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# I Am Malala

THE GIRL WHO STOOD UP
FOR EDUCATION AND WAS
SHOT BY THE TALIBAN

MALALA
YOUSAFZAI

*with* CHRISTINA LAMB

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

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Map by John Gilkes

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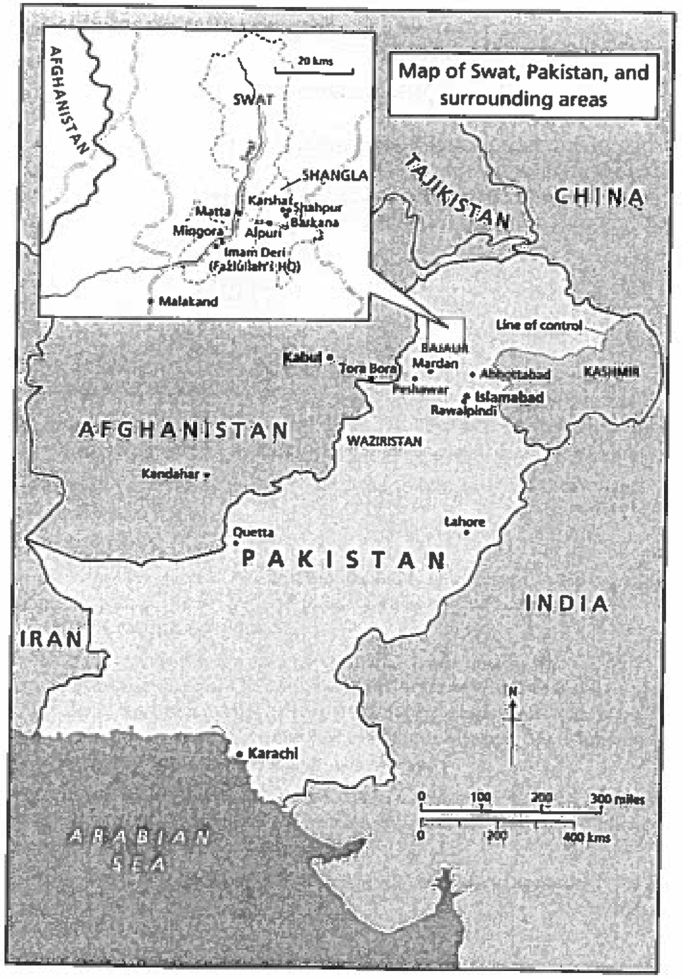
*To all the girls who have faced injustice*
*and been silenced.*
*Together we will be heard.*


Map of Swat, Pakistan, and surrounding areas
AFGHANISTAN
20 kms
SWAT
SHANGLA
Karshat
Shahpur
Matta
Barkana
Mingora
Alpuri
Imam Deri
(Fazlullah's HQ)
Malakand
TAJIKISTAN
CHINA
Line of control
BAJAUR
Kabul
Tora Bora
Mardan
Abbottabad
KASHMIR
Peshawar
Islamabad
Rawalpindi
AFGHANISTAN
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IRAN
N
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0
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400 kms
ARABIAN SEA

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# I Am Malala

## 3

# Growing Up in a School

My mother started school when she was six and stopped the same term. She was unusual in the village, as she had a father and brothers who encouraged her to go to school. She was the only girl in a class of boys. She carried her bag of books proudly into school and claims she was brighter than the boys. But every day she would leave behind her girl cousins playing at home and she envied them. There seemed no point in going to school to just end up cooking, cleaning and bringing up children, so one day she sold her books for nine annas, spent the money on boiled sweets and never went back. Her father said nothing. She says he didn't even notice, as he would set off early every morning after a breakfast of cornbread and cream, his German pistol strapped under his arm, and spend his days busy with local

politics or resolving feuds. Besides he had seven other children to think about.

It was only when she met my father that she felt regret. Here was a man who had read so many books, who wrote her poems she could not read, and whose ambition was to have his own school. As his wife, she wanted to help him achieve that. For as long as my father could remember it had been his dream to open a school, but with no family contacts or money it was extremely hard for him to realize this dream. He thought there was nothing more important than knowledge. He remembered how mystified he had been by the river in his village, wondering where the water came from and went to, until he learned about the water cycle from the rain to the sea.

His own village school had been just a small building. Many of his classes were taught under a tree on the bare ground. There were no toilets, and the pupils went to the fields to answer the call of nature. Yet he says he was actually lucky. His sisters—my aunts—did not go to school at all, just like millions of girls in my country. Education had been a great gift for him. He believed that lack of education was the root of all of Pakistan's problems. Ignorance allowed politicians to fool people and bad administrators to be re-elected. He believed schooling should be available for all, rich and poor, boys and girls. The school that my father dreamed of would have desks and a library, computers, bright posters on the walls and, most important, washrooms.

My grandfather had a different dream for his youngest son—he longed for him to be a doctor—and as one of just two sons, he expected him to contribute to the household budget. My father's elder brother Saeed Ramzan had worked for years as a teacher at a local school. He and his family lived with my grandfather, and whenever he saved up enough of his salary, they built a small concrete *hujra* at the side of the house for guests. He brought logs back from the mountains for firewood, and after teaching he would work in the fields where our family had a few buffaloes. He also helped *Baba* with heavy tasks like clearing snow from the roof.

When my father was offered a place for his A Levels at Jehanzeb College, which is the best further education institution in Swat, my grandfather refused to pay for his living expenses. His own education in Delhi had been free—he had lived like a *talib* in the mosques, and local people had provided the students with food and clothes. Tuition at Jehanzeb was free, but my father needed money to live on. Pakistan doesn't have

student loans and he had never even set foot in a bank. The college was in Saidu Sharif, the twin town of Mingora, and he had no family there with whom he could stay. There was no other college in Shangla, and if he didn't go to college, he would never be able to move out of the village and realize his dream.

My father was at his wits' end and wept with frustration. His beloved mother had died just before he graduated from school. He knew if she had been alive, she would have been on his side. He pleaded with his father but to no avail. His only hope was his brother-in-law in Karachi. My grandfather suggested that he might take my father in so he could go to college there. The couple would soon be arriving in the village, as they were coming to offer condolences after my grandmother's death.

My father prayed they would agree, but my grandfather asked them as soon as they arrived, exhausted after the three-day bus journey, and his son-in-law refused outright. My grandfather was so furious he would not speak to them for their entire stay. My father felt he had lost his chance and would end up like his brother teaching in a local school. The school where Uncle *Khan dada* taught was in the mountain village of

Sewoor, about an hour and a half's climb from their house. It didn't even have its own building. They used the big hall in the mosque, where they taught more than a hundred children ranging from five to fifteen years old.

The people in Sewoor were Gujars, Kohistanis and Mians. We regard Mians as noble or landed people, but Gujars and Kohistanis are what we call hilly people, peasants who look after buffaloes. Their children are usually dirty and they are looked down upon by Pashtuns, even if they are poor themselves. "They are dirty, black and stupid," people would say. "Let them be illiterate." It is often said that teachers don't like to be posted to such remote schools and generally make a deal with their colleagues so that only one of them has to go to work each day. If the school has two teachers, each goes in for three days and signs the other in. If it has three teachers, each goes in for just two days. Once there, all they do is to keep the children quiet with a long stick, as they cannot imagine education will be any use to them.

My uncle was more dutiful. He liked the hilly people and respected their tough lives. So he went to the school most days and actually tried to teach the children. After my father had graduated from

school he had nothing to do, so he volunteered to help his brother. There his luck changed. Another of my aunts had married a man in that village and they had a relative visiting called Nasir Pacha, who saw my father at work. Nasir Pacha had spent years in Saudi Arabia working in construction, making money to send back to his family. My father told him he had just finished school and had won a college place at Jehanzeb. He did not mention he could not afford to take it, as he did not want to embarrass his father.

"Why don't you come and live with us?" asked Nasir Pacha.

"Oof, I was so happy, by God," says my father. Pacha and his wife Jajai became his second family. Their home was in Spal Bandi, a beautiful mountain village on the way to the White Palace, and my father describes it as a romantic and inspirational place. My father went there by bus and it seemed so big to him compared to his home village that he thought he'd arrived in a city. As a guest, he was treated exceptionally well. Jajai replaced his late mother as the most important woman in my father's life. When a villager complained to her that he was flirting with a girl living across the road, she defended him. "Ziauddin is as clean as an egg with no hair," she said. "Look instead to your own daughter."

It was in Spal Bandi that my father came across women who had great freedom and were not hidden away as in his own village. The women of Spal Bandi had a beautiful spot on top of the mountain where only they could congregate to chat about their everyday lives. It was unusual for women to have a special place to meet outside the home. It was also there that my father met his mentor Akbar Khan, who although he had not gone to college himself lent my father money so he could. Like my mother, Akbar Khan may not have had much of a formal education, but he had another kind of wisdom. My father often spoke of the kindness of Akbar Khan and Nasir Pacha to illustrate that if you help someone in need you might also receive unexpected aid.

My father arrived at college at an important moment in Pakistan's history. That summer, while he was walking in the mountains, our dictator General Zia was killed in a mysterious plane crash, which many people said was caused by a bomb hidden in a crate of mangoes. During my father's first term at college national elections were held, which were won by Benazir Bhutto, daughter of

the prime minister who had been executed when my father was a boy. Benazir was our first female prime minister and the first in the Islamic world. Suddenly there was a lot of optimism about the future.

Student organizations which had been banned under Zia became very active. My father quickly got involved in student politics and became known as a talented speaker and debater. He was made general secretary of the Pakhtoon Students Federation (PSF), which wanted equal rights for Pashtuns. The most important jobs in the army, bureaucracy and government are all taken by Punjabis because they come from the biggest and most powerful province.

The other main students' organization was Islami Jamaat-e-Talaba, the student wing of the religious party Jamaat-e-Islami, which was powerful in many universities in Pakistan. They provided free textbooks and grants to students but held deeply intolerant views and their favorite pastime was to patrol universities and sabotage music concerts. The party had been close to General Zia and done badly in the elections. The president of the students' group in Jehanzeb College was Ihsan ul-Haq Haqqani. Though he and my father were great rivals, they admired each other and later became friends. Haqqani says he is sure my father would have been president of the PSF and become a politician if he had been from a rich khan family. Student politics was all about debating and charisma, but party politics required money.

One of their most heated debates in that first year was over a novel. The book was called *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie, and it was a parody of the life of the Prophet, PBUH, set in Bombay. Muslims widely considered it blasphemous and it provoked so much outrage that it seemed people were talking of little else. The odd thing was no one had even noticed the publication of the book to start with—it wasn't actually on sale in Pakistan—but then a series of articles appeared in Urdu newspapers by a mullah close to our intelligence service, berating the book as offensive to the Prophet, PBUH, and saying it was the duty of good Muslims to protest. Soon mullahs all over Pakistan were denouncing the book, calling for it to be banned, and angry demonstrations were held. The most violent took place in Islamabad on 12 February 1989, when American flags were set alight in front of the American Center—even though Rushdie and his publishers were British. Police

fired into the crowd, and five people were killed. The anger wasn't just in Pakistan. Two days later Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of Iran, issued a fatwa calling for Rushdie's assassination.

My father's college held a heated debate in a packed room. Many students argued that the book should be banned and burned and the fatwa upheld. My father also saw the book as offensive to Islam but suggested: "First, let's read the book and then why not respond with our own book." He ended by asking in a thundering voice my grandfather would have been proud of, "Is Islam such a weak religion that it cannot tolerate a book written against it? Not *my* Islam!"

For the first few years after graduating from Jehanzeb my father worked as an English teacher in a well-known private college. But the salary was low, just 1,600 rupees a month (around $19), and my grandfather complained he was not contributing to the household. It was also not enough for him to save for the wedding he hoped for to his beloved Tor Pekai.

One of my father's colleagues at the school was his friend Mohammad Naeem Khan. He and my father had studied for their bachelor's and master's degrees in English together and were both passionate about education. They were also both frustrated, as the school was very strict and unimaginative. Neither the students nor the teachers were supposed to have their own opinions, and the owners' control was so tight they even frowned upon friendship between teachers. My father longed for the freedom that would come with running his own school. He wanted to encourage independent thought and hated the way the school he was in rewarded obedience above open-mindedness and creativity. So when Naeem lost his job after a dispute with the college administration, they decided to start their own school.

