

Excerpts from *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai

Tuesday, Oct. 9, 2012, wasn't the best of days to start with, as it was the middle of exams—though as a bookish girl I didn't mind them as much as some of my classmates did. That morning we arrived in the narrow mud lane off Haji Baba Road in our usual procession of brightly painted rickshaws sputtering diesel fumes, each one crammed with five or six girls. Since the time of the Taliban, our school has had no sign and the ornamented brass door in a white wall gives no hint of what lies beyond.

For us girls, that doorway was like a magical entrance to our own special world. As we skipped through, we cast off our head scarves and ran helter-skelter up the steps. At the top of the steps was an open courtyard with doors to all the classrooms. We dumped our backpacks in our rooms, then gathered for assembly under the sky, our backs to the mountains.

The school was founded by my father before I was born, and on the wall above us, "Khushal School" was painted proudly in red and white letters. We went to school six mornings a week, and as I was in Year 9, my classes were spent chanting chemical equations or studying Urdu grammar, writing stories in English with morals like "Haste makes waste" or drawing diagrams of blood circulation—most of my classmates wanted to be doctors. It's hard to imagine that anyone would see that as a threat. Yet outside the school lay not only the noise and craziness of Mingora, the main city of the province of Swat, but also those, like the Taliban, who think girls should not go to school.

Because it was exam time, school started at 9 instead of 8 that morning, which was good, as I don't like getting up and can sleep through the crows of the roosters and the prayer calls of the muezzin. Malala as a toddler with her brother Khushal in Mingora, Pakistan.

I slept in the room at the front of our house. The only furniture was a bed and a cabinet that I had bought with the money I'd been given as an award for campaigning for peace in our valley and the right for girls to go to school. On some shelves were the gold-colored plastic cups and trophies I had won for coming first in my class. There were a few times I had not come out on top—both times I was beaten by my class rival, Malka-e-Noor. I was determined it would not happen again.

The school was not far from my home and I used to walk, but since the start of the last year I had been going with other girls in a rickshaw and coming home by bus. It was a journey of five minutes along the stinky stream, past the giant billboard for Dr. Humayun's Hair Transplant Institute, where we joked that one of our bald male teachers must have gone when he suddenly started to sprout hair. I liked riding the bus because I didn't get as sweaty as when I walked, and I could chat with my friends and gossip with Usman Ali, the driver, whom we called Bhai Jan, or "brother." He made us all laugh with his crazy stories.

I had started taking the bus because my mother worried about me walking on my own. We had been getting threats all year. Some were in the newspapers, and some were messages passed on by people. I was more concerned the Taliban would target my father, as he was always speaking out against them. His friend and fellow campaigner Zahid Khan had been shot in the face in August on his way to prayers.

Our street could not be reached by car. I would get off the bus on the road below, go through an iron gate and up a flight of steps. Sometimes I'd imagine that 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 that if I did that, there would be no difference between me and a terrorist. It would be better to plead, "Okay, 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. We'd lived on the same street when we were little and had been friends since primary school. We shared Justin Bieber songs and Twilight movies, the best face-lightening creams. Moniba always knew if something was wrong. "Don't worry," I told her. "The Taliban have never come for a small girl."

When our bus was called, we ran down the school steps. The bus was actually a white Toyota truck with three parallel benches. It was cramped with 20 girls and three teachers. I was sitting on the left between Moniba and a girl named Shazia Ramzan, all of us holding our exam folders to our chests.

Inside the bus it was hot and sticky. In the back, where we sat, there were no windows, just plastic sheeting, which was too yellowed to see through. All we could see out the back was a little stamp of open sky and glimpses of the sun, a yellow orb floating in the dust that streamed over everything.

Then we suddenly stopped. A young bearded man had stepped into the road. "Is this the Khushal School bus?" he asked our driver. Usman Bhai Jan thought this was a stupid question, as the name was painted on the side. "Yes," he said.

"I need information about some children," said the man. "You should go to the office," said Usman Bhai Jan. As he was speaking, another young man 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, journalists often came, though not like this, in the road.

The man was wearing a peaked cap and had a handkerchief over his nose and mouth. Then he swung himself onto the tailboard and leaned in over us. "Who is Malala?" he demanded.

No one said anything, but several of the girls looked at me. I was the only girl with my face uncovered.

That's when he lifted up a black pistol. Some of the girls screamed. Moniba tells me I squeezed her hand.

My friends say he fired three shots. The first went through my left eye socket and out under my left shoulder. I slumped forward onto Moniba, blood coming from my left ear, so the other two bullets hit the girls next to me. One bullet went into Shazia's left hand. The third went through her left shoulder and into the upper right arm of Kainat Riaz.

My friends later told me the gunman's hand was shaking as he fired.

I woke up on Oct. 16, a week after the shooting. I had been flown from Pakistan to the U.K. while unconscious and without my parents. I was thousands of miles away from home with a tube in my neck to help me breathe and unable to speak.

