

# Gul Zehra



## Early Life

Gul was born in Quetta, a predominantly Hazara area of Pakistan. The Hazara people are an Afghan ethnic minority group with Persian, Mongolian, and Turkish ancestry. In Pakistan, Gul's father worked as an engineer and her mother had a Masters of English Literature; they were known to be modern and progressive in their outlook. Gul's family always emphasised education and the girls attended an English-speaking school where they were taught Urdu and English to complement her home language of Farsi.

When Gul was one, the family moved to Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, where most people spoke Urdu and there were few Hazara people. Despite these differences, Gul loved the vibrancy of Islamabad with its different cultures, foods, and celebrations. Her parents recognised that as a targeted minority group, immigration would provide more opportunities for their children and so applied for a working visa to leave Pakistan. Despite the challenges and obstacles, and the 2-year approval process, the family gathered to celebrate when they heard the news that they were coming to Australia.

The only thing Gul knew about Australia at that stage was that it was an island! Prior to leaving though, the family made connections with cousins in Australia and anticipated seeing things they had heard about, like letterboxes, recycling bins etc.

The family saw moving to Australia was living the dream and hadn't thought beyond arriving and so any difficulties were easy to overlook. Soon after arriving, her father had to return to Pakistan for a year initially then 2 years to wait for her grandmother to have her visa approved. Meanwhile Gul's mother had the responsibility for the four children, setting up the family home, working and studying for an early childhood qualification. The family had no car and so walked everywhere; a habit Gul still enjoys.

## Education

The family settled in Campbelltown given their English skills the girls moved straight into Charles Campbell College. School was such a change from Pakistan where learning focused mainly on taking notes while the teacher talked and doing tests with the results publicly announced. Gul enjoys the relaxed relationships with teachers, the emphasis on collaboration and using a broad range of resources in Australian schooling with more free time and self-responsibility. Recess was something Gul had only heard of in films, and she was shocked by the casual relationships between students and teachers and that some students didn't value learning. Loving sport, Gul enjoyed the emphasis on girls playing sports in Australia as in Pakistan she believed her love of sports made her a boy!

Between years 7-12, Gul consistently maintained a GPA of above 4.5, with numerous outstanding achievements for 5.0 GPAs. Furthermore, Gul was awarded the female champion medal each year at school sports days and participated in Interschool Athletics at Santos Stadium on numerous occasions.

2020 was Gul's last year of school and she was elected Year 12 captain but then Covid hit so privileges like a common room, the rescheduling of the Year 12 formal and online learning added to the pressure of trying to get good results. Gul received an ATAR score of 98.80 but didn't get into medicine so went back to school for Year 13 to improve her chances and in 2022 has been accepted into med school on the Gold Coast. Gul has always wanted to be a doctor all of her life and is particularly interested in surgery.

In saying that. She has an amazing record of achievements since arriving in Australia. These include:

- 2014 (Yr 6): Morialta Citizenship Award (John Gardner (MP), Member for Morialta)
- 2015 (Yr 7): College Values Award
- 2018 (Yr 10):
  - Australian Defence Force Long Tan Youth Award (leadership and teamwork)
  - College All-Rounder Award (certificate of excellence)
  - Senior Sportswoman of the Year (Charles Campbell College)
  - Interschool Athletics Best Female Athlete (Charles Campbell College)
  - College Dux
- 2019 (Yr 11)
  - Hartley Medal (Vincent Tarzia (MP), Member for Hartley)
  - College Dux
- 2020 (Yr 12):
  - Excellent Academic Achievement (highest achieving student for EAL and Psychology)
  - Australian Defence Force Long Tan Youth Awards (leadership and teamwork)
  - Molly Byrne Award (Labor Government – Displaying Hard work and Perseverance)
  - College leadership awards (Yr 12 captain and gave a valedictorian speech)
- 2021 (Yr 13): Excellent Academic Achievement (highest achieving student for Medicine and Dentistry Preparation)

### **Connection to Campbelltown**

On moving to Campbelltown, Gul loved the greenery and felt the area looked like an episode of a suburban TV program. Gul appreciates the multicultural nature of Campbelltown and openness of the people; it made the family feel like they too could fit in and be welcomed. Gul featured in Council's 'This is my Campbelltown: stories of arrival, acceptance and belonging' video project which can be viewed at [www.campbelltown.sa.gov.au/thisismycampbelltown](http://www.campbelltown.sa.gov.au/thisismycampbelltown)

### **Community Service**

Gul joined the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) in year 10 as her sister had already been part of YAC for 2 years and their mother was very keen for the family to be involved and take up opportunities. Gul loved the people, the work, the free pizzas, and that the Council was interested in hearing from young people.

In the past 4 years Gul is proud of the work YAC has done in establishing the movies in the park as a family friendly environment, and small events like the book-to-movie screenings at the library. She believes YAC has been a great way to socialise and build her confidence with public speaking and learn leadership and organisation skills. Gul sees YAC as a great way for young people to share opinions and to learn that it is okay to think differently, ask questions and take action to build the community.

### **Success/Reflections**

When Gul was younger, she saw success as objective short-term goals, such as to get an A or finish first in a race and so it was easy to measure success. Nowadays, Gul is less focused on the outcome and more focused on the process and feeling content and positive along the journey. She wants to live a life without regrets and to enjoy life's highs and lows for what they bring.

Gul believes that every experience, good or bad, is a learning opportunity and the way you respond is a true reflection of who you are as a person. Setting clear short- and long-term goals doesn't take long, and it is important to do so, but try to focus mainly on how you'll enjoy the journey towards said goals. Lastly, know that happiness is not an objective goal to work towards your whole life, it's a feeling that can be felt any time anywhere if you truly know yourself, so strive to know yourself.

***“Surround yourself with the types of people you aspire to be.”***