A letter from Hadi Mufid, former Star student and J.D. candidate

Dear Star students,

I am Hadi Mufid, a Star Educational Society alumnus. About seven years ago, I was sitting where you are sitting now: in a crowded classroom with an instructor whom most of you admire. Now I am doing my J.D. (Juris Doctor) degree in a U.S. law school in South Korea. I also hold a bachelor degree in International Business Management. I am writing this message to share some advice about your journey in English learning with hopes that you will learn from my mistakes.

There are three things I should have done while I was learning English at Star. If you're not doing these already, I hope you can turn them into things you will do from this day forward.

1) English is not all about speaking a few fancy words

I understand most of you want to focus on speaking only. Well, that is good, but you will be surprised to know that speaking is only a piece of the puzzle. I assume most of you are students, and you're learning English for academic purposes. In that case, your reading ability is needed more than any other skills. For instance, when you enroll in a good university (at home or overseas) or graduate school, secure a well-paid job, or obliged to leave the country (I hate this last one btw!). But at any rate, you will need good English to do any of the above. I could also fancily tell you that the world is getting smaller, borders are shrinking, populations are mixing, competitions are heightening and businesses are globalizing to convince you that English is a necessity. Although those might sound a little unrealistic to you, they never are, so instead, simply picture yourself ten years from now, and be sure to realize that no matter where you may end up, you will need English to live. And finally, I hope this note was helpful, or didn’t bore you at least, as some of the consequences I have faced made it necessary for me to boil down all I had to say into this short message. My wish is that people like my younger brother, who is still at Star, would take this seriously, if you and he are not doing so already.

2) Use the internet as a learning tool

Where I am currently living and studying, sayings such as, "YouTube is my teacher!" and "Google is my best friend!" are very common. People spend countless MBs of data to learn, not to simply Facebook like some of you (you know who you are!). So my point is: do not limit yourself to your textbook, dictionary or teacher. Use Google and YouTube to find answers to your questions. Most, if not all, of you have access to Internet. You have access to endless resources. Use them. (You can’t believe I once fought with a classmate over an old English magazine somebody from the previous class had forgotten. Nope! I didn’t get it!)

3) English is not a privilege anymore, it is a necessity

Last but not least, I am sure by now you realize that Fluent or Excellent English is becoming a must on your resumé. Think of what you will be doing in the next five or ten years. I assume you’re either hoping to be enrolled in a good university/graduate school, secure a well-paid job, or obliged to leave the country (I hate this last one btw!). But at any rate, you will need good English to do any of the above. I could also fancily tell you that the world is getting smaller, borders are shrinking, populations are mixing, competitions are heightening and businesses are globalizing to convince you that English is a necessity. Although those might sound a little unrealistic to you, they never are, so instead, simply picture yourself ten years from now, and be sure to realize that no matter where you may end up, you will need English to live.

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On Saturday, November 21st, nearly 500 students, from Preparatory to Advance Classes, participated in the C Branch “Inter-class Quiz Competition.” We at Star believe that healthy competitions engender positive learning. We encourage students to strive for their desired goals. Such events help prepare students for the scholarship competitions that have enabled many Starians to study in high schools and universities around the world. The quizzes simulate standardized English exams, like TOEFL and IELTS, and were designed to evaluate grammar skills and reading comprehension.
Rokshana

The night was black. The sky was full of twinkling, dancing stars that sparkled in an alluring way. I was lost in my thoughts and gazed at the natural beauties glimmering within the frame of the dark night sky. Suddenly someone touched my colorful and flowing skirt. I turned. I was startled, as if awakened from sleep. It was my baby sister, Shabana. While her thin body shimmered and her pearl teeth chattered, she said, “Let’s go home, Rokshana!” I picked up the dishes unzipped the large, brown, leather case under the middle of the handwoven rug. I started gazing at every single thing in my room—photos of my family, my little red alarm clock on the shelf and even the cracks along my walls. Suddenly the rectangular mirror drew my attention. I lifted myself up and took my comb from the shelf. When I stood in front of the mirror, tilted my head to the side and started combing my soft, long, black hair, I saw the reflection of a beautiful, hopelessly lost girl. I braided my hair, turned off the gaslight and climbed beneath my purple quilt.

