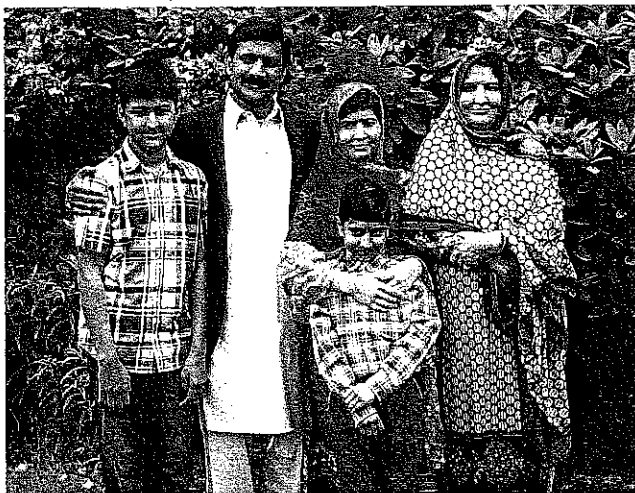


COVER STORY

The Bravest Girl in the World

Last year, the Taliban shot Malala Yousafzai in the head for daring to speak about the need for girls' education in Pakistan. She survived—and she's still talking.





Malala and her family outside their new home in Birmingham, England



Pakistani students with pictures of Malala in the days after her shooting

Usman Ali, the driver, who we called Bhai Jan, or "Brother." He made us all laugh with his crazy stories.

I had started taking the bus because my mother was scared of me walking on my own. We had been getting threats all year. Some were in the newspapers, some were notes or messages passed on by people.

Imagining a Terrorist

My mother was worried about me, but the Taliban had never come for a girl and I was more concerned they would target my father, as he was always speaking out against them. His close friend and fellow campaigner, Zahid Khan, had been shot in the face in August on his way to prayers and I knew everyone was telling my father, "Take care, you'll be next."

Our street could not be reached by car, so coming home I would get off the bus on the road below and go through a barred iron gate and up a flight of stairs. I always thought if anyone attacked me it would be on those steps.

Like my father I've always been a daydreamer, and sometimes in lessons my mind would drift and I'd imagine that on the way home a terrorist might jump out and shoot me on those steps. I wondered what I would do. Maybe I'd take off my shoes and hit him, but then I'd think if I did that there would be no difference between me and a terrorist. It would be better to plead, "OK, shoot me, but first listen to me. What you are doing is wrong. I'm not against you personally, I just want every girl to go to school."

I wasn't scared, but I had started making sure the gate was locked at night and asking God what happens when you die. I told my best friend Moniba everything.

Education in Pakistan

Percentage of Pakistani children (ages 7-16) who have never gone to school

25%

Percentage of Pakistani schools that have electricity

39%

LITERACY RATE

Men:

Women:

69% 40%

(U.S.: 99%, men & women)

SOURCES: UNESCO, THE WORLD FACTBOOK 2013 (C.I.A.), "THE STATE OF PAKISTAN'S CHILDREN REPORT 2011"

**'Don't worry,'
I told her. 'The Taliban
have never come for
a small girl.'**

We'd lived on the same street when we were little and been friends since primary school and we shared everything—from Justin Bieber songs and *Twilight* movies to the best face-lightening creams.

Moniba's dream was to be a fashion designer. She knew her family would never agree to it, so she told everyone she wanted to be a doctor. It's hard for girls in our society to be anything other than teachers or doctors if they can work at all.

I was different. I never hid my desire when I changed from wanting to be a doctor to wanting to be an inventor or a politician. Moniba always knew if something was wrong. "Don't worry," I told her. "The Taliban have never come for a small girl."

'Who Is Malala?'

The bus was actually what we call a dyna, a white Toyota truck with three parallel benches, one along either side and one in the middle. It was cramped with 20 girls and three teachers. I was sitting on the left between Moniba and a girl from the year below called Shazia Ramzan, holding our exam folders to our chests and our school bags under our feet.

After that it is all a bit hazy. The bus stopped. We couldn't see in front, but a young bearded man in light-colored clothes had stepped into the road and waved the van down.

Another young man in white approached the back of the van. "Look, it's one of those journalists coming to ask for an interview," said Moniba.

Since I'd started speaking at events with my father to campaign for girls' education and against those like the Taliban

ANTONIO OLIVOS (LEFT); FAREED KHAN/AP PHOTO (RIGHT)