



Class of '57 Albert and Virginia Raymond Scholarship

January 2023

Dear Members of the Class of 1957,

My name is Zahra. I am 14 years old and my birthday is coming up in two months on the 9th of March. I am living in dorm C 5 at Northfield Mount Hermon. I was born in Afghanistan but my home is in Auburn, Maine and I go there on holidays. I have 6 siblings, three sisters and three brothers not including me. One of my brothers, Masood, is also studying in my school which is annoying because he teases me but sometimes I am happy that I have someone there with me. I like when we run around the compass. He likes to tell me funny poems that he made himself in the dining hall when we go to eat.

I had 4 classes this semester: Algebra 1, ESL (English as Second Language), Robotics, and Arts Foundation. I also have violin class and I enjoy it greatly. It was one of my goals to learn how to play violin. My favorite subject is Math. I love Math and I am good at it. I used to write stories every week but when we ran away to Pakistan when the Taliban took over Afghanistan I stopped writing them. In Pakistan, Masood and I asked my sister if we were going to go to school ever again. Then my sister, Fatima, told us about NMH however I have heard about NMH since I was 4 years old. My elder sister Fatima went to NMH 10 years ago in 2012.

My sister always tells me "Short letters are the powerful ones." Yet I am a person who can't ignore the details and as a consequence of that sometimes my projects are late and I need more time to finish them especially in art class. All my life whatever school project I created, I would bring it to my mom. For the first time, my mom is not here to take my project in her hands. She always cooked for me and hugged me when I came back from school. She admires my projects with her brown eyes which sometimes cry if my siblings or I are sad, decide with her kind heart and say positive words about my project with her mouth which always used to tell stories or sing for me, to not make me sad even if my project is total trash. Now, my mom is very relieved that Masood and I are here in a safe place and learning a lot of new things. Before, she was always worried and had nightmares at night.

My favorite place is the dining hall because I am a foodie and I am always hungry. On holidays one day Masood and I came out of the dining hall. Masood started running and I ran after him with boots on. After 5 seconds I twisted my ankle and I was running like mad for two seconds and then fell

down. Thank god there was no one around. That day there were few students in the campus so I guess no one saw me in that situation I hope. But still the dining hall is my favorite even when I don't like the food. The only food I like is the Turkey sandwich. I eat it all the time every day of every week.

The first time when we arrived in NMH we couldn't speak English but right now I am writing this letter. The supportive community at NMH helps me a lot to learn English but not the way to live. Maybe it will take some time to show me how to live. I have three years to learn more about everything: how to live, how to talk, how to behave, how to think positively and how to make friends. Actually I don't have a lot of friends. In my whole life I have just had a best friend and 3 friends.

I am not good at communication and I can't connect to people easily. I always think I have a problem but in the last days of school me and my art teacher were talking about bad and good things about living in Afghanistan and then about friendship. I told him "I am not good at connecting with people and I don't have a lot of friends. I'm shy and cannot talk to someone to make friends and no one talks to me." And he said "it was scary for me to ask you about your life and your family because you are from another country and your country is an Islamic country and just few people know how to behave so as not to make you sad. And this is my first time talking to you about your family and your country. So maybe the other students are just shy like you or they just don't know how to behave and that stops them I suppose." And that taught me a lot.

As my sister says short letters are powerful ones but I write all of the things that I experience because of your support. I appreciate it and I will try my best to become my best version.

Thank you,

Zahra – Class of 2026