Their original plan was to open a school in my father's village of Shahpur, where there was a desperate need: "Like a shop in a community where there are no shops," he said. But when they went there to look for a building, there were banners everywhere advertising a school opening—someone had beaten them to it. So they decided to set up an English-language school in Mingora, thinking that since Swat was a tourist destination there would be a demand for learning in English.

As my father was still teaching, Naeem wandered the streets looking for somewhere to rent.

One day he called my father excitedly to say he'd found the ideal place. It was the ground floor of a two-story building in a well-off area called Landikas with a walled courtyard where students could gather. The previous tenants had also run a school—the Ramada School. The owner had called it that because he had once been to Turkey and seen a Ramada Hotel! But the school had gone bankrupt, which perhaps should have made them think twice. Also the building was on the banks of a river where people threw their rubbish, and it smelled foul in hot weather.

My father went to see the building after work. It was a perfect night with stars and a full moon just above the trees, which he took to be a sign. "I felt so happy," he recalls. "My dream was coming true."

Naeem and my father invested their entire savings of 60,000 rupees. They borrowed 30,000 rupees more to repaint the building, rented a shack across the road to live in and went from door to door trying to find students. Unfortunately the demand for English tuition turned out to be low, and there were unexpected drains on their income. My father's involvement in political discussions continued after college. Every day his fellow activists came to the shack or the school for lunch. "We can't afford all this entertaining!" Naeem would complain. It was also becoming clear that while they were best friends, they found it hard to work as business partners.

On top of that there was a stream of guests from Shangla now that my father had a place for them to stay. We Pashtuns cannot turn away relatives or friends, however inconvenient. We don't respect privacy and there is no such thing as making an appointment to see someone. Visitors can turn up whenever *they* wish and can stay as long as *they* want. It was a nightmare for someone trying to start a business and it drove Naeem to distraction. He joked to my father that if either of them had relatives to stay, they should pay a fine. My father kept trying to persuade Naeem's friends and family to stay so he could be fined too!

After three months Naeem had had enough. "We are supposed to be collecting money in enrollment fees. Instead the only people knocking on our doors are beggars! This is a Herculean task," he added. "I can't take any more!"

By this time the two former friends were hardly speaking to each other and had to call in local elders to mediate. My father was desperate not to give up the school so agreed to pay Naeem a return on his share of the investment. He had no

idea how. Fortunately another old college friend called Hidayatullah stepped in and agreed to put up the money and take Naeem's place. The new partners again went from door to door, telling people they had started a new kind of school. My father is so charismatic that Hidayatullah says he is the kind of person who, if invited to your house, will make friends with your friends. But while people were happy to talk to him, they preferred to send their children to established schools.

They named it the Khushal School after one of my father's great heroes, Khushal Khan Khattak, the warrior poet from Akora just south of Swat, who tried to unify all Pashtun tribes against the Moghuls in the seventeenth century. Near the entrance they painted a motto: WE ARE COMMITTED TO BUILD FOR YOU THE CALL OF THE NEW ERA. My father also designed a shield with a famous quote from Khattak in Pashto: "I girt my sword in the name of Afghan honor." My father wanted us to be inspired by our great hero, but in a manner fit for our times—with pens, not swords. Just as Khattak had wanted the Pashtuns to unite against a foreign enemy, so we needed to unite against ignorance.

Unfortunately not many people were convinced. When the school opened they had just three students. Even so my father insisted on starting the day in style by singing the national anthem. Then his nephew Aziz, who had come to help, raised the Pakistan flag.

With so few students, they had little money to equip the school and soon ran out of credit. Neither man could get any money from their families, and Hidayatullah was not pleased to discover that my father was still in debt to lots of people from college, so they were always receiving letters demanding money.

There was worse in store when my father went to register the school. After being made to wait for hours, he was finally ushered into the office of the official of schools, who sat behind towering piles of files surrounded by hangers-on drinking tea. "What kind of school is this?" asked the official, laughing at his application. "How many teachers do you have? Three! Your teachers are not trained. Everyone thinks they can open a school just like that!"

The other people in the office laughed along, ridiculing him. My father was angry. It was clear the official wanted money. Pashtuns cannot stand anyone belittling them, nor was he about to pay a bribe for something he was entitled to. He and

Hidayatullah hardly had money to pay for food, let alone bribes. The going rate for registration was about 13,000 rupees, more if they thought you were rich. And schools were expected to treat officials regularly to a good lunch of chicken or trout from the river. The education officer would call to arrange an inspection then give a detailed order for his lunch. My father used to grumble, "We're a school not a poultry farm."

So when the official angled for a bribe, my father turned on him with all the force of his years of debating. "Why are you asking all these questions?" he demanded. "Am I in an office or am I in a police station or a court? Am I a criminal?" He decided to challenge the officials to protect other school owners from such bullying and corruption. He knew that to do this he needed some power of his own, so he joined an organization called the Swat Association of Private Schools. It was small in those days, just fifteen members, and my father quickly became vice president.

The other principals took paying bribes for granted, but my father argued that if all the schools joined together they could resist. "Running a school is not a crime," he told them. "Why should you be paying bribes? You are not running brothels; you are educating children! Government officials are not your bosses," he reminded them; "they are your servants. They are taking salaries and have to serve you. You are the ones educating *their* children."

He soon became president of the organization and expanded it until it included 400 principals. Suddenly the school owners were in a position of power. But my father has always been a romantic rather than a businessman and in the meantime he and Hidayatullah were in such desperate straits that they ran out of credit with the local shopkeeper and could not even buy tea or sugar. To try and boost their income they ran a sweet shop at school, going off in the mornings and buying snacks to sell to the children. My father would buy maize and stay up late at night making and bagging popcorn.

"I would get very depressed and sometimes collapse seeing the problems all around us," said Hidayatullah, "but when Ziauddin is in a crisis he becomes strong and his spirits high."

My father insisted that they needed to think big. One day Hidayatullah came back from trying to enroll pupils to find my father sitting in the office talking about advertising with the local head of Pakistan TV. As soon as the man had gone, Hidayatullah burst into laughter. "Ziauddin, we don't even have a TV," he pointed out. "If we advertise we won't be able to watch it." But my father is an optimistic man and never deterred by practicalities.

One day my father told Hidayatullah he was going back to his village for a few days. He was actually getting married, but he didn't tell any of his friends in Mingora, as he could not afford to entertain them. Our weddings go on for several days of feasting. In fact, as my mother often reminds my father, he was not present for the actual ceremony. He was only there for the last day, when family members held a Quran and a shawl over their heads and held a mirror for them to look into. For many couples in arranged marriages this is the first time they see each other's faces. A small boy was brought to sit on their laps to encourage the birth of a son.

It is our tradition for the bride to receive furniture or perhaps a fridge from her family and some gold from the groom's family. My grandfather would not buy enough gold, so my father had to borrow more money to buy bangles. After the wedding my mother moved in with my grandfather and my uncle. My father returned to the village every two or three weeks to see her. The plan was to get his school going then, once it was successful, send for his wife. But *Baba* kept complaining about the drain on his income and made my mother's life miserable. She had a little money of her own, so they used it to hire a van and she moved to Mingora. They had no idea how they would manage. "We just knew my father didn't want us there," said my father. "At that time I was unhappy with my family, but later I was grateful, as it made me more independent."

He had however neglected to tell his partner. Hidayatullah was horrified when my father returned to Mingora with a wife. "We're not in a position to support a family," he told my father. "Where will she live?"

"It's OK," replied my father. "She will cook and wash for us."

My mother was excited to be in Mingora. To her it was a modern town. When she and her friends had discussed their dreams as young girls by the river, most had just said they wanted to marry and have children and cook for their husbands. When it was my mother's turn she said, "I want to live in the city and be able to send out for kebabs and naan instead of cooking it myself." However, life wasn't quite what she expected. The shack had just two rooms, one where Hidayatullah and my father slept and one which was a

small office. There was no kitchen, no plumbing. When my mother arrived, Hidayatullah had to move into the office and sleep on a hard wooden chair.

My father consulted my mother on everything. "Pekai, help me resolve my confusion on this," he would say. She even helped whitewash the school walls, holding up the lanterns so they could paint when the light went off in power cuts.

"Ziauddin was a family man and they were unusually close," said Hidayatullah. "While most of us can't live with our wives, he couldn't be without his."

Within a few months my mother was expecting. Their first child, born in 1995, was a girl and stillborn. "I think there was some problem with hygiene in that muddy place," says my father. "I assumed women could give birth without going to hospital, as my mother and my sisters had in the village. My mother gave birth to ten children in this way."

The school continued to lose money. Months would pass and they could not pay the teachers' wages or the school rent. The goldsmith kept coming and demanding his money for my mother's wedding bangles. My father would make him good tea and offer him biscuits in the hope that would keep him satisfied. Hidayatullah laughed. "You think he will be happy with tea? He wants his money."

The situation became so dire that my father was forced to sell the gold bangles. In our culture wedding jewelry is a bond between the couple. Often women sell their jewelry to help set up their husbands in business or to pay their fares to go abroad. My mother had already offered her bangles to pay for my father's nephew to go to college, which my father had rashly promised to fund—fortunately, my father's cousin Jehan Sher had stepped in—and she did not realize the bangles were only partly paid for. She was then furious when she learned that my father did not get a good price for them.

Just when it seemed matters could not get worse, the area was hit by flash floods. There was a day when it did not stop raining, and in the late afternoon there was a warning of flooding. Everyone had to leave the district. My mother was away and Hidayatullah needed my father to help him move everything up to the first floor, safe from the fast-rising waters, but he couldn't find him anywhere. He went outside, shouting "Ziauddin, Ziauddin!" The search almost cost Hidayatullah his life. The narrow street outside the school was

totally flooded and he was soon up to his neck in water. There were live electric cables hanging loose and swaying in the wind. He watched paralyzed with fear as they almost touched the water. Had they done so, he would have been electrocuted.

When he finally found my father, he learned that he had heard a woman crying that her husband was trapped in their house and he had rushed in to save him. Then he helped them save their fridge. Hidayatullah was furious. "You saved this woman's husband but not your own house!" he said. "Was it because of the cry of a woman?"

When the waters receded, they found their home and school destroyed: their furniture, carpets, books, clothes and the audio system entirely caked in thick foul-smelling mud. They had nowhere to sleep and no clean clothes to change into. Luckily, a neighbor called Mr. Aman-ud-din took them in for the night. It took them a week to clear the debris. They were both away when, ten days later, there was a second flood and the building again filled with mud. Shortly afterward they had a visit from an official of WAPDA, the water and power company, who claimed their meter was rigged and demanded a bribe. When my father refused, a bill arrived with a large fine. There was no way they could pay this, so my father asked one of his political friends to use his influence.

It started to feel as though the school was not meant to be, but my father would not give up on his dream so easily. Besides, he had a family to provide for. I was born on 12 July 1997. My mother was helped by a neighbor who had delivered babies before. My father was in the school waiting and when he heard the news he came running. My mother was worried about telling him he had a daughter not a son, but he says he looked into my eyes and was delighted.

"Malala was a lucky girl," says Hidayatullah. "When she was born our luck changed."

But not immediately. On Pakistan's fiftieth anniversary on 14 August 1997 there were parades and commemorations throughout the country. However, my father and his friends said there was nothing to celebrate, as Swat had only suffered since it had merged with Pakistan. They wore black armbands to protest, saying the celebrations were for nothing, and were arrested. They had to pay a fine they could not afford.

A few months after I was born the three rooms above the school became vacant and we all moved in. The walls were concrete and there was running water, so it was an improvement on our muddy shack, but we were still very cramped, as we were sharing it with Hidayatullah and we almost always had guests. That first school was a mixed primary school and very small. By the time I was born it had five or six teachers and around a hundred pupils paying a hundred rupees a month. My father was teacher, accountant and principal. He also swept the floors, whitewashed the walls and cleaned the bathrooms. He used to climb up electricity poles to hang banners advertising the school, even though he was so afraid of heights that when he got to the top of the ladder his feet shook. If the water pump stopped working, he would go down the well to repair it himself. When I saw him disappear down there, I would cry, thinking he wouldn't come back. After paying the rent and salaries, there was little money left for food. We drank green tea, as we could not afford milk for regular tea. But after a while the school started to break even and my father began to plan a second school, which he wanted to call the Malala Education Academy.

