

## MOVING TO AUSTRALIA

Through our life journey, we have gone through a lot of changes. We have had many dreams, many difficulties and many achievements. But where do these come from? Where do these changes come from? You would say, oh it is just time going and there are unexpected events. It might be true but Barack Obama once said, "If we wait for time, if we wish for something to happen, then the change will not come. We are just the ones we've been the change we seek."

From my experience, the change is about taking the challenges, then stepping up and finally you see, something is waiting for you. This is where you see the differences and where you have made the changes.

Back to my childhood, I was born hard of hearing in Burma, a beautiful, cheerful homeland which is well known for its golden pagodas surrounded by tropical forests. At that time, I was grown up talking Burmese language with my families and my friend yet we all knew that I was Deaf. Being engrossed in the typical lifestyle of a Burmese hearing child, celebrating water festivals, listening to music and having fun, at that time, I did not see myself as a Deaf person. So, I did not see the value of the Deaf world. I just saw myself being belonged to this hearing Burmese world.

When I was ten years old, I faced the unexpected situation. It is about moving to Kalgoorlie which is only well known for being a small mining town. But you would feel being in the baking oven in summer or in the freezer in the winter. And you would just see a few animals in the bare, empty red bushland. Having to move away from my homeland where I had the strongest connection with, is the first time I began to face something.

This is the challenge as I had to leave something behind, being with a big family and many friends, celebrating water festivals and wandering around temples. I was forced to live in somewhere I didn't know and I had to talk another language. When I arrived in Australia, it is the first time I have learnt English. When struggling to speak and getting used to live in this empty town, I had another struggles, making friends. But this challenge makes me grow up, makes me more mature and determined to learn more about Australia. Certainly, I had faced typically like what Asian immigrants would face, such as culture shock and language barrier.

Along my journey of living in Kalgoorlie, I met a nice mentor, [REDACTED] who comes from New Zealand. She helped me adapt to live in this remote town where there is a lack of accessibility for Deaf students. She helped my English communication skills. She gave me lots of newspapers related to Deaf students from different cities and towns and even encouraged me to post my story in those newsletters. She is the first person to give me an idea about how WA Deaf students experience, which makes me feel like I am not the only one being a Deaf student!

When I read one of those newspapers, I found that there is a student I met from [REDACTED] posting his story just a few years later. I couldn't believe it at that time. I am glad that WA Deaf Society heavily develops the social network, even connecting students from remote areas to metropolitan areas and making us feeling heard! At that time, I was 13 years old. Experiencing such this moment I never expect of led me to develop a self-growth mindset. Since that time, I became more open-minded and more culturally understanding.

## MOVING TO PERTH

Over time, my family decided to move to Perth. This city is really overwhelming - full of streams of cars flowing along the roads and between the colourful buildings. Just a few days later, I went through a surgery for a Cochlear BAHA (Bone anchored hearing aid) implant for my right side which is quite overwhelming. It is obviously louder that I began to hear my own breathing sound, rustling leaves and more! It is much more clear, especially when I am having conversations. Then, I quickly learn for how lip reading corresponds to the sounds coming out from lip. Nevertheless, I still rely on lip reading and eye contacts.

At that time, I was 13-14 years old, remembering this moment as a life-changing moment. Because, before I got this implant, I got feelings of confusion and being lost in making friends and communicating with several people, including my family. I also remembered dealing with many struggles and difficulties to cope with my academic studies, especially when teachers face on whiteboards and they continue to speak.

But now, wearing a Cochlear BAHA hearing aid proudly, I am amazed at how technology is advancing so fast. I can listen to music happily over my phone via bluetooth. Even my sister and friends got jealous for the fact that listening music is simply wireless! What's more? I can make phone calls without using speaker so I won't be embarrassed in public! Even better, Cochlear BAHA has its own app which I use to adjust my hearing aid's volume and even locate it. Wearing Cochlear BAHA hearing aid is certainly amazing, helping me reach out to where I am now.

## ATTENDING [REDACTED]

After a while, my parents decided to enrol me into [REDACTED]. At that time, I didn't find it desirable. I just didn't see myself actually being in the Deaf community. So, I kind of didn't approve of my parent's decision.

When selecting the language as a subject, at first I was going to choose Japanese Language but the principal, [REDACTED] told me to try AUSLAN. This one is another challenge because it kind of forces me to think about myself whether being Deaf is part of me or not.

While attending this school, I had met several people I had never heard about. I didn't know that there were Deaf teachers. There were varieties of classmates. Some of them are just like me. Some of them only use sign language. Some of them use both. This is the remarkable beginning of the change as I began to see different types of Deaf identities. And then, I started to be proud of myself.

Plus, I didn't know that there were interpreters, notetakers and hearing support teachers for Deaf students. Again, this one is another change because I had never had such a huge support. This [REDACTED] makes me more aware that Deaf people in Australia are well recognised and well supported, encouraging me to learn about the Deaf community. This really deepens my cultural understanding. Actually, I thought moving into Kalgoorlie would make me understand most of cultures, ranging from Indigenous cultures to being a Burmese person living overseas. But, there is so much to learn as I am just shocked by the huge difference between Myanmar and Australia's cultures.

My home country's culture focussed on unifying all people as a group, representing a certain voice and encouraging residents to share their beliefs. Those beliefs heavily relied on religion and past traditions. On the other hand, Australian culture is much more open and diverse, filled with Asian, European, Aboriginal, Deaf and other unique cultures. This is overwhelming at first because you are expected to express about yourself and define about who you really stand as. This was confusing because I was not used to having a sense of individualism and I had never thought of who I really was, just being conformed to one particular group.

I even remembered thinking of what I should be and who should I recognise myself as? At that time, I struggled to express as I sometimes don't feel being wholly part of Burmese or Australian or even Deaf communities. These confusions broke me several times so much that I had begun to figure out what I like to be.

Throughout these times of my primary and high school years, I realise that labelling yourself as Burmese or Australian doesn't have to be this way. You can be both. For me, I am proudly considering myself as triple identities, being Burmese-Australian Deaf. What does this mean? Well, Myanmar culture helps me to be humble, patient and grateful. Australian culture teaches me to develop a sense of freedom, individualism and to be culturally understanding. Deaf culture

expands on my understanding of what it means to live as Deaf, how important it is to communicate through a sign language and how Deaf people can live proudly as being Deaf.

A few years ago, I asked my friend in Year 10, "How is your Japanese language?" She replied, "It's a bit hard. You have to listen through radio and work out." I thought to myself, if I choose it, it would be hard for me, much harder than Auslan. So, I am really grateful that I got this opportunity to learn another language. Learning Auslan is much easier than you think! It is interesting how visual this language is.

So, I am really grateful for the principal. I am also grateful for my Auslan teachers, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. They introduced me to the Deaf networks across the world, keeping me updated with Deaf news. They even let me know about some American Deaf doctors which inspires me, keeping up with my ATAR studies because my dream is to be a doctor.

Along my high school journey, I not only had the opportunity to build my own identity but also I had the opportunity to share about my personal story in several societies, including WA Children Foundation. This is where I made public speaking for the first time. Yes, I got nervous with public speaking, even interpreter had to calm me down as I was speaking fast!

Nevertheless, I received cheerful laughs, smiles and claps from audiences filled with full of Deaf children, adults, their parents and supporters of Deaf community. I even met one who had been in my country! Although Deaf community in Perth is small, the bonding between each other is so close that they are interested in how you overcame your Deafness. This wonderful opportunity is all thanks to [REDACTED] who guided me to these societies.

She and [REDACTED] guided me for what university courses I would attend if I could not make my first choice for medicine, equipping me with so much resources that I was motivated to shot my best for WACE exams. [REDACTED] ensured that I got the fair condition when taking exams. She even urged several universities to take into account of my Deafness and its impact on my academic studies, especially ATAR. Even more, she and [REDACTED] updated me with scholarship applications and so much opportunities I never consider of.

## ATAR

ATAR is challenging and even more challenging with having your Deafness impacting on your academic studies. However, accepting several supports and seeking help is your survival skill! At first, I was reluctant to seek help just because I am Deaf. But really, you just need to access academic studies and have fair test conditions as equal as hearing students. Thus, Deaf students need notetakers, interpreters and captioning of videos in order for them to receive the same information hearing students had.

Using such those friendly-Deaf accessibility services since Year 8 actually makes me believe in myself, trying my best to overcome my learning journey with my Deafness. Thus, any disabilities or any conditions that impact your living are not something you need to be afraid of, especially when seeking help.

I have seen many people of any struggles doing professional jobs, even Deaf doctors and several Deaf teachers, such as [REDACTED] who is a strong Deaf STEM teacher. Even [REDACTED], a hearing teacher of Auslan and [REDACTED], a Deaf mentor and teacher of TAFE Auslan and interpreter training created the first Auslan course in [REDACTED] in Western Australia, considering Auslan as one of ATAR subjects!

This actually confirms the quote stating there is no such thing impossible for us to do it! So, there's nothing to be ashamed of being Deaf. Those Deaf professionals see their Deafness as their opportunity to figure out what they can do. If they can figure out, then we can figure out what we can do!

I remembered taking WACE exams for long hours and sitting a UCAT test(University Clinical Aptitude Test) which is a brand new medical entrance test for Year 12 students last year. And one more for me being tested is having an interview. I had to fly to ██████████ in Queensland and had to fly back to ██████████, just on the same day I had interview meeting with ██████████. Then, on the next morning, I sat interview with ██████████. You might say that sounds nerve-wrecking and overwhelming to get over those so many tests. But actually, they are just testing you whether you can do it or not. So, yes, at first, I got nervous and even vomited during flights. But then, I decided to let loose of myself, visualising that whatever the opportunity comes, just do it.

