



# The Politics of Hope Ezine

## *“Helping Ordinary Citizens Become Extraordinary Public Leaders”*



### Education in the Post-Taliban Era

By Donna Zajonc May, 2008

Dear Readers,

I recently received this personal letter from my friend and mentor, Ted Achilles. Ted and I served in the Oregon Legislature together. I want to share with you his hopeful "on the ground" perspective about the post-Taliban era and the role of education in Afghanistan.

Donna

Dear Donna,

Why do I write? The war in Afghanistan will be won by America's commitment to meeting their educational needs, not by bullets. I am an ex-infantry officer and a Republican for Obama.

As you know, I have lived and worked in Afghanistan now for close to five and a half years. My retirement career is in education as I manage a pair of scholarship programs funded by our State Department for both Afghan High School and College kids to spend from one to four years in the States.

Why five years? Why Afghanistan? I am privileged to be working with the best and the brightest of this country's next leadership generation. We have given, for example, 3,944 first level tests (of four steps involving more English tests, essays, a mammoth application form and an interview of which I have done well over a thousand interviews myself) to end up with 40 finalists - 20 girls, 20 boys. They are absolutely outstanding kids that have taught those of us who work with them to redefine the word "diligent". We'd like to add to the definition of diligent "... as characterized by an Afghan high school student intent on re-educating him or herself and their countrymen and women in the post Taliban era".

The following paragraph is from a reference letter I wrote for a high school senior a year ago who just received a four year, full bore, scholarship to Bates in Maine.

I have not met a family as committed to the education of their children as the senior (name withheld) during my four and a half years in Afghanistan. Their father has a master's degree in Management and Logistics. Their mother, one of only a few women in her extended family to receive an education, is a senior teacher at the Maryam High School that is always counted among the top two or three high schools for girls in Kabul. More significantly, they were among the minority who did not flee to Pakistan as refugees during the Taliban. They educated their children at home and that experience has had a major role in defining who this young man has come to be."

The boy's older sister is a pre-med student at Simmons in Boston and his younger sister (an alumna of our program) pulled down a full 4 year scholarship to Middlebury several months shy of her 17th birthday. She has a 4 point average. Will all three of them end up back home and applying their new world view to their country's future? I'll bet on it -- 100:1

*“They are absolutely outstanding kids that have taught those of us who work with them to redefine the word "diligent". We'd like to add to the definition of diligent "... as characterized by an Afghan high school student intent on re-educating him or herself and their countrymen and women in the post Taliban era".*

*~Ted Achilles*

These students lived their formative years under the Taliban.

They absorbed visually, audibly and intuitively, the gruesome reality of enforced ignorance and the cruelty it begets.

Their mother and father educated them at home despite the most dire of possible consequences and now find themselves quite literally on the flip side of the Taliban coin with the prospect of an American education. They now know, without a single qualifier, they are THE generation that will begin to bring Afghanistan back into the real world.

They have an inner, self-starting motivation, gentleness and respect for humankind and take very, very little for granted. I am grateful to the many in the United States who have contributed to this program and the American Councils for International Education, who has helped us leave behind some hope for these children. With one great big hug for you, Donna. I hope this finds you thriving and as happy as I am here in Kabul.

Take care. Be well.

Ted Achilles ( R-West Linn, Oregon)

If you'd like more information on American Councils for International Education, click [here](#).



If you are interested in learning more about Donna and the Politics of Hope, visit her website: [www.politicsofhope.com](http://www.politicsofhope.com) or email her at: [donna@politicsofhope.com](mailto:donna@politicsofhope.com)