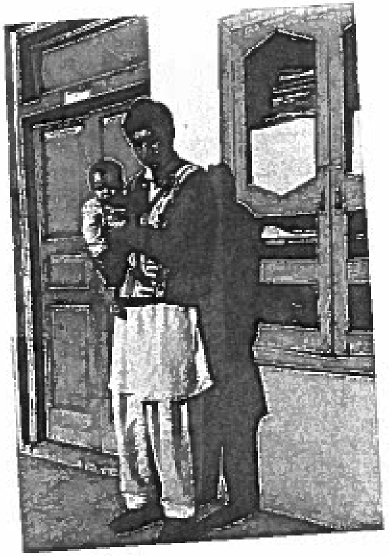
I had the run of the school as my playground. My father tells me even before I could talk I would toddle into classes and talk as if I were a teacher.

Some of the female staff like Miss Ulfat would pick me up and put me on their laps as if I were their pet or even take me home with them for a while. When I was three or four I was placed in classes for much older children. I used to sit in wonder, listening to everything they were being taught. Sometimes I would mimic the teachers. You could say I grew up in a school.

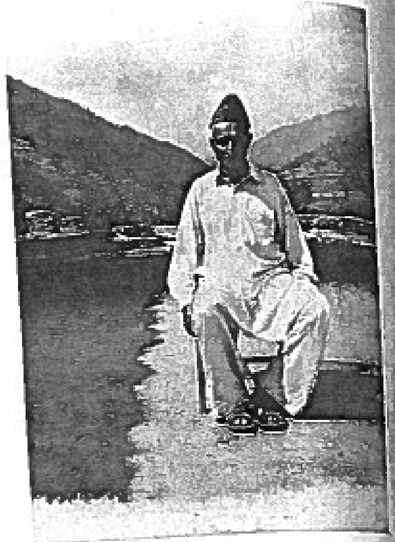
As my father had found with Naeem, it is not easy to mix business and friendship. Eventually Hidayatullah left to start his own school and they divided the students, each taking two of the four years. They did not tell their pupils, as they wanted people to think the school was expanding and had two buildings. Though Hidayatullah and my father were not speaking at that time, Hidayatullah missed me so much he used to visit me.

It was while he was visiting one afternoon in September 2001 that there was a great commotion and other people started arriving. They said there had been a big attack on a building in New York. Two planes had flown into it. I was only four and too young to understand. Even for the adults it was hard to imagine—the biggest buildings in Swat are the hospital and a hotel, which are two or three stories. It seemed very far away.

I had no idea what New York and America were. The school was my world and my world was the school. We did not realize then that 9/11 would change our world too, and would bring war into our valley.

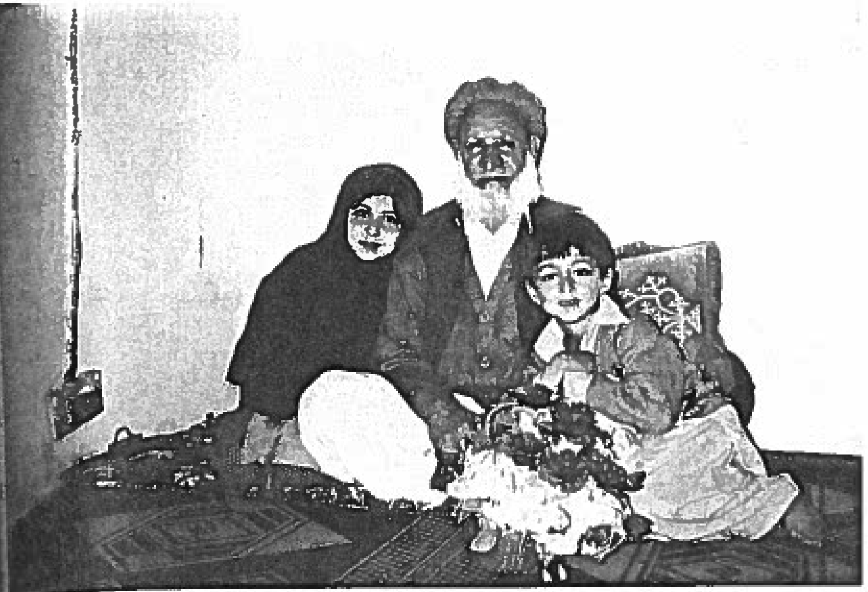


My father's friend Hidayatullah holding me outside our first school building.

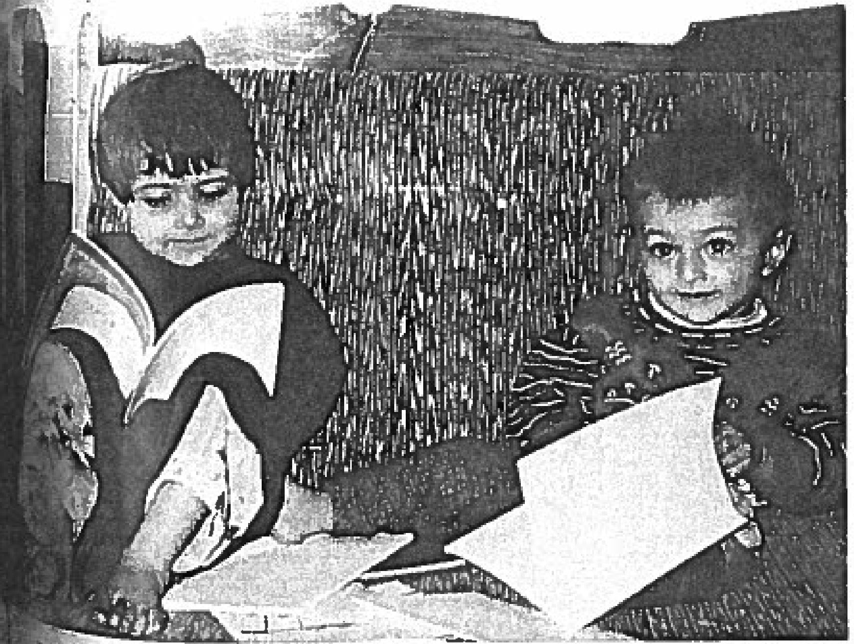


My maternal grandfather, Malik Janser Khan, in Shangla.

My father's childhood home.



My paternal grandfather, Baba, with me and Khushal in our house in Mingora.

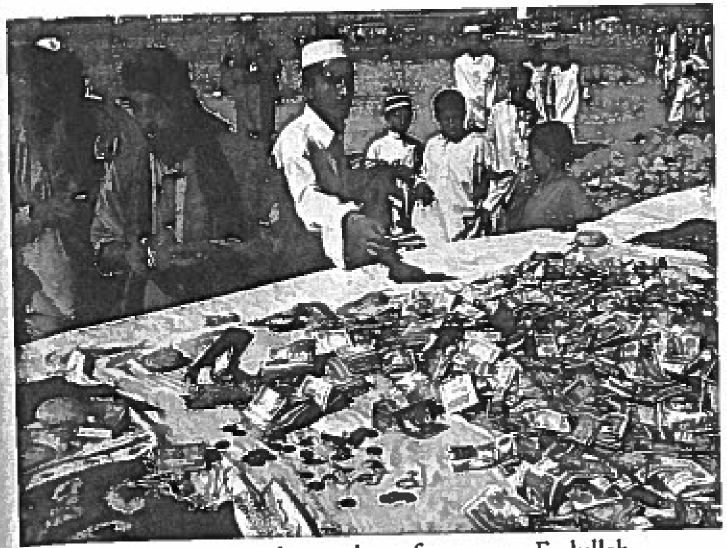


Reading with my brother Khushal.

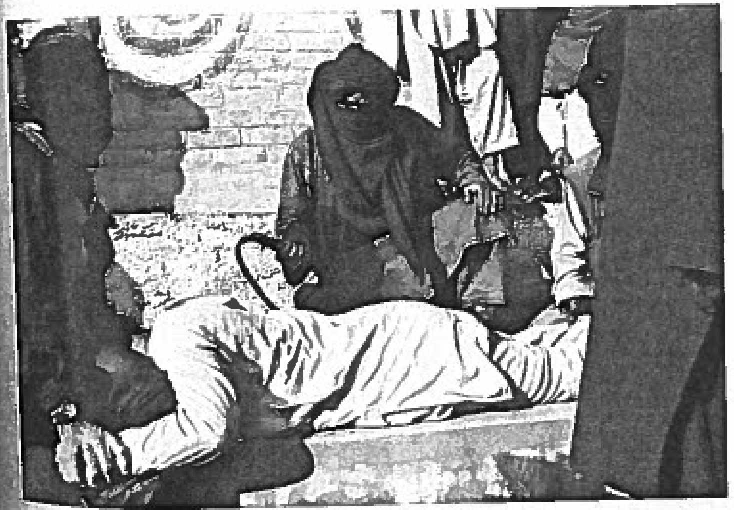
With Khushal, enjoying the waterfall in Shangla.

A school picnic.

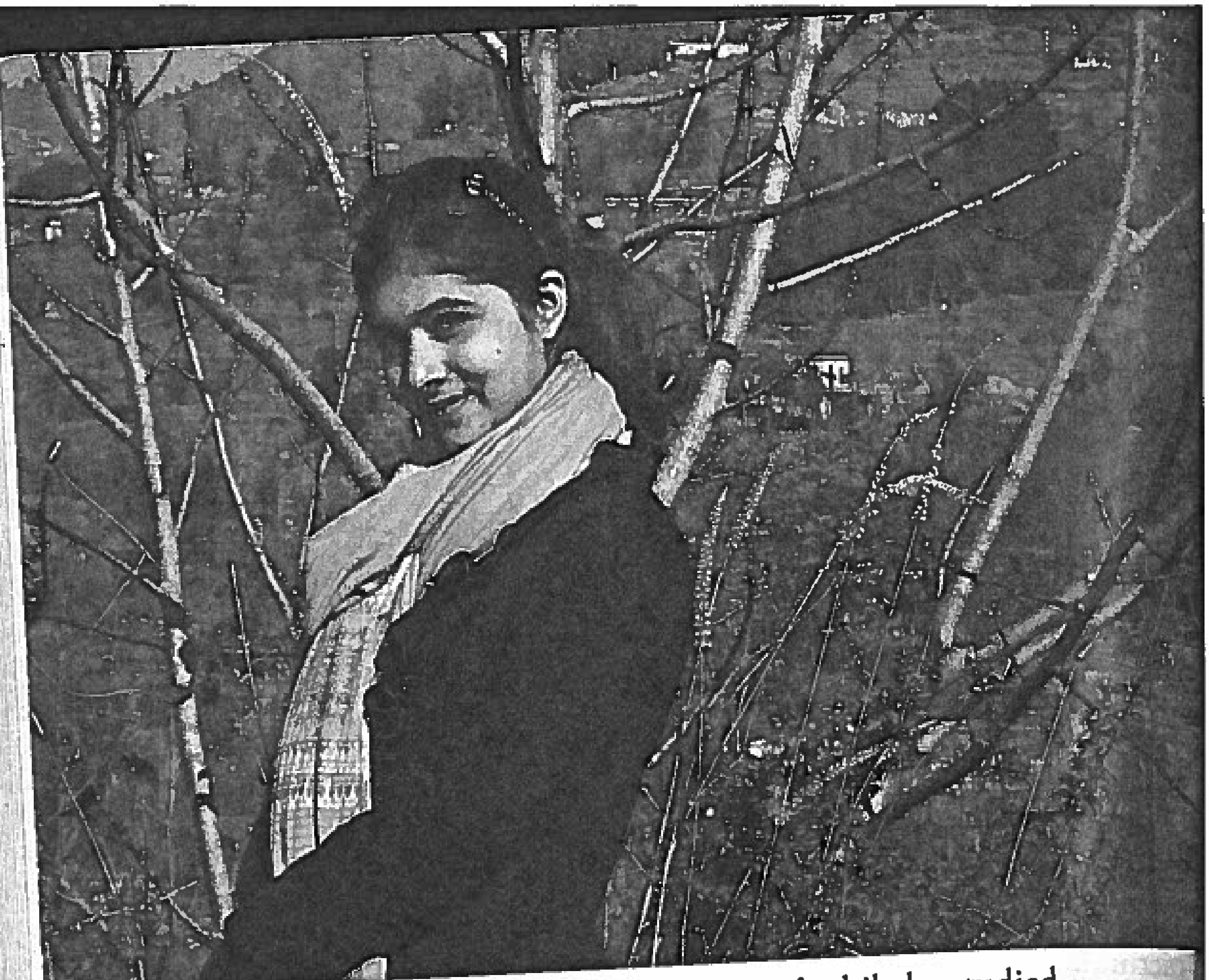
Assembly prayers at Khushal School. *(Copyright © Justin Sutcliffe, 2013)*



