

Malala the

The true story of a teen girl who almost died for her right to go to school

BY KRISTIN LEWIS

At first, October 9, 2012, seemed like an ordinary day in the Swat Valley in northern Pakistan. Malala Yousafzai [yoo-suf-ZEYE], 15, was on a school bus waiting to go home. Suddenly, two masked gunmen stormed the bus.

One of them yelled out, “Who is Malala?”

Terror immediately filled the bus. Then the gunmen opened fire. Malala was hit in the head with a bullet, and two of her friends were struck in their arms. Then the gunmen fled, leaving Malala to die.

It seems inconceivable that anyone would attempt to murder an innocent girl on her way home from school. But some people in Pakistan did not view Malala as the bright, kind teenager she was. Instead, they perceived her as a dangerous threat to their way of life.

Malala had been strongly advocating for all girls to have the opportunity to go to school. Her activism had made her famous around the world.

It also made her a target of the Taliban, an evil group of **terrorists** in Pakistan.



VIDEO

GO TO
WEB VIEW

JIM MCMAHON/MPAMAN © (GLOBE); VERONIQUE DE VIGUERIE/GETTY IMAGES (MALALA YOUSAFZAI)



PAUSE AND THINK: Why were people trying to kill Malala?





Powerful

“On my way from school to home I heard a man saying, ‘I will kill you.’”

—MALALA YOUSAFZAI



THE SWAT VALLEY Malala is from Mingora, a city in the Swat Valley. The area is known for its green mountains, thick forests, and mighty rivers.



FIGHTING TO SURVIVE Malala got better in a hospital in England. The bullet badly damaged her hearing and fractured—or cracked—her skull.

Taliban Control

Despite not being a part of Pakistan’s government, the Taliban’s forces were very powerful. Taliban members followed an **extreme** form of the religion Islam. Most Muslims—people who follow Islam—do not agree with the Taliban.

In 2007, the Taliban began exerting control over Swat, blowing up government buildings and murdering police officers. Malala’s town, Mingora, became a war zone, and Malala was often woken in the middle of the night by gunfire.

VOCABULARY

terrorists: people who use fear or violence to gain power

extreme: very far from agreeing with the opinions of most people

oppressive: very cruel or unfair

pseudonym: a name that someone (such as a writer) uses instead of his or her real name

crusade: a serious attempt to change something

The Taliban forced people in Swat to obey **oppressive** religious rules. All music, television, and movies were banned, and women were not allowed to go to school or do any work outside of the home.

Anyone who broke these rules might be beaten—or even killed.



PAUSE AND THINK: What happened in 2007 that changed life in Mingora?

Top Secret School

In January 2009, the Taliban ordered all girls’ schools to close, including Malala’s school, which her father owned.

The news was deeply upsetting to Malala, who placed a high value on education. Fewer than half the girls who lived in Pakistan’s countryside had the opportunity to go to school, so Malala knew she was very fortunate.



A HERO FOR GIRLS Students in Pakistan hold up pictures of Malala. After the attack, people around the world gathered to show support for Malala and girls' education.

Malala's father made the dangerous decision to defy the Taliban and keep his school open. In order to stay alive, the students had to keep their activities top secret. So Malala and her classmates stopped wearing their school uniforms, and they hid their books beneath their clothing.

Malala was scared and angry—but was there anything she could do to fight back?



PAUSE AND THINK: Why did Malala feel lucky to be able to go to school?

A Powerful Weapon

As it turned out, Malala had her own powerful weapon: her voice. And she would risk everything to use it.

In 2009, using a **pseudonym**, Malala began writing for a British blog. She described the hardships of her life under Taliban control. She wrote about her dream of becoming a doctor one

day and her fear of the terrorists. "On my way from school to home I heard a man saying, 'I will kill you,'" she wrote.

The blog was an instant hit. People all over the world were reading it—and learning what was happening in Swat.



PAUSE AND THINK: What did people learn by reading Malala's writing?

Malala's Crusade

In May 2009, the Pakistani army finally launched an attack against the Taliban in Swat. Malala and her family, along with millions of others, escaped to the south. After three months, the conflict was over, and it was safe to go home.

Not long after, Malala began an attack of her own. She came forward as the famous blogger. She appeared on television, and she gave powerful speeches to Pakistani children. Her message: All



children deserve the chance to get an education.

But in 2010, notes began appearing under Malala's door, ordering her to give up her **crusade**—or else. Malala refused to back down, and in October 2012, the Taliban shot her.

Malala was flown to a hospital in England that treats serious brain injuries, and her family soon joined her there. Meanwhile, the Taliban spoke out, declaring that the shooting was a warning to other girls not to follow Malala's example.

But people around the world refused to be intimidated, and they continued Malala's fight. Protesters marched, many of them kids carrying signs that read "I Am Malala."



PAUSE AND THINK: What message did Malala share? Who disagreed?

What Girls Can Do

Malala survived the shooting, which was more

than seven years ago. She and her family remained in England, where Malala was able to get the one thing she always wanted: an education.

Approximately 130 million girls around the world do not attend school. The circumstances that prevent these girls from getting an education vary. Many of the girls have to work instead to earn money to support their families. For other girls, the obstacle is that they have no school to go to.

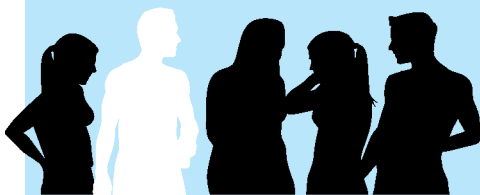
In 2014, Malala started the Malala Fund, an organization that works to make education possible and accessible for all girls.

Today, Malala is a student at Oxford University in England. Although she is still deciding on a career path, she feels certain that she will continue fighting for the rights of girls and women:

"If one girl with an education can change the world," Malala says, "just imagine what 130 million can do." •

HOW MANY KIDS DON'T GO TO SCHOOL?

Americans have a right to free public education. In other parts of the world, kids aren't as lucky.



1 IN 5
CHILDREN
worldwide (ages 6-17)
are not in school

ONLY
66%

of countries
provide an
elementary school
education to
as many girls as boys

Kids are more likely to
be out of school if they:

ARE POOR
HAVE A DISABILITY
LIVE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE
LIVE IN A WAR ZONE

SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS