A Message from the TOEFL/IELTS Program Director

Nasrallah Hussaini

For more than 15 years, Star Educational Society has stood out from the rest of educational centers to provide a quality program for English language learners, and I am exceedingly pleased to play a role in this success. Star has proven this through initiatives and innovation in its English Language programs.

The educational and academic environment that Star Educational Society has created for the students is unparalleled. Reading circles, translation, story writing and speech contests encourage the students to enhance their skills more and more. Libraries, replete with books, have fostered students’ interest in reading. Star has instilled hope and dreams in the people of this society. A huge number of people trust Star, join it and get a good education with eagerness and verve.

Star’s aim is not restrained to only English language instruction. It has always endeavored to pave the way for students to extend their realm of knowledge beyond the scope of a language. Star and its students have crossed the borders of Afghanistan and even Asia. The cooperative and sincere teachers of this educational center have always tried to discover opportunities for students to study abroad. In the last few years, many students have succeeded. For example, many have gone to Japan, Germany, Canada and USA to gain knowledge. Of course, the key to open the doors of education abroad is TOEFL and IELTS, the highly regarded English language tests.

These tests are the most widely accepted tests throughout the world. More than 8500 colleges, universities and agencies in 130 countries accept TOEFL and IELTS scores, and the comprehensive programs for TOEFL and IELTS, offered at Star Educational Society, have helped students master these tests and open the doors to education in some of the best universities in the world.

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As the director of the TOEFL/IELTS team, I aim to provide the best service for TOEFL/IELTS learners. And just like our former students who made their way to many great universities around the world via these tests, we believe that everybody who joins these classes will score high on these two English proficiency tests. Do not procrastinate. You can be another Starian earning the chance to study at an international university here or abroad.

Speech Contest Competitors

Diploma Holders of A and B Branches

Teacher Training
The Dreamseller

About the Author: Ahmad Murtaza Ahmadzai graduated from Kabul University with a degree in Political Science in 2011. He studied English at STAR from 2006 to 2008 and began teaching at STAR in 2009. Currently working at the Ministry of Higher Education, this is the first in a series of stories that he will be contributing to the Interstellar Bulletin.

When I was almost five years old, I lived in a small and simple world, a world of joy and happiness. My world was my house in the Debori area of the 3rd district of Kabul and a small tributary of the Kabul River next to our house. I could usually be seen with old buttornless clothes, rubber boots and bruised and dirty hands. I entertained myself by flying kites, catching fish with my shirttail (daman), playing marbles and playing with a bicycle tire (lolak). Sometimes, my greatest joy was rolling up my sleeves and pant legs to wash carrons with my friend at the river. As a reward, my friends filled my shirttail with carrons that I was able to bring home and share with my whole family. At this tender age, I was only aware of the joys and happy moments in life and was oblivious of the civil war that was brewing beyond my small world.

The civil war began and everything in the country collapsed. A different city emerged populated by cruel and angry citizens. Some ran to abandon the country, some were busy stealing vacant houses, some screamed in pain and some shouted at each other in angry voices. The bakeries closed and flour was rarely found in shops. People were no longer able to buy a 49 or 98 kilo sack of flour (buji) because the price had become too expensive after the mujahideen blocked the transport of flour and took the country, some were busy stealing vacant houses, some screamed in pain and some shouted at each other in angry voices. The bakeries closed and flour was rarely found in shops. People were no longer able to buy a 49 or 98 kilo sack of flour (buji) because the price had become too expensive after the mujahideen blocked the transport of flour and took it to three different eligible UK university courses and have received an unconditional offer from one of these choices by 14 July 2016.

With pride and gratitude for Star

About the author: Abdul Hamid Wali graduated from Kabul University with a degree in Political Science in 2011. He studied English at STAR from 2006 to 2008 and began teaching at STAR in 2009. Currently working at the Ministry of Higher Education, this is the first in a series of stories that he will be contributing to the Interstellar Bulletin.

At the very commencement, I would like to express my gratitude on behalf of all my talented colleagues to the Chairman and Founder, Executive Director and General Director of Star Educational Society for their huge help for both English instructors and English learners. I feel extremely proud to see so many students who come to Star with minimal English skills and leave with a great deal of expertise in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, writing and TOEFL.

It is with great pride for me to state here that I have spent six years learning from the instructions of experienced and talented teachers at Star and serving my fellow Afghans.