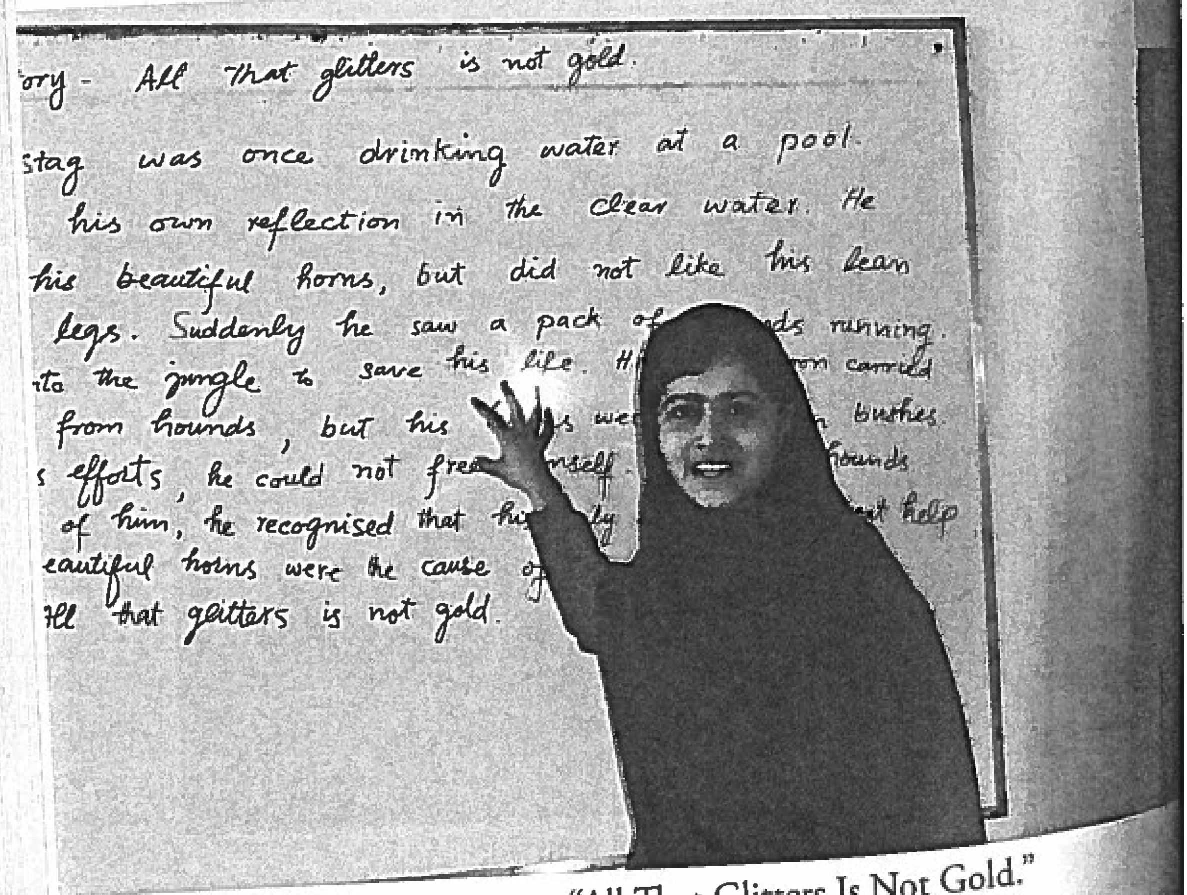
At the beginning, people gave lots of money to Fazlullah.



The Taliban publicly whipped people.



Visiting Spal Bandi, where my father stayed while he studied.


ory - All That glitters is not gold.
stag was once drinking water at a pool.
his own reflection in the clear water. He
his beautiful horns, but did not like his lean
legs. Suddenly he saw a pack of ds running
to the jungle to save his life. H ron carried
from hounds, but his s we bushes
s efforts, he could not free nself. hounds
of him, he recognised that hi ly t help
eautiful horns were the cause o
All that glitters is not gold.

At school reading a story: "All That Glitters Is Not Gold."

time the Taliban came I had finished my recitation of the complete Quran, what we call *Khatam ul-Quran,* much to the delight of *Baba,* my grandfather the cleric. We recite in Arabic, and most people don't actually know what the verses mean, but I had also started learning them in translation. To my horror one *qari sahib* tried to justify Benazir's assassination. "It was a very good job she was killed," he said. "When she was alive she was useless. She was not following Islam properly. If she had lived there would have been anarchy."

I was shocked and told my father. "We don't have any option. We are dependent on these mullahs to learn the Quran," he said. "But you just use him to learn the literal meaning of the words; don't follow his explanations and interpretation. Only learn what God says. His words are divine messages, which you are free and independent to interpret."

## 11

## The Clever Class

It was school that kept me going in those dark days. When I was in the street it felt as though every man I passed might be a Talib. We hid our school bags and our books in our shawls. My father always said that the most beautiful thing in a village in the morning is the sight of a child in a school uniform, but now we were afraid to wear them.

We had moved up to high school. Madam Maryam said no one wanted to teach our class, as we asked so many questions. We liked to be known as the clever girls. When we decorated our hands with henna for holidays and weddings, we drew calculus and chemical formulae instead of flowers and butterflies. My rivalry with Malka-e-Noor continued, but after the shock of being beaten by her when she first joined our school,

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I worked hard and had managed to regain my position on the school honors board for first in class. She usually came second and Moniba third. The teachers told us examiners first looked at how much we had written, then presentation. Moniba had the most beautiful writing and presentation of the three of us, but I always told her she did not trust herself enough. She worked hard, as she worried that if she got low marks her male relatives might use it as an excuse to stop her education. I was weakest in math—once I got zero in a test—but I worked hard at it. My chemistry teacher, Sir Obaidullah (we called all our teachers Sir or Miss), said I was a born politician because, at the start of oral exams, I would always say, "Sir, can I just say you are the best teacher and yours is my favorite class."

Some parents complained that I was being favored because my father owned the school, but people were always surprised that despite our rivalry we were all good friends and not jealous of each other. We also competed in what we call board exams. These would select the best students from private schools in the district, and one year Malka-e-Noor and I got exactly the same marks. We did another paper at school to see who would get the prize and again we got equal marks. So people wouldn't think I was getting special treatment, my father arranged for us to do papers at another school, that of his friend Ahmad Shah. Again we got the same, so we both got the prize.

There was more to school than work. We liked performing plays. I wrote a sketch based on *Romeo and Juliet* about corruption. I played Romeo as a civil servant interviewing people for a job. The first candidate is a beautiful girl, and he asks her very easy questions such as "How many wheels does a bicycle have?" When she replies, "Two," he says, "You are so brilliant." The next candidate is a man, so Romeo asks him impossible things like "Without leaving your chair tell me the make of the fan in the room above us." "How could I possibly know?" asks the candidate. "You're telling me you have a PhD and you don't know!" replies Romeo. He decides to give the job to the girl.

The girl was played by Moniba, of course, and another classmate, Attiya, played the part of my assistant to add some salt, pepper and masala with her witty asides. Everyone laughed a lot. I like to mimic people, and in breaks my friends used to beg me to impersonate our teachers, particularly Sir Obaidullah. With all the bad stuff going on in those days, we needed small, small reasons to laugh.

The army action at the end of 2007 had not got rid of the Taliban. The army had stayed in Swat and were everywhere in the town, yet Fazlullah still broadcast every day on the radio, and throughout 2008 the situation was even worse than before with bomb blasts and killings. All we talked about in those days was the army and the Taliban and the feeling that we were caught between the two. Attiya used to tease me by saying, "Taliban is good, army not good." I replied, "If there is a snake and a lion coming to attack us, what would we say is good, the snake or lion?"

Our school was a haven from the horrors outside. All the other girls in my class wanted to be doctors, but I decided I wanted to be an inventor and make an anti-Taliban machine which would sniff them out and destroy their guns. But of course at school we were under threat too, and some of my friends dropped out. Fazlullah kept broadcasting that girls should stay at home, and his men had started blowing up schools, usually during nighttime curfew when the children were not there.

The first school to be blown up was Shawar Zangay, a government girls' primary school in Matta. We couldn't believe anyone would do such

a thing. Then many more bombings followed, almost every day. Even in Mingora, there were explosions. Twice bombs went off when I was in the kitchen, so close by that the whole house rattled and the fan above the window fell down. I became very scared of going into the kitchen and would only run in and out.

On the last day of February 2008 I was in the kitchen when we heard an enormous blast. It was ear-shatteringly loud and obviously close by. As we always did, we called to each other to make sure we were all safe. "*Khaista, pisho, bhabi,* Khushal, Atal!" Then we heard sirens, one after another, as if all the ambulances of Mingora were passing. A suicide bomber had struck in the basketball court at Haji Baba High School. Funeral prayers had been under way for a popular local police officer, Javid Iqbal, who had been killed by a suicide bomber in a remote area while trying to escape from the Taliban. He was from Mingora, and his body had been brought back for the funeral and a police salute. Now the Taliban had bombed the mourners. More than fifty-five people were killed, including Javid Iqbal's young son and many people we knew. Ten members of Moniba's family were there and were either killed or injured. Moniba was devastated and the whole town was in shock. There were condolences in every mosque.

"Are you scared now?" I asked my father.

"At night our fear is strong, *Jani,*" he told me, "but in the morning, in the light, we find our courage again." And this is true for my family. We were scared, but our fear was not as strong as our courage. "We must rid our valley of the Taliban, and then no one has to feel this fear," he said.

In times of crisis we Pashtuns resort to the old trusted ways, so in 2008 elders in Swat created an assembly called the Qaumi Jirga to challenge Fazlullah. Three local men, Mukhtar Khan Yousafzai, Khurshid Kakajee and Zahid Khan, went from *hujra* to *hujra* persuading elders to join together. The senior elder was a white-bearded man of seventy-four called Abdul Khan Khaliq who had been one of the queen's bodyguards when she had visited Swat to stay with our *wali.* Even though my father was not an elder or a khan, he was chosen as spokesperson, as he was more not afraid to speak out. Though he was more poetic in Pashto, he could speak our national language, Urdu, and English fluently, which meant he was an effective communicator outside Swat as well as inside.

Every day, on behalf of the Swat Council of

Elders, he was at seminars or on the media challenging Fazlullah. "What are you doing?" he would ask. "You are playing havoc with our lives and our culture."

My father would say to me, "Any organization which works for peace, I will join. If you want to resolve a dispute or come out from conflict, the very first thing is to speak the truth. If you have a headache and tell the doctor you have a stomachache, how can the doctor help? You must speak the truth. The truth will abolish fear."

When he met his fellow activists, particularly his old friends Ahmad Shah, Mohammad Farooq and Zahid Khan, I often went with him. Ahmad Shah also had a school, where Mohammad Farooq worked, and they would sometimes gather on his lawn. Zahid Khan was a hotel owner and had a big *hujra.* When they came to our house I would bring them tea, then sit quietly listening as they discussed what to do. "Malala is not just the daughter of Ziauddin," they would say; "she is the daughter of all of us."

They went back and forth to Peshawar and Islamabad and gave lots of interviews on the radio, particularly to the Voice of America and the BBC, taking turns so there would always be one of them available. They told people that what was happening in Swat was not about Islam. My father said the Taliban presence in Swat was not possible without the support of some in the army and the bureaucracy. The state is meant to protect the rights of its citizens, but it's a very difficult situation when you can't tell the difference between state and non-state and can't trust the state to protect you against non-state.

Our military and ISI are very powerful and most people did not like to voice these things publicly, but my father and many of his friends were not scared. "What you are doing is against our people and against Pakistan," he would say. "Don't support Talibanization, it's inhuman. We are told that Swat is being sacrificed for the sake of Pakistan, but no one and nothing should be sacrificed for the state. A state is like a mother, and a mother never deserts or cheats her children."

He hated the fact that most people would not speak up. In his pocket he kept a poem written by Martin Niemöller, who had lived in Nazi Germany.

*First they came for the communists,*
*and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist.*

*Then they came for the socialists,*
*and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a socialist.*
*Then they came for the trade unionists,*
*and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist.*
*Then they came for the Jews,*
*and I didn't speak out because I was not a Jew.*
*Then they came for the Catholics,*
*and I didn't speak out because I was not a Catholic.*
*Then they came for me,*
*and there was no one left to speak for me.*

I knew he was right. If people were silent, nothing would change.

