

Imagine growing up in a crowded city and your only contact with horses being the violently thrilling game of Buzkashi. A game that thrives off of horses and riders being brutal in their attempts to capture the beheaded corpse of a goat and depositing it in the goal. These horses are one step away from the war horses of Medieval times but living in the year 2005.

Now imagine what was going through my head when, at my host family's farm, their biggest horse comes directly at me with what I thought, certain death in her eyes. The only time I've seen horses approach humans, was to bite them and thought for sure she was going to get me. I would have none of that though, and took off running, under one fence, then another and finally past the barn before I felt I was safe. It seemed as though all the horses were chasing me and I was certain I would not make it though my first days in this "American experience".

As it turns out, my host mother trains horses and gives a lot of lessons to beginner riders. Apparently her horses *like* people. What a relief. She reassured me that unless I do something really bad to her horses, they will do their best to not hurt me. I have since learned to ride and have gone on several trail rides with her and help with chores occasionally.

High school here was at least as different as I thought it would be but less difficult than I feared in the way of race and religion. On my first day of school every body greeted me like I was a very important person. Every body came to me and said "It is very cool that we have an exchange student from Afghanistan this year with us". I met many people my first day of high school and found that the teachers were glad to have me in their classes. I was surprised to find that many of my teachers knew about my birthday and on that day, they all wished me well. I am impressed by the hospitality of my American friends and teachers.

Girls and boys, all under one roof, from Kindergarten thru college, was a new thing for me. This was a huge change for me since I was educated in an environment where boys do not go to school with girls. Even within my Afghan family, there is strict gender separation and very clear gender oriented household chores. My American family, while having a host father from Afghanistan, has a more complicated structure with my host parents both contributing equally. Coming to American has shown me that there are many different ways of interacting with your community and that women and men can be on more equal ground than what I had thought, without losing their sense of self worth.

Sports was another opportunity for me to learn more about United States and to be socialized. Skiing was one part of that. I never thought of skiing in my whole life but after coming to united states I became familiar with skies and skiing. I met with different people during skiing which gave me a good opportunity to be socialized and make good friends.

At last I want to say that I did not had any hard time in blending because of my race or my religion . my friend liked me as much as they like their American friends. Teachers helped me as honestly as they help their own American students. I am happy that they all welcomed me with open hands and hearts.

I want to say thank you to American Councils for providing this life changing opportunity for me and other students.

I am thank full to them from depth of my heart.

Boy from Afghanistan YES 2004-05