Little Girls, BIG Dreams

THINK
DIGITAL ACADEMY

Malala Yousafzai

In the beautiful Swat Valley, in Pakistan,
lived a Muslim girl called Malala.

Her home was humble and so was the school for girls her father ran.

Even though education is every human's right, her mother never had the chance to learn how to read and write. Still, Malala hoped her life would be different. She wanted to prove to everyone that girls can have big dreams, too.
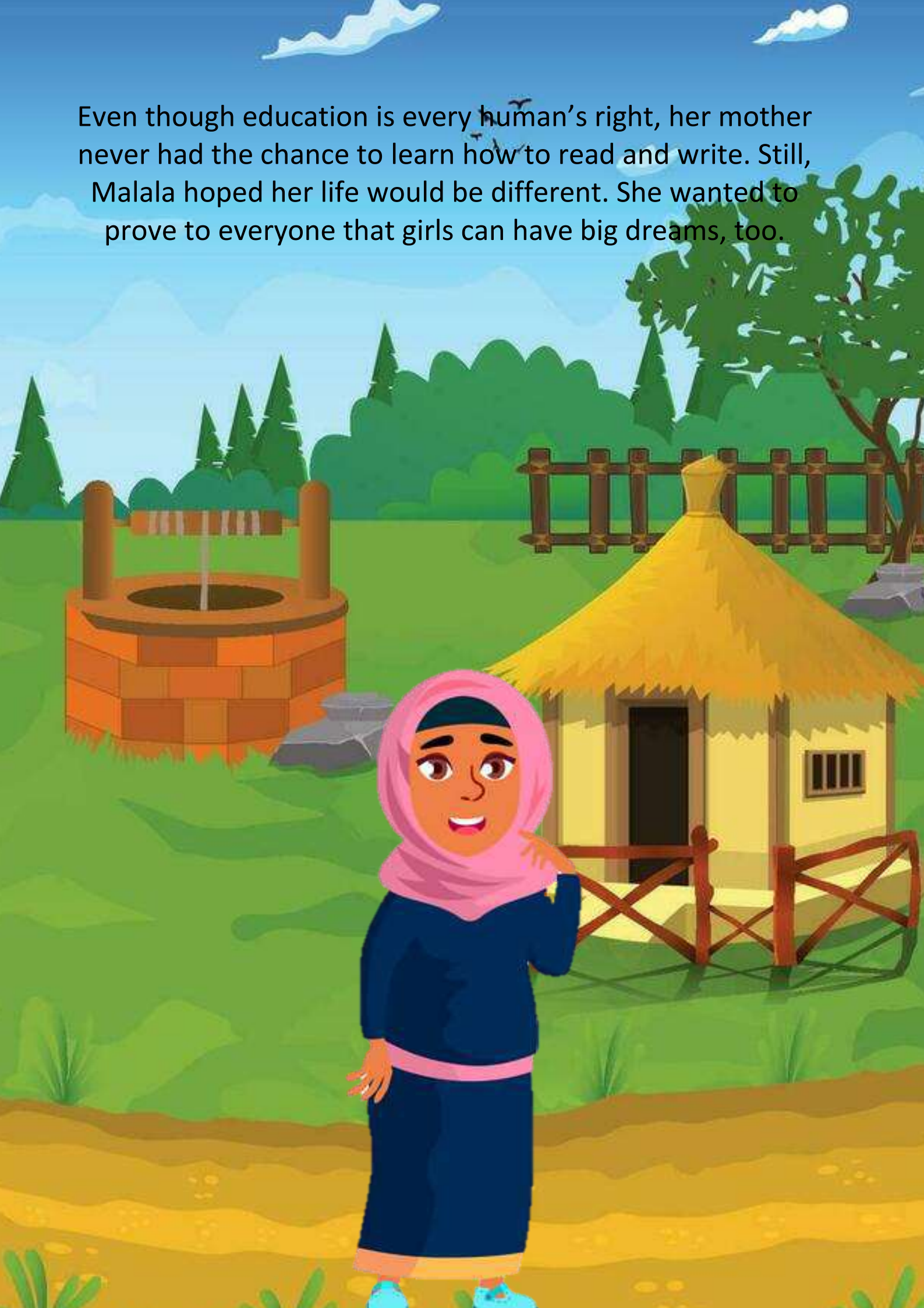
But Malala's dream became a nightmare when a violent group called the Taliban took control of her valley. They banned most of the things she liked, from listening to music, to taking photographs and even flying kites.
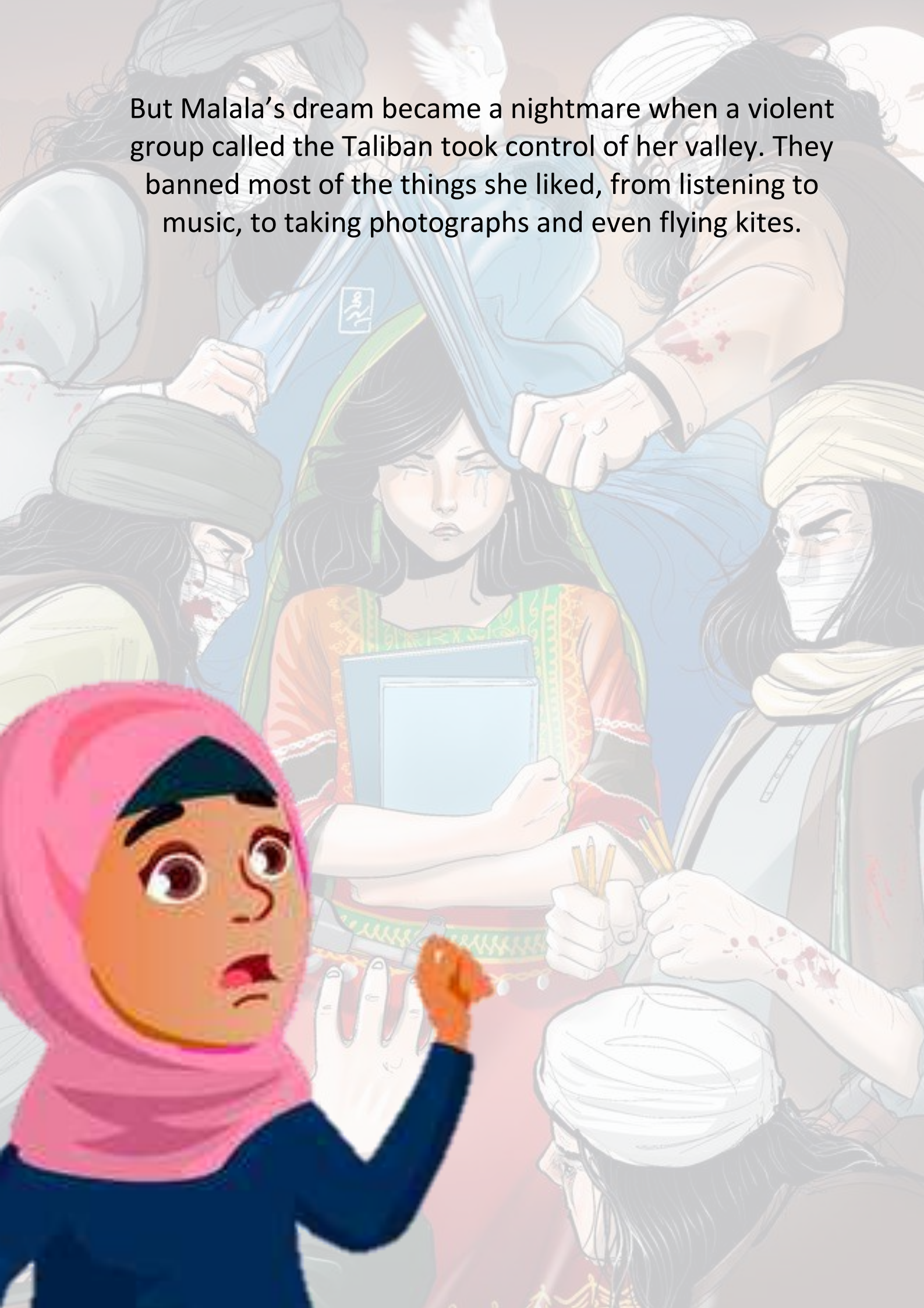
The Taliban believed that, instead of going to school, girls should get married, cover their bodies from head to toe, and never leave the house without their husbands or brothers. It was like being in prison for doing nothing wrong.

In just a heartbeat, the Taliban destroyed hundreds of all-girls schools and made parents scared to send their daughters to class. Malala and the rest of the students wondered what they could do to stop he madness.

Maybe the Taliban had bombs and guns, but Malala and her friends had books and pens to fight back with. They decided to raise their voices and speak up about how important it was for their future to attend school.

They shared their story on local television, and soon, Malala was asked to write a diary about her life under Taliban rule of the BBC. She used the name of a heroine from one of her favourite Pashtun tales, 'Gul Makai'.

But for the Taliban, there was nothing scarier than a girl willing to speak up.

One day, Malala and two of her friends were shot on their way back home from school. Malala was very badly injured. The whole world cried for her.

When Malala woke up, she couldn't recognise her room. She had been taken to a hospital in England, far away from home. But children from all over the world had written get well wishes. There was a pile off letters waiting to be read.

Malala did not just get better, but stronger and louder. She knew her story was the story of millions of other girls, too. With her father's help, she created a foundation to improve their lives and their education.

Two years later, she became the youngest person ever to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Malala brought with her some brave friends from Pakistan, Nigeria and Syria, who deserved the same recognition.

From the White House to refugee camps, Malala travelled the world, speaking up about every child's right to go to school. But as soon as she was settled in her new home in England, it was time for her to attend class.

The day she received her degree from the University of Oxford was one of her happiest. Still, the next morning, she woke up ready to fight for all the little Malala's in the world and their tight to dream as big as they want.

And she will keep doing so.

Malala Yousafzai was born in 1997, in an area of Pakistan called Swat Valley. Her father was an educator who taught at schools and other learning centres. Before she could even talk, Malala would wander into his classes – and pretend to be the teacher.

Her family taught her that education is precious, and as she got older, she became more and more passionate about a child's right to go to school.

When Malala was 10 years old, a group known as the Taliban took power in the region she called home. They set out new, strict rules, including a ban on dancing, television and – most devastating of all – girls going to school. When people spoke against the, the Taliban used violence and fear to get their way.

Hundreds of schools were destroyed. But even though the was afraid, Malala saw that guns and bombs were useless against a girl with pens and books. She decided to stand up for what she believed in. on Pakistani TV and with the BBC, Malala spoke out against the crime of denying girls an education.

Suddenly, it was the Taliban's turn to be afraid. Malala was shot by them in 2012, on the bus home from school. Miraculously, she recovered – and got back to campaigning for a girl's right to education. This time, the world listened.

She spoke at the Unted Nations, met refugees and other activists, and became a champion for the rights of children the world over. Malala is the youngest person ever to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, and today continues to campaign for a child's right to a future as big and bright as their dreams.

By Maria Isabel Sánchez Vegara