About Malala

Malala was born in Swat Valley, more specifically Mingora, situated in the north area of Pakistan. She belongs to a Yousafzai tribe, the Pashtuns, whose main slogan is honor and hospitality. She’s the daughter of a well-educated father, Ziauddin, founder and responsible of the Khushal School, and of a very pious and loving mother, Toor Pekai. Despite being common to prefer a male child instead than a female (the male is able to provide and help the family financially), Malala clearly states how loved she felt from both her parents. Like her father’s mother, she is described as a clever and funny girl. Throughout the book, Malala makes mention of the support and encouragement her father gives about her future. Since a young age, Malala promotes and deeply understands the importance of education, freedom, peace and she has an innate sense of contributing to the betterment of the world. In school, she is a highly competitive top-student, always looking for ways to improve herself.

Malala’s Courage

Malala tastes the radicalism of her society, talking about the false interpretation of Islam made by conservative Islamic scholars, who pushes for girls to be in reclusion in their home and wear burqas. Malala’s father, after being accused of committing blasphemy for letting girls to go to school, stand up for the right of girls to have an education, acting for allowing them to safely study.

Things start changing with the arrival of the Taliban; leader Fazlullah promotes himself as an advocate of justice, promising to bring back the sharia law and bringing hope to many who were tired of how things were run by the Pakistani government. Fazlullah start banning things like music, dance, movies, dresses, and school for girls; he mandates women to stay home and go out only if fully covered and accompanied by a male. The Taliban soon start killing whoever disobeys Fazlullah. Terror start populating the country, there are killings of mosque’s leaders, teachers, dancers, and suicide bombers become more frequent. Politician activist Benazir Bhutto, also get killed. The situation becomes more and more dangerous for girls like Malala. The Taliban soon reach Swat, and war between them and the army erupts. School become the shelter of girls like Malala, who continues being passionate of learning and asking questions. Ziauddin, in the meantime, becomes a promoter for truth and peace, giving speeches and interviews to the BBC; Malala soon follows her father example, and she volunteers to tell how life is under Taliban attack. Malala and her school mates take a trip to Islamabad, where life is much easier than Swat. After some time, Fazlullah decides to let girls under ten to return to school, which is great news for Malala, who pretends to be one year younger to be able to go. In 2009, Malala’s family decides to part, travelling to Shangla, where Malala can go to school. Three months later, they decide to return to Mingora, which is drastically affected by the war. Malala’s home and school mordaciously survived, and she is happy to return to school. She continues to bring awareness throughout the globe, participating in an invitation in Islamabad from a Stafford student who was impressed of Malala’s courage upon watching one of her documentaries from BBC. Malala becomes a recognized face of the resistance to the Taliban, becoming a powerful voice and a well-known speaker, which makes her embark the path of politics to properly help her country. Desmond Tutu nominates her to the international peace prize, the Pakistani government awards her the National Peace Prize, a prestigious recognition that makes her happy. Aware of her influence and power, Malala requests the government to rebuild schools that were destroyed by the Taliban’s. The more outspoken and stronger she becomes, the more she is targeted by the Taliban’s: she starts having frightening feelings, and takes every precautions possible. In October 2012, a man steps into her school bus at the army checkpoint, asks who Malala is, and shoots her.

The Hopeful Present/Life after shooting/Life abroad

Malala was only fifteen years old when she was shot. After the shooting, they rush to take her to the hospital. The news of her shooting reaches her family and many other people in and outside the country, and when her conditions start severely worsening, a British doctor who was in Peshawar decides to take care of her. She starts developing infection and her body organs start leaving her. She is taken to a better hospital in Birmingham, to where she flights on a private jet. Since her family did not have passports, they are not able to accompany her, and they anxiously pray for her recovery. Malala wakes up from an induced coma, far from home and unaware of what happened, nor where her family is. She is filled with questions and is afraid on how her family is going to afford medical expenses. She realizes the left side of her face is paralyzed. Her story reaches many people, who send a lot of messages, cards, and gifts to her, making her feel loved and supported. Malala and her family finally reunite, and Ziauddin notices her face changes, stating that the Taliban store her smile. Malala goes through different operations to fix her paralyzed side of the face and her missing skull; a cochlear implant is used to return hearing to her damaged left ear. President Asif Zardari visits her, giving Ziauddin a diplomatic passport and a job, which allows Malala’s family to remain in England without asking for asylum. He also tells them that Pakistan will pay Malala’s medical expenses. In 2013, Malala leaves the hospital, and is motivated to use her story to contribute to the world. Malala and her family move in a house in Birmingham, which makes her mother experiencing loneliness and Ziauddin feeling like an outsider who did not benefit from the respect and status he built back home. Malala is happy to go back to school, where everyone treats her as a celebrity instead than a teenager like them. However, she remains dedicated on the work, and doesn’t get distracted by the awards and prices she’s being awarded. She wants to be remembered as someone who stood up for education, not as the girl who survived after being shot by a Taliban. Malala is only sixteen years old when she delivers her speech at the United Nations.

Personal Inspiration

I recall watching on the TV Malala’s speech to the United Nations upon receiving the Nobel Price. My mom immediately made remark on how such a young girl impacted the lives of so many people. Since she was pretty much my same age (only two years older), I started making more research on her work and the reason why she became famous. I knew that she was somebody who fought for the freedom of education and peace, but I had no clue on the dynamics that made her become such a big influence. To me it was important the fact that she was recognized a Nobel Price and she was on TV, more than her cause and beliefs. I remember my dad questioning me about her famous statement “One child, one teacher, one pen, and one book can change the world”. My interest and understanding towards her work became stronger as I continued watching her interviews and speeches on YouTube. Her passion and determination made me reflect a lot about things I’ve always given for granted, such as going to school or walking safely outside of my house. I’ve always had an internalized voice that made me want to help other people and bring my contribution to the world. Witnessing the story of Malala shaped my idea of what truly means making a difference, helping me becoming an active member of my community. Malala’s strength and work is something that I will always take inspiration from in times where I feel hopeless or overwhelmed by the circumstances. Her beliefs and her courage remain alive within every girl in the world.

Elements of Malala

There are several elements that have impacted the life of Malala and her personality, such as a scarf, a pencil, a book. Malala remember watching a show about a boy who draws using a magic pencil, and everything he draws turn into life. She internalizes a lot with the pencil, as she would also love to have a magic pencil to realize her dreams. Another big element for Malala is her scarf; throughout her life, she receives critiques about not wearing the hijab(the traditional name of the scarf) in a proper way. She tastes the difficulty of being a women in her community, where a women must properly cover themselves, are sometimes treated with not enough respect and are bounded to speaking to certain people or doing certain things.

[not sure about this part]

In one part of the book, Malala recalls an episode in which she stole jewelry from her friend Safina for revenge, after Safina stole her toy mobile phone; when her parents find out, they explain her that the act of stealing and lying only brings shame to the family. From that moment on, she stopped wearing jewelry. Because her parents’ approval and support matters a lot to her, she participates in a speaking competition, talking about a speech that emphasizes the importance of good deeds and non-violence, winning second-place.