At school my father organized a peace march and encouraged us to speak out against what was happening. Moniba put it well. "We Pashtuns are a religion-loving people," she said. "Because of the Taliban, the whole world is claiming we are terrorists. This is not the case. We are peace-loving. Our mountains, our trees, our flowers—everything in our valley is about peace." A group of us girls gave an interview on ATV Khyber, the only privately owned Pashto television channel, about girls dropping out of school due to militancy. Teachers helped us beforehand on how to respond to questions. I wasn't the only one to be interviewed. When we were eleven and twelve, we did them together, but as we turned thirteen or fourteen, my friends' brothers and fathers didn't allow them because they had entered puberty and should observe purdah, and also they were afraid.

One day I went on Geo, which is one of the biggest news channels in our country. There was a wall of screens in their office. I was astonished to see so many channels. Afterward I thought, *The media needs interviews. They want to interview a small girl, but the girls are scared, and even if they're not, their parents won't allow it. I have a father who isn't scared, who stands by me. He said, "You are a child and it's your right to speak."* The more interviews I gave, the stronger I felt and the more support we received. I was only eleven, but I looked older, and the media seemed to like hearing from a young girl. One journalist called me *takra jenai*—a "bright shining young lady" and another said I was *pakha jenai*—wise beyond my years. In my heart was the belief that God would protect me. If I am speaking for my rights, for the rights of girls, I am not doing anything wrong. It's my duty to do so. God wants to see how we behave in such situations. There is

a saying in the Quran, "The falsehood has to go and the truth will prevail." *If one man, Fazlullah, can destroy everything, why can't one girl change it?* I wondered. I prayed to God every night to give me strength.

The media in Swat were under pressure to give positive coverage to the Taliban—some even respectfully called the Taliban spokesman Muslim Khan *School Dada,* when in reality he was destroying schools. But many local journalists were unhappy about what was happening to their valley and they gave us a powerful platform, as we would say things they didn't dare to.

We didn't have a car, so we went by rickshaw, or one of my father's friends would take us to the interviews. One day my father and I went to Peshawar to appear on a BBC Urdu talk show hosted by a famous columnist called Wasatullah Khan. We went with my father's friend Fazal Maula and his daughter. Two fathers and two daughters. To represent the Taliban they had Muslim Khan, who wasn't in the studio. I was a bit nervous, but I knew it was important, as many people all over Pakistan would be listening. "How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?" I said. There was no response from Muslim Khan because his phone interview had been prerecorded. How can a recording respond to live questions?

Afterward people congratulated me. My father laughed and said I should go into politics. "Even as a toddler you talked like a politician," he teased. But I never listened to my interviews. I knew these were very small steps.

Our words were like the eucalyptus blossoms of spring tossed away on the wind. The destruction of schools continued. On the night of 7 October 2008 we heard a series of faraway blasts. The next morning we learned that masked militants had entered the Sangota Convent School for girls and the Excelsior College for boys and blown them up using improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The teachers had already been evacuated, as they had received threats earlier. These were famous schools, particularly Sangota, which dated from the time of the last *wali* and was well known for academic excellence. They were also big—Excelsior had over 2,000 pupils and Sangota had 1,000. My father went there after the bombings and found the buildings completely razed to the ground. He gave interviews to TV reporters amid broken bricks and burned books and returned home horrified. "It's all just rubble," he said.

Yet my father remained hopeful and believed there would be a day when there was an end to the destruction. What really depressed him was the looting of the destroyed schools—the furniture, the books, the computers, were all stolen by local people. He cried when he heard this. "They are vultures jumping on a dead body."

The next day he went on a live show on the Voice of America and angrily condemned the attacks. Muslim Khan, the Taliban spokesman, was on the phone. "What was so wrong with these two schools that you should bomb them?" my father asked him.

Muslim Khan said that Sangota was a convent school teaching Christianity and that Excelsior was coeducational, teaching girls and boys together. "Both things are false!" replied my father. "Sangota school has been there since the 1960s and never converted anyone to Christianity—in fact some of them converted to Islam. And Excelsior is only coeducational in the primary section."

Muslim Khan didn't answer. "What about their own daughters?" I asked my father. "Don't they want them to learn?"

Our headmistress, Madam Maryam, had studied at Sangota, and her younger sister Ayesha was a pupil there, so she and some of the other Sangota girls transferred to our school. The monthly school fees were never enough to cover all our outgoings, so the extra fees were welcome, but my father was unhappy. He went everywhere he could demanding the reconstruction of both schools. Once he spoke at a big gathering and held up an audience member's baby girl and said, "This girl is our future. Do we want her to be ignorant?" The crowd agreed that they would sacrifice themselves before giving up their daughters' education. The new girls had horrible stories. Ayesha told us how one day on the way home from Sangota she had seen a Taliban holding up the severed head of a policeman by its hair, blood dripping from the neck. The Sangota girls were also very bright, which meant more competition. One of them, Rida, was excellent at making speeches. She became a good friend of mine and of Moniba's, which sometimes caused fights, as three is a tricky number. Moniba often brought food to school and would just bring one spare fork. "Are you my friend or Rida's?" I asked Moniba.

She laughed and said, "We are all three good friends."

By the end of 2008, around 400 schools had been destroyed by the Taliban. We had a new

government under President Asif Zardari, the widower of Benazir, but they didn't seem to care about Swat. I told people things would be different if Zardari's own daughters were at school in Swat. There were suicide bombings all over the country: even the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad had been blown up.

In Swat it was safer in the town than in the remote areas, and many of our family came from the countryside to stay with us. The house was small and got very crowded with the cousins who already lived with us. There was little to do. We couldn't play cricket in the street or on the roof like we used to. We played marbles in the yard over and over again. I fought nonstop with my brother Khushal, and he would go crying to our mother. Never in history have Khushal and Malala been friends.

I liked doing my hair in different styles and would spend ages in the bathroom in front of the mirror trying out looks I had seen in movies. Until I was eight or nine my mother used to cut my hair short like my brothers' because of lice and also to make it easier to wash and brush, as it would get messed up under my shawl. But finally I had persuaded her to let me grow it to my shoulders. Unlike Moniba's, which is straight, my hair is wavy, and I liked to twist it into curls or tie it into plaits. "What are you doing in there *pisho?*" my mother would shout. "Our guests need the bathroom and everyone is having to wait for you."

One of the worst times was the fasting month of Ramadan in 2008. During Ramadan no food or drink can pass a Muslim's lips in daylight hours. The Taliban bombed the power station, so we had no electricity, then a few days later they blasted the pipeline, so we had no gas either. The price of the gas cylinders we used to buy from the market doubled, so my mother had to cook on a fire like we did in the village. She didn't complain—food needed to be cooked and she cooked it, and there were others worse off than us. But there was no clean water and people started dying from cholera. The hospital could not cope with all the patients and had to erect big tents outside to treat people.

Though we had no generator at home, my father bought one to install at the school, and fresh water was pumped from a borehole, which all the children in the neighborhood went to collect. Every day there would be lines of people waiting to fill jugs, bottles and drums. One of the neighbors got frightened. "What are you doing?" he

asked. "If the Taliban find out you're giving water in the month of Ramadan they will bomb us!"

My father replied that people would die either of thirst or bombings.

The days when we used to go for trips or for picnics seemed like a dream. No one would venture from their homes after sunset. The terrorists even blew up the ski lift and the big hotel in Malam Jabba where tourists used to stay. A holiday paradise turned into a hell where no tourist would venture.

Then, at the end of 2008, Fazlullah's deputy Maulana Shah Dauran announced on the radio that all girls' schools would close. From 15 January girls must not go to school, he warned. First I thought it was a joke. "How can they stop us from going to school?" I asked my friends. "They don't have the power. They are saying they will destroy the mountain, but they can't even control the road."

The other girls didn't agree with me. "Who will stop them?" they asked. "They have already blown up hundreds of schools and no one has done anything."

My father used to say the people of Swat and the teachers would continue to educate our children until the last room, the last teacher and the last student was alive. My parents never once suggested I should withdraw from school, ever. Though we loved school, we hadn't realized how important education was until the Taliban tried to stop us. Going to school, reading and doing our homework wasn't just a way of passing time, it was our future.

That winter it snowed and we built snow bears but without much joy. In winter the Taliban used to disappear into the mountains, but we knew they would be back and had no idea what was coming next. We believed school would start again. The Taliban could take our pens and books, but they couldn't stop our minds from thinking.

Hawking's *A Brief History of Time,* which answered big questions such as how the universe began and whether time could run backward. I was only eleven years old and already I wished it could.

We Pashtuns know the stone of revenge never decays, and when you do something wrong you will face the music. *But when would that be?* we continually asked ourselves.

## 13

## The Diary of Gul Makai

It was during one of those dark days that my father received a call from his friend Abdul Hai Kakar, a BBC radio correspondent based in Peshawar. He was looking for a female teacher or a schoolgirl to write a diary about life under the Taliban. He wanted to show the human side of the catastrophe in Swat. Initially Madam Maryam's younger sister Ayesha agreed, but her father found out and refused his permission saying it was too risky.

When I overheard my father talking about this, I said, "Why not me?" I wanted people to know what was happening. Education is our right, I said. Just as it is our right to sing. Islam has given us this right and says that every girl and boy should go to school. The Quran says we should seek knowledge, study hard and learn the mysteries of our world.

I had never written a diary before and didn't know how to begin. Although we had a computer, there were frequent power cuts and few places had Internet access. So Hai Kakar would call me in the evening on my mother's mobile. He used his wife's phone to protect us, as he said his own phone was bugged by the intelligence services. He would guide me, asking me questions about my day, and asking me to tell him small anecdotes or talk about my dreams. We would speak for half an hour or forty-five minutes in Urdu, even though we are both Pashtun, as the blog was to appear in Urdu and he wanted the voice to be as authentic as possible. Then he wrote up my words and once a week they would appear on the BBC Urdu website. He told me about Anne Frank, a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl who hid from the Nazis with her family in Amsterdam during the war. He told me she kept a diary about their lives all cramped together, about how they spent their days and about her own feelings. It was very sad, as in the end the family was betrayed and arrested and Anne died in a concentration camp when she was only fifteen. Later her diary was published and is a very powerful record.

Hai Kakar told me it could be dangerous to use my real name and gave me the pseudonym

Gul Makai, which means "cornflower" and is the name of the heroine in a Pashtun folk story. It's a kind of *Romeo and Juliet* story in which Gul Makai and Musa Khan meet at school and fall in love. But they are from different tribes, so their love causes a war. However, unlike Shakespeare's play their story doesn't end in tragedy. Gul Makai uses the Quran to teach her elders that war is bad and they eventually stop fighting and allow the lovers to unite.

My first diary entry appeared on 3 January 2009 under the heading I AM AFRAID: "I had a terrible dream last night filled with military helicopters and Taliban. I have had such dreams since the launch of the military operation in Swat." I wrote about being afraid to go to school because of the Taliban edict and looking over my shoulder all the time. I also described something that happened on my way home from school: "I heard a man behind me saying, 'I will kill you.' I quickened my pace and after a while I looked back to see if he was following me. To my huge relief I saw he was speaking on his phone, he must have been talking to someone else."

It was thrilling to see my words on the website. I was a bit shy to start with, but after a while I got to know the kind of things Hai Kakar wanted me to talk about and became more confident. He liked personal feelings and what he called my "pungent sentences" and also the mix of everyday family life with the terror of the Taliban.

I wrote a lot about school, as that was at the center of our lives. I loved my royal-blue school uniform, but we were advised to wear plain clothes instead and hide our books under our shawls. One extract was called DO NOT WEAR COLORFUL CLOTHES. In it I wrote, "I was getting ready for school one day and was about to put on my uniform when I remembered the advice of our principal, so that day I decided to wear my favorite pink dress."

I also wrote about the burqa. When you're very young, you love the burqa because it's great for dressing up. But when you are made to wear it, that's a different matter. Also it makes walking difficult! One of my diary entries was about an incident that happened when I was out shopping with my mother and cousin in the Cheena Bazaar: "There we heard gossip that one day a woman was wearing a shuttlecock burqa and fell over. When a man tried to help her she refused and said. 'Don't help me, brother, as this will bring immense pleasure to Fazlullah.' When we entered the shop we were going to, the shopkeeper laughed and told us he got scared thinking we might be suicide bombers, as many suicide bombers wore the burqa."

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At school people started talking about the diary. One girl even printed it out and brought it in to show my father.

"It's very good," he said with a knowing smile.

