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April 6, 2017

### Malala's Activism

When an individual goes through certain obstacles in their life that leave a big impact it could often lead to wanting to help others that went through the same situation. This is what happens with Malala Yousafzai. Malala was a young girl that lived in Swat Valley in a town named Mingora. In Swat she lived with her family; her father Ziauddin, her mother Toor Pekai, and her two brothers Khushal and Atal. Her father owned a school named Khushal school, which had to do with Malala's love for education. Malala loved school with a passion that her life seemed to revolve around it. When a group named the Taliban came to Swat her education was put at risk. The Taliban didn't want girls going to school because they thought it was un-Islamic. Of course, Malala and her father didn't agree with the Taliban, so they started speaking out against them. Malala's activism was created and influenced by her father when he would fight for education issues and for the people of Swat's rights, as well her name being inspired by a heroine Malalai Maiwand and the problems caused in Swat by the Taliban. All these experiences inspired Malala to write her memoir named *I Am Malala*.

When Malala was born her father Ziauddin knew that she was going to be a special person. He never treated her less than her brothers just because she was a woman. In their Pashtun culture when women are born they are not celebrated like when men are born. But her father celebrated her even though it was against their culture. He was the one that named her Malala, which was inspired by a heroine in Afghanistan, Malalai Maiwand. Malalai was with her father and fiancé in the battle of Afghanistan and the British in 1800. She helped defeat the British with her bravery. In her memoir Malala states, "She saw the men were losing, and when the

flagbearer fell she lifted her white veil up high and marched onto the battlefield in front of the troops (pg14).” Malalai inspired the troops by telling them not to give up but then was killed under fire. Malalai was seen as a brave woman that was willing to risk her life to help others. Bravery was what Malalai had and was recognized for and Malalai's father wanted his daughter to have those traits in her name. Little did Malalai's father know that later on she would risk her life to fight for others rights and have her own inspiring story of bravery.

Ziauddin, Malalai's father, was a person that inspired her to fight for her rights. He was an activist for people's rights and I think that his passion influenced Malalai. Ziauddin started his activism in college and continued when he started to settle down with his family in Swat. He was an outspoken man that wasn't afraid to speak out on issues that others were afraid to. Malalai in her memoir talks about how he used to help with the issues that Swat had and how recognized her was. Her father was well known not just for speaking out but his speeches and poems about peace and love. Malalai gives an example of her father's urge to help people by writing, “He and his friends set up some thing called the Global Peace Council which, despite its name had very local concerns...the organization's aim was serious to preserve the environment of Swat and promote peace and education among local people (Pg. 84-5).” She explains how involved her father was to attack issues in his local community. Her father also spoke out and got threats not just for going against the Taliban but having girls in his school. Malalai got her activist qualities, as you can see, from her father. She fights for what she believes is right, which is education for every child but specifically girls.

When the Taliban took over Swat every belief was turned around. It all started with a radio station Mullah FM, that was hosted by a leader of the Taliban named Fazlullah. Fazlullah started saying that women could not go outside without men that were relatives or uncovered.

The women in Swat had to wear a veil every time they were outside. Fazlullah would often say on his radio show that he only wanted to speak to the women and the men should step outside. He also prohibited DVD's and TV's. He made the local people throw away all of their electronics. Malala's family didn't throw their TV away but were really careful about not being caught. Later on Fazlullah attacked people who let girls go to school. He made threats to Ziauddin's school because he let girls and boys go to his school. Malala didn't understand how Fazlullah didn't want girls going to school because based on her understanding of the Quran it didn't make women less than men. But, the Taliban won the battle and at some point all Swat schools that let girls get an education were shut down. When this happened Malala was devastated. Her and her father started doing interviews to get the public to know what the Taliban had done. Malala was being more outspoken at that time and the Taliban took notice. She wrote for a website about the Taliban taking over and how much it had affected Swat. When all this was happening she started to get a new appreciation for her education. She wrote in her memoir, "Though we loved school, we hadn't realized how important education was until the Taliban tried to stop us. Going to school, reading and doing our homework wasn't just a way of passing time, it was our future (pg. 146)." Malala wanted to keep going to school and be able to have a future. Her father supported her by going with her to her speeches and interviews. Together they were a team and they planned to make a change.

Malala and everyone knew that being an activist brought exposure and threat from the Taliban. But she still did interviews talking about girl's education and the Taliban took notice and were not too pleased. The Taliban later was defeated and the children were able to go back to school. But no one noticed that the Taliban were still around and had kept tabs on Malala. On the month of October 2012, when she was in the bus going to school the bus got stopped in one

of the army check points. There a man asked who Malala was and then shot her in her face. Malala didn't exactly know what was going on but only remembered thinking about a revision she had the next day. Malala survived after a life and death situation, but was at risk of losing her life.

Malala after went on with her life and is still outspoken about girl's education. She started her own foundation called the Malala foundation. The foundation is designed to provide education for every girl up until the 12<sup>th</sup> year. Malala being an activist was inspired by her father, Malalai Maiwand, and the Taliban. She did what everyone was afraid to do at the time the Taliban took over Swat; she went against them. Her father was her role model to do so because he always spoke out on the issues that were important to him. Even though, Malala risked her life for the rights of girls she helped a lot of girls now have an education. Malala's story was inspiring to see that one doesn't have to be a well known person to make a change. One doesn't have to have the power or the money to speak out and be heard. Malala was just a civilian like most of us and spoke out on what she believed in. She was brave and took a risk that she knew would cause her life. She took it because she believed she could make a change no matter the obstacles she had to face. She took all the threats the Taliban gave her and the hate of other people saying she was going against her beliefs. Malala carried all that on her shoulders and didn't give up. That is something to admire and look up to.

Upon reading Malala's memoir I had observations and realizations. Before reading her story I never really thought about how different education could be in different countries. I learned that education is a right that every human being should have and no one should be able to interfere with that right. When Malala started sharing her experience about how the simple fact of being a women affected how she was treated it made me realize that the gender inequality is

still an issue that needs to be addressed. Whether one is a woman or man it should not affect what education or opportunities one should have. Malala in Swat was prevented to get an education, while her brothers were required to be educated just for being men. Malala's whole story was fascinating to learn and be able to make connections to my own life. I know that my life in America is way different than hers, but one connection I made was the issue of gender discrimination. Where I live and in other countries this is an issue that is still present. Malala's memoir brought that issue to light and made me realize that there is still change to be made. Her story also shows that not every situation or obstacle has to stay as a bad memory, but it can be turned into an inspiration to make a change. Her memoir inspired me to open myself to learn about issues that need to be addressed and I hope that it also inspired and affected others in a positive way.

#### Work Cited

Lamb, Christina, and Yousafzai. *I Am Malala*, Little Brown and Company, 2015, New York.