

## Embracing New Beginnings

I had just set foot in Australia from Afghanistan and was overjoyed beyond measure. It was the end of the year, and the hustle and bustle among people was incredible. We chose to settle in a place called Prospect. This location was lovely because many of its residents were Afghans, making it much easier for us to access the market and shopping areas conveniently.

When 2022 began, I enrolled at school to continue my education. Our neighbours, who had moved to South Australia years before us, spoke highly of a school called Thebarton. Among them was Reza, who had completed his law degree and described Thebarton as a place of hope. The neighbours' frequent praises led me to accept Thebarton's reputation, and I prepared myself to start my studies there.

Initially, when I walked from home toward my school, a strange sense of pride overwhelmed me. University students in Afghanistan carried their laptops in their right hands, close to their chests, as they walked. This habit symbolized intellectualism among young scholars in Afghanistan and seeing this in Adelaide gave me hope.

I was introduced to year 11 at school. Imagine someone from a country where educational facilities were scarce—where even having desks to sit on in classrooms was a rarity—seeing Thebarton's chairs made of metal and adorned with beautiful colours, with desks provided for each student. The teachers taught with a unique combination of discipline and culture, which inspired students to study hard, learn about each other and pursue education seriously.

The school's educational structure offered a wide range of subjects across arts, sciences, humanities, and mathematics. I really loved law, and this strong interest stemmed from a meeting with one of the Australian senators. The name of this Australian senator was Smith. She was a knowledgeable and dignified person. During my first meeting with her, I was very excited. I had come from a country where meeting a politician was something you could only dream of. I shook hands with her. At that time, my English wasn't good. She spoke very quickly, but I had a rough understanding of what she was saying and asking. She warmly welcomed me to Australia and asked what I wanted to do in the future. I said I wanted to be like her. She smiled and told me that Australia is a land of opportunities. Here, everyone is appointed to jobs based on merit and expertise, and legally, no one can boast over another. Finally, she said, in Australia, if you stand against injustices, the government and the people will stand by you. Her words had a profound impact on me, and from that meeting, I laid the foundation of my future, which was based on justice, equality, and freedom. That's why I turned to the field of law.

Among the teachers at Thebarton, there was one person who later became dear and cherished to me: Eva. With big eyes and a warm voice, this woman was incredibly delightful. Our school nurtured students from over 76 different cultures under one roof. Some of these cultures directly contradicted Australian culture. Yet, Eva, with her charismatic personality, managed these contradictions beautifully. She remembered the

names of every student. According to her, she had spent over two decades of her life fostering the growth of migrants.

The last time, five months ago, she invited me to her small office tucked away in a corner of the administration wing. It was winter, and Adelaide's cold air had enveloped everything. She asked about my perspectives on migrants. From her manner of speaking, it was clear that she carried painful stories of migrants within her, stories that haunted her as well.

Occasionally, when I looked into her eyes, she shared tales of her youth, Australia, her travels, her achievements, and her honours. But all these sweet and bitter stories belonged to the past. I was speaking to a great personality who was highly respected here at our school—a person whose way of life was rooted in humanity, respecting both young and old. Yet, she was passionately pursuing global peace, where the essence of humanity and compassion would be honoured.

As the head of our school, Eva accomplished four significant achievements over the past ten years:

To promote Human Rights and compassion she worked to embed progressive thinking among migrants and students, striving to make Thebarton a reliable bridge for those who wished to pursue higher education. Along with her team, she promoted peace by creating subjects like Peace Studies, turning peace into the core essence of our school. She played a crucial role in reconciling conflicting cultures with Australian values, eliminating absurd superstitions by promoting conversations that promoted sharing and gratitude. She was a unique advocate for women's freedom, especially in countries where women are not regarded as equals. She believed that Australia could not achieve economic and political prosperity without women.

When our conversation ended, she stood up. We had talked for nearly an hour. She grabbed her phone and walked me to the outer gate. The air was growing dark, and I disappeared into the evening shadows with slow and steady steps.

My eyes could no longer follow her from a distance. It was a strange scene. I felt as though I was watching a movie that had just ended. Loneliness, darkness, raindrops, and the foggy air erased me from the scene of Thebarton (our school). No, this wasn't a movie; it was reality that I was witnessing. When I returned home, tears welled up in my eyes as I thought about the past years. I reflected on how being in this place had allowed me to escape alienation and how I now had to prepare myself for university journey. But my father's words gave me peace of mind: "Life is a journey, and the rule of journeys is that every journey ends one day."

