

Sarah Z. Abdella

Class of 2005

Columbia High School

Corporal Sarah Z. Abdella, a distinguished member of the United States Marine Corps since 2008, is serving a mission as a Pashto linguist/translator for II MEF General Staff in Afghanistan for 2013-14. She is also the co-founder of Hayla International, a non-profit organization established to provide education, clothing and blankets to indigent children in Afghanistan.

At Columbia High School, Sarah was an acclaimed artist, actress, and photographer. She was a connoisseur of music and literature, and had a passion for horseback riding and being outdoors. She demonstrated in these years a tremendous gift for working with others, as seen in the school's Shakespeare Celebration Festival in the spring of 2003, which drew an afternoon crowd of over 140 people. Sarah performed in several scenes with panache, but even more impressive was the fact that she had co-organized the event with a fellow sophomore. Talent, initiative, integrity, a love of learning and taking on new challenges—these qualities were innate to Sarah who, during in her senior year in 2004-2005, was enrolled in the prestigious New Visions Performing and Visual Arts Program.

After brief travels to Australia and London through People to People and New Visions respectively, the next stop for Sarah was the venerable Tisch School of the Arts at New York University from 2005-08. A fine arts major at the time, she was involved in creating set designs for school productions. Then, a change of heart occurred and she decided on a new, bold path: she enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 2008. Her late father, a distinguished veteran, would be proud to know of the many accolades she has earned in five years:

*Navy Unit Commendation Ribbon	*Navy & Marine Corps Achievement Medal
*Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal	*Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal
*National Defense Service Medal	*Afghanistan Campaign Medal
*Global War on Terrorism Service Medal	*Sea Service Deployment Ribbon
*NATO Article 5 Active Endeavour Medal	

Given her love of language, Sarah became proficient in Pashto in 2009-10 and has since learned to speak Dari and Farsi (she will soon be completing Bachelor's in Middle Eastern Studies). In 2010-11, she served as a cryptologic linguist. As a Lance Corporal, Sarah was deployed for all of 2011 in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Sarah returned home in 2012 for Easter weekend to a hero's welcome at Albany International Airport, the scene for the lead story of an 11 p.m. broadcast on News Channel 10 (WTEN).

Her professional achievement as a linguist, outstanding service as a Marine in one of the most dangerous regions of the world, and contribution to humanity (which was recognized by the Pentagon for her co-founding of Hayla International) all speak to a life in constant motion. Sarah Abdella was an extraordinary student at Columbia. Today, she is a resolute hero fighting for the cause of peace in our time. As Corporal Sarah Abdella, she has seen things no one should ever see, and things we all should see: the noble truths of a life in service of others. The East Greenbush Education Foundation is honored this evening to induct this remarkable member of the Class of 2005, who is serving our country with courage and conviction, and making her family and friends justifiably proud, into the Columbia High School Alumni Hall of Fame.