Star has left no stone unturned to provide people with English language services and to be a model of excellence and quality education throughout the community at large. In fact, English language, which has become one of the most widely used languages, is taught with great honesty and effort at Star Educational Society.

Last, but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks from the depth of my heart to all of Star’s team members for their hard work and constant dedication. In fact, I hope to never be forgotten and will remain forever etched in my memory. I look forward to seeing the future achievements of all my colleagues and students at Star.
Education is the most important factor for the development of human civilization. Education provides the nation with manpower, promotes national unity and raises public awareness. Education helps improve people’s health, fosters peace in society and among nations, boosts economic growth, reduces poverty, encourages good governance and makes us informed of our fundamental rights. An educated individual can better distinguish between right and wrong or good and evil. Every nation has a responsibility to educate its citizens.

In Afghanistan, education has faced serious obstacles, yet there have been enormous gains since 2001. After collapse of the Taliban regime, the education sector was completely paralyzed and it was one of the top priorities of Afghanistan, which required a concentrated effort. There were only a few educational centers and it was difficult for the government to provide education for all of the people and fulfill the needs of the country.

It was important for everyone to contribute to the rebuilding of Afghanistan in whatever way they could: politics, economy, culture and education. Ali Reza Yasa, Hussain Yousaf and all the other teachers and staff of Star Educational Society are good examples of people who contributed generously and created the opportunity for many people to access education. Besides many other subjects, English was an urgent need for everyone in Afghanistan, especially in Kabul. English was the language that facilitated communication between Afghans and the rest of the world and the presence of troops from dozens of countries made this communication even more critical. Star quickly identified the need for proper English language instruction and began to offer quality programs.

Afghans needed to have a strong relationship and direct cultural communication with the western countries. It was necessary to learn a common language and create a solid English education foundation in order to train the children of Afghanistan who are the key to this nation’s future. We needed to enlighten the people’s thoughts and world view, to encourage people to be hopeful for the future, to help the people to meet their material needs in life, and to create and build people’s characters and values. Star filled this gap and played a pivotal role to move Afghanistan forward towards positive change and development.

After many years of hard work, now is the harvest season for Star as the country reaps the human capacity that has been sowed at Star. An educated generation in Afghanistan connects us to the world of technology, thoughts and culture of powerful countries. These big gains could not have been achieved without communication. Star emerged to successfully equip its students with the English language skills required at that crucial time. Star created thousands of opportunities and opened a gateway for many people to education and employment in and with foreign countries. Star presented many students to prestigious universities and academic institutions in the world and gave people the tools to be competitive candidates for jobs with governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Today, Star works harder than ever and is more committed and energetic than in all the years past. Star Educational Society is a platform to learn English as a second language through its various resources and programs. Star will help you gain proficiency in English and it will put you one step ahead of the others.

Starians will work together and support this center to maintain its reputation as a distinguished and outstanding academic institution. We will work together to improve Star’s role in the cultural arena, especially in education. For anyone seeking to learn English, Star provides them this chance. Star creates hope and opportunities, so join Star and be hopeful for a better future and make a difference.

About the Author: Jomakhan Hamdard started studying at Star in 2009, received his Diploma in 2011 and recently participated in the Teacher Training Course. He is a junior at Kabul University majoring in Political Science. He currently works as a program manager in the Youth Development Association (YDA) and also works as an Outreach Intern in Canadian Women for Afghan Women (CW4AW).
also seized many weapons and ammunition earlier. By seizing this district, the Taliban attacks started in this province two days ago, the security forces in the district resulted in the group attacked the district and the lack of reports that on Tuesday night the Taliban's province, Mohammad Asef Jabarkhail, reported that the Taliban seized control of Pakistani Taliban and insurgents in the area. Meanwhile, Laghman Police commander states that primary research declares that tribal enmity has a connection with the abduction. "Police research for identifying the abductors and where these hostages are taken has started; similarly, local white bearded elders are trying to resolve the issue," says Pardeidi.

Since the commencement of new solar year, abductions have increased remarkably. Two days ago, six passengers were kidnapped in the north of country by unknown people. Moreover, 20 passengers and drivers were kidnapped from Daudkendi in the center of the country but later released. Afterwards, six passengers were kidnapped in the north of country. More than one month ago, in two other cases, unknown men had kidnapped four women and a child, residents of Jaghori district of Ghazni province, in Gillam district.