My father’s knocks on the door awakened me. I opened the door and rubbed the sleep from my eyes only to see the unsettling image of my father’s sad and weary face. Without saying anything, he took my hand and led me to the guest room. Mullah Youssaf was waiting. My father told me to kneel down and I did. Mullah Youssaf glanced at me with a look of pronounced affection, threw a pack of clothes in front of me and left the room. My father hung his head and tears began to fall from his eyes as he turned away and left the room.

I came back to my own room and opened the pack of clothes. The pile of wedding dresses made me imagine my own funeral. The long, elegant white dress was my shroud. I heard someone call my name. I looked around the room and saw no one. I opened the window slowly. Mohammad Gul was there. He heard about the wedding clothes and my visible desperation confirmed what he had heard. He begged me to escape and persuaded me that it was only option. I agreed and asked him to wait for me near the hill.

I left the room and house forever. No one suspected that I was running away. I went to the hill where Mohammad Gul was waiting. I took his hand and became like a lamb being guided by its shepherd. The path was long, the weather was cold and my feet were freezing. The sound of the yellow leaves crunching under our feet seemed deafening. We were near the main road when a crowd of angry men approached us like hunters surrounding their prey. They yelled and cursed us and were grabbing at us from every side. I saw them strike Mohammad Gul and watched as his limp body fell to the ground. As I twisted, runked and kicked to escape from the many hunters, a black cloth bag was put over my head and everything instantly became dark. The blindness panicked me and suddenly I felt like I could no longer breathe. I heard the men yelling at Mohammad Gul to get up. The sound of chains was followed by the feeling of cold metal being wrapped harshly around my wrists and ankles. The icy, heavy chains pulled on my frail arms, as my sweet shepherd and I were dragged to the desert to our unknown fate.

When my hood was removed, I was alone in a trench and Mohammad Gul was nowhere in sight. My captors glared at me with their evil, hungry eyes. The swift hearing of the desert court began and the one-sided forum charged me with adultery. Mullah Youssaf was the judge. His eyes were full of sorrow locked in my heart and mind. As I stood up, I whispered to myself with determination, “I do not accept destiny, I will never give up.”…

I sat down next to my sister and answered her questions. I only studied six grades, but I was able to help my sister who is a first grade student. When her homework was finished, she closed her books and put them in her bag. The sight of her innocent face prompted me to hug her, and kiss her face and small hands. Shabana was shocked by my sudden affection, said good night and quickly fell asleep.

The weight of my sorrow was more than I could bear and I collapsed onto the middle of the handwoven rug. I started gazing at every single thing in my room—photos of my family, my little red alarm clock on the shelf and even the cracks along my walls. Suddenly the rectangular mirror drew my attention. I lifted myself up and took my comb from the shelf. When I stood in front of the mirror, tilted my head to the side and started combing my soft, long, black hair, I saw the reflection of a beautiful, hopelessly lost girl. I braided my hair, turned off the gaslight and climbed beneath my purple quilt.

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Twenty bearded, turbaned men made a circle around me. Everyone had a stone in their hands. I appealed to them for mercy but everyone was deaf. They started throwing stones at me. The first stone hit my brow. My cries and shrieks were like music for the primitive men hurling heavy, dancing stones at my head. The hunters continued to attack me - their helpless, shackled prey. As each stone hit my body, the spot turned to ice and blood seeped out around me. Finally their despicible stones blinded me and all around me was darkness. The weight of my sorrow was more than I could bear and I collapsed onto the middle of the handwoven rug. Suddenly the rectangular mirror drew my attention. I lifted myself up and took my comb from the shelf. When I stood in front of the mirror, tilted my head to the side and started combing my soft, long, black hair, I saw the reflection of a beautiful, hopelessly lost girl. I braided my hair, turned off the gaslight and climbed beneath my purple quilt.