## **OUR DEAFNESS DOES NOT LIMIT OUR POTENTIAL TO BE SUCCESSFUL**

So far, as you see, I have faced several challenges of living in Australia and realising about the Deaf community. These challenges in the end make a lot of tremendously huge differences. Living in Australia with good education, healthcare and technology allows me to participate in several activities, such as making presentations in ██████████ Education Centre for young Deaf students. I had emphasised the importance of accepting their Deafness and following their academic studies. This is because my Deaf teachers told me that those Deaf students who are new to high school have no idea of how to adapt into high school and even into Deaf community. So, I realised that I need to set up as a role model because I had experienced just like how those students faced. Then, I encourage them to see their difficulties as opportunities for them to learn.

Because of these experiences, this makes me keen to volunteer in Deaf children's school as a teacher's assistant in Myanmar in Year 10 summer. The reason why I volunteered there is that I learnt Australian sign language here (Auslan). I thought that would help me to teach there but I realised that children's sign language is different to Auslan. So, this is such a huge unexpected situation and I couldn't show my empathy. However, this reminds me of how I adapt into learning Auslan and arriving in Australia. Thus, along with my strong passion, I had to learn their Burmese sign language and seek for help even from those children. Then, I can teach them through their sign language. So, this tells me that, even if you want to help others, there can be limitations. So, helping involves with overcoming those limitations.

Experiencing such this moment leads me to realise about what it means to be flexible which motivates me to seek new challenges. What's more to realise is that learning anything involves with high curiosity, great passion and seeking help from others. This is which I promote in educating those students. I have promoted this by creating fun competitions for Deaf students in my home country where it has lack of resources to support them. So that, they can learn and help each other while competing against each other.

At that time, I had learnt a lot. Because I thought all sign languages used around the world are the same! But the fact the all sign languages are different and even Deaf countries' cultures are different to each other is mind-blowing. This keeps me being out of my comfort zone, exploring about how they overcome their challenges and they even provide different perspectives about being Deaf. This makes me much more understanding about their cultures and how they like to be treated. Thus, I am keen in seeking any new skills. You might call me adventurer! I am willing to empower people to learn regardless of what difficulties they have.

## **SPECIAL THANKS**

Lastly, I also would like to recognise the efforts my parents made, especially their bravery and courage in making a huge decision to move here and place me in a well developed supportive school. I cannot imagine how huge their sacrifice is, especially on behalf of leaving our big families in Myanmar and taking risks to ensure that I receive proper healthcare, education and technologies. Because of their medical knowledge, they can identify my severe Deaf condition and many opportunities given in here, especially Deaf support. This was not served properly in Myanmar, a developing country with lack of awareness about Deafness when I was born. However, by now, I am amazed by the quick growing developments in Deaf support, especially Deaf schools and Burmese Sign Language being in health medias. Nevertheless, I am inspired by

my parent's resilience and determination for building a safe pathway for me to grow up as equal as other hearing children.

Plus, there have been quite diverse and helpful teachers along my learning journey. Overall, moving to here is filled with many memorable ones, motivating me to reach my dream goals. My parents, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] networks are great role models, inspiring me to believe in myself.

## NOW

Even after my high school, I still remain in touch with my Deaf teachers and other support teachers, being committed to mentoring the following Deaf students and the students who are learning Auslan. The principal let me know how the first year Deaf students were like me, being nervous to be enrolled in [REDACTED]. She understood it as it is normal. It is normal to be uncertain of what your identity is. It is normal to be confused and afraid of having multi-divergent identifications. But taking time to figure what you want to be is worth it. So, take time. Take risks and keep learning.

Thus, if you accept the challenges and go ahead, you will see the differences and opportunities. This is what change is about. Quoting from C.JoyBell who is a proud female writer of literature, sciences and cultural critics, *"The only way that we can live, is if we grow. The only way that we can grow is if we change. The only way that we can change is if we learn. And the only way that we can learn is if we become exposed, throwing ourselves out into the open. So, do it. Throw yourself."*

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Hi everyone, my name is Khin. I am currently attending [REDACTED], studying Integrated Medical Sciences and Clinical Practice (IMSCP) under a biomedical bachelor degree with an assured pathway into medicine in 2020.

That title sounds long and fancy, right? Actually, learning medical sciences is much more fun than high school. You don't have homeworks. You don't have lots of tests. Even in tests, you don't have that much of essay questions. You just have to fill in multiple choices and short answer questions. You are just self taught and you can enjoy several social opportunities given out at university. And it is easy to make friends. You will find lots of people who are similar-minded to you, just like how I found out that there is a 1st year undergraduate Burmese student who has an interest in being a medical researcher! I am also keeping up with my Auslan skills and learning American Sign Language from a Deaf university, [REDACTED] as an online course.

I moved to Australia in 2012 and attended [REDACTED] in 2015, being graduated in 2019. It is such an amazing journey to grow up here and I am looking forwards to hearing any news from Deafness Forum Of Australia.

I would like to recognise guidance from [REDACTED], one of the heads of Deafness Forum of Australia. She encourages me to express in this newsletter for my viewpoint of Deafness which is based on technology, attending a Deaf school and being part of Deaf community. I am looking forwards to your viewpoints of what it means to be Deaf.