

My name is Rohallah. I am from Afghanistan. I belong to an ethnic minority group called the Hazaras.

Hazaras have faced persecution for centuries in Afghanistan for reasons of race and religion.

The Taliban has been one of the most hostile groups to persecute Hazaras in recent times.

I fled Afghanistan when the Taliban were advancing on our province Ghazni in 1997. I then came to Pakistan as a young teenager.

In Pakistan I was very fortunate to meet an Australian couple, John and Margaret. They were teaching English to Afghanistan refugees.

Pakistan was a very difficult place to live as a young refugee because refugees didn't have access to education, healthcare or other basic facilities and there were millions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

As the persecution of the Hazaras continued under a resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan, my journey as a refugee took me to other places over 6 years and then finally, I applied to come to Australia with the help of John and Margaret as a refugee after previous failed attempts.

Sometime between 2003 and 2004, during one cold Kabul winter, John and Margaret took a huge risk by travelling from down-under all the way to Afghanistan to help me lodge my application to come to Australia. Receiving John and mum Margaret at Kabul airport was unbelievably special.

I arrived in Australia on 23 Aug 2004 to a beautifully quiet Perth dawn, and the motherly embrace of mum Margaret and the ever-smiling John.

Arriving in Australia to the lovingly warm welcome of John and Margaret made me feel like I had been born again.

Living at home with John and Margaret I wasn't an asylum seeker any more. Australia and John and Margaret provided me with a permanent home.

It wasn't just an ordinary home. It was one where for the first time I felt respect as a human being. For the first time I was a proud Hazara and an Australian because in Australia being a Hazara is not frowned upon - unlike in Afghanistan.

John and Margaret fed me delicious meals every day and sent me to school, college and then secured a scholarship for me to go on and study at one of the most generous universities - the Notre Dame University in Fremantle, WA.

While studying at Notre Dame I was honored to become one of their student ambassadors. It was an absolute pleasure to promote the values that Notre Dame University stood for. I was one of many refugees with a Muslim background that this Christian university provided education to - an amazing gesture of goodwill that touched my heart.

Notre Dame in Freo, I'll forever be grateful to you.

I lived with John and mum Margaret for about 5 years. During this period they raised me from a raw refugee kid to a fully grown up Ozzie bloke ready to participate in the Australian community.

The love and kindness I received from mum Margaret and John and those around them in the wonderful environment of St Mathews church in Shenton Park and a vibrant Needland's Uniting Church, helped me begin to overcome the impact of past torture and trauma I had experienced. This included experiences from the invasion of the Soviet Union, the Kabul Civil war, the persecution of Hazaras at the hands of the Taliban, and the loss of family members during these harrowing periods in my life.

Despite massive improvement in my personal wellbeing from the first day I arrived in Australia, one thing has bugged me ever since. Like many refugees fleeing conflict the ongoing debilitating PTSD has always been with me.

Now I'm doing my masters and working for the government in Canberra. Such a story of hope, redemption and rising from the ashes of conflict to doing my masters despite not having done any formal schooling prior to Australia - can only happen in countries like Australia and with the love and care of John and mum Margaret – my Australian parents.

I'm very grateful to Australia for its generosity towards refugees. For this I shall always remain grateful, faithful and smiley.