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My heart was racing. I was nervous and confused. I never thought about starting my life by running away from everyone and everything I knew. But it was the only way to save myself and protect my dignity. I could not allow myself to be bought like an animal. I looked at my brown, leather case which held the contents of my dowry. I took out the intricately embroidered dest-}

Opportunity - like the wings of a free bird

It was a cold winter day in Kabul when the sun was only a mere sliver and the restive wind was blowing fast. My nose and cheeks as well as my toes felt numb. I was still dreaming of going to school, owning some books and having my own blue backpack like the ones carried by all the schoolchildren every day. Afterward, when I got home my family shared the news that a educational center was opened which teaches old women how to read and write. The news lightened my eyes and I was shocked. I didn’t say anything but I was telling myself that after this my life would change.

A while later when I came home from my grandfather’s house, my sisters told me that they registered me in the new educational center. I was very happy to join a community to study and brighten my mind and lighten my life. Two of my sisters were also registered. I was excited because one of my life’s dreams was coming true. However, when I entered the center, the manager told me that I can’t study there because I was almost a teenager and the center was for old and middle aged women. He told me to go to school not the educational center, but he didn’t know that my father didn’t allow me to go to school like other lucky girls. Some months after the center rejected me, my friends who were living in my neighborhood told me that the center was now accepting women of all ages. With a happy and smiling face, I joined the center and studied for almost one year. After that, by changing of the situation and many other changes and, above all, my younger uncle’s persuasion, my father’s mind was changed. He agreed to send me to school and finally my dreams came true. I registered in a private high school where I currently study where I work hard to fulfill my purpose and reach my targets. Opportunity finally opened the door of my imagination. I feel that the cage of my dark and depressing life no longer exists and I, like a free bird, will fly to the top of victory and success.

About the author: Roqia Abhlagi is a Level Two student in C. Branch. She is in grade 1 at Tadbir-e Danish High school.

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127 Hours: A reflection on the movie

Muhammad Jalal’s message from Tokyo

Yes! We Are Afghans!
Ali Aboden Hashimi, a former student of Star Educational Society, has racked up awards and accolades from Afghanistan to Australia. He was Afghanistan’s best Junior Wrestler of the year in 2014, Australia’s Best Senior Wrestler, Referee for the 2015 Youth National Championships and was recently honored with the Best Referee Prize in Perth City. Hashimi is the freestyle wrestling coach at MMA 24/7 in Perth, Australia and has won numerous state and national competitions. He is also a certified referee with Wrestling Western Australia.

Ali Aboden Hashimi was born in 1996. Originally from the Jalriz district of Maidan Wardak Province, he moved to Australia to seek asylum. He has been a dedicated wrestler with significant experience gained through seven years of competition wrestling at the local, state, and national levels both in Afghanistan and in Australia and through coaching and refereeing school-age and senior wrestlers.

Hashimi, who is admired by his coaches in Australia as a highly skilled wrestler, has gained many significant achievements.

Athletic Achievements:
1. First Place-Freestyle, School-age, 38kg 2009, 42kg 2010, 55kg 2011, 55kg 2012 for the state tournament held in Kabul, Afghanistan.
2. First Place-Freestyle, Cadets, 2013, South Australia Local, State and Regional tournaments.
3. First Place-Freestyle Junior, 60kg 2014 Western Australia Cup (March 2014, Kennington WA PCYC)
4. First Place-Freestyle Junior, 65kg 2014 Australian Cup (18 May 2014 Melbourne)
5. Awarded “The Best Junior Wrestler of the Day” by the Wrestling Australia Inc. president, from votes by Coaches and Referees.
6. Second place-Freestyle senior, 65kg 2014 Australian Cup (18 May 2014 Melbourne)
7. Selected to attend Canberra Training Camp to train with the 2014 Australian Commonwealth Wrestling Team.
8. First Place-Freestyle Junior, 70kg 2014 George Samios Cup (24 Aug. 2014 Fremantle PCYC)
9. First Place-Freestyle Junior, 70kg 2014 PCYC Cup (1 June 2014 Kennington WA)
10. First Place-Freestyle Junior, 74kg 2014 Western Australia State Championships (Nov. 2014)
11. First Place-Freestyle Senior, 74kg 2014 Western Australia State Championships (Nov. 2014)
12. Awarded “Best Junior Wrestler of the year” 2014 Fremantle Wrestling Club
13. First place-Freestyle Junior, 70kg Western Australia Cup (22 March 2015 Fremantle PCYC)
14. Selected to Referee the 2015 Youth National Championships

