



COOL4CLIMATE



Ziauddin and Malala Yousafzai

MALALA YOUSAFZAI

12 July 1997. Malala Yousafzai is born in Mingora, the capital of the Swat Valley in the shadow of Pakistan's Hindukush to a family of teachers and social activists. The Swat has always been very traditional. "While boys and men could roam freely about town, my mother and I could not go out without a male relative to accompany us, even if it was a five year-old boy!" she tells us in her autobiography (I am Malala) "I had decided very early I would not be like that. My father always said, 'Malala will be free as a bird!'"

Her father Ziauddin has been pivotal to her story. He has always been passionate about gender equality, particularly in education, which is why early in life, he and a friend founded with practically no financial resources a school (Khushal Public School) that would provide girls with what they considered to be their inalienable right: non-discriminatory education! From a very early age Malala frequented, or as she said, "grew up in" her father's school.

In 2007, the Taliban, a group of religious fundamentalists reach Swat and begin to take control by force. By November, they control most of Swat outside the capital. The Pakistani army tries to push back, but does not succeed. The Taliban leader "kept broadcasting that girls should stay at home and his men had started blowing up schools, usually during night-time curfew when the children were not there."

In 2008, following Pashtun tradition, the local elders gather and found the Swat Council of Elders to challenge the Taliban. Ziauddin becomes Council spokesperson and is daily engaged on its behalf in meetings and the media. Malala too gives interviews to local media, inspired by her father: "I have a father who isn't scared, who stands by me. He said, 'You are a child and it's your right to speak.' The more interviews I gave, the stronger I felt and the more support we received." She accompanies her father to appear on a BBC Urdu talk show in Peshawar questioning "How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?" In October 2008 Ziauddin goes live on Voice of America, condemning the Taliban attacks on schools, over 400 of which had by then been destroyed. At the end of the year, the Taliban announce that from 15 January 2009, all girls schools would be closed and warned girls not to go to school.

Around the same time, Ziauddin receives a call from a BBC radio correspondent in Peshawar who is looking for a female teacher or school girl to write a diary about life under the Taliban. Malala offers to do it and on 3 January 2009 publishes the first entry of the "Diary of a Pakistani schoolgirl" under the pseudonym "Gulmakai" (Cornflower) on BBC Urdu online, and two weeks later on the main BBC news website. The two-part diary, spanning 3 to 22 January, gives a touching account of what life was like under the menace of the Taliban, particularly for women. The focus of the diary is on how the Taliban edict impacts on her education, from going undercover (not wearing school uniform) to the uncertainty about having a school to go to after the holidays starting on 14 January, the day before the deadline of the Taliban edict.

On that day, a TV crew followed Malala to document her last day at school for the website of the New York Times, released 22 of February as "Class Dismissed in Swat Valley".

Although the Taliban revoke their school ban for girls up to Year 4, this is of no help to Malala in Year 5. Still, she goes back to school "dressed in ordinary clothes and hiding our books under our shawls." A couple of weeks thereafter, a peace deal is struck between the government and the Taliban, but "things didn't change much. If anything the Taliban became even more barbaric." Ziauddin is again busy speaking out on people's troubles with the Taliban when at the beginning of May the army launches Operation True Path to drive the Taliban out of Swat, with the result of almost 2 million people fleeing the fighting including Malala and her family: "On 5 May 2009 we became IDPs. Internally displaced persons. It sounded like a disease." They have to move around and stay in various places, including Abbottabad which two years later becomes infamous as the hiding place of Osama bin Laden. After almost three months, the government announces the Taliban have been cleared out of Swat and the family returns to find that the Taliban "had never really left."

Shortly after their return, Khushal Public School is asked to take part in the UNICEF-supported Swat District Child Assembly, where Malala is duly elected speaker. In October 2011, Ziauddin learns that 1984 Nobel Peace Laureate Bishop Desmond Tutu has nominated Malala for the International Children's Peace Prize (which is eventually awarded to her in 2013). In December 2011, she goes to the Prime Minister's Office in Islamabad to be awarded Pakistan's first National Peace Prize, which is to be awarded annually to young people and renamed 'Malala Prize' in her honour. She continues to give TV interviews, in one of which she identified Benazir Bhutto and Barack Obama as among her favorite politicians.

In January 2012 she is invited by a Karachi tv station after it is announced that a government girls secondary school in Karachi is to be named after her. During that visit, her father learns that the Taliban have issued a specific death threat to Malala for "spreading secularism". All through that spring and summer "strangers came to the house asking questions about my family and my father's fellow peace campaigners."

On Monday 9 October 2012, Malala is notoriously shot point blank in the head on her way home from school. The Taliban, in a statement acknowledging the attack, say that she "has been targeted because of her pioneer role in preaching secularism . . . She was young but she was promoting Western culture in Pashtun areas. . .; she was calling President Obama her idol." Critically ill, she is taken first to Peshawar where she has emergency surgery and is put into an induced coma. There is global condemnation of the attack, with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon calling it 'a heinous and cowardly act' and President Obama describing it as 'reprehensible and disgusting and tragic'. "What the Taliban had done was make my campaign global."

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Malala, still critically ill and in a coma, is flown to Birmingham Children's Hospital where she wakes up and is told about the attack 10 days after it happened. On 25 October, Gordon Brown, UN special envoy for education and former UK Prime Minister, launches a petition under the slogan 'I am Malala' demanding no child be denied schooling by 2015, to be presented to Pakistan's President Zardari on 10 November.

In August 2013, after months of surgery and rehabilitation, Malala "determined to continue my fight until every girl could go to school" re-joins her family who have moved to Birmingham. In October, she publishes *I Am Malala: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban*, an autobiographical book co-authored with Christina Lamb.

In 2014 she not only establishes "with my father, who has always been my ally and inspiration" the Malala Fund, a charity dedicated to giving every girl an opportunity to achieve a future she chooses. She also becomes the world's youngest-ever Nobel Laureate when on 10 December she receives the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo.

In April 2017, Malala is designated the youngest-ever UN Messenger of Peace. In October she takes up her place as an undergraduate studying philosophy, politics and economics in Lady Margaret Hall at the University of Oxford.



**We realise the
importance of our
voices only when we
are silenced.**

