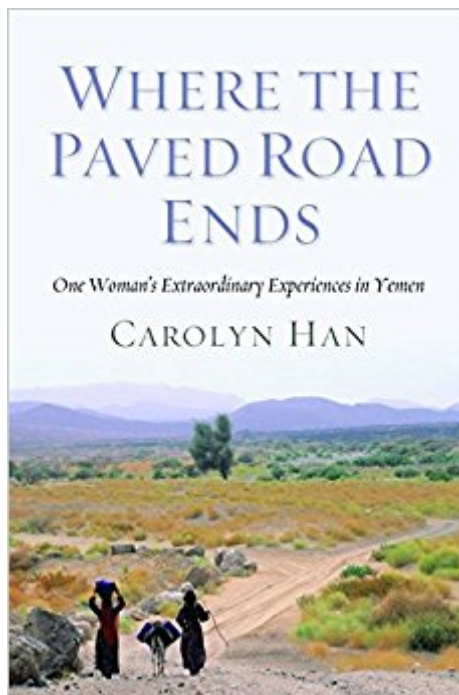




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Where The Paved Road Ends: One Woman's Extraordinary Experiences In Yemen



Synopsis

In 2004, Carolyn Han left her comfortable life and position as a lecturer in English at Hawaii Community College and went to live in one of the most remote and mysterious places in the Middle East—Yemen, known in the West primarily for providing a haven for terrorists affiliated with al Qaeda. The previous year, she had sold her gold jewelry to travel with Bedouin by camel from Marib to Shabwa, and the life-changing experience opened the path for her to become the first American English instructor in Yemen's wild tribal area, Marib. Guided by fateful encounters and unfazed by warnings of danger, Han allowed her life to unfold as it might, with a sense of acceptance informed by the idea that whatever happens is meant to happen. Learning and understanding would come later. In this book, Han paints a vivid portrait of Yemeni customs, including their enjoyment of the stimulant qat and their proclivity for carrying AK-47s wherever they go, and she conveys what it was like to be a woman alone surrounded by a culture not her own. As the old saying goes, the teacher became the student, and through these pages Han allows readers a rare glimpse into a Bedouin culture that most will never encounter.

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Customer Reviews

CAROLYN HAN is the author of several books, including *From the Land of Sheba: Yemen Folk Tales* (Interlink Publishing, 2005) and three collections of Chinese folktales published in the 1990s by the University of Hawaii Press. She received a BA in English from the University of Hawaii at Hilo and an MA in comparative literature from San Diego State University.

Ms. Han has written two tales in this exceptional book. The first is a narrative of life in Yemen. She leaves the relative modernity of Sana'a and goes to teach English in Marib, a place that even the Yemeni people eschew. Body guards, heavily armed Bedouins, tribal feuds and strict Islam are the norm. She commits to teaching hospital workers where the hospital sits unfinished, the donated money long gone. She finds endless obstacles to her living there. At first she is barely appreciated, suspected of being a spy and a thief of antiquities. Her infrequent trips to her beloved desert and ancient sites are few and far in between. And yet, she is able to accept people for who they are, form friendships and maintain a wonderful sense of humor. The second story is very personal and painful. She finds herself slowly disappearing as the constant erosion of her freedom to make personal choices adds to her physical confinement. She loses her ability to write, which for her is losing life itself. This is an extremely well written book of adventure, acceptance and learning. I highly recommend it and think that it would be an excellent choice for book clubs. Marta M. Lopes

I was taken on an eye-opening and riveting journey in the land of the Queen of Sheba (Yemen) by American author Carolyn Han in her latest book *Where the Paved Road Ends*. The author and her desert cat, Zhara, experienced challenging and surprising adventures in Yemen, especially in the wild tribal region of Marib where Ms. Han taught English to hospital workers. Because of the dangers in Yemen she had a bodyguard (Mohammed) who challenged her free-spirited nature but also provided her with the safety she didn't want to admit she needed. Their relationship provided tension, relief and some surprises. Her account of crossing the desert on a camel (a dream of hers) is inspiring. I learned that women in Yemen definitely don't have the freedom, power or educational opportunities that we do in the USA. She describes her experiences so poignantly that I felt I was there with her when reading her book. Wearing the veil was expected of her and she shares her experience of making that adjustment. I liked the pace of this book and had a hard time putting the book down. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to know what it's like for a woman to live in a part of the world that seems like a time warp and is rich in ancient history, living traditions and mystery. The author seemed to lose herself and then find herself anew.

I am fortunate to know Carolyn Han personally, as both a friend and an author. Ms. Han was a guest at our public and school library where she described her travel experiences in China and the Middle East while introducing a new book she had written. I met her because I was a librarian, yet I know her now as a wise and loving interpreter of our world. *Where the Paved Road Ends*, with its

honest observations of Islamic customs and lifestyle and its thoughtful, sometimes humorous, glimpses of her own personal journey, underlines what a brave and incredibly international person Ms. Han is. Carolyn Han makes the perfect traveler, respectful and empathetic. By living a far more exemplary life than most Americans, she'd be an ideal ambassador candidate. We need more Carolyn Hans who live open-heartedly and fearlessly, pursuing their artistic and humanitarian passions, even at the cost of their own security and comfort. I applaud this book for its eye-opening descriptions of the veiled and mysterious foreign country of Yemen and for allowing the reader to get to know, as I do, the strong and resilient personality of the author. Poetically, from reading a good book, you may yourself become more enlightened and understanding. This is such a book.

Where The Paved Road Ends is a woman's personal account of life and Yemeni tradition in the tribal, desert region of Marib, a life where rigid views of Islam are practiced and enforced, almost-always favoring men at the expense of women. Thought to be a spy, a woman not to be trusted, Han pushes through obstacles and frustrations. Along the way, she finds pieces of herself in the journey; she discovers parts of herself not examined but indeed worth living. Had Han known before beginning her journey that it would be riddled with danger and sacrifices, would she have ventured out into the unknown desert of her life? Undoubtedly. Han's choices live up to her first paragraph and Rumi's words, "Let the beauty we love be what we do." Carolyn Han chose to do. And fortunately for us, she has written the beauty that she loves into this extraordinary adventure, allowing the reader to get into her innermost thoughts and struggles as she travels uncharted paths of Yemen and self-discovery.

The subtitle of Carolyn Han's book Where the Paved Road Ends, One Woman's Extraordinary Experiences in Yemen should perhaps have been worded One Extraordinary Woman's Experiences in Yemen. For Han is definitely a woman beyond the ordinary. Han's fixed determination to repay the kindness of Bedouin who had helped her realise her ambition to travel in the desert with them was no easy undertaking. Her decision to teach English in the remote area of Marib meets with limited success and at great cost to her personal freedom. Yet never does she falter in her mission. In the end, she gets more than she gives... and she is wise enough and humble enough to recognise this important fact. Armchair travellers might find Han's story daunting; people who know the Middle East in general and Yemen in particular will appreciate her love, her honesty and her deep respect for a people who touched her soul.

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