

Student Shares Amazing Story

Surviving war, discrimination on her journey to success

Her story covers surviving a war in Afghanistan, discrimination and harassment in Pakistan, acclimating to a new country in the United States and finding her identity at one of the country's largest community colleges.

Miral Rezayee Bessed, 29, will share her amazing story as she graduates from Portland Community College and is honored as the school's commencement speaker on Friday, June 11.

As a kid, Bessed survived five rocket explosions in her hometown of Kabul, Afghanistan, and her family escaped the violence by traveling across the border into Pakistan in 1992.

Pakistan wasn't much better. Her family endured extreme poverty and discrimination commonly directed toward Afghan expats and, being a woman from a liberal family, was the target of sexual and verbal violence.

"Discrimination against women is a huge problem in Peshawar, Pakistan, especially immigrant women who came from Afghanistan," she said. "There is a lot of hate out there and the equality line is very blurry.

But I was able to survive it and still had the chance to get an education because of an open-minded family, who put education first, so I'm lucky."

In 2000, Bessed moved to Portland to be with her husband and immediately had to fight another battle – assimilation.

"It was absurdly hard," Bessed added. "My first time away from my home was coming halfway around the world as well as flying in an airplane for the very first time. Considering this, can you imagine having to hop four flights to get here? It was a horrifying experience, but, hey, I made it. That is part of what has helped be who I am today."

Her husband happened to be a PCC student and he encouraged her to enroll. Bessed said she remembers clearly coming to the college's Sylvania Campus and taking the placement test in 2001. Because of the language barrier and not being strong at math, she placed all the way at the bottom in Math 20 and Reading and Writing 90. But like all challenges in her life, she didn't let low first scores stop her.



Miral Rezayee Bessed survived war in Afghanistan, discrimination in Pakistan and assimilation in a new country to graduate with honors from Portland Community College.

"I had to work myself up from there and completed a lot of prerequisites," Bessed remembered.

A lay off forced her husband out of work and her into it. College was put on stand-by as she became a professional Jeweler for Ben Bridge Jewelers in Clackamas. She was so successful selling diamonds and luxury timepieces (more than \$1 million in total sales) that she was recently honored at a luncheon with billionaire investor Warren Buffett of Berkshire Hathaway. Bessed accomplished this feat despite going to PCC full-time while working full-time starting back in 2007.

She is now well on her way toward being a journalist, a profession that she said seems a good fit for her. It's a career that can help her in her quest to shine a light on women's rights back home and it's an issue she feels she can do a lot of

good for as a journalist.

"It is in my blood," said Bessed, who is fluent in four languages. "My father was a journalist and my uncle too. As an Afghan with strong ties to Pakistan and to America, I can relate to the bicultural issues of discrimination, oppression, religious domination, and assimilation that is often forced. As a woman, I am well positioned to see gender inequity, particularly when it is coupled with my ethnicity. I so far

have been successful at everything I have started. So on my way up, I want to lift other women with me to proof the fact that success doesn't have limits of ethnicity and gender. That is my main source of inspiration."

She credits her husband of 11 years, family and especially PCC instructors for giving her the support she needed to excel in her studies and become a big success at the college.

48th PCC Graduation Ceremony

Portland Community College is celebrating its 48th graduation with a commencement ceremony beginning at 7 p.m. on Friday, June 11, at the Memorial Coliseum.

Family, friends, faculty and staff will be on hand to congratulate

late the graduates and celebrate their accomplishments as they take center stage.

PCC will be awarding nearly 3,000 diplomas and certificates, with approximately 600 graduates expecting to walk on stage during the commencement ceremony.

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Improve Your Computer Skills

Free training for job seekers

The state of Oregon will partner with Microsoft to provide free online technology training to Oregonians who are out of work and looking for opportunities to improve their computer skills.

"This public-private partnership will provide Oregonians with the opportunity to learn the skills needed for 21st Century jobs," said Gov. Ted Kulongoski. "I would like to personally thank

Microsoft for their generosity during this difficult time."

Under Microsoft's Elevate America initiative, Oregon will receive 16,875 vouchers for online training, online testing, and for more advanced level training:

Each training voucher is redeemable for free, online training on one Microsoft Windows Vista or of the programs in the Microsoft Office Suite.

Advanced level online training vouchers are redeemable for training for individuals on technical professional career tracks in ar-

reas such as web development or database management.

WorkSource Oregon, the state's workforce system, will administer the Elevate America program in Oregon. Eligible participants must be unemployed and registered with WorkSource Oregon. Vouchers will be provided on a first-come, first-serve basis for those eligible.

Oregonians can find out how to access the program by going to WorkSourceOregon.org or by visiting their local WorkSource Oregon Center.