This was my last meeting with Mrs. Eva during my school years. Her work commitments had taken away the opportunities for more conversations. Time—hours, days, and months—was passing unusually fast for me. In the final days, one of the teachers who had recently joined our school entered our classroom. From her language and manner of speaking, it was clear that she was a kind teacher. With kindness and a pleasant voice,

she asked the students if anyone was interested in speaking at the graduation ceremony to send their written speeches to her email.

her words sparked a sense of pride in me, and I thought to myself that, without a doubt, I would be the only one giving a speech at the graduation ceremony. I stood up, changed the tone of my voice with full confidence, and said, "I want to speak at this ceremony." she kindly stared at me. her arched eyebrows and honey-coloured eyes will never be forgotten, and then she said, "You can send your written speech to my email."

From that night on, I began writing. I had a month to share the final version of my writing with them. I would write at night and erase during the day. Finally, after about two weeks of writing and erasing, I managed to send them a draft of my speech.

It was winter, and the nights were longer. I would take my coat, hat, and gloves and head to the nearest park to our house, gazing at the sky. Occasionally, I would see the moonlight, illuminating the stars and transforming the oppressive darkness that had taken over this beautiful park into brightness. Then, I would read my speech with full dedication and practice. My writing began like this:

"For three years, I have been grappling with learning the English language at Thebarton Senior collage. During this time, I have fallen and risen many times. Sometimes I have laughed, and often I have cried, but I have never accepted defeat. I have learned language from the old, the young, and even children. In these swift three years, I have learned one significant lesson, and that is to accept reality. I have executed whatever was within my capacity, but for that which was beyond my limit, I have strived and planned to reach it.

My main goal over these three years at Thebarton has been to learn about the Australian culture and various other cultures. I have continually tried to learn from others and planned my actions in such a way that I may develop as an active and effective global citizen, enjoying and benefiting from life with my friends. Over the past three years, I have tried to establish strong connections with different people. It is only by converging with diverse cultures that we can grow and improve.

As an Afghan-Australian, I have devoted three years of my life to contributing my best to society and the community. During this time, I have worked to present a positive and different image of Afghans within Australian society. I have shown respect for the Australian flag and have cherished its soil.

My message to all my friends is to understand reality and surrender to it. Choose to be motivated and to always do your best, if you don't you risk being left behind by this highly competitive world. Don't be discouraged by those who think you can't achieve the aspirations you have set for yourself. When people seek to drag you down rise above and let your actions and results do the talking. These are the things that I have learned from the good times and the bad, and I carry these with me as I move into the next stage of my life and learning journey.

Now, if I were to go back three years, I would set the same plan for myself and would not change a single thing. My message to you, my dear friends, is to strive for your dreams

and never give up. One day, you will taste the sweetness of victory. Never tire of reaching for your dreams, for sooner or later, the world will yield to your rightful aspirations.

I was reading to myself and walking. While walking, sometimes, when I imagined myself in front of dozens of students, my heartbeat would increase, and the image of my family and friends would bloom in my mind. They would politely smile at me, and with their smiles, they would gift me a sense of pride. Two weeks passed, and with each passing day, my heartbeat grew faster, and my eyes, like an owl's, were glued to our school emails. I write down some of the important events in my life in my diary so that I never forget them.

From what I have written in my diary, it seems that on Tuesday, the same lady will appear in our class again. Apparently, she has an important message to convey. She begins by greeting all the students with a "Good morning" and kindly wishes everyone a great day. I think to myself: this is a good teacher, someone who cares about every student. Then, she looks at me with her eyes and asks me to speak with her outside the classroom for a moment.

She kindly starts speaking and begins by discussing all the criteria for a good manuscript. From all the conversations exchanged between us, I realized that my manuscript was not accepted. Yet, I look at her with a smiling face and nod my head to her words in agreement. I do my best to hide this pain with my smiles and diminish its importance with a cheerful demeanour. She was as grateful as she was kind. Despite my manuscript not meeting the acceptance criteria, she said: "Your manuscript has deeply affected me." After about 10 minutes, she said she had to go and left her seat. In solitude, tears formed in my eyes, but I wiped them away with my hands. When I returned to class, the second lesson was almost over. That day, the sun had turned its warmth into merciless cold. The chill of this pain burned within me, robbing me of the strength to stay in class any longer. I picked up my wallet and computer and slowly left the school heading home.

On the way, the car radio caught my attention with a song by the English singer Adele. I turned up the volume. Adele, with her magnificent voice, sang: "Hello, it's me." Since that day, this song has become eternal in my mind. Now, every time I listen to this song, I remember that day.

I reach home. Nostalgia and a lump in my throat squeeze my being and shut the window of light before me. When I open my eyes again, my room's clock has moved four hours forward. I had been lying like a stone for four hours. I open the window of my room. The sun is setting, bringing a message of profound sorrow. The sound of the gutters makes it clear that the sky, like me, is heavy-hearted. I feel like going outside to experience the beauty and sweetness of walking in the rain and returning home once I am soaked. But then, I tell myself, no, this is not the end. I think of the greatness of Australia and its noble people. I imagine the beauty of Adelaide blooming in my mind. A city with many features. A city that, as my father says, is the purest. A city that, as my friends say, is unparalleled. A city where you want to sleep in its embrace and breathe in your sense of belonging to Australia; breathe deeply, and breathe deeply. Adelaide, this city is a symbol of pluralism. A city that embraces people from different countries around the world like a vast ocean. A city that is a land of education. Universities compete with each other and send new

recruits to the field of development. I reflect on all these aspects and arrive at a final question: How can one not be optimistic about the future?

The year 2023 was almost over. After a year, I was beginning to reap the rewards of my efforts. Throughout the year, I had conducted deep research on the differences between poor and wealthy countries, centred on the question: Why do nations fail?

Toward the end of the year, I received an email from friends at Rotary. Rotary is one of the largest social organizations in Australia, aiming to promote peace and collaborate with poorer countries in education and mental health—a cornerstone of all known problems.

They kindly asked me to give a brief talk about my research. Rotary took my work very seriously, which created a strong motivation for me to study late into the night. In my belief, Rotary is one of the best social organizations in Australia. We, the youth, must be active in welcoming and supporting such important non-governmental organizations that consistently strive to build a good and healthy society. We should collaborate more with Rotary and similar organizations, write about them, speak about them, and plan with them. Because they deserve to be talked about and written about. Because they have paved the way for the younger generation. Because they are our pride. All these reasons came together for me to invite one of my classmates, whom everyone called Mursal, to join me in this program. She gladly accepted this invitation. Her acceptance brought a sense of togetherness to my mind. For a moment, I imagined her and myself traveling to distant places on diplomatic missions. She was an elegant, graceful, and extraordinarily beautiful woman.

What I will never forget about her was love. But I can't make this story too romantic. When I compare this image with today, I feel as though all of it was a dream, not reality.

When I had an early meeting with one of the teachers in 2022, they reminded me that if I wanted to pursue university education, I would need to stay with them for at least three more years. I pulled my phone out of my pocket and checked the date. It was February. I counted three years: 2025. I thought to myself, "Oh no! I have to study at Thebarton until 2025." Those three years seemed unbearably long.

I returned home. I thought all night and judged myself: Should I study here to qualify for university, or should I say goodbye to education forever? I finally chose the first option.

Imagine, from 2021 to now, four years have passed, and how swiftly they went by. A 20-year-old young man had aged 20 years more. I had sacrificed my childhood to the horrors of war, and these bitter experiences made life in Australia less thrilling for me. In the tiresome realm called migration, the imposed thoughts of a heavy-hearted man ruled over my young personality of just 20 years.

This turned me into an old, depressed, yet responsible young man. The only thing that rescued me from this painful state was returning to education. I worked hard to learn English and, through it, reconcile with the society, history, and culture of this new country.

Finally, after four years, I concluded that migration can never replace one's homeland. Believe me, it's a great illusion that migrants sometimes impose on themselves. While

migration may challenge language retention, keeping your language and culture is largely up to the individual. Language is the most crucial tool for expressing yourself, and if it doesn't work properly, it can lead to feelings of isolation and frustration.

Closing Remarks If there's one lesson I've learned, it is this: Gratitude is the foundation of growth. By embracing who we are, defining our goals, and striving to learn and contribute, we unlock the potential to thrive—even in unfamiliar lands.

New horizons await, and I walk toward them with a heart full of hope, gratitude and trust in the country I now call home.