A few days ago, four more residents of Jaghori district were kidnapped in Qarasgh district. Still, there is no clear information about their status. Five months ago, 31 passengers were kidnapped on Kabul-Qandahar Highway in Zabul province, the status of at least 12 of whom is not known.

**Update:** The hostages were released by kidnappers after 48 hours.

The rural authorities of Sar-e-pol province in the north of the country reported that the Taliban seized control of the Kohistanat district by attacking the province. Police commander of Sar-e-pol province, Mohammad Asef Jabarkhail, confirmed this event and said that security forces of this district’s center retreated and now the district is in the hands of Taliban. But Mr. Jabarkhail did not report on the casualties from these attacks on security forces.

Also Abdul Ghafur Dastral, the governor’s assistant of Sar-e-pol province, reported that on Tuesday night the Taliban’s group attacked the district and the lack of security forces in the district resulted in the district being seized. A statement prepared by the Taliban said that the Taliban’s attacks started in this province two days earlier. By seizing this district, the Taliban also seized many weapons and ammunition from the security forces.

The Taliban are trying to seize control of all the areas of Kohistanat district from the security forces. The rural authorities of Sar-e-pol province announced two days ago that seven soldiers and one rural commander of Kohistanat district joined the Taliban’s group. Amanuddin Aman, official spokesman for Sar-e-pol province, explained that this commander and his seven followers who were working in Qala rural area of Kohistanat district had relationship with the Taliban from the past and they helped coordinate the Taliban’s attack on this district.

The Kohistanat district is one of the most important places for the Taliban. According to Hajji Mahdawi, one of the commanders in this province, all the headquarters of the Taliban are located in the mountainous districts. One month ago, he reported to the daily news that if the security forces regain control of this province from the Taliban, then Sar-e-pol province will be secured. Early this year all the provinces in the north of the country become insecure, especially Farah, Sar-e-pol, Badakshan, and Kunduz provinces.

Research shows that the modern lifestyle affects the human body directly. The consequences of events that have changed early humans to the existing ones have been much related to his life circumstances in each period of time. As early man created the first tools the human body reflected a gradual change. For instance, early man needed thirty-four teeth to chew, hunt and eat hard edibles. But gradually, by the discovery of fire and changes in the edibles, his teeth decreased to thirty-two.

If using primary tools can change the shape of man’s head, body and hands, then using advanced tools can do the same. However, the difference is that changes occur rapidly in the second case. Statistics show that around five billion people use cell phones in the world which may include 70% of the world population by 2017. Currently more than two billion people use smart phones, which is increasing every day. It is predicted that 50% of people who use cell phones will use smart phones by the end of the current year. In Afghanistan, twenty million people are using smart phones, each person spends an average of 37 hours per month and using smart phones is not uncommon.

Many of the advantages and disadvantages of the smart phones are clear. We want to know whether using smart phones causes the brain to change or not. If so, which part of the body does it change more?

The enlargement of screens in smart phones, which is most welcome by users, persuades companies to pay more attention to the ways their products are used. Replacement of the keys, controlling the sound and power, using buttons, reducing the weight and decreasing the thickness of the phone are all priorities of the companies. But, still there are problems such as using larger smart phones with only one hand particularly while typing or using applications.

Actions like decreasing or increasing the volume, locking the screen, and moving the screens are all performed by the thumb. Thus, the thumb suffers more pain while using smart phones. People, who replace their old phones with smart phones moves the second joint of the thumb, the severity of which depends on the level of usage. People using smart phones for a long time may suffer severe pain in the distal joint of their thumb. It occurs when the flexor tendon of the thumb is affected which may result in limited movements of the fingers.

Using the screen with one hand may persuade the brain toward enlargement of the thumb. And it is expected that the thumbs will be longer in the future to be able to touch different parts of the screen. Experiments have proven that it is hard to press 3, 6 and 9 keys with long fingers whereas short ones have problems pressing 1, 4 and 7 keys. Deformation of the wrist and its rotation with the flexion of the fingers is also expected in the future generation. If humans don’t change the way of using smart phones, they may end up having problem making a fist like chimpanzees. What is the solution? Is it not easier to avoid defects rather than to accept the changes?

