

Malala Yousafzai: A Normal Yet Powerful Girl

Malala Yousafzai (born 1997) is a Pakistani activist for female education and the youngest ever winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Malala is from the Swat Valley in northwest Pakistan, where the local Taliban has banned girls from attending school. Malala, whose family ran a chain of local schools, publicly stood against the Taliban's actions and launched an international movement. On October 9th, 2012, a gunman from the Taliban boarded a school bus and shot her in the head. Malala remained in critical condition in the days following the attack, but survived. Since then, she has continued to advocate internationally for women's education.

As you read, consider what drove Malala to overcome tremendous adversity.



"I think Malala is an average girl," Ziauddin Yousafzai says about the 16-year-old Pakistani girl who captured the world's attention after being shot by the Taliban, "but there's something extraordinary about her."

A teacher himself, Yousafzai inspired his daughter's fight to be educated. At a special event with Malala in Washington, D.C., he tells NPR's Michel Martin that he is often asked what training he gave to his daughter. "I usually tell people, 'You should not ask me what I have done. Rather you ask me, what I did not do,'" he says. "I did not clip her wings to fly. I did not stop her from flying." Yousafzai has this advice for parents of girls around the world: "Trust your daughters, they are faithful. Honor your daughters, they are honorable. And educate your daughters, they are amazing." A year after being shot, Malala is clear about her goal. "I speak for education of every child, in every corner of the world," Malala says. "There has been a discrimination in our society," which she believes must be defeated. "We women are going to bring change. We are speaking up for girls' rights, but we must not behave like men, like they have done in the past." Perhaps she has learned from her father's experience. When asked what gave him a passion for girls' education, Yousafzai points out that he was "born in a society where girls are ignored." Living with five sisters, he was sensitive to discrimination from an early age. "In the morning, I was used to milk and cream, and my sisters were given only tea," he says. Yousafzai felt the injustice even more when Malala was born. He later opened a school that Malala attended in the Swat Valley. At the time, the Taliban's influence was gaining power and both Yousafzais were firmly on their radar. "But we thought that even terrorists might have some ethics," Yousafzai says. "Because they destroyed some 1,500 schools but they never injured a child. And she was a child."

Malala says that the shooting has taken away her fear. "I have already seen death and I know that death is supporting me in my cause of education. Death does not want to kill me," she says. "Before this attack, I might have been a little bit afraid how death would be. Now I'm not, because I have experienced it."

When asked if she is having any fun now with all her campaigning, Malala laughs, "It's a very nice question. I miss those days." But she also says that there is another side to her than what is shown in the media. "Outside of my home, I look like a very obedient, very serious, very good kind of girl, but nobody knows what happens inside the house." There, she says, she's not naughty, but she has to stand up to her brothers. "It's good to fight with your brothers and it's good to tease them to give them advice."

She says her little brother doesn't really understand why his sister has so much attention. "He said, 'Malala ... I can't understand why people are giving you prizes, and everywhere you go people say, 'This is Malala' and they give you awards, what have you done?'" she says.

Malala knows the Taliban would still like to kill her, but she says she hopes to return to Pakistan one day. "First, I need to empower myself with knowledge, with education. I need to work hard," she says. "And when I [am] powerful, then I will go back to Pakistan, inshallah [God willing]."

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Notes

All Definitions Footnotes

1.

The Taliban is an Islamic militant group based in Afghanistan and western Pakistan. They are known around the world for their cruel punishment of citizens, their harsh treatment of women, and for their involvement in acts of terrorism.

2. **Discrimination** (*noun*) : the unjust or unfair treatment of people based upon race, gender, religion, age, etc.

3. **Injustice** (*noun*) :

a lack of fairness or equality in a situation

4.

To be "on the radar" is a common expression meaning to be noticed or aware of

5. **Campaign** (*verb*) :

to carry out a planned set of activities over a period of time in order to achieve a specific goal