Our society has a fascination with heroes. It is evident in the movies we watch, which are filled with brave deeds done by men wearing capes or military uniforms. It is seen in newspapers and television shows, as journalists and news anchors freely grant the title of ‘hero’ to celebrities who have donated large amounts of money to charity. However, there is another, more exceptional type of heroism besides cinematic theatrics or financial benevolence. Moral courage is exhibited when one takes a strong stance, based on deeply held beliefs, against a social injustice, even at risk of personal harm. Many notable heroes have emerged from the Holocaust and civil rights movements, but one of the most remarkable moral heroes in recent times is Malala Yousafzai. She has exhibited tremendous fearlessness and dedication that is made even more impressive due to her age.

Malala’s name is known globally, and she has received numerous prestigious awards. However, she grew up quietly in the little-known Swat Valley, in Pakistan. Since a young age, she was at the top of her class in school. Her father, who worked as a journalist, encouraged her love of learning. In 2009, when the Taliban violently took control of Swat and enforced strict rules regarding religion, dress, justice, and women’s rights, eleven-year-old Malala was approached by the BBC and asked to write a blog about her experiences. She agreed and chronicled the fear and hardships brought on by the Taliban. “‘The night was filled with the noise of artillery fire and I woke up three times. Today is the last day before the Taliban’s edict comes into effect’” (“Portrait” 1). The journal became the first venue of many in which her voice was heard. Supported by her father, she soon made her way into the public arena. She took the stage at public events and appeared on television, making speeches about the importance of
education, urging the government to increase funding, and imploring community leaders to foster opportunities for women (Walsh).

As Malala’s voice became louder, she attracted the attention of the Taliban. On August 9th, 2012, a group of armed men boarded her school bus. They shot Malala in the head and neck and similarly wounded one of her classmates. Malala was flown to a nearby medical center and then transferred to a hospital in England. This attack garnered worldwide attention, and Malala underwent multiple surgeries and struggled through months of recovery (Baker). As soon as she was sufficiently healthy, she used her new platform to continue her mission, meeting with world leaders and constantly speaking out about education and women’s rights. “I raise up my voice—not so I can shout but so that those without a voice can be heard…we cannot succeed when half of us are held back” (I Am Malala 83). Malala, now sixteen, resides in England, yet continues to actively call awareness to her cause.

The story of Malala is one of incredible bravery and determination. Under Taliban rule, an eleven-year-old girl publically took a stand against men who were known for their cruel and oppressive ways. Malala was determined to fight for the right of education and encourage the spread of peace and freedom. Even after an attempt on her life, she has continued to vocally call for reform and change. She has demonstrated how a single person can have an immense effect and impact the world.

Malala has become a role model for many people, including myself. I find it incredibly inspirational how she has allowed neither age nor location nor circumstance to limit her mission. Her story has inspired me to be more aware of my actions and to ensure that they are a positive influence in my environment, both at school and at home. I’ve been motivated to make small decisions that better the world around me, such as changing the subject when conversation at the
lunch table turns to unkind rumors, or staying calm when I feel like snapping at my little brother. I have recognized that my actions shape the world beyond myself, and everything I do either contributes positively or negatively.

In Pakistan, the Taliban have systematically taken away rights to education, free speech, and safety. This deliberate suffocation is similar to the domination that the Nazis had in Europe during the Holocaust. Terror has been struck into the hearts of the people, and opposition is forcefully silenced. However, just like in Europe, there have been those who refuse to stand down, and in doing so challenge the persecutors and lead the way toward triumph. Malala fought for those with no voice, and became the voice of many. She has drawn comparisons to Anne Frank, a single person documenting abuse and calling international attention to a conflict that often seems to be swept under the rug (“Malala”). However, while Anne Frank’s activism was inadvertent and entirely written, Malala has been a purposeful voice calling for awareness.

Malala has achieved more in a few years than many people will ever accomplish in their lives. She has led the global conversation on women’s rights and the importance of education and is the youngest person ever to be nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize (Baker). Her story has captured the interest of millions of people around the world. However, Malala’s vision of human rights is not complete. There is inarguably much more to be accomplished, and so she continues to focus on bringing about her dream: a world of education and equality.
Works Cited