Remember that a difference of even one inch in screen size may change the way it is put in the hand. To decrease the defects to the lowest level try to specify the size of the screen appropriate to your mostly used hand while buying a smart phone. To do this, put the phone in your frequently used hand and move your thumb semi-circularly, which shows the highest level of movement of the thumb on the screen. If you have problem touching the entire screen properly, you have to change your mind about the screen size or at least use the phone with both hands.
Afghanistan’s national cricket team qualified for the 2016 ICC World Twenty20 tournament to be held next year. The Afghan team was greeted by hundreds of Kabulis, including senior government officials, at the Hamid Karzai International Airport when they returned home. The team earned fifth place in the qualifying rounds with five victories, two losses and two draws during the tournament which was co-hosted by Scotland and Ireland.

Today, I draw your attention to a phenomenon called human trafficking. Human trafficking is committed for commercial and sexual exploitation. Pedophilia for sexual exploitations and forcing children to work as bus conductors are clear examples. According to the annual report of the U.S. Department of State, Afghanistan has more human trafficking than many other countries.

Hearing this, do not feel pressured. In Afghanistan, nothing is left that we do not traffic. Trafficking is rampant in Afghanistan. From fathers who sell their own children, to lawyers and ministers who are busy trafficking petroleum, flour, wine, marble stones, and opium, I think we should not discuss it, it is an issue we all know.

Pedophilia, which stains our reputation in the minds of people all over the world, and keeps their mouths open in awe, is not a newfound phenomenon. It has been prevalent in Afghanistan for many years, but has increased in the last two decades. The level of human trafficking can be witnessed clearly in the case of twenty-one residents who were murdered in DaSalah, Baghlan. This is not an exception, there is much non-reported violence that occurs as a result of human trafficking. Unfortunately, it has to be mentioned that many anti-trafficking departments, which are responsible for prevention, commit this crime themselves.

Do you remember the ghishil strategic agreement between police heads of the 11th and 3rd districts? They were involved in this business. Inevitably, not knowing about this issue has helped to spread this phenomenon. Maybe neither the police head of the 11th district nor the police head of the 3rd district knew that they were trafficking. We saw that their trafficking even drew their ire as they raised guns on each other.

Officials like the police heads of the 3rd and 11th districts are not the only perpetrators, ordinary citizens are also guilty of trafficking. In many cases, poverty and illiteracy cause such a result that even the government is unable to prevent it. According to the reports, many penurious parents sell their teenage children to traffickers, pedophiles and terrorists. This means that human trafficking in Afghanistan not only displays government’s weaknesses, but it also shows the society’s involvement in it.

Eliminating this tragedy is difficult, but possible. It could be combated with social awareness and a change in peoples’ mindsets. It can be confronted more effectively by partnering with executive organizations that are responsible for suffocating this phenomenon. By neglecting the cases that cause disgrace, the expansion of this calamity continues. Powerful and influential characters committing this crime for sexual and commercial purposes are remarkable; they were not only investigated, but also supported by anti-trafficking organizations.

The most reasonable solutions to the trafficking problem are found in the executive security forces; the police and policymaking organizations; and changing the mindsets in society; but unfortunately, there are too many obstacles for all three of these solutions. Those obstacles are poverty and the extremist mentality of Afghan society. Poverty contributes to the use of bribes in society and extremism results in the mindsets and cultural beliefs that allow this practice to flourish.

Nonetheless, hope you would not get trafficked. With all excuses and objections, human beings sometimes believe they can control their minds, but are unable to follow their own paths. Thus, they get trafficked and the U.S. Department of State reports it.
When people speak of the good old days, they speak of delusions. If you were rich, the old days were good. If you were poor and helpless like we were, the old days were the days of despair. Food was scarce, and a lot of work and hard labor yielded little fruit.

Hadi Zaher was the first graduate of Star Educational Society in the year 1999. He is the nephew of the founder of Star in Quetta, Mr. Nabi Atiq. Hadi is also among one of the first Star graduates who together with Mr. Hussain Yousufi, was selected as a language teacher. Hadi Zaher has an MA from University of Wollongong, Australia in Economics and Politics. He is a post-graduate student of Juris Doctor at the University of New South Wales. His job includes being para-legal employee at Playfair Visa and Migration Services in Sydney. He is also currently the president of Zaheristan, a virtual world of professional photography that he describes in these words: "A land of good people, a free people. A land where flowers bloom in streets, rubab music plays in the samovar tea houses, and kites fly in the skies."

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Hadi Zaher
July 14, 2015

His wife was different. She was kind. She called me over. She picked up many hands full of grain and poured them into my scarf. She said, "take this, run, and hide it somewhere. Don’t tell anyone I gave you this. This will let you feed your children." And that was all we got for months of laboring. Those, my child, were the "good old days".