Ali Aboden Hashimi’s qualifications in his field, are as follow:
1. Completed Basic and Advanced WAI Referee Course
2. Certified Wrestling Western Australia Referee
3. Assistant Coach Fremantle Wrestling Club
4. University of Rabbani while the second explosion took place in Naqsh, Dasht-e-Barchi, in West of Kabul.

Ministry of Interior spokesman tweeted about the incident, “An explosion from an unexploded munition remaining from the civil war in District 13 killed three civilians.”

Mr. Sediqi tweeted again and said that four civilians were wounded in the attack and did not mention the number of killed civilians. This explosion took place around 5pm on Tuesday near Kabul Education University of Rabbani while the second explosion took place in Naqsh, Dasht-e-Barchi, in West of Kabul.

Haidar Yousufi, one of the witnesses of this incident, said, “Local people took some soil for construction works after which the unexploded munition was visible and could be reached by children’s hands.” According to Yousufi, the unexploded munition exploded while the children were busy playing with it. Four children and eight others were injured and were transported to the hospital. Dasht-e-Barchi, which is located in the West of Kabul, is considered one of the peaceful areas in Kabul which has not witnessed such incidents previously.

This incident shows that explosives are still remaining in different parts of Kabul from the civil war and may cause further casualties.

# Afghan wrestler and former Star student amasses honors and awards

# 8 Killed and 12 Wounded in two blasts in Kabul

Translated by: Mohammad Asif
Source: Etilaatrooz, 954

Written by: Sajed Abrar

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News

December 12th, 2015

Translated by: Mohammad Asif
Women in Afghanistan face violence on a daily basis. In 2014, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission registered 2,026 cases of violence against women—a 15.8 percent increase from two years earlier. Last year alone, 162 women were beaten to death, with 92 of those incidents described as honor killings. No wonder Afghanistan has been called the world’s “most dangerous country” for women.

These incidences do not occur only in rural Afghanistan, as commonly perceived, but in major cities like Herat and Kabul as well. Apart from physical violence, other types of violence against women are also widespread. Perhaps the least spoken-about form is sexual harassment, which is rife in workplaces, at educational institutions, and on the streets.

Afghanistan’s sexual harassment problem has held back the inclusion of women in society. Though girls’ access to education and women’s employment and participation in public life have improved since 2001, unchecked sexual harassment makes it hard for girls and women to take advantage of these new opportunities.

Unfortunately, in a country where traditions, taboos, and stigmas—compounded by weak rule of law—restrict women’s access to justice and delay their emancipation, many cases of sexual harassment go unreported. Nevertheless, many NGOs have taken up the task of collecting data and registering cases of sexual harassment.

The data is alarming. Recent research by Open Society Afghanistan grants Women and Children Legal Research Foundation was carried out in seven provinces. The results indicate that nine out of ten girls and women in those provinces have been harassed at least once. Tragically, 14 percent of the respondents who experienced harassment in schools and universities dropped out of those institutions.

A number of organizations have been working in Kabul to raise awareness, provide support to the victims, and advocate for the criminalization of harassment. After years of such advocacy, in August the Afghan Council of Ministers passed the Sexual Harassment Prevention Regulation, drafted by a committee of a dozen civil society organizations. Getting the regulation passed into law by parliament will require continued efforts, and be immensely critical for women in less-developed provinces where meager attention has been paid to their plight.

