

family is, in fact, deeply religious, but the Taliban do not tolerate any form of Islam that differs from its own.

School Ban

In January 2009, the Taliban ordered all girls' schools to close. That included Malala's school, which her father had owned for more than a decade. It was devastating news. School was one of the most important parts of Malala's life—and a luxury she never took for granted. After all, fewer than half the girls in rural Pakistan had the opportunity to receive any education at all.

Despite the Taliban's order, Malala's father decided to keep his school open. This was incredibly dangerous, especially because the Taliban were gaining popularity in Swat. Some residents saw them as a welcome alternative to Pakistan's government and military, which

have been **plagued** by corruption.

From then on, Malala and her family lived under constant threat. Across the region, hundreds of schools were being bombed. Teachers were being murdered. Malala and her classmates stopped wearing their school uniforms and began hiding their books under their clothing. Staying alive meant going to school had to be top secret. Even with these precautions, many parents felt the risk was too great. Attendance at Malala's school decreased by more than 60 percent.

But what could Malala do?

What could one girl do but watch helplessly as her freedoms were taken away?

A Powerful Weapon

It turns out, there was something she could do. Malala possessed a weapon of her own: her voice. And she would risk everything to use it.

In 2009, she began blogging for the British Broadcasting Company's (BBC) Urdu site about what her life was like under the Taliban. (Urdu is an official language of Pakistan.) To protect her identity, she used a **pseudonym**. She wrote about her dream of becoming a doctor one day, her fears of the terrorists, and her fierce determination to get the education she needed, no matter what the Taliban did or how afraid she was.

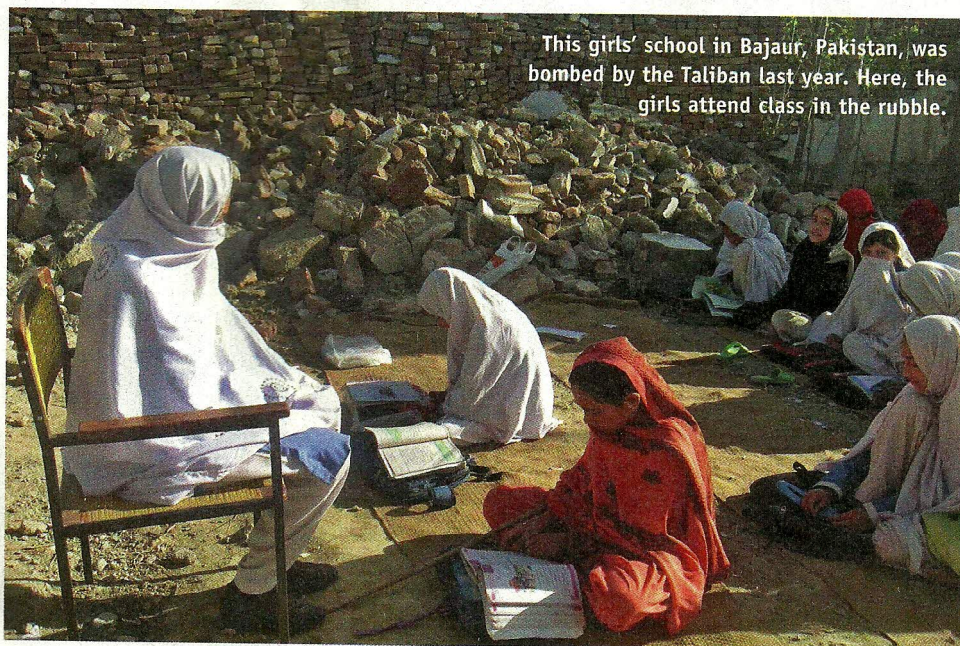
And indeed, fear was her constant companion. "On my way from school to home I heard a man saying, 'I will kill you,'" she wrote in one blog entry. "I hastened my pace and after a while I looked back [to see] if the man was still coming behind me. But to my utter relief he was talking on his mobile and must have been threatening someone else over the phone."

The blog was an instant hit; soon, people all over the world

were reading it. Malala was helping to focus attention on what was happening in Swat. Outrage grew, and many in Pakistan and around the world criticized the Pakistani government for allowing the Taliban to become so powerful.

A Crusade

In May 2009, the Pakistani army launched a full-scale attack against the Taliban in Swat. Along with millions of refugees, Malala



This girls' school in Bajaur, Pakistan, was bombed by the Taliban last year. Here, the girls attend class in the rubble.

QUEEN ELIZABETH HOSPITAL BIRMINGHAM/REUTERS. MAP BY JIM MCMAHON/MAPMAN™
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