*Baabay=Babay for grandfather; old man.
*Aata=Hazara for father, i.e. Aatay Chaman: Chaman’s father

"Sister, it was unlike anything I have seen before. It was round, and looked like a hand-washing basin. Men and women spoke out of it."

"Women spoke out of it! Could you see them?"

"No, you could hear them, but they weren’t there. It was magic."

Mullah Rabzan’s wife had just returned from Sang-e-Masha where she had been attending a wedding. She had seen the men play something on a "radio" (gramophone). For weeks after that, this magic was the talk of the village.


Still

Rise

By: Maya Angelou
1928 - 2014

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sissiness upset you? Why are you beset with gloom? 'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken? Bowed head and lowered eyes? Shoulders falling down like Teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you? Don't you take it awful hard 'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you? Does it come as a surprise That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame I rise Up from a past that's rooted in pain I rise I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide, Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear I rise Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear I rise Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave. I rise I rise I rise.

Maya Angelou
By: St. Louis

Maya Angelou was born Marguerite Johnson in St. Louis, Missouri, on April 4, 1928. She grew up in St. Louis and Stamps, Arkansas. She was an author, poet, historian, song writer, playwright, dancer, stage and screen producer, director, performer, singer, and civil rights activist. She was best known for her autobiographical books: Mom & Me & Mom (Random House, 1986); Letters to My Daughter (2008); All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes (1986); The Heart of a Woman (1981); Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas (1976); Gather Together in My Name (1974); and I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969), which was nominated for the National Book Award. Among her volumes of poetry are

A Brave and Startling Truth (Random House, 1995); The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou (1994); Wouldn’t Take Nothing for My Journey Now (1993); Now Sheba Sings the Song (1987); I Shall Not Be Moved (1990); Shaker, Why Don’t You Sing? (1983); Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well (1975); and Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water ‘fore I Die (1971), which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

In 1959, at the request of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Angelou became the northern coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. From 1961 to 1962 she was associate editor of The Arab Observer in Cairo, Egypt, the only English-language news weekly in the Middle East, and from 1964 to 1966 she was feature editor of the African Review in Accra, Ghana. She returned to the United States in 1974 and was appointed by Gerald Ford to the Bicentennial Commission and later by Jimmy Carter to the Commission for International Woman of the Year. She accepted a lifetime appointment in 1982 as Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. In 1993, Angelou wrote and delivered a poem, "On The Pulse of the Morning," at the inauguration for President Bill Clinton at his request. In 2000, she received the National Medal of Arts, and in 2010 she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama.
A Gender Revolution Hits the Streets. Two Wheels at a Time

When Fatima Haidari got her first bike at age 9, she rode it all the time. But when she became a teenager, the rules changed. “I used to bike outside because I was a kid, and nobody cared,” Haidari says. “But when I got older, it got kind of weird so I stopped.” By “weird,” she means people aren’t used to seeing a young woman outside, by herself, on the streets of Kabul, Afghanistan. It’s even more uncommon to see women out on the streets on wheels. Haidari says she would have attracted unwanted attention from passersby — disapproving stares and even taunts.

While studying in the U.S. last spring, she met representatives from Girl Up, a group from the U.N. Foundation that advocates for young girls around the world. With support from Girl Up, Haidari returned to Kabul and created a bike-riding club just for girls. She and her friends met weekly, sometimes to watch and discuss movies starring women, like Gravity. Every Friday, they went biking around the city.

Shannon Galpin, the first woman known to mountain bike in Afghanistan, donated 10 bikes to club members. For each of the girls, it was her first bike. Before then, they had to borrow from a male friend or relative. “It’s really new for our society to see women outside their house because we usually think women are supposed to be home to raise the children or take care of the husband,” Haidari says. “We’re trying to push women to have equal presence in society, and biking is just part of it.”

This spring Haidari has been studying at St. Timothy’s School, a boarding school for girls in Baltimore, Md. And she has put the club in the hands of a good friend while she’s away. The club is still going strong, she says. It started out with just five girls. Now, more than 20 get together each week to go cycling. After a brief introduction from Girl Up, we caught up with Haidari as she was preparing for her finals. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Why did you focus on bike riding? It’s kind of cliche, but it’s really important for a woman to be able to get somewhere without a man’s help. There are so many girls in Afghanistan who can’t afford to drive to school so they walk for hours. But they can use a bicycle. First, it’s not that expensive, and second it’s a kind of sport. There aren’t many opportunities for women to exercise. So biking serves multiple purposes. I don’t know who said this, but I think women on wheels is the start of women’s independence.

