look into this one in a way I could never have achieved even had I visited Kabul myself. Now, of course in 2016, I wonder how it has changed. But cultures change very slowly and women are women, so I'm sure the look we got in this book is still authentic. For me, it was a page turner. I've had friends from the Middle East and knew they were unable to tell me what it was like for them there.

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