

Nobel Prize winner Malala and novelist discuss building peace with words

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Nobel Peace Prize recipient Malala Yousafzai (center) waves while being introduced at a ceremony for the 70th anniversary of the United Nations in San Francisco, California, June 26, 2015.

Photo: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu

Seventeen-year-old Malala Yousafzai is the [world's youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner](#). On June 26 she came to speak at San Jose State University. As she walked onstage to a standing ovation, the first words she said to the roaring crowd were "Thank you." A 4,000-strong audience of young and old had gathered to hear from Malala. Girls held her book, "I Am Malala." Parents whispered her story into the ears of their children.

Malala grew up in the Swat Valley region of Pakistan. Her area had come under the control of a hard-line Islamic group known as the Taliban. The Taliban believes that women should not go out in public alone or work outside the home. They also believe that girls should not get an education.

Malala first began pushing against the Taliban's rules when she was only 11 years old. After the Taliban started shutting down schools for girls, she began writing blog posts for the news company BBC Urdu. Her online diary entries were written under the pen name "Gul Makai" and were soon widely read. They described life under Taliban occupation from the point of view of a young girl forbidden to go to school. Once it became known that she was "Gul Makai," Malala began speaking out in public.

Girl Was Shot After Speaking Out

On Oct. 9, 2012, when Malala was 15, the Taliban attempted to silence her forever — with three bullets to the head. The attack captured the world's attention. Malala was airlifted to a military hospital in Peshawar, Pakistan, and then to England. She recovered fully and since then has continued to campaign for girls' education. Malala now speaks about her mission throughout the world. She leads the Malala Fund, a group that fights to give girls in Pakistan and around the world the right to get an education.

Malala appeared at the university in San Jose with Afghan-American novelist Khaled Hosseini. In his introduction to their conversation, Hosseini said that the gunman had "technically shot the girl he was meant to shoot. But in every other way, he shot the wrong girl."

During the hourlong conversation, Malala was both wise and funny.

"There has always been this fear that if you give girls education, then girls will get out of control," she said. "You have the right to education, and you have the right to discover more in life."

She also joked that in her family, her brothers think she is treated better than they are. "I think that's fine," she said, with a smile.

Father Inspired Fight For Education

Malala described how girls in Pakistan are routinely treated as less important than boys. It even shows up at the dinner table, she said. "Boys would get the chest piece and the leg piece of the chicken, while girls would get the wings and the neck."

Malala said her fight for girls' education was inspired by her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai. He ran a chain of private schools that admitted poorer children for free. He welcomed 150 children whose parents could not afford to pay, even though some of the richer parents complained that they did not want their children mixing with poor children.

"He's always been an inspiring father," Malala said, asking him to stand up from his front-row seat.

Like all 17-year-olds, though, she does sometimes argue with her father. "We had a fight in the car" on the way to the talk, she told Hosseini.

Tour Looks For Support In U.S.

Hosseini then asked Malala why she decided to speak up through her blog entries and public appearances.

"If you remain in silence, you will continue to live in terrorism," Malala said. "Or you speak up." The results are "hard" either way, but it is better to fight back, she said.

The teenage activist is currently touring the United States with her father. Her group, the Malala Fund, is trying to get countries to promise to provide 12 years of free education for all children by 2030.

On Tuesday, Malala made her first visit to Congress, where she met with lawmakers. Malala talked about the importance of U.S. support for the Global Partnership for Education, an international effort to improve education worldwide. She also praised first lady Michelle Obama's ["Let Girls Learn" initiative](#).

"Nobel Prize Winner Malala and Novelist Discuss Building Peace with Words." *Newsela*. 12 July 2015. Web. 19 Sept. 2015.

The Nobel prizes are named after Alfred Nobel, a Swedish scientist, and designed to honor people who have helped humankind in some way. Do you believe Malala is deserving of the Nobel Peace Prize? Include evidence to support your opinion.

*Paragraph format, refer to your rubric.