What were some obstacles in starting the club? There were so many girls who wanted to come riding with us. They would be super passionate, but their families wouldn’t let them come. I understand where they’re coming from — they were scared for their daughter’s security. So we started with five girls. When the other girls saw that nothing [bad] really happened, and that it was successful, I think that convinced the other girls’ families.

Were you nervous about the first bike ride? We never felt that our lives were in danger, but we weren’t sure what the reaction was going to be. One of my friends said that we should call a cop to watch over us, but we wanted to send a message that girls have the freedom to go outside and bike. And having that cop next to us would have totally ruined that message.

Did anyone try to get in the way? There was an instance when this guy tried to stop one of my friends and made her fall from her bike. It was right in front of the Ministry of Education, where there were guards. And they didn’t do anything! The Ministry of Education is supposed to inform people about human rights and that women should use their freedom. But the guards were just staring. It was really ironic that there was nobody to protect us — or at least to call the person out.

When things like that happen, what inspires you to keep going? I had a friend who didn’t know anything about biking. She had never rode a bike, and she wanted to join. I told her the bike ride is tomorrow, and she was like, “Well I’m going to learn tonight.” So she learned it overnight, and she came and joined us the next day. It was really inspiring to see that much dedication.

http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2015/06/09/406744975/a-gender-revolution-hits-the-streets-two-wheels-at-a-time
What words would people use to describe you? This is a very hard question to answer. I always prefer others to say it for me. But I guess people might use the word energetic, ambitious, and funny if they are very close with me.

What event or events do you consider to be a turning point(s) in your life? I think two events have greatly influenced me. One, when I started working at Star Educational Society and second when I traveled to USA for studying. At Star I grew up and got connected with many influential personalities, made great friends and learned from many inspiring people. When I came to the USA to continue my education, I was exposed to a new environment where I knew no one. I was lucky to have an amazing host family who supported me and helped me adjust with the new environment and introduced me to great people.

Who was your favorite teacher and what made them so special? I have had many great teachers but currently my favorite professor is Professor Pickett. He is smart, sincere and caring. He always challenges his students to grow.

Who has had the greatest influence in your life and why? I would say Ali Reza Yasa among family members. He has been more than a brother for me. When I was barely 5 years old, he would take me to Pamir Educational House, the first English institute that he had initiated, to learn English. Besides English he also made me take painting, drawing, Persian and many more courses. He has always been a pioneer leader in our family and I find that inspiring.

You are the youngest child in the Yousofi family. Star Educational Society is obviously a very big part of your family’s life. What was it like growing up in that environment? Growing up was fun. It was certainly not very easy considering the fact that it was not very routine and monotonous. There was always momentum, new programs, new people with new challenges and different situations that we had to deal with as a family and I have learned a ton from them.

Did you ever feel that you were living in your siblings’ shadows or that it was too difficult to follow in their footsteps? I definitely think that my siblings have had a great influence on my growth. In some occasions it has not always been very easy to follow their footsteps because of the societal boundaries that are dominant for women. However, I try to build my own footsteps because we have different interests and dreams.

Tell us about the grant that you secured from Washington and Lee University that funded Star Compu-Aid. As part of my poverty minor, I was supposed to intern with a non-profit for two months to fully understand the scope and depth of poverty in developing nations. I chose to have my internship with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. To conduct this internship, we were also given a grant, which was basically to cover our own expenses and also conduct development programs. I believe through education we can empower people and resources are a huge part of education. I chose to use my grant to build a computer lab at Star because there are so many students who do not yet have a computer and, thus, do not know how to use the Internet. I think the computer lab at Star is going to be a good resource for these students to get connected with the world and benefit from the vast amount of resources that are available online.

What is an achievement that you are most proud of? In 2011 I built a library at Star and I think seeing students use the library makes me most proud.

What advice do you have for Afghan high school students? I would advise them to take their classes seriously - even the ones that they hate. I have always escaped from math but I have always encountered it in high school and in college. I eventually made a promise with myself that I am going to study it well. Also, my other advice for them is that they should dream big and work hard to follow their dreams even if it might seem impossible and intimidating.