

# The ultimate power of hope

By  Daniel Derksen

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With the not-to-be-missed and life-affirming *He Named Me Malala*, acclaimed Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker Davis Guggenheim brings us a profoundly moving and intimate portrait of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Malala Yousafzai, who was targeted by the Taliban and severely wounded by a gunshot when returning home on her school bus in Pakistan's Swat Valley.

The then 15-year-old (she turned 18 in July) was singled out, along with her father, for advocating for girls' education, and the attack on her sparked an outcry from supporters around the world. She miraculously survived and is now a leading campaigner for girls' education globally as co-founder of the Malala Fund.

To millions, she is a transformative world figure and inspiration. Among extremists, she has been pursued as a threat and a target.

For those who don't know anything about Malala Yousafzai, or her story, you will not be able to let go of the film for one second, and will be utterly immersed in her magnificent presence and personality.



## Change the way you see the world

It's one of those rare films that not only changes your life, but will change the way you see the world as it opens a window into the intimate world of a story that needed to be told.

In Guggenheim's empowering portrait, we see the Pakistan-born teenager and youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai as a very real young girl - an alternatively brave, compassionate, imperilled and fun-loving teen who simply insists on the right to live and learn - for everyone.

Filmed over 18 intensive months that Guggenheim spent with the entire Yousafzai family in the UK and on the road in Nigeria, Kenya, Abu Dhabi and Jordan, the film is an intimate chance to get to know Malala, her father Ziauddin, her mother Tor Pekai and brothers Khushal and Atal who helped forge the young woman that she is becoming.

This is the story behind Malala's culture and enchanted childhood: the story behind a family that said no to tyranny and the unseen aftermath of a shattering event that turned a daring schoolgirl into an educational campaigner known around the world.

For Guggenheim, getting to know the many diverse facets of Malala only made her story even more intriguing. Though her courage might be uncommon, he saw that Malala's determination came by way of her parents, cultivating in herself a power we all have - the power of our voice.



## **An incredible story**

"Malala's is an incredible story of a girl who risked her life to speak out for what is right," said Guggenheim. "But my first instinct in making this movie was that it is very much about a family, about a father's love and about a girl who feels empowered to do amazing things. It would be easy to tell this story in a sensational way. But that's not what inspires me. What inspires me is a father who saw in his daughter someone who could do anything and who believed in her. What inspires me is a mother who said it's important that our daughter go to school. What inspires me is a daughter who saw her father speaking out and said 'I want to do that too.' The most extraordinary thing about Malala's story is her family, their relationships and the choices they made in their lives."

"It is a combination of passion: my passion, the passion of my family and the passion of Davis Guggenheim," says Yousafzai. "We all wanted to raise the voices of girls. This movie became a great opportunity to tell our story but also to say that education is a basic human right."

The film unfolds in a meld of emotionally candid interviews, footage from within Pakistan and vivid, hand-drawn animation that brings memories of the past to vibrant life.

It takes viewers from the moment Pakistani activist and educator Ziauddin Yousafzai named his daughter Malala, in honour of the legendary Pashtun folk heroine Malalai of Maiwand, to Malala's bold decision at the age of 11 to blog for the BBC under a pseudonym about life as a girl in a Taliban-led city, to the Taliban's shocking unsuccessful assassination attempt on a child and Malala's subsequent battle for her life.

The film focusses most intently on the here and now, on Malala growing up even as she comes to grips with her power as an agent of global change. She is more focussed than ever on the most important battles of our time: empowering girls through education, countering violence and forging new community leaders. And yet she is also just a teenager grappling with her beliefs on boys, homework, siblings, parents and the future ...in the midst of an intense media spotlight.

## A profound impact

Guggenheim's films have taken him from political circles to life on the road with U2 - but his keen interest in education clearly is visible in the making of *He Named Me Malala*. It had a profound impact on his outlook, an experience he wants to share with audiences. The film releases on 20 November in South Africa.

"After making this movie I'm more hopeful," says Guggenheim. I got to know a family who have faced so many obstacles, yet their belief in speaking out continues to inspire. In the course of making this film, I've had many people come up to me and ask: What is Malala like and how can I do what she does? The chance to give people that story motivated me."

For Ziauddin Yousafzai, making the decision to allow a film crew into the heart of his family's inner circle was not simple, but he believed he had found the right partners.

"I felt as a father that we had just been through a very big trauma in our life and being followed by cameras might be difficult - but we have always done things in our lives for a cause that is bigger than us," he comments. "Walter and Laurie motivated our family and then, after meeting Davis and getting to know him, I realised that we will never find anyone better than this man to tell this story about our campaign for global education. David has something special in his personality, he can bring out the inner truths lying deep in your heart and that's what we wanted to share with the world."

*For more on *He Named Me Malala* and other new films, go to [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)*

## ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Derksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

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