

Malala's Story



By DFID - UK Department for International Development (Malala Yousafzai: Education for girls) [CC BY 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Malala Yousafzai was born in 1997 in Pakistan and grew up in the idyllic Swat Valley. For many years, Pakistan's Swat Valley was a very popular vacation spot for tourists. The lush valley, with its mountain vistas, is both beautiful and idyllic, making it the perfect spot for a restful vacation and a safe place to raise young children.

When she was old enough, Malala attended the nearby school which was founded by her father, Ziauddin. Malala enjoyed exploring nature and learning at school; she enjoyed life. But things began to change rapidly for the worse in 2007 when the Taliban moved in and took control of the valley.

The Taliban is a Muslim terrorist organization and a militant group, which means that it has an army that attacks and takes control of towns and cities. Members of the Taliban have very extreme views on how people should live and are merciless in enforcing this lifestyle on the people living under its control. The Taliban forbids people from listening to music or having celebrations of any kind, even including weddings. The Taliban doesn't believe that women or girls are equal to men and will not let girls or women get an education. Wherever the Taliban takes control, it prevents girls from getting an education by shutting down—and often destroying—girls' schools and forbidding them to learn alongside boys.

Malala's Story

Malala saw this as a call to action—she believed that all children (both boys and girls) have the right to an education and to go to school. In 2008—despite the dangers of doing so—11-year-old Malala gave a speech called, “How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?”

A year later, Malala began blogging for the BBC online, which is a major British news network that has readers all over the world. In her blog, Malala described what it was like to live under the Taliban's rule. Malala wrote her blog under the fake name Gul Makai because if the Taliban found out who was writing the blog, Malala would've been in great danger. Her ploy worked for a time, but later that year, the New York Times featured a short documentary about Malala's fight to protect girls' education in the Swat Valley. The documentary publicly revealed Malala's true identity and the Taliban swiftly named her as one of its main targets despite the fact that she was just a young girl. Apparently, to the Taliban, a young girl with an education is far more dangerous than a man wielding machine guns.

By 2011, the Pakistani army forced the Taliban out of Swat Valley and Malala and her friends were able to return to school. Malala was happy, but nervous—she felt like a walking target—and less than a year later, disaster struck.

In 2012, a masked gunman boarded Malala's school bus and asked which girl was Malala Yousafzai. Unable to help themselves, many of the girls on the bus turned to look at Malala. His target identified, the terrorist moved forward and shot her in the head. Miraculously, Malala survived the attack and was rushed to a local hospital. She was treated for her injuries in Pakistan, but soon after, she was moved to a hospital in England for more advanced surgeries and treatments.

After enduring nearly six months of medical rehabilitation, Malala's doctors deemed her healthy enough to return home and return to school. In the meantime, Malala's story went viral and people all over the world were amazed by the young girl who was brave enough to stand up to the Taliban. Malala began to travel all over the world to meet world leaders, other girls who were fighting for their own educations, and the media.



Malala's Story

Malala became famous for her work in promoting and supporting girls in fighting for the right to get an education. People all over the world were astounded at the global impact that one little girl could make (she wasn't so little anymore, but she was still pretty young!).

In 2013, Malala and her father founded the Malala Fund, an organization that advocates for girls' education worldwide. Malala traveled around the world listening to girls' struggles and advising them on how to stand up for their rights—she called this the Girl Power Trip. She even opened a high school for Syrian refugee girls in Lebanon.

In 2014, Malala was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize—at 17, she was the youngest person in the world ever to receive this prestigious award. However, Malala's work is not done. She still continues to fight for children's rights and girls' rights. In 2016, she launched a campaign to encourage people around the world to support education for girls called #YesAllGirls.

In 2017, 20-year-old Malala was accepted to Oxford University in England. Oxford is one of the world's most prestigious universities. She plans to study subjects that will help her continue to make a difference and help improve the lives of girls all over the world.

Malala meets with President Obama in the Oval Office in 2013



Pete Souza [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

