

Unstoppable

by Suzy Hopkins

For 15-year-old Malala Yousafzai, October 9, 2012 seemed like other days in the hot town of Mingora, Pakistan. She was riding the school bus home when it was stopped by a man from the Taliban, the Islamic fundamentalist militant group. He asked the school children, "Which one of you is Malala? Speak up; otherwise I will shoot you all." She was identified by her peers and was shot in the head.

After being airlifted to a military hospital in Peshawar, Pakistan she remained unconscious and in critical condition. When her condition improved she was flown to the United Kingdom for intensive rehabilitation. A team of doctors travelled with her and Pakistan paid for the treatment.

Why was she shot?

In 2008, when she was 11, she spoke in Peshawar, to the local press club saying, "How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?" They had closed the girls' schools frequently during her education. Her entire speech was covered by newspapers and television channels throughout the region.

On January 3, 2009, at the age of 12, The British Broadcasting Corporation asked her to write about life under the Taliban. She would pass handwritten notes to a BBC reporter who would scan and e-mail them.

In her home town, the Taliban stated that as of January 15, 2009 no girls could attend school. They blew up hundreds of girls' schools including the one her father owned.

In July 2009, after many death threats received by her and her father, she met with President Obama's special representative to Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke. Malala asked him to intervene in the situation. Nothing could be done.

A documentary about her life was created by an American. At the age of 13 she appeared on local television to publically advocate for girls' education.

On December 19, 2011 she was awarded Pakistan's first National Youth Peace Prize.

In November 2012 *Foreign Policy* magazine named her as one of the 100 top global thinkers even though she was only 15.

A month later she was shortlisted for *Time's* person of the year and was included in the magazine's "100 Most Influential People In The World".

Less than a year after the attack, on July 12, 2013, she celebrated her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday by giving a speech at the U.N. on what had been named "Malala Day". She said, "The terrorists thought

they would change my aims and stop my ambitions, but nothing changed in my life except this: weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage was born. So here I stand... one girl among many. I speak – not for myself, but for all girls and boys. I raise up my voice – not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard ... One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world.”

In 2014 she was a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize along with a children’s rights activist from India. At 17 she was the youngest person to have won this award.

She is a speaker for the Women’s Lecture Series called Unique Lives and Experiences this June in two United States appearances in San Jose, California and Denver.

A spokesman for the Taliban said they would target her again since she “is a symbol of the infidels and obscenity.” Ironically the word Taliban comes from the Arabic *talib* which means student.