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MALALA'S MISSION

The Pakistani teen who survived a horrible attack by Islamist extremists talks with *JS* about her courageous campaign for girls' education

Life changed forever for Malala Yousafzai *(yoo-suf-ZAY)* on October 9, 2012. On her way home from school that day in Pakistan, two members of the **Taliban** flagged down her school bus, and one of the men shot the 15-year-old in the head.

Why? Because Malala, now 17, had been speaking out for girls' rights since 2007, when the Taliban arrived in the Swat Valley, where she lived. The militants banned everything they considered un-Islamic, including TV, music, and education for girls, and they used violence to force people to obey. But Malala refused to give in, and she continued attending school.

Malala survived the attack, and she and her family now live in England. While Malala is a regular teen in many ways—she loves her iPad and struggles with biology—she's gained global recognition as she continues to speak out for the right of girls to attend school. And Pakistan's army recently arrested several militants suspected of being involved in the attack on Malala.

Scholastic editor Alessandra (Ale) Potenza spoke with the young activist on a recent visit to New York City.

Word to Know

- **Taliban** *(n)*: a group of Islamist militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Malala's classmates keep a seat in her honor *(far right)* at her former school in Mingora, Pakistan.

REX FEATURES/AP IMAGES (MALALA); COURTESY OF MALALA YOUSAFZAI (CLASSROOM)

COURTESY OF LITTLE BROWN (MEMOIR); JIM MCMAHON/MAPMAN™ (GLOBE)

JS Pakistan faces many challenges. Why do you think girls' education is an important issue to focus on?

MY In Pakistan, I've seen so many situations in which girls are denied their basic human rights. For example, in 2007 terrorism started in Swat Valley, and women were not allowed to go to markets or to school. More than 400 girls' schools were destroyed. I realized girls' education is something important, and that's why the terrorists are afraid of it—because they do not want women to [be] empowered. That's why I started speaking for it.

JS What do you miss the most about Pakistan?

MY When you go to your hometown, there's this special feeling which [you] don't find in any other place. I miss that feeling. But when I was in Swat Valley, I would see children every day who were not going to school. They were going to other people's houses to clean their dishes, clean their houses. So I really want to go back to Pakistan to help those children and to make sure all children in Pakistan are getting [a] quality education, especially girls.

JS What would you say to the members of the Taliban who tried to kill you?

MY I always say [of] the Taliban that my campaign is not just to speak against them, but my campaign is for education, which definitely goes against their views. So I [would] tell them education is important, and the view they have that education is not allowed in Islam is totally wrong, because in Islam it is said that education is not only each child's right, but it's compulsory. So [the Taliban] should definitely study Islam because I think they don't really [understand] it.

JS What advice do you have for other teens?

MY [Some] teenagers think that speaking up [for] women's rights or human rights is not their job to do. They usually consider themselves as people who have fun [and] take selfies, but I think it's important that teenagers take active roles in speaking up for justice and equality.

The interview and excerpt have been condensed and edited for space.

JS CONTEST

Read the full interview and the rest of the introduction from *I Am Malala* online. How does Malala compare and contrast her life now in England with her past in Pakistan? Use details from the two texts to support your answer. Send us your three-paragraph response. Five winners will each receive a copy of *I Am Malala* and a $25 gift card. Go to www.scholastic.com/js for details.

Ale & Malala

MORE FROM MALALA

Here's an excerpt from the introduction of Malala Yousafzai's new memoir for teens, *I Am Malala*. It describes Malala getting ready for school on the day she was shot.

It was the most ordinary of days. I was 15, in grade nine, and I'd stayed up far too late the night before, studying for an exam.

I'd already heard the rooster crow at dawn but had fallen back to sleep. I'd heard the morning call to prayer from the mosque nearby but managed to hide under my quilt. And I'd pretended not to hear my father come to wake me.

Then my mother came and gently shook my shoulder. "Wake up, *pisho*," she said, calling me *kitten* in Pashto [one of many languages spoken in Pakistan]. "It's 7:30 and you're late for school!" . . .

I gulped down a bit of fried egg and chapati [flatbread] with my tea. My youngest brother, Atal, was in an especially cheeky mood that morning. He was complaining about all the attention I'd received for speaking out about girls getting the same education as boys, and my father teased him a little at the breakfast table.

"When Malala is prime minister someday, you can be her secretary," he said. Atal, the little clown in the family, pretended to be cross. "No!" he cried. "She will be *my* secretary!"

All this banter nearly made me late, and I raced out the door, my half-eaten breakfast still on the table. I ran down the lane just in time to see the school bus crammed with other girls on their way to school. I jumped in that Tuesday morning and never looked back at my home.