The first thing I thought when I came around was, 'Thank God I'm not dead.' But I had no idea where I was. I knew I was not in my homeland. The nurses and doctors were speaking English, though they all seemed to be from different countries. I was speaking to them, but no one could hear me because of the tube in my neck. To start with, my left eye was very blurry and everyone had two noses and four eyes. All sorts of questions flew through my waking brain: Where was I? Who had brought me there? Where were

my parents? Was my father alive? I was terrified. Dr. Javid Kayani, deputy medical director of University Hospitals Birmingham who had been in Islamabad when I was shot and was the reason I was now in Birmingham, was there when I was brought around and says he will never forget the look of fear and bewilderment on my face.

He spoke to me in Urdu. The only thing I knew was that Allah had blessed me with a new life. A nice lady in a headscarf held my hand and said, “Asalaamu alaikum,” which is our traditional Muslim greeting. Then she started saying prayers in Urdu and reciting verses of the Quran. She told me her name was Rehanna and she was the Muslim chaplain. Her voice was soft and her words were soothing, and I drifted back to sleep.

I dreamed I wasn’t really in hospital. When I woke again the next day, I noticed I was in a strange green room with no windows and very bright lights. It was an intensive-care cubicle in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Everything was clean and shiny, not like the hospital in my hometown, Mingora. A nurse gave me a pencil and a pad, but I couldn’t write properly and the words came out wrong. I wanted to write my father’s phone number. I couldn’t space letters. Dr. Javid brought me an alphabet board so I could point to the letters. The first words I spelled out were father and country. The nurse told me I was in Birmingham, but I had no idea where that was. Only later did they bring me an atlas so I could see it was in England. I didn’t know what had happened. The nurses weren’t telling me anything. Even my name. Was I still Malala?

My head was aching so much that even the injections they gave me couldn’t stop the pain. My left ear kept bleeding and my left hand felt funny. Nurses and doctors kept coming in and out. Then a kind lady called Dr. Fiona came and gave me a white teddy bear. She said I should call it Junaid and she would explain why later. [Colonel Junaid Kahn was an army surgeon who had performed emergency brain surgery on me in the military hospital in Peshawar, where I was first brought after being shot in the head.] I didn’t know who Junaid was, so I named it Lily. She also brought me a pink exercise book to write in. The first two questions my pen wrote were “Why have I no father?” and “My father has no money. Who will pay for all this?”

“Your father is safe,” she replied. “He is in Pakistan. Don’t worry about payment.” I repeated the questions to anyone who came in. They all said the same. But I was not convinced. I had no idea what had happened to me, and I didn’t trust anyone. If my father was fine, why wasn’t he here? I thought I had been shot but wasn’t sure — were these dreams or memories? It was only later I learned that people were not supposed tell me anything, as the doctors were worried it could traumatize me.

I was also obsessed by money. Whenever I saw the doctors talking to one another I thought they were saying, “Malala doesn’t have any money. Malala can’t pay for her treatment.” One of the doctors was a Polish man who always looked sad. I thought he was the owner of the hospital and was unhappy because I couldn’t pay. So I gestured at a nurse for paper and wrote, “Why are you sad?” He replied, “No, I am not sad.” “Who will pay?” I wrote. “We don’t have any money.” “Don’t worry, your government will pay,” he said. Afterward he always smiled when he saw me.

I was worried my father could be dead. Then Fiona brought in a Pakistani newspaper from the week before which had a photograph of my father talking to General Kayani with a shawled figure sitting at the back next to my brother. I could just see her feet. “That’s my mother!” I wrote. Later that day Dr. Javid came in with his mobile phone. “We’re going to call your parents,” he said. My eyes shone with excitement. “You won’t cry, you won’t weep,” he instructed me. He was gruff but very kind, like he had known me forever. “I will give you the mobile and be strong.” I nodded. He dialed the number, spoke and then gave me the phone.

There was my father's voice. I couldn't talk because of the tube in my neck. But I was so happy to hear him. I couldn't smile because of my face, but it was as if there were a smile inside. "I'll come soon," he promised. "Now have a rest and in two days we will be there." Later he told me that Dr. Javid had also ordered him not to cry, as that would make us all sadder. The doctor wanted us to be strong for each other.

A few days later, I asked for a mirror. "Mirror," I wrote in the pink diary — I wanted to see my face and hair. The nurses brought me a small white mirror, which I still have. When I saw myself, I was distraught. My long hair, which I used to spend ages styling, had gone, and the left side of my head had none at all. "Now my hair is small," I wrote in the book. I thought the Taliban had cut it off. In fact the Pakistani doctors had shaved my head with no mercy. My face was distorted like someone had pulled it down on one side, and there was a scar to the side of my left eye.

"Who did this to me?" I wrote, my letters still scrambled. "What happened to me?" I also wrote "Stop lights," as the bright lights were making my head ache.

"Something bad happened to you," said Dr. Fiona.

"Was I shot? Was my father shot?" I wrote.

She told me that I had been shot on the school bus. She said two of my friends on the bus had also been shot, but I didn't recognize their names. She explained that the bullet had entered through the side of my left eye where there was a scar, traveled 18 in. down to my left shoulder and stopped there. It could have taken out my eye or gone into my brain. It was a miracle I was alive.

I felt nothing, maybe just a bit satisfied. "So they did it." My only regret was that I hadn't had a chance to speak to them before they shot me. Now they'd never hear what I had to say. I didn't even think a single bad thought about the man who shot me — I had no thoughts of revenge — I just wanted to go back to Swat. I wanted to go home.