Bamiyan is one such province. Located in the central highlands, it is growing every day as its universities become a popular destination in central Afghanistan. The nongovernmental sector is also developing and a number of NGOs have emerged in recent decades, supporting women and young girls’ activities in public life as students, employees, and activists.

This growing presence of women in the public sphere has presented challenges. While many assume that the relatively peaceful Bamiyan offers a female-friendly environment, girls and women living there can tell you otherwise. Interviewing students—both male and female—I was informed that girls and women face harassment everywhere, particularly in Bamiyan’s academic institutions and on its streets.

Lack of awareness, the absence of laws against harassment, a corrupt justice system, and indifferent police forces have aggravated the problem. While certain progress has been achieved in the capital, there is still a long way to go. NGOs must focus their attention and work with locals to address this problem, lest women’s presence in public life in Afghanistan fades again.
The Fulbright Program is a program of highly competitive, merit-based grants for international educational exchange for students, scholars, teachers, professionals, scientists and artists, founded by United States Senator J. William Fulbright in 1946. Under the Fulbright Program, competitively selected U.S. citizens may become eligible for scholarships to study, conduct research, or exercise their talents abroad; and citizens of other countries may qualify to do the same in the United States.

The Fulbright Program is one of the most prestigious awards programs worldwide, operating in over 155 countries. The program was established to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries through the exchange of persons, knowledge, and skills. The Fulbright Program is managed by the Institute of International Education (IIE). The Fulbright Program is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. Government. The Fulbright Program in Afghanistan is currently one of the largest Fulbright Programs in the world. It is designed to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of Afghanistan. The Fulbright Program provides participants—chosen for their academic merit and leadership potential—with the opportunity to study, research, and teach in the United States and in their home countries, and to develop a professional network of counterparts around the world. Fulbright grantees bring new perspectives to the mutual understanding between the people of Afghanistan and the people of the United States.

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Khalilullah Khalili, born in 1907 in Kabul province, was Afghanistan’s foremost 20th century poet as well as a noted historian, university professor, diplomat and royal confidant. He was the last of the great classical Persian poets and among the first to introduce modern Persian poetry and Nimai style to Afghanistan.

In addition to more than 70 works of poetry, he is author of over 20 standard works on history, literature and philosophy. He is best remembered for his quatrains; his most notable work was published after the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979, and provided inspiration to the freedom fighters.

Khalili’s father, Mirzā Muhammad Hussein Khan, was King Habibullah Khan’s finance minister, but was later dismissed and hanged by Habibullah Khan’s son and successor, Amanullah Khan. His mother died when Khalili was seven. After being orphaned, Ustad Khalili spent the turbulent years of King Amanullah’s reign in the Northern Plains of Kabul where he studied classical literature and began writing poetry. He, then, joined his uncle Abdull Rahim Khan Safi, the then governor of Herat, where he remained for more than 10 years. In 1945, both Khalili and his uncle were imprisoned. After one year of imprisonment, Khalili was exiled to Kandahar where he flourished as a poet and writer.

In the 1950s, Khalili was allowed to return to Kabul where he was appointed as Minister of Culture and Information and began teaching at Kabul University. He became a confidante to King Zahir Shah. In the 1960s and 1970s, Khalili, served as Afghanistan’s ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Following the April 1978 Communist coup, Khalili sought asylum first in Germany and then in the United States where he wrote much of his most powerful poetry about the war in his native land. In the late 1980s, he moved to Islamabad, Pakistan, where he spent his final years. He died in 1987 and was buried in Peshawar next to the tomb of the Pashto poet Rahman Baba.

Khalili was renowned for his generosity. Author Robert Abdul Hayy Darr had the pleasure of spending time with him in the year before his death. He said, “His openness was like a sea of kindness that washed over me with familiarity. All of his poetry is infused with an enduring sadness, softened by his immense kindness and generosity of spirit. In person, Ustad Khalili could also be very funny and a little mischievous.”