I wanted to tell people it was me, but the BBC correspondent had told me not to, as it could be dangerous. I didn't see why, as I was just a child, and who would attack a child? But some of my friends recognized incidents in it. And I almost gave the game away in one entry when I said, "My mother liked my pen name Gul Makai and joked to my father we should change my name…I also like the name because my real name means 'grief-stricken.'"

The diary of Gul Makai received attention further afield. Some newspapers printed extracts. The BBC even made a recording of it using another girl's voice, and I began to see that the pen and the words that come from it can be much more powerful than machine guns, tanks or helicopters. We were learning how to struggle. And we were learning how powerful we are when we speak.

Some of our teachers stopped coming to school.

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One said he had been ordered by Mullah Fazlullah to help build his center in Imam Deri. Another said he'd seen a beheaded corpse on the way in and could no longer risk his life to teach. Many people were scared. Our neighbors said the Taliban were instructing people to make it known to the mosque if their daughters were unmarried so they could be married off, probably to militants.

By the start of January 2009 there were only ten girls in my class when once there had been twenty-seven. Many of my friends had left the valley so they could be educated in Peshawar, but my father insisted we would not leave. "Swat has given us so much. In these tough days we must be strong for our valley," he said.

One night we all went for dinner at the house of my father's friend Dr. Afzal, who runs a hospital. After dinner, when the doctor was driving us home, we saw masked Taliban on both sides of the road carrying guns. We were terrified. Dr. Afzal's hospital was in an area that had been taken over by the Taliban. The constant gunfire and curfews had made it impossible for the hospital to function, so he had moved it to Barikot. There had been an outcry, and the Taliban spokesman Muslim Khan had called on the doctor to reopen it. He had asked for my father's advice. My father told him, "Don't accept good things from bad people." A hospital protected by the Taliban was not a good idea, so he refused.

Dr. Afzal did not live far from us, so once we were safely home, my father insisted on going back with him in case he was targeted by the Taliban. As he and my father drove back, Dr. Afzal nervously asked him, "What names shall we give if they stop us?"

"You are Dr. Afzal and I am Ziauddin Yousafzai," replied my father. "These bloody people. We haven't done anything wrong. Why should we change our names—that's what criminals do."

Fortunately the Taliban had disappeared. We all breathed a big sigh of relief when my father phoned to say they were safe.

I didn't want to give in either. But the Taliban's deadline was drawing closer: girls had to stop going to school. How could they stop more than 50,000 girls from going to school in the twenty-first century? I kept hoping something would happen and the schools would remain open. But finally the deadline was upon us. We were determined that the Khushal School bell would be the last to stop ringing. Madam Maryam had even

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got married so she could stay in Swat. Her family had moved to Karachi to get away from the conflict and, as a woman, she could not live alone.

Wednesday 14 January was the day my school closed, and when I woke up that morning I saw TV cameras in my bedroom. A Pakistani journalist called Irfan Ashraf was following me around, even as I said my prayers and brushed my teeth.

I could tell my father was in a bad mood. One of his friends had persuaded him to participate in a documentary for the *New York Times* website to show the world what was happening to us. A few weeks before, we had met the American video journalist Adam Ellick in Peshawar. It was a funny meeting, as he conducted a long interview with my father in English and I didn't say a word. Then he asked if he could talk to me and began asking questions using Irfan as an interpreter. After about ten minutes of this he realized from my facial expressions that I could understand him perfectly. "You speak English?" he asked me.

"Yes, I was just saying there is a fear in my heart," I replied.

Adam was astonished. "What's wrong with you people?" he asked Irfan and my father. "She speaks better English than the rest of you and you're translating for her!" We all laughed.

The original idea for the documentary had been to follow my father on the last day of school, but at the end of the meeting Irfan asked me, "What would you do if there comes a day when you can't go back to your valley and school?" I said this wouldn't happen. Then he insisted and I started to weep. I think it was then that Adam decided he should focus on me.

Adam could not come to Swat because it was too dangerous for foreigners. When Irfan and a cameraman arrived in Mingora, our uncle, who was staying with us, said over and over that it was too risky to have cameras in our house. My father also kept telling them to hide the cameras. But they had come a long way and it's hard for us as Pashtuns to refuse hospitality. Besides my father knew this could be our megaphone to the outside world. His friend had told him it would make far more impact than him roaming from pillar to post.

I had done a lot of television interviews and enjoyed speaking into the microphone so much that my friends would tease me. But I had never done anything like this. "Be natural," Irfan told me. That wasn't easy with a camera trained on me everywhere I went even as I brushed my teeth. I showed them the uniform I couldn't wear and told them I was scared that if the Taliban caught me going to school they would throw acid in my face, as they had to girls in Afghanistan.

We had a special assembly that final morning, but it was hard to hear with the noise of helicopters overhead. Some of us spoke out against what was happening in our valley. The bell rang for the very last time, and then Madam Maryam announced it was winter vacation. But unlike in other years no date was announced for the start of next term. Even so, some teachers still gave us homework. In the yard I hugged all my friends. I looked at the honors board and wondered if my name would ever appear on it again. Exams were due in March, but how could they take place? Coming first didn't matter if you couldn't study at all. When someone takes away your pens you realize quite how important education is.

Before I closed the school door I looked back as if it were the last time I would ever be at school. That's the closing shot in one part of the documentary. In reality I went back inside. My friends and I didn't want that day to end, so we decided to stay on for a while longer. We went to the primary school where there was more space to run around and played cops and robbers. Then we

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played mango mango, where you make a circle and sing, then when the song stops everyone has to freeze. Anyone who moves or laughs is out.

We came home from school late that day. Usually we leave at 1 p.m., but that day we stayed till three. Before we left, Moniba and I had an argument over something so silly I can't remember what it was. Our friends couldn't believe it. "You two always argue when there's an important occasion!" they said. It wasn't a good way to leave things.

I told the documentary makers, "They cannot stop me. I will get my education if it's at home, school or somewhere else. This is our request to the world—to save our schools, save our Pakistan, save our Swat."

When I got home, I cried and cried. I didn't want to stop learning. I was only eleven years old, but I felt as though I had lost everything. I had told everyone in my class that the Taliban wouldn't go through with it. "They're just like our politicians—they talk the talk, but they won't do anything," I'd said. But then they went ahead and closed our school and I felt embarrassed. I couldn't control myself. I was crying, my mother was crying, but my father insisted, "You will go to school."

For him the closing of the schools also meant the loss of business. The boys' school would reopen after the winter holidays, but the loss of the girls' school represented a big cut in our income. More than half the school fees were overdue and my father spent the last day chasing money to pay the rent, the utility bills and the teachers' salaries.

That night the air was full of artillery fire and I woke up three times. The next morning everything had changed. I began to think that maybe I should go to Peshawar or abroad or maybe I could ask our teachers to form a secret school in our home, as some Afghans had done during Taliban rule. Afterward I went on as many radio and TV channels as possible. "They can stop us going to school, but they can't stop us learning," I said. I sounded hopeful, but in my heart I was worried. My father and I went to Peshawar and visited lots of places to tell people what was happening. I spoke of the irony of the Taliban wanting female teachers and doctors for women yet not letting girls go to school to qualify for these jobs.

Once Muslim Khan had said girls should not go to school and learn Western ways. This from a man who had lived so long in America! He insisted he would have his own education system. "What would Muslim Khan use instead of the stethoscope and the thermometer?" my father asked. "Are there any Eastern instruments which will treat the sick?" The Taliban is against education because they think that when a child reads a book or learns English or studies science he or she will become Westernized.

But I said, "Education is education. We should learn everything and then choose which path to follow." Education is neither Eastern nor Western, it is human.

My mother used to tell me to hide my face when I spoke to the media because at my age I should be in purdah and she was afraid for my safety. But she never banned me from doing anything. It was a time of horror and fear. People often said the Taliban might kill my father but not me. "Malala is a child," they would say, "and even the Taliban don't kill children."

But my grandmother wasn't so sure. Whenever my grandmother saw me speaking on television, or leaving the house, she would pray, "Please God make Malala like Benazir Bhutto but do not give her Benazir's short life."

After my school closed down I continued to write the blog. Four days after the ban on girls' schools, five more were destroyed. "I am quite surprised," I wrote, "because these schools had

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closed, so why did they also need to be destroyed? No one has gone to school following the Taliban's deadline. The army is doing nothing about it. They are sitting in their bunkers on top of the hills. They slaughter goats and eat with pleasure." I also wrote about people going to watch the floggings announced on Mullah FM, and the fact that the police were nowhere to be seen.

One day we got a call from America, from a student at Stanford University. Her name was Shiza Shahid and she came from Islamabad. She had seen the *New York Times* documentary *Class Dismissed in Swat Valley* and tracked us down. We saw then the power of the media and she became a great support to us. My father was almost bursting with pride at how I came across on the documentary. "Look at her," he told Adam Ellick. "Don't you think she is meant for the skies?" Fathers can be very embarrassing.

Adam took us to Islamabad. It was the first time I had ever visited. Islamabad was a beautiful place with nice white bungalows and broad roads, though it has none of the natural beauty of Swat. We saw the Red Mosque where the siege had taken place, the wide, wide Constitution Avenue leading to the white-colonnaded buildings of the Parliament House and the Presidency, where Zardari now lived. General Musharraf was in exile in London.

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We went to shops where I bought school books and Adam bought me DVDs of American TV programs like *Ugly Betty*, which was about a girl with big braces and a big heart. I loved it and dreamed of one day going to New York and working on a magazine like her. We visited the Lok Virsa museum, and it was a joy to celebrate our national heritage once again. Our own museum in Swat had closed. On the steps outside an old man was selling popcorn. He was a Pashtun like us, and when my father asked if he was from Islamabad he replied, "Do you think Islamabad can ever belong to us Pashtuns?" He said he came from Mohmand, one of the tribal areas, but had to flee because of a military operation. I saw tears in my parents' eyes.

Lots of buildings were surrounded by concrete blocks, and there were checkpoints for incoming vehicles to guard against suicide bombs. When our bus hit a pothole on the way back my brother Khushal, who had been asleep, jerked awake. "Was that a bomb blast?" he asked. This was the fear that filled our daily lives. Any small disturbance or noise could be a bomb or gunfire.

On our short trips we forgot our troubles in

Swat. But we returned to the threats and danger as we entered our valley once again. Even so, Swat was our home and we were not ready to leave it.

Back in Mingora the first thing I saw when I opened my wardrobe was my uniform, school bag and geometry set. I felt so sad. The visit to Islamabad had been a lovely break, but this was my reality now.

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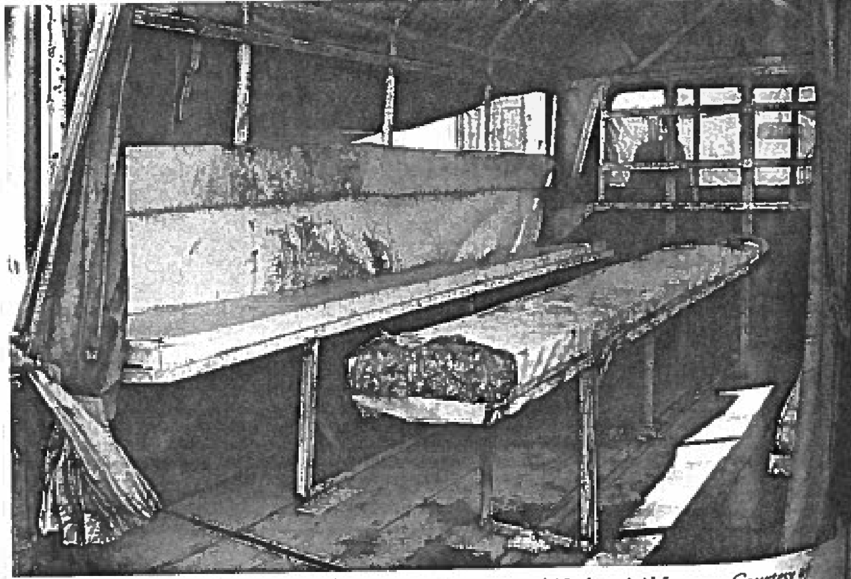
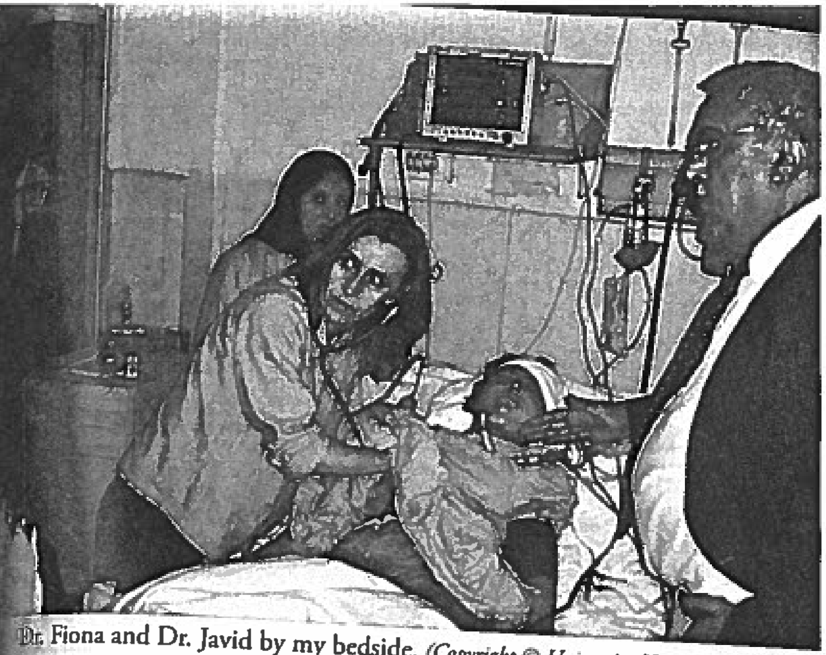
School bombing. *(Copyright © Kh Awais)*



