

## Shabana Basij-Rasikh: Dare to educate Afghan girls

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When I was 11, I remember waking up one morning to the sound of joy in my house. My father was listening to BBC News on his small, gray radio. There was a big smile on his face which was unusual then, because the news mostly depressed<sup>1</sup> him.

"The Taliban are gone!" my father shouted.

I didn't know what it meant, but I could see that my father was very, very happy.

"You can go to a real school now," he said.

A morning that I will never forget. A real school. You see, I was six when the Taliban<sup>2</sup> took over Afghanistan<sup>3</sup> and made it illegal<sup>4</sup> for girls to go to school. So for the next five years, I dressed as a boy to escort<sup>5</sup> my older sister, who was no longer allowed to be outside alone, to a secret school. It was the only way we both could be educated. Each day, we took a different route<sup>6</sup> so that no one would suspect where we were going. We would cover our books in grocery<sup>7</sup> bags so it would seem we were just out shopping. The school was in a house, more than 100 of us packed<sup>8</sup> in one small living room. It was cozy<sup>9</sup> in winter but extremely hot in summer. We all knew we were risking our lives<sup>10</sup> --the teacher, the students and our parents. From time to time, the school would suddenly be canceled<sup>11</sup> for a week because Taliban were suspicious<sup>12</sup>. We always wondered what they knew about us. Were we being followed? Do they know where we live? We were scared, but still, school was where we wanted to be.

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<sup>1</sup> 使…沮喪

<sup>2</sup> 「塔利班」在阿拉伯語中是學生的意思，它的大部分成員是阿富汗難民營伊斯蘭學校的學生，故又稱「伊斯蘭學生軍」

<sup>3</sup> 阿富汗

<sup>4</sup> 非法

<sup>5</sup> 陪伴

<sup>6</sup> 路線

<sup>7</sup> 雜物

<sup>8</sup> 擠在一起

<sup>9</sup> 舒適的

<sup>10</sup> 冒生命危險

<sup>11</sup> 取消

<sup>12</sup> 懷疑的

I was very lucky to grow up in a family where education was prized<sup>13</sup> and daughters were treasured<sup>14</sup>. My grandfather was an extraordinary<sup>15</sup> man for his time. A total maverick<sup>16</sup> from a remote<sup>17</sup> province<sup>18</sup> of Afghanistan, he insisted that his daughter, my mom, go to school, and for that he was disowned<sup>19</sup> by his father. But my educated mother became a teacher. There she is. She retired<sup>20</sup> two years ago, only to turn our house into a school for girls and women in our neighborhood<sup>21</sup>. And my father -- that's him -- he was the first ever in his family to receive an education. There was no question that his children would receive an education, including his daughters, despite the Taliban, despite the risks. To him, there was greater risk in not educating his children. During Taliban years, I remember there were times I would get so frustrated<sup>22</sup> by our life and always being scared and not seeing a future. I would want to quit<sup>23</sup>, but my father, he would say, "Listen, my daughter, you can lose everything you own in your life. Your money can be stolen. You can be forced to leave your home during a war. But the one thing that will always remain<sup>24</sup> with you is what is here, and if we have to sell our blood to pay your school fees, we will. So do you still not want to continue?"

Today I am 22. I was raised in a country that has been destroyed<sup>25</sup> by decades<sup>26</sup> of war. Fewer than six percent of women my age have made it beyond high school<sup>27</sup>, and had my family not been so committed<sup>28</sup> to my education, I would be one of them. Instead, I stand here a proud graduate<sup>29</sup> of Middlebury College.

