Malala's MISSION

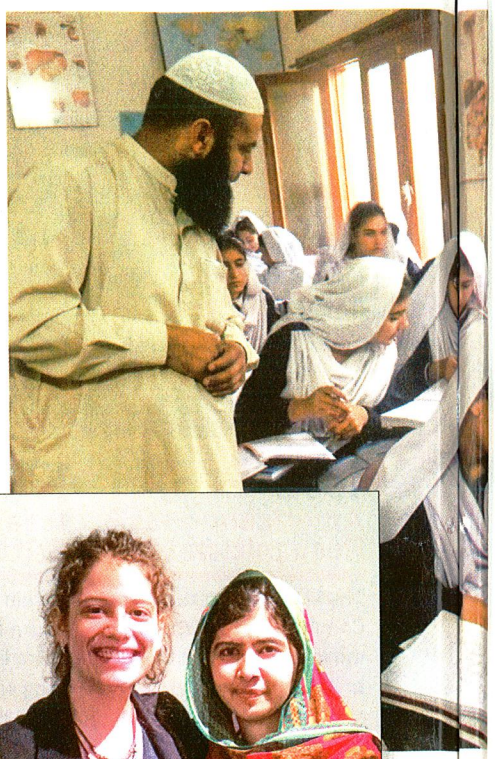
The outspoken Pakistani teen shot by the Taliban in 2012 won the Nobel Peace Prize last month. She talks with *Upfront* about her campaign for girls' education.

BY ALESSANDRA POTENZA

Life changed forever for 15-year-old Malala Yousafzai on Oct. 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 her in the head.

Why? Because Malala had been speaking out for girls' rights since 2008, after the Taliban took over Swat Valley, where she lived. The Islamic militants came from neighboring Afghanistan, where they'd been battling U.S. troops since 2001. In Swat, they imposed their harsh interpretation of Islamic law, banning TV, music, and girls' education. But Malala refused to give in, and she continued attending school and speaking out.

Malala, now 17, survived the attack, and she and her family fled to England. While Malala is a regular teen in many ways—she loves her iPad and struggles with biology—she continues to speak out for the right of girls everywhere to go to school. Last month, she became the youngest person to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.



Upfront spoke with Malala during her recent visit to New York City, where she was promoting her new book for teens, *I Am Malala (see "More From Malala")*.

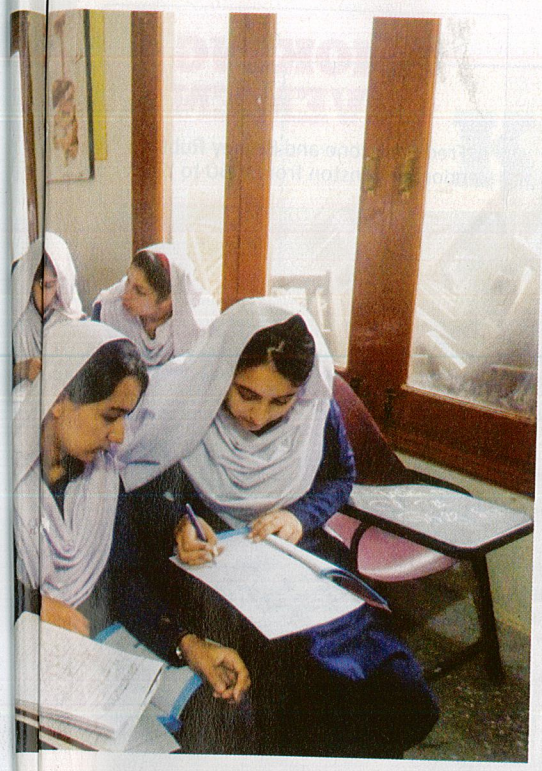
Upfront Pakistan faces many challenges. Why do you think girls' education is an important issue to focus on?

Malala 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.

REX FEATURES/AP IMAGES (MALALA YOUSAFZAI); LITTLE, BROWN BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS (CLASSROOM, BOOK COVER)

Watch a video on Malala at www.upfrontmagazine.com

Listen to our interview with Malala at www.upfrontmagazine.com



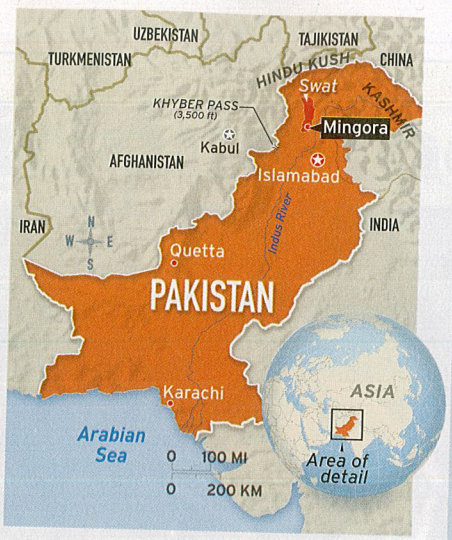
Malala's classmates keep a seat in her honor *(above right)* at her old school in Mingora, Pakistan; *Upfront* editor Alessandra Potenza and Malala in New York in August *(left)*.

Upfront What do you miss the most about Pakistan?

Malala 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.

Upfront What's your life like in England?

Malala England is a very nice country, [but] it's quite difficult for me to get used to the cold weather. Other than that, I have a very good school. I'm very happy that I'm getting a quality education, because the schools in Pakistan are totally different from the schools in Birmingham. In the U.K., you can find libraries, science labs, and computer labs in every school, and you can find teachers who can help you all the time. You don't have to sit on the floor in a building where there's no toilet and wait for the teacher. When I go back to Pakistan I will start schools for my friends and the daughters and sons of our nation.



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

Malala 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. 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 know about it yet.

Upfront What advice do you have for other teens?

Malala [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 against injustice and inequality. •

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

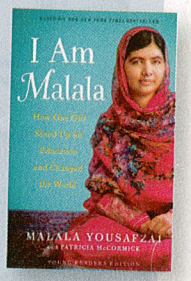
MAP: JIM MCMAHON

More From MALALA

In an excerpt from her new memoir for teens, Malala describes 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.