The bus where I was shot. *(Copyright © Asad Hashim / Al Jazeera. Courtesy of Al Jazeera English; AlJazeera.com)*



Dr. Fiona and Dr. Javid by my bedside. *(Copyright © University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust; used with the kind permission of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham)*

First days in the Birmingham hospital. *(Copyright © University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust; used with the kind permission of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham)*

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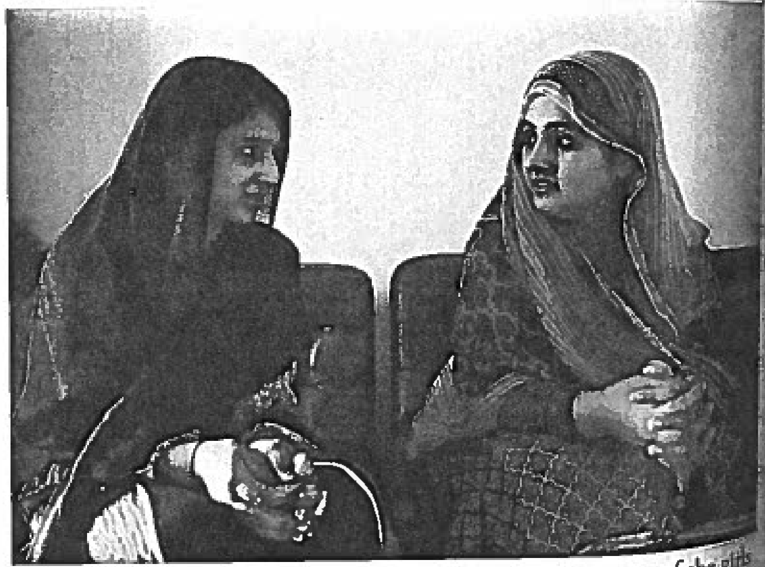
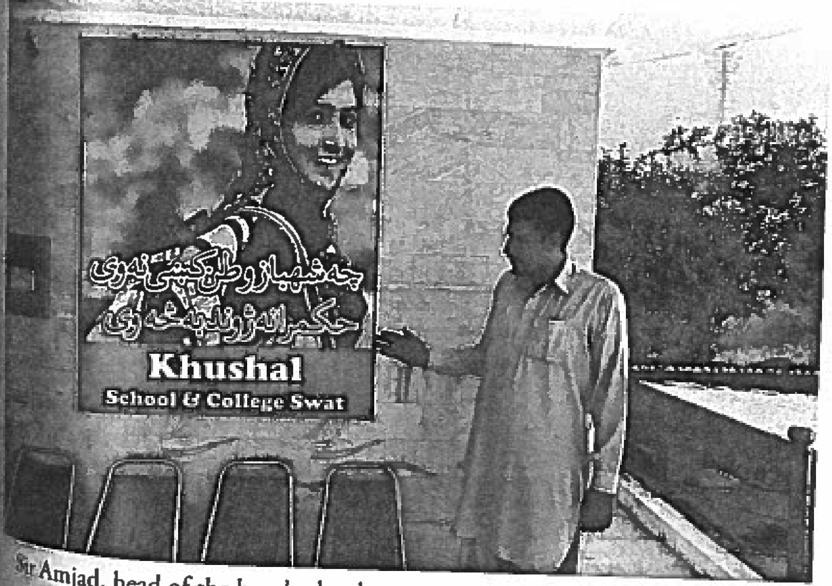
I am reading in hospital. *(Copyright © University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust; used with the kind permission of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham)*



Our headmistress, Madam Maryam (left), with Shazia, one of the girls who was shot with me.

My friends keep a chair in class for me (far right).



Sir Amjad, head of the boys' school, greets my poster every morning. *(Copyright © Justin Sutcliffe, 2013)*

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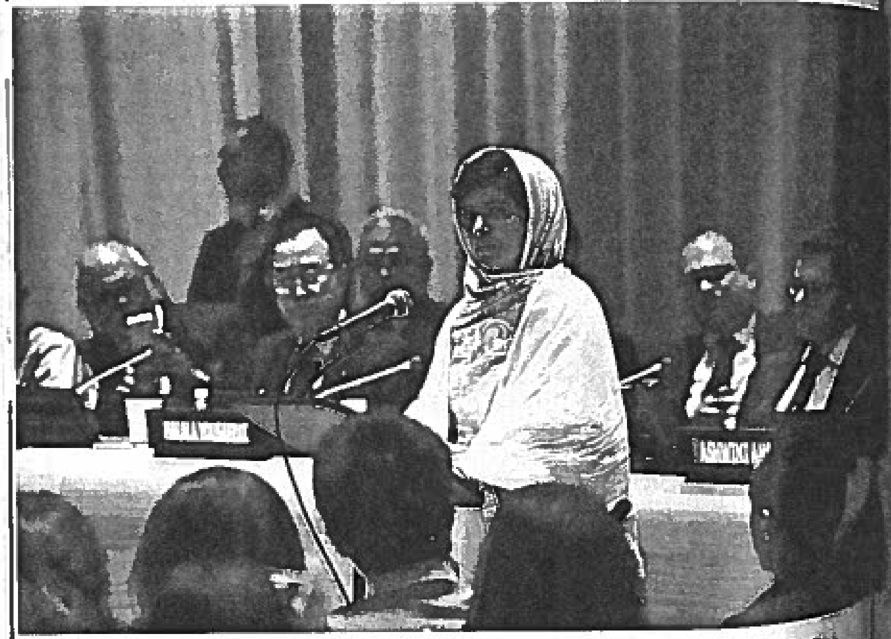
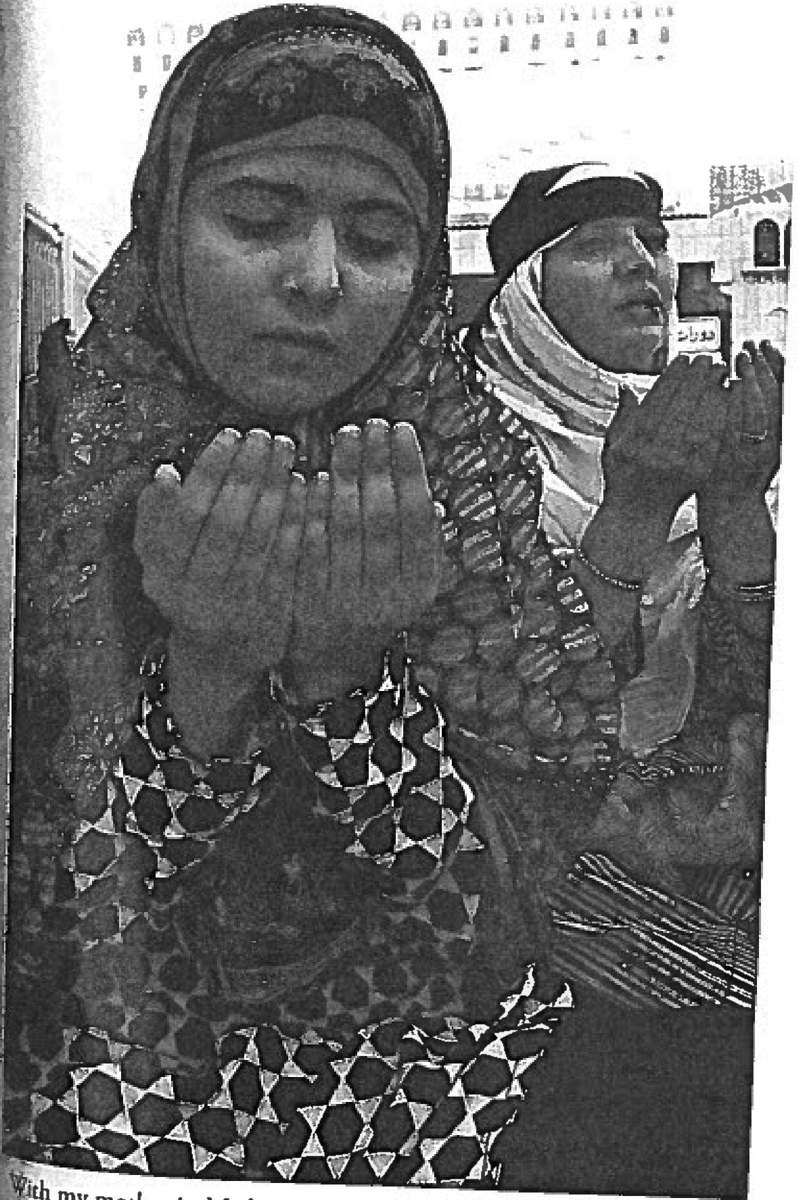
Here I am at the UN with Ban Ki-moon, Gordon Brown, family and friends. *(Copyright © UN Photo / Eskinder Debebe; used with the kind permission of the United Nations Photo Library)*



Speaking at the UN on my sixteenth birthday. *(Copyright © UN Photo / Ri Bajornas; used with the kind permission of the United Nations Photo Library)*



With my mother in Medina.

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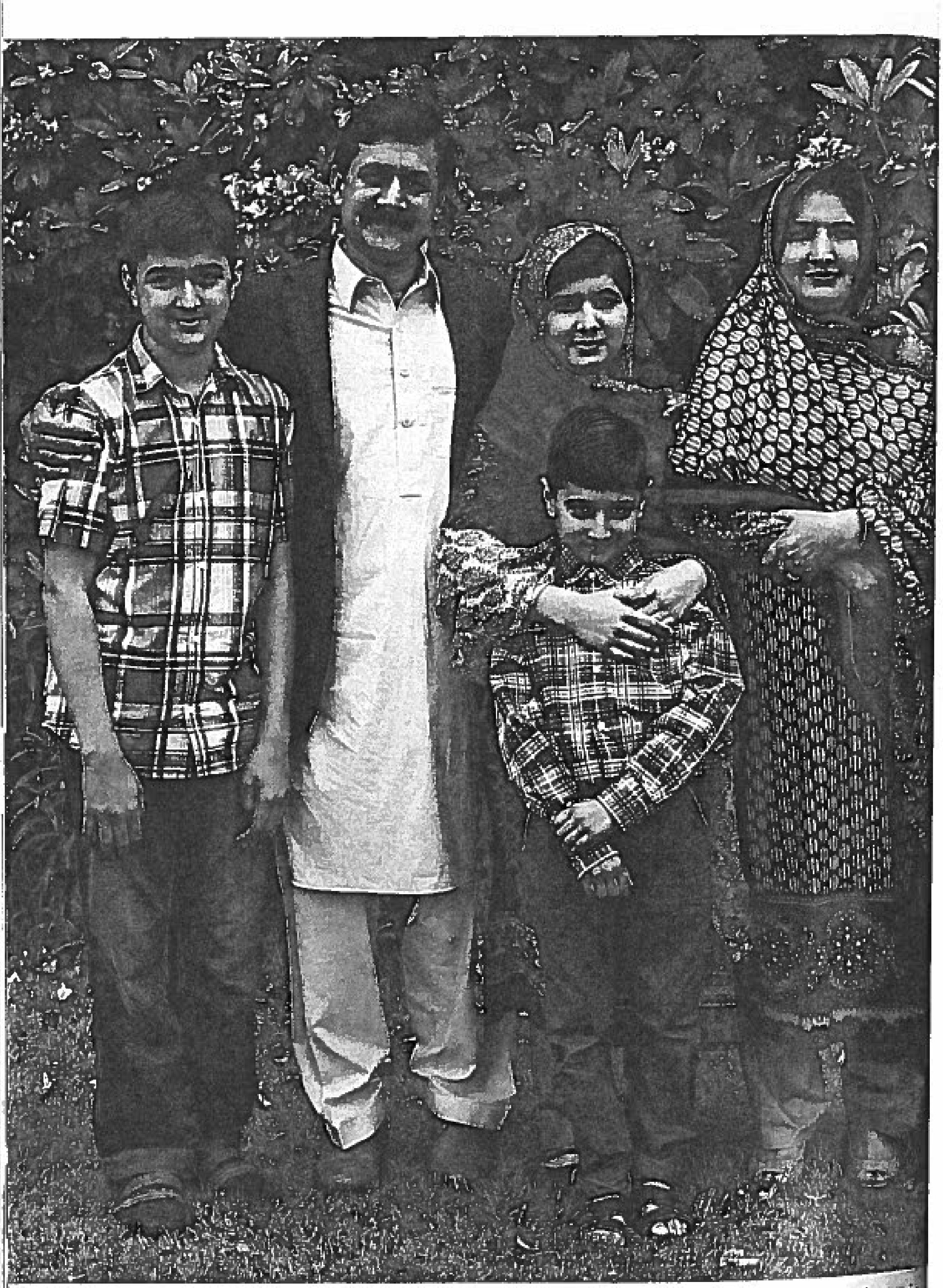

