



Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai meets with some of the students of Yerwa Girls School in Maiduguri, Nigeria in 2017.

# Malala Yousafzai: Youngest Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize

by Colette Weil Parrinello

## Blogger at 11

Malala didn't plan on being an anonymous blogger. But when the Taliban threatened her right to learn, the safety of her friends and family, and her school, everything changed.

Her family encouraged her, a girl, to learn and speak freely about the importance of education. When she was 10, the Pakistani Taliban took over the Swat Valley, and her city, Mingora, in northwest Pakistan. The Taliban bombed girls' schools, threatened people, forbade women from going outside, banned TV, cinema, and DVDs, and murdered those who didn't follow their edicts. In December 2008, the Taliban issued a demand—no girls shall go to school. Many students and teachers in Malala's school stayed home out of fear.

Her father, Ziauddin, ran a chain of public schools and was a leading education advocate.

A friend of his at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) asked if there was a teacher or older student who would write a diary about life under the Taliban for its Urdu website. Nobody would do it. Malala overheard her father and said, "Why not me?"

Malala's blog was born under the fake name "Gul Makai," which is the name of a heroine in a Pashtun folk story. Her first entry was on January 3, 2009, and was titled "I am Afraid."

Her blog became a success. She wrote about girls getting an education, her fear of the Taliban and the loss of her school, how much she loved learning, and her worry about her family and friends.

## Identity Revealed and Escape

In January 2009, a *New York Times* documentary film made earlier showed

Malala's and her father's efforts to improve education. By April, her secret identity was accidentally revealed, and her blogging days ended. She continued to speak out about girls education rights in TV interviews, even as her beloved school was closed.

A peace agreement was made with the local government and the Taliban, but the Taliban's treatment worsened—more fights, beatings, killings, and punishment for infractions of their sharia.

Malala and her family fled from the Taliban to a family member's mountain home.

## Going Home

A few months later, Malala and her family returned home. The Taliban had retreated into the mountains. Khushal School was repaired and reopened, and Malala returned to her advocacy, books, friends, and learning.

She received many honors for her activism efforts. She was nominated for the 2011 International Children's Peace Prize by the The KidsRights Foundation, invited to speak at a conference on education in Lahore, Pakistan, and received the 2012 National Peace Award by the Pakistani government (now changed to the National Malala Peace Prize for those under 18 years old).

But Malala and her family continued to be threatened. Her parents were worried, yet Malala insisted on speaking with her father throughout Swat on behalf of girls. Although the Taliban had fled the city, there was still violence in the valley.

## Shot

In October 2012, Malala, 15, was riding on a bus to her home from school. Two men in a white robes stopped the bus and asked if this was the bus to the Khushal School. One of the men boarded. He leaned into the

Malala Yousafzai attends the 2013 Glamour Woman of the Year Awards in New York.





Pakistani teenager Malala Yousafzai, shot by the Taliban for refusing to quit school, received her Nobel Peace Prize in 2014.

back shouting, "Who is Malala?" Then he fired three shots.

Malala was shot in the head. The bullet hit her left brow and moved under her skin along the side of head, and into her shoulder. Two other students were wounded. She was taken immediately to a Pakistani military hospital for delicate surgery and then flown to Birmingham, England, for more operations and rehabilitation. Miraculously, she survived. Her treatment included being fitted with a titanium plate and a cochlear implant in her skull to help her hear. Her friends also recovered.

## Global Outrage

The world cried out at the violence and brutality to children by the Taliban. The Pakistani Taliban claimed credit for the shooting, saying Malala was a "symbol of the infidels and obscenity."

After the shooting, more than two million people in Pakistan signed a petition titled "I am Malala" for the Right to Education campaign. The petition helped the ratification of Pakistan's first Right to Education bill.

Malala was discharged in 2013 and spoke to 500 young people at the United Nations in July. She called for worldwide access to education. *TIME* named her as one of 2013's most influential people. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and won the European Sakharov prize for Freedom of Thought. Then she published her autobiography, *I am Malala*, which became an international best-seller. She and her father also established the nonprofit Malala Fund to champion every girl's right to 12 years of free, safe, quality education.

## Nobel Peace Prize

The 2014 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded jointly to Malala Yousafzai, the youngest person to ever receive the Prize, and Kailash Satyarthi, an Indian child rights activist. This prestigious award recognized their outstanding contributions to children and peace.

Malala and her family live in Birmingham, England. It's not safe for them to return to their home in Pakistan. She attends Oxford's Lady Margaret Hall where she studies politics, philosophy, and economics. She and her father continue to speak and work worldwide for a girl's right to an education and rights for all children.



Colette Weil Parrinello is a frequent contributor to magazines for children.

## You should know

The Taliban is mainly a militant Pashtun movement in areas straddling Pakistan and Afghanistan that came into prominence in 1994. They preach an austere hard-line form of Sunni Islam with their own version of Sharia or Islamic law.

## Apple and Malala

Tim Cook, CEO of Apple Corporation, announced in 2018 a long-term partnership and funding of The Malala Fund to get 100,000 girls into school, focusing on increasing the number of underprivileged girls who get into primary school. The target countries are: Lebanon, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey.

## Sharia Law

Sharia law is the law of Islam. The Sharia (Shari'a or Shariah) is the overall way of life of Islam and the guiding moral principles according to traditional, early interpretations cast from Muhammad's words, called "hadith," his actions called "sunnah," and the Quran, which he dictated. The many schools of Islam and the different societies within which it is practiced interpret these spiritual guidelines.

Nearly two million copies of *I am Malala* have been sold worldwide.