When I returned to Afghanistan, my grandfather, the one exiled<sup>30</sup> from his home for daring<sup>31</sup> to educate his daughters, was among the first to congratulate<sup>32</sup> me. He not

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<sup>13</sup> 珍貴的

<sup>14</sup> 寶貝的

<sup>15</sup> 非常奇特的

<sup>16</sup> 特立獨行的人

<sup>17</sup> 遙遠的

<sup>18</sup> 省分

<sup>19</sup> 不承認為親屬

<sup>20</sup> 退休

<sup>21</sup> 鄰近地區

<sup>22</sup> 沮喪

<sup>23</sup> 放棄

<sup>24</sup> 留下來

<sup>25</sup> 破壞

<sup>26</sup> 幾十年

<sup>27</sup> 能夠讀到高中以上

<sup>28</sup> 致力於

<sup>29</sup> 畢業生

<sup>30</sup> 被放逐

<sup>31</sup> 敢於

only brags<sup>33</sup> about my college degree<sup>34</sup>, but also that I was the first woman, and that I am the first woman to drive him through the streets of Kabul.

My family believes in me. I dream big, but my family dreams even bigger for me. That's why I am a global ambassador<sup>35</sup> for 10x10, a global campaign<sup>36</sup> to educate women. That's why I cofounded<sup>37</sup> SOLA, the first and perhaps only boarding school<sup>38</sup> for girls in Afghanistan, a country where it's still risky for girls to go to school. The exciting thing is that I see students at my school with ambition<sup>39</sup> grabbing at<sup>40</sup> opportunity. And I see their parents and their fathers who, like my own, advocate<sup>41</sup> for them, despite and even in the face of daunting opposition<sup>42</sup>.

Like Ahmed. That's not his real name, and I cannot show you his face, but Ahmed is the father of one of my students. Less than a month ago, he and his daughter were on their way from SOLA to their village, and they literally<sup>43</sup> missed being killed by a roadside bomb<sup>44</sup> by minutes. As he arrived home, the phone rang, a voice warning him that if he sent his daughter back to school, they would try again.

"Kill me now, if you wish," he said, "but I will not ruin<sup>45</sup> my daughter's future because of your old and backward<sup>46</sup> ideas."

What I've come to realize<sup>47</sup> about Afghanistan, and this is something that is often dismissed<sup>48</sup> in the West, that behind most of us who succeed is a father who recognizes<sup>49</sup> the value in his daughter and who sees that her success is his success. It's not to say that our mothers aren't key in our success. In fact, they're often the initial<sup>50</sup> and convincing<sup>51</sup> negotiators<sup>52</sup> of a bright future for their daughters, but in

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<sup>32</sup> 祝賀

<sup>33</sup> 自誇

<sup>34</sup> 學位

<sup>35</sup> 全球大使

<sup>36</sup> 活動

<sup>37</sup> 共同創立

<sup>38</sup> 住宿學校

<sup>39</sup> 野心

<sup>40</sup> 抓住

<sup>41</sup> 提倡, 鼓吹

<sup>42</sup> 面臨巨大反對力量

<sup>43</sup> 確實地, 真正地

<sup>44</sup> 路邊炸彈

<sup>45</sup> 毀滅

<sup>46</sup> 落伍的

<sup>47</sup> 逐漸瞭解

<sup>48</sup> 把...輕視

<sup>49</sup> 認知

<sup>50</sup> 最初的

the context of<sup>53</sup> a society like in Afghanistan, we must have the support of men. Under the Taliban, girls who went to school numbered<sup>54</sup> in the hundreds --remember, it was illegal. But today, more than three million girls are in school in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan looks so different from here in America. I find that Americans see the fragility<sup>55</sup> in changes. I fear that these changes will not last much beyond the U.S. troops' withdrawal<sup>56</sup>. But when I am back in Afghanistan, when I see the students in my school and their parents who advocate for them, who encourage<sup>57</sup> them, I see a promising<sup>58</sup> future and lasting<sup>59</sup> change. To me, Afghanistan is a country of hope and boundless possibilities<sup>60</sup>, and every single day the girls of SOLA remind me of that. Like me, they are dreaming big.

Thank you.

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<sup>51</sup> 使人信服的

<sup>52</sup> 協調人

<sup>53</sup> 在...背景下

<sup>54</sup> 計數

<sup>55</sup> 脆弱性

<sup>56</sup> 美國軍隊撤離後

<sup>57</sup> 鼓勵

<sup>58</sup> 有希望的

<sup>59</sup> 持久的

<sup>60</sup> 無止境的可能性