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## Celebrating Women Who Tell Our Stories Highlighting Malala Yousafzai for Women's History Month

8 March 2023



United Nations | <https://www.un.org/en/messengers-peace/malala-yousafzai>

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**PATRICK SPACE FORCE BASE, Fla.** — Since 1987, the month of March has been annually observed as Women's History Month, a celebration of women's contributions to history, culture, and society. This year's WHM theme, Celebrating Women Who Tell Our Stories, recognizes women who have devoted their lives to telling stories through all forms of media and who have given a voice to those from all walks of life.

The Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute celebrates the 2023 WHM observance by recognizing a modern-day example of one woman's contribution, female education activist Malala Yousafzai. Yousafzai is a young woman whose devotion to expand education, basic rights, and equality for young girls and courage in the face of adversity continues to inspire peace across the world. She is the youngest person to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She also survived a Taliban attack meant to end her life.

Yousafzai was born in Mingora, Pakistan, on July 12, 1997. She developed a thirst for knowledge as a young girl, pretending to be a teacher like her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, who ran a girls' school in the village of Swat Valley, Mingora.



In 2007, the Khushal Girls High School and College in Swat Valley, where 10-year-old Yousafzai attended, was invaded by the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, also known as Pakistani Taliban. The invaders took control of the valley and quickly began imposing strict Islamic Law, which impacted women's rights and their place within society.

In a year's time, the Pakistani Taliban had shut down and destroyed girls' schools, preventing young girls from receiving an education, and banned them from active roles in society. The Taliban also prevented girls from participating in cultural activities like dancing and watching television. Shortly after, Yousafzai's family left Mingora fearing for their safety.

"I was just 11 years old, I said goodbye to my classmates, not knowing when — if ever — I would see them again," said Malala, according to the Malala Fund website.

Yousafzai, after having endured more than a year of discrimination, became a determined critic of the Taliban's terror. Accompanied by her father, she attended a local press club in Peshawar, Pakistan's sixth most populated city, to advocate for all girls.

"How Dare the Taliban Take Away My Basic Right to Education?" Yousafzai said during her speech, which was publicized throughout Pakistan.

She continued advocating for girls' rights to return to the classroom. In the three years that followed, she went from anonymously blogging for the BBC to appearing on television — receiving widespread recognition far beyond Pakistani borders.

The Pakistani Taliban felt undermined by Yousafzai, then only 15 years old. On October 9, 2012, two Taliban members boarded her school bus and fired three shots, striking Yousafzai in the head and neck. Critically wounded, she was flown to Birmingham, England, for surgery. Miraculously, she survived the attack and recovered in less than three months. In 2013, she returned to school and continued her activism in Birmingham.

Later that year, on her 16th birthday, she spoke at a United Nations Youth Assembly in New York.

"The terrorists thought that they would change my aims and stop my ambitions. But nothing changed in my life, except this: weakness, fear, and hopelessness died. Strength, power, and courage was born," said Yousafzai at the assembly.

"We call upon all the governments to fight against terrorism, to protect children from brutality and harm. We call upon the United Nations to expand opportunity and education for girls all over the world," she added.

Her speech captivated the audience and gained global support. A year later, she was named a Nobel Prize winner, becoming the youngest Nobel laureate. In her acceptance speech, Yousafzai said, "This award is not just for me. It is for those forgotten children who want education. It is for those frightened children who want peace. It is for those voiceless children who want change."

Yousafzai continues advocating for women's and girls' rights. She meets with young female students and local leaders from around the world and encourages them to invest in innovative solutions that will empower girls to achieve their potential and become strong, confident leaders within their own communities. She also began The Malala Fund, an organization she co-founded with her father. The Malala Fund partners with international leaders and funds education projects globally for quality secondary education for all girls.

Yousafzai's story, while recent, serves as a reminder that change is possible. There are numerous noteworthy women throughout history, each with a unique and inspirational story to tell. March is a time to celebrate these women and the many contributions they made to our history, culture, and society.

**See also, YouTube video: [Women's History Month – Malala Yousafzai](#).**

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