



Zuhail Razman

Comebacker

When Afghanistan fell to the Taliban in 2021, Zuhail Razman's world changed overnight. Her father, a military general who had worked alongside the U.S., was evacuated to America for his safety. Zuhail, her mother, and siblings fled to Uzbekistan. She was in 11th grade, right in the middle of exams, when school (and childhood) suddenly stopped.

For almost three years, her family lived apart before finally reuniting in the United States in December 2023. Starting over in a new country, in a new language, without a high school diploma, Zuhail had to rebuild everything from scratch.

In Bloomington, Indiana, where her family settled, she found a lifeline at the local adult education center. That's where she decided to finish what war had interrupted.

Every day she'd walk past Indiana University's limestone buildings on her way to her adult education classes, studying English and GED materials, and feeling a spark of hope grow stronger.

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When I walked near Indiana University, I used to dream,” she says, “when can I join this university and start my studies there?”

Before she could make that dream real, she had to earn her high school diploma and learn how to navigate life in a completely new world.

The adult education center became more than a school. It became her community. Teachers explained American systems step by step. Classmates, many immigrants themselves, shared struggles and shortcuts.

Belonging there wasn't abstract. It looked like shared study plans, rides to ceremonies and doors held open.

By May 2024, Zuhail had earned her diploma.



At the graduation ceremony, she walked across the stage, AND she delivered a graduation speech as **Indiana's Outstanding Adult Learner of the Year!**

Soon after, she attended the national Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) conference, the largest gathering of adult educators in the world. There, she met other learners rebuilding their lives, and she came home with a mission bigger than her own.

Now a scholarship student at Indiana University studying International Law, Zuhail dreams of using her education to help others – especially girls who are still denied the right to learn.

“I want to help those girls who are not allowed to go to school,” she says. ***“Because I know how it feels to be denied education.”***

For Zuhail, education isn't just about degrees. It's about freedom.

“Here, I can breathe as a free human,” she says. ***“Because of these opportunities, I can make my family proud.”***

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“Meeting other adult learners, especially immigrants, showed me our stories were similar,” she said. **“We all struggled, but we were finding our way.”**



My career has focused on building systems that make comeback stories possible at scale, and now I'm sharing the education comeback stories of real people.

If this resonates, you'll find more at BridgettStrickler.com or follow me on [LinkedIn](#).

Looking for more inspiration? [Watch my TEDx talk](#). [If you're going back to school, community may be the medicine.](#)