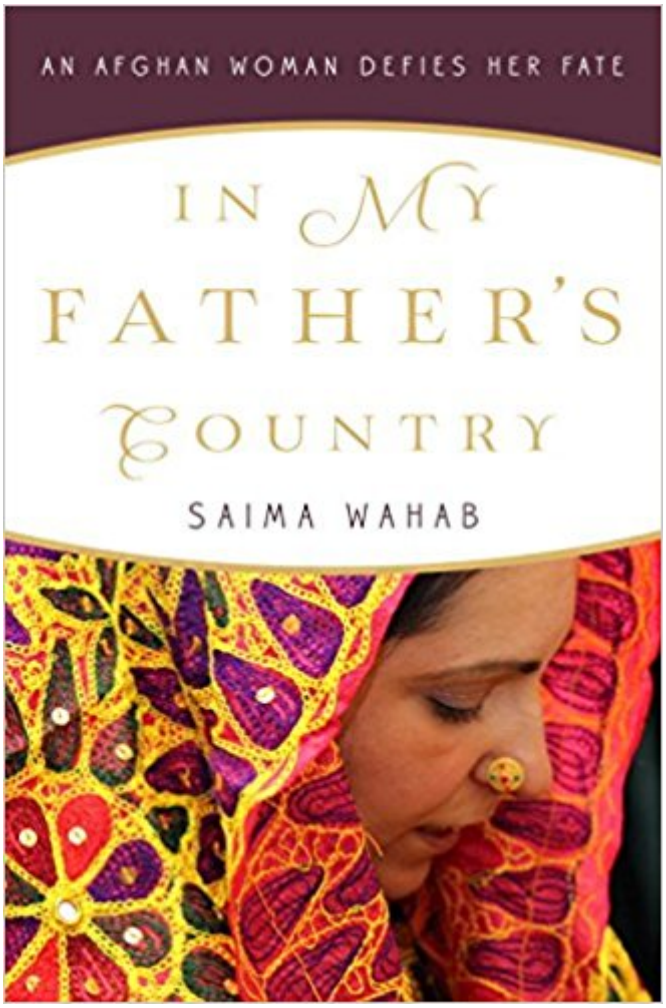
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In My Father's Country: An Afghan Woman Defies Her Fate



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Synopsis

Born in Kabul, Afghanistan, at age three Saima Wahab watched while her father was arrested and taken from their home by the KGB.Ã Â She would never see him again. When she was fifteen an uncle who lived in Portland, Oregon brought her to America.Ã Â Having to learn an entire new language, she nonetheless graduated from high school in three years and went on to earn a bachelor's degree.Ã Â In 2004 she signed on with a defense contractor to work as an interpreter in Afghanistan, never realizing that she would blaze the trail for a new kind of diplomacy, earning the trust of both high-ranking U.S. army officials and Afghan warlords alike.Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â When she arrived in Afghanistan in the winter of 2004, Saima was among theÃ Â few college-educated female Pashto speakers in the entire country. She was stunned to learn how little U.S. and coalition forces knew about the Pashtun, who comprise 40% of the population and from whom the Taliban arose. The blessing of the Pashtun is essential, but the U.S. army was so unaware of the workings of this ancient, proud, insular ethic group, that they would routinely send Farsi interpreters into Pashtun villages.Ã Â As a Pashtun-born American citizen, Saima found herself in an extraordinary positionÃ¢â ¬â •to be able to explain the people of her native land to those of her adopted one, and vice versa, in a quest to forge new and lasting bonds between two misunderstood cultures.Ã Â In My FatherÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Country follows her amazing transformation from child refugee to nervous Pashtun interpreter to intrepid Ã¢â ¬Å“human terrainÃ¢â ¬Â• specialist, venturing with her twenty-five-soldier force pro-tection into isolated Pashtun villages to engage hostile village elders in the first, very frank dialogue they had ever had with the Americans.From her posting at the forward operating base Farah in AfghanistanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s blistering western frontier to the year she spent in Jalalabad translating for provincial governor Ã¢â ¬Å“Hollywood PashtunÃ¢â ¬Â• Sherzai to the near-suicide missions of a year and a half in the Khost Province, where before every mission, she left instructions on how to dispose of her belongings, having to face the very real possibility of not coming back alive, Saima WahabÃ¢â ¬â„¢s is an incomparable story of one young womanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s unwavering courage and undaunted spirit.Ã Â

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Customer Reviews

"In vibrant but understated prose, Wahab vividly portrays a misunderstood culture, as well as the tense life on military bases where everyone must wear body armor and carry a weapon. While fighting to build a bridge of understanding between her 'native and adoptive nations,' Wahab admirably wages a more universal war--for gender equality, human rights, and peace."--Publisher's Weekly (starred review)"Extraordinary....detailed, lively...A carefully wrought work that allows a rare look inside Pashtun culture."--Kirkus Reviews

SAIMA WAHAB was born in Afghanistan, went to Pakistan as a refugee, and moved to the United States as a teenager. Since then she has become one of the only Pashtun female translators in the world, andÃ¢â ¬â •among other consequent rolesÃ¢â ¬â •has returned to Afghanistan several times to work as a cultural adviser with the U.S. Army. She lives in Washington, D.C.

I read this book to further my understanding of the female, Afghan, Pashtun perspective and experience. As someone who also teaches memoir writing to adult writers, I also always read with an eye toward good teaching material. I was pleased to see a strong balance of scene, summary, and reflection in this memoir. I felt most drawn in by the first 2/3 of the book. In the last 1/3, as the author tires of her own stay in Afghanistan, I, too, started to grow tired. That's the result of effective writing on Wahab's part, of course, and I'm glad I stuck it out to reach her moment of realization and accomplishment in the end. A revealing, educational, honest account.

Our book club read this book last month and it was badly panned by our group. It is rare that we agree so completely about a book. This was the 4th book we had read on the subject of Afghanistan so it was a familiar topic. Our group found very little to like about this author. (And the whole book is just all about her.) She is a very unsympathetic character. She has no empathy for people, no

understanding of friendship, or love, or loyalty, or patriotism. Her only use for her American passport is to protect her if needed. She is cruel to lovers and strangers alike. Moreover, the surprise ending - that this book really not about her at all - has absolutely no credibility.

Saima Wahab was sent at an early age to Portland Oregon to be raised by relatives who had escaped Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. Her aptitude for languages enabled her to graduate from high school, attain a college degree, while living under the thumbs of her tradition bound uncles who were determined to continue the tribal ways of her Pashtun inheritance. Even an innocent inquiry from a boy regarding homework would lead to interrogation and accusation. As soon as she was able she defied them, forging her own life. Her ties to and memories of her native land led her to sign on as an interpreter for American forces, putting her in a sometimes dangerous position as a woman who is also a native Pashto speaker as well as being fluent in English. Her story opens up Afghanistan in a way that only someone who has access to intimate knowledge of both cultures can, and she gives her unique perspective on the role of sometimes misguided Americans in their blundering intentions. Some reviewers have found fault with the writing style, but she is not a writer, but an individual with a powerful story to tell and the generosity to share it. Highly recommended.

I could not put this book down. The writer really took me inside herself and gave me a real understanding of her native culture and the conflicts her new values as an American created in her. I could truly understand why she felt impelled to return to her native country to face and merge the vast differences between these two cultures, particularly for a woman. Accepting the fact that this story is true, I am hoping the writer realizes the great and wonderful service she has accomplished by helping both sides understand each other better. What makes it even more emotional and real for the reader is experiencing with her the deep love relationships she sacrificed in deference to what she felt was her duty to herself and her countries. On another level, the insights provided by this book make it a crucial "must read" for today’s young people, all of whom will be faced with either serving in a professional or military capacity on foreign turf or meeting and living with immigrants from mid-eastern countries in their daily lives here in America.

The author seemed to be a little into herself and some of her views were annoying, but I thought she offered valuable insight into traditional Pashtun culture. The reason her views were annoying is because she is Pashtun and was raised within an atrocious traditional value system. ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s a miracle that she came out as normal as she did. But, the real value of the

book is in explaining some of the traditions that still go on today in Afghanistan and Pakistan and how they impact people trying to integrate with the Western world. It is both disturbing and humanizing. I recommend this book, but the writing doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t always flow easily which is why I give it 4 stars instead of 5. I thought the word ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“traditionÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• was appropriate, because it is used to describe other value systems which I also abhor.

Saima deserves so many honors that it is doubtful she will ever receive!A true american , that because of and through her love of both her adopted land and native land put herself in harm's way so that the gap between the two could have a bridge with a solid foundation. She is the architect of that foundation !! I sincerely hope those that build on that foundation are wise enough to use properly. Thank you for sharing your dream and aspiration with us. Truly inspiring!!

Once you start to read this book you cannot stop. Could read it in just a few days. How an Afghan woman putting her own life in harm's way alongside our army troops helped US forces better understand her people's culture and traditions, while trying to make Afghans understand that American soldiers were there to help! Her story, filled with mission impossible type of tasks, is one that would amaze anyone, no matter where you are from. This book is an inspiration for women and an eye opener for guys. Very pleased with the book. Every one should read it! Thank you for sharing your amazing life's stories with us Saima! and thank you to jon Stewart for having you over at his Daily Show! [...]

I recently joined a book club, and the book for October was "your choice of autobiography, biography, or memoir". I simply started surfing the biography section and came upon Saima Wahab's autobiography. I chose it because I'm interested in political geography, and so many times while I read this book I had an "aha" moment and had to bookmark the page. This is written from the point of a view of an exceptionally strong woman, very unusual in her home country of Afghanistan, and offers insights into the fighting today. She still lives, so the rest of her story hasn't been written yet, but I'd be very interested to see how she continues her service and her struggle.

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