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Khalilullah Khalili
Afghanistan’s foremost 20th century poet
(1907 – 1987)

Close Acquaintance
Oh believers, can you hear that far off scream?
It rends a heart already burning with grief,
I can’t say where the wolf lies in ambush,
But that waiting comes from someone I know well.

Independence
I gather that everyone speaks of my faults and flaws.
What loss?
I gather than everyone praises me.
What gain?
New sprouts laugh on meadow branches
And give no thanks.
Spring flowers grow from the earth
And ask no permission.

Watching Atoms
A sufi sees the universe
in the heart of one single atom:
It’s all there – sun, moon, milky way –
together in a glance.
Now compare
the atomic perspective of ignorant science:
No hearts – only hands and heads blow apart.

News Upon Arrival
Any child,
upon delivery by its mother,
With a hidden message.
Here it is:
No matter how dense the trees
in death’s large field,
There’s always room to plant another sapling.

Oh’ Great Mountain
Oh’ Great Mountain, reaching far into the sky!
How long will you find satisfaction in self-love?
Though just a tiny butterfly, I am yet free,
To dance on a flower head while you remain shackled.

Welling Up
Sweet, life-bringing spring,
let me ask you:
Where’s your source?
What’s your water’s message?
You rise slow and gentle,
without a sound,
Like my tears,
hidden away from the people.

Neither Lions Nor Foxes
Recited by the Poet to J.F. Kennedy
How long
will you persist sword and dagger?
How long
with artifice and cunning?
One is fit for lions,
the other for foxes.
So:
Be fully human and free from dagger!
Dr. Timur Sharan received his Bachelor’s degree in International Relations and Politics in Developing World from the University of Essex and his Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Development Studies from University of Cambridge. Dr. Sharan was offered funding from the Economics and Social Research Council to pursue a PhD in International Relations and Peacebuilding at University of Exeter in the UK. He has worked as an international policy advisor and donor support program specialist for DFID and USAID. Dr. Sharan has published extensively in peer-reviewed international journals including the Central Asian Survey and Europe-Asia Studies and foreign news outlets such as Foreign Policy.

How did you become what you are today? I am a product of the society where I grew up. I grew up in a society where I had first-hand poverty and illiteracy. My parents were illiterate and I remember my father, until very late, would constantly ask us, “What is good about education that you are studying?” There was only my mother who inspired me and helped me to study. The experiences, the moments and that burning feeling in me to do well in life also contributed to my development. Like being beaten by my teacher for my essay about carpet weaving and his accusation of, “It is not in your level and you might have copied it!” Also growing up under Taliban rule and suffering a lot, I think these points made me a stronger person and motivated me to do well in life.

How did you overcome the severities and harshness in your life? First of all, if you work hard and grasp opportunities when they arise, you can achieve your potential. Another factor was to be independent and to solve problems on my own. The third point was my feeling that I lived for a purpose to do good for society. If I am part of the society that does not understand the importance of education and who sacrificed himself for the rest of family. Me to that leadership, because you sacrifice yourself for the good of family, community and country.

How do you see the condition of education and its future in Afghanistan? If you look at quantity, it is in good shape, because there are about 250,000 applicants every year for the university entrance exam. That is a significant change since 2001. Our prediction is by 2020 at least 40 to 45% of our citizens will be educated through grade 12. In terms of quality, we are not there yet. The country needs a lot of adjustments and improvements. We are suffering both in primary and higher education levels. We need the producing the best students who could be leaders of the country. At the university level, for example, the best students go to Kabul University. Unfortunately, because of the lack of properly trained and updated professors, by the time students graduate, they are uneducated and disillusioned. It means they develop mental problems because of constant discrimination. If our best institutions cannot produce future leaders, it means that this country’s education system needs to improve.

What do you believe are the priorities for Afghanistan? The immediate priority for Afghanistan is an effective transition both at an economic and security level. We need to reform our political institutions and our security institutions in terms of providing them the necessary leadership and necessary logistical support. Moreover, there is the issue of Pakistan. We need a political settlement with Pakistan. We need to bring to them the negotiation table and with that, bring the Taliban to the negotiation table so that we agree on a political settlement in order for us to improve. Tied to that is economy. Now the current level of unemployment in the country is immense. We need jobs, we need to improve our economy. One of the things that we did do is to announce the day of the election, because every MP spends fifty thousand dollars that restarts the economy. In the long run, I think we can learn a lot from South East Asian countries like, Singapore, Korea and Taiwan who had experiences similar to Afghanistan in the 1950s - 60s. Learn from them so that we achieve our economic potential and political ambitions as a country. Those will come with reform in the legal system, in the governance structure of Afghanistan, both in central and subnational level and also in key development sectors, such as education and health.

What role do you see yourself playing in any of these priorities? At this stage, I am working with an international organization that supports the Afghan government with institutional building and institutional reform and in development sectors, as well. But, I do not think that I am in that stage of helping the Afghan government or our country fully, based on my potential. Simply, the government is not able to utilise my potential. I have already indicated to the people I know that I am willing to work for the government, as long as they give me a position where I am effective. For instance, they offered me to be the deputy chief of staffs for the president for communication, but I have not studied communication. My area of expertise is policy and program. In other words, there are a lot of political and structural limitations for an individual like me to help the country. But at the individual level, I am constantly meeting students to help them with their bachelor thesis and constantly advising students who are applying for scholarships abroad. It is what I feel responsible to do. I hope it becomes a more institutionalized contribution, so that I help them to go abroad and come back and help their country.

What accomplishments are you most proud of? I do not want to come across selfish, but in terms of accomplishment at an individual level, I think one of the accomplishments that I am proud of is that I obtained my PhD when I was only 28. Despite the fact that I have worked 3 years in Afghanistan, being one of the youngest PhD holders in Afghanistan.

What are the turning points in your life? I was not a hard worker until the end of year three at school. In year three, we had a writing class which made me realize that I have writing potential and, if I study hard, I can be motivated enough to reach my potential. I still remember when I was only seven years old, my teacher asked me to write about a subject that you feel comfortable. I wrote about carpets because as a child I was weaving carpets from the age of six. When my teacher checked my writing, he made me stand up and beat me twice, because he thought that it was not my writing and that was looking higher than my level. He sent me back to write something by my own. The second time I wrote about honey bees and this time he asked me, “Are you sure it is your writing?” I replied, “Yes,” and then he said, “Well done, you have got complete mark and you have potential in writing.” From then, I started writing and that motivated me to work hard and realize my leadership potential and writing skills. Another turning point was when I was working in the market selling plastic bags and chewing gum. During those two years I gained certain skills to reconnect with the population, to understand the life of or community and to be independent.

The third point was when I was accepted in Afghan-Turk High School. It made me go back for education. The final point was going to the U.K. and then by hard work leading me to Cambridge University.

What is your advice for people of Afghanistan, especially for students? My chief advice would be studying. Studying hard is good. But, it is only one side of the coin. You can be a good student at university, but in real life if you lack communication skills and leadership skills, your ability to have an impact on a society is limited. So my advice to students is to study hard and, in addition, try to build some skills early in life that will help you later in life. For example, I worked two years in a newspaper. Anyone else would think that those were the weakest period of my life. That is not how look at it. The fact that I worked in the streets and at the bazaar for two years meant that I became more motivated to study, my communication skills with ordinary people improved significantly, I became more independent as an individual and the driving force in me to make a difference became greater. At that time, I did not understand those, but later they became more helpful to me to achieve my potentials. In other words, studying is only one element of university life or a high school life. A significant part of it comes from building additional skills and also building an expanding network of individuals that you know, because those individuals come to help you in life.