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 *Barbara R. Hauser, a lawyer, says her work in Saudi Arabia has changed her assumptions about attitudes toward women there.* nytimes.com/opinion

The New York Times | <http://nyti.ms/1DfPXfE>

The Opinion Pages | LETTER

Women in Saudi Arabia

FEB. 16, 2015

To the Editor:

Re “Businesswomen Navigate Traditions in Saudi Arabia,” by Joe Sharkey (On the Road column, Feb. 3):

For me, learning that most of my initial assumptions about working in Saudi Arabia were simply wrong has been both educational and enjoyable.

I used to be certain that there was little respect for women in Saudi Arabia. I based this on the requirement for all women to wear a full black covering (an abaya) in public, on the prohibition against women driving (the only country to do so) and on the strict gender separations (separate ordering lines at McDonalds).

On my first trip to Riyadh, in 2003, I saw how wrong that assumption was. I visited my husband’s medical lecture (covered in my black abaya and head scarf), where the male residents were sitting in the front rows and the female residents were in the rows behind them. During the Q. and A. time, not only did many female hands shoot up, but also the men turned around and listened to their questions attentively.

Since then, I have consistently seen the respect given by the Saudi businessmen I work with, for their wives, sisters and daughters. Daughters are training as doctors, lawyers, architects, investment managers and business leaders. The men have invited me into their businesses and into their homes, hiring me to give them advice on better corporate governance and family asset management.

Saudi Arabia is a very complex society, and one that is extremely important in the world. We would all profit from more interaction.

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The writer is a lawyer and the author of “Saudi-Girl Barbara,” about her experiences in Saudi Arabia.