

The Power of One Girl

Born in Swat Valley, Pakistan, Malala Yousafzai was ten years old when the Taliban came to her village. They created a radio station called Mullah FM, which was highly influential. First, they urged the people to cease listening to music, watching movies, and dancing, and in six months, TVs, DVDs, and CDs were being burned publicly and voluntarily. Slowly, the Taliban crept more and more into the villagers' lives, increasing in power as the people bent to their will. The Taliban's warnings became more personal: they declared that women were only fit to work at home, and if they were to go out, they needed to wear burqas and be accompanied by a male relative. Next, they condemned girls' education, praising girls who had quit school by name on Mullah FM. To enforce these rules, they established a local court in which one of the punishments for offenders was public whipping, something the village had never experienced before.

Soon after, Yousafzai found a letter attached to the gate of her school, Khushal School, that claimed that the institution was "un-Islamic." Yousafzai's father was inspired by a poem he kept in his pocket, written by Martin Niemöller, who had lived during Nazi Germany, and he encouraged Yousafzai and her classmates to stand up against the Taliban's ban on female education. Only eleven years old then, she spoke out against the injustice by appearing in TV interviews, including ones in ATV Khyber, Dawn TV, and Geo. In a BBC Urdu talk show, she asserted, "How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?" While the local journalists were providing her a platform to say the things they themselves were afraid to even utter, the Taliban continued to bomb houses and schools and flog those who violated their laws. When

Yousafzai became more publicly recognized through her peace awards, threats to her became increasingly intense. On Tuesday, October 9, 2012, Yousafzai and her classmates clambered into a white Toyota TownAce truck serving as a school bus. Near an army checkpoint, a man stopped the car and ordered, "Who is Malala?" Then he fired his Colt. 45 three times, the first piercing Yousafzai's left eye socket.

Yousafzai's courageous actions have impacted the world by motivating the world to stand up for what we believe in no matter what our age is. She was a mere eleven-year-old, younger than I am, when she wrote a diary for BBC about how life was like under the oppressive Taliban. She took this risk despite the fact that if her true identity was revealed, she would be subjected to severe ramifications. In addition, Yousafzai has asserted the importance of education, something valuable that students often take for granted. By showing us the struggle in obtaining education in her homeland, she reminds millions of students that school is a blessing that we are fortunate to have. Moreover, she is a role model and an embodiment of peaceful protest for gender equality. Yousafzai highlights how the bullet that wounded her, and violence in general cannot deter her from achieving her goal of education for both girls and boys; instead, they strengthened her ambition even further.

Yousafzai's tangible impacts include spurring all nations to revive the talk about education for all. This is apparent in the United Nations declaring July 12 "Malala Day." Through this revival, she has also influenced the UN to promise to achieve Millennium Development Goal 2, which states that "children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling." Yousafzai accomplished this by starting the Malala Petition, which thousands of people have signed. Lastly, she has

established the Malala Fund, which encourages action upon problems affecting girls globally and advocates for solutions that can be measured.

My goal is to ensure gender equality for future generations. Being a female and a student, I relate to Yousafzai's struggle for equal rights. She has influenced me to try to make a difference in my school community. Recently, I entered in an elocution competition, in which I recited Susan B. Anthony's speech on a woman's right to vote. One of the guidelines of the contest was to choose a formal speech, and I wanted to do something relating to feminism. Anthony's speech was a perfect opportunity to meet the guideline and hopefully spark my classmates' passion for equality as well. Next year, I plan to enter in my school's oratorical contest again, and I'm going to write my own speech about feminism, using Yousafzai as my inspiration and main example. Also, I am applying for the San Francisco Youth Commission in hopes that I will be invited to join and speak up for my beliefs and in doing so, be able to make tangible differences in my community. Yousafzai wonders, "If one man, Fazlaullah, can destroy everything, why can't one girl change it?" in her memoir, *I Am Malala*. This quote, along with her moral courage to act upon it, has lit the fire of passion deep within me to stand up against injustice despite of my fears of being ostracized or jeopardized.