Here we are outside our new home in Birmingham. *(Copyright © Antonio Olmos)* ing around on the street. He followed me to the house and put a note inside our gate where I would see it. I told a small girl to fetch it for me. He had written, "Now you have become very popular, I still love you and know you love me. This is my number, call me."

I gave the note to my father and he was angry. He called Haroon and told him he would tell his father. That was the last time I saw him. After that the boys stopped coming to our street, but one of the small boys who played with Atal would call out suggestively, "How is Haroon?" whenever I passed by. I got so fed up with it that one day I told Atal to bring the boy inside. I shouted at him so angrily that he stopped.

I told Moniba what had happened once we were friends again. She was always very careful about interactions with boys because her brothers watched everything. "Sometimes I think it's easier to be a Twilight vampire than a girl in Swat," I sighed. But really I wished that being hassled by a boy was my biggest problem.

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## 20

# Who Is Malala?

One morning in late summer when my father was getting ready to go to school he noticed that the painting of me looking at the sky which we had been given by the school in Karachi had shifted in the night. He loved that painting and had hung it over his bed. Seeing it crooked disturbed him. "Please put it straight," he asked my mother in an unusually sharp tone.

That same week our math teacher, Miss Shazia, arrived at school in a hysterical state. She told my father that she'd had a nightmare in which I came to school with my leg badly burned and she had tried to protect it. She begged him to give some cooked rice to the poor, as we believe that if you give rice, even ants and birds will eat the bits that drop to the floor and will pray for us. My father gave

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money instead and she was distraught, saying that wasn't the same.

We laughed at Miss Shazia's premonition, but then I started having bad dreams too. I didn't say anything to my parents, but whenever I went out I was afraid that Taliban with guns would leap out at me or throw acid in my face, as they had done to women in Afghanistan. I was particularly scared of the steps leading up to our street where the boys used to hang out. Sometimes I thought I heard footsteps behind me or imagined figures slipping into the shadows.

Unlike my father, I took precautions. At night I would wait until everyone was asleep—my mother, my father, my brothers, the other family in our house and any guests we had from our village—then I'd check every single door and window. I'd go outside and make sure the front gate was locked. Then I would check all the rooms, one by one. My room was at the front with lots of windows and I kept the curtains open. I wanted to be able to see everything, though my father told me not to. "If they were going to kill me they would have done it in 2009," I said. But I worried someone would put a ladder against the house, climb over the wall and break in through a window.

Then I'd pray. At night I used to pray a lot. The Taliban think we are not Muslims but we are. We believe in God more than they do and we trust him to protect us. I used to say the *Ayat al-Kursi,* the Verse of the Throne from the second surah of the Quran, the Chapter of the Cow. This is a very special verse and we believe that if you say it three times at night your home will be safe from *shayatin* or devils. When you say it five times your street will be safe, and seven times will protect the whole area. So I'd say it seven times or even more. Then I'd pray to God, "Bless us. First our father and family, then our street, then our whole *mohalla,* then all Swat." Then I'd say, "No, all Muslims." Then, "No, not just Muslims; bless all human beings."

The time of year I prayed most was during exams. It was the one time when my friends and I did all five prayers a day like my mother was always trying to get me to do. I found it particularly hard in the afternoon, when I didn't want to be dragged away from the TV. At exam time I prayed to Allah for high marks though our teachers used to warn us, "God won't give you marks if you don't work hard. God showers us with his blessings, but he is honest as well."

So I studied hard too. Usually I liked exams as

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a chance to show what I could do. But when they came around in October 2012 I felt under pressure. I did not want to come second to Malka-e-Noor again as I had in March. Then she had beaten me by not just one or two marks, the usual difference between us, but by five marks! I had been taking extra lessons with Sir Amjad, who ran the boys' school. The night before the exams began I stayed up studying until 3 o'clock in the morning and reread an entire textbook.

The first paper, on Monday, 8 October, was physics. I love physics because it is about truth, a world determined by principles and laws—no messing around or twisting things like in politics, particularly those in my country. As we waited for the signal to start the exam, I recited holy verses to myself. I completed the paper, but I knew I'd made a mistake filling in the blanks. I was so cross with myself I almost cried. It was just one question worth only one mark, but it made me feel that something devastating was going to happen.

When I got home that afternoon I was sleepy, but the next day was Pakistan Studies, a difficult paper for me. I was worried about losing even more marks, so I made myself coffee with milk to drive away the devils of sleep. When my mother came she tried it and liked it and drank the rest.

I could not tell her, "*Bhabi,* please stop it, that's my coffee." But there was no more coffee left in the cupboard. Once again I stayed up late, memorizing the textbook about the history of our independence.

In the morning my parents came to my room as usual and woke me up. I don't remember a single school day on which I woke up early by myself. My mother made our usual breakfast of sugary tea, chapatis and fried egg. We all had breakfast together—me, my mother, my father, Khushal and Atal. It was a big day for my mother, as she was going to start lessons that afternoon to learn to read and write with Miss Ulfat, my old teacher from kindergarten.

My father started teasing Atal, who was eight by then and cheekier than ever. "Look, Atal, when Malala is prime minister, you will be her secretary," he said.

Atal got very cross. "No, no, no!" he said. "I'm no less than Malala. I will be prime minister and she will be my secretary." All the banter meant I ended up being so late I only had time to eat half my egg and no time to clear up.

The Pakistan Studies paper went better than I thought it would. There were questions about how Jinnah had created our country as the first

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Muslim homeland and also about the national tragedy of how Bangladesh came into being. It was strange to think that Bangladesh was once part of Pakistan despite being a thousand miles away. I answered all the questions and was confident I'd done well. I was happy when the exam was over, chatting and gossiping with my friends as we waited for Sher Mohammad Baba, a school assistant, to call for us when the bus arrived.

The bus did two trips every day, and that day we took the second one. We liked staying on at school and Moniba said, "As we're tired after the exam, let's stay and chat before going home." I was relieved that the Pakistan Studies exam had gone well, so I agreed. I had no worries that day. I was hungry, but because we were fifteen we could no longer go outside to the street, so I got one of the small girls to buy me a corn cob. I ate a little bit of it then gave it to another girl to finish.

At 12 o'clock *Baba* called us over the loudspeaker. We all ran down the steps. The other girls all covered their faces before emerging from the door and climbed into the back of the bus. I wore my scarf over my head but never over my face.

I asked Usman Bhai Jan to tell us a joke while we were waiting for two teachers to arrive. He has a collection of extremely funny stories. That day instead of a story he did a magic trick to make a pebble disappear. "Show us how you did it!" we all clamored, but he wouldn't.

When everyone was ready he took Miss Rubi and a couple of small children in the front cab with him. Another little girl cried, saying she wanted to ride there too. Usman Bhai Jan said no, there was no room; she would have to stay in the back with us. But I felt sorry for her and persuaded him to let her in the cab.

Atal had been told by my mother to ride on the bus with me, so he walked over from the primary school. He liked to hang off the tailboard at the back, which made Usman Bhai Jan cross, as it was dangerous. That day Usman Bhai Jan had had enough and refused to let him. "Sit inside, Atal Khan, or I won't take you!" he said. Atal had a tantrum and refused, so he walked home in a huff with some of his friends.

Usman Bhai Jan started the *dyna* and we were off. I was talking to Moniba, my wise, nice friend. Some girls were singing, I was drumming rhythms with my fingers on the seat.

Moniba and I liked to sit near the open back so we could see out. At that time of day Haji Baba Road was always a jumble of colored rickshaws, people on foot and men on scooters, all zigzag-

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ging and honking. An ice-cream boy on a red tricycle painted with red and white nuclear missiles rode up behind waving at us, until a teacher shooed him away. A man was chopping off chickens' heads, the blood dripping onto the street. I drummed my fingers. Chop, chop, chop. Drip, drip, drip. Funny, when I was little we always said Swatis were so peace-loving it was hard to find a man to slaughter a chicken.

The air smelled of diesel, bread and kebab mixed with the stink from the stream where people still dumped their rubbish and were never going to stop despite all my father's campaigning. But we were used to it. Besides, soon the winter would be here, bringing the snow, which would cleanse and quieten everything.

The bus turned right off the main road at the army checkpoint. On a kiosk was a poster of crazy-eyed men with beards and caps or turbans under big letters saying WANTED TERRORISTS. The picture at the top of a man with a black turban and beard was Fazlullah. More than three years had passed since the military operation to drive the Taliban out of Swat had begun. We were grateful to the army but couldn't understand why they were still everywhere, in machine-gun nests on roofs and manning checkpoints. To even enter our valley people needed official permission.

The road up the small hill is usually busy, as it is a shortcut, but that day it was strangely quiet. "Where are all the people?" I asked Moniba. All the girls were singing and chatting and our voices bounced around inside the bus.

Around that time my mother was probably just going through the doorway into our school for her first lesson since she had left school at age six.

I didn't see the two young men step out into the road and bring the van to a sudden halt. I didn't get a chance to answer their question "Who is Malala?" or I would have explained to them why they should let us girls go to school as well as their own sisters and daughters.

The last thing I remember is that I was thinking about the revision I needed to do for the next day. The sounds in my head were not the *crack, crack, crack* of three bullets, but the *chop, chop, chop, drip, drip, drip* of the man severing the heads of chickens, and them dropping into the dirty street, one by one.

## 23

# "The Girl Shot in the Head, Birmingham"

I woke up on 16 October, a week after the shooting. I was thousands of miles away from home with a tube in my neck to help me breathe and unable to speak. I was on the way back to critical care after another CT scan, and flitted between consciousness and sleep until I woke properly.

The first thing I thought when I came around was, *Thank God I'm not dead.* But I had no idea where I was. I knew I was not in my homeland. The nurses and doctors were speaking English, though they all seemed to be from different countries. I was speaking to them, but no one could hear me because of the tube in my neck. To start with, my left eye was very blurry and everyone had two noses and four eyes. All sorts of questions flew through my waking brain: *Where was I? Who* *had brought me there? Where were my parents? Was my father alive?* I was terrified.

Dr. Javid, who was there when I was brought around, says he will never forget the look of fear and bewilderment on my face. He spoke to me in Urdu. The only thing I knew was that Allah had blessed me with a new life. A nice lady in a headscarf held my hand and said, *"Asalaamu alaikum,"* which is our traditional Muslim greeting. Then she started saying prayers in Urdu and reciting verses of the Quran. She told me her name was Rehanna and she was the Muslim chaplain. Her voice was soft and her words were soothing, and I drifted back to sleep.

I dreamed I wasn't really in hospital.

When I woke again the next day, I noticed I was in a strange green room with no windows and very bright lights. It was an intensive care cubicle in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Everything was very clean and shiny, not like the hospital in Mingora.

A nurse gave me a pencil and a pad. I couldn't write properly. The words came out wrong. I wanted to write my father's phone number. I couldn't space letters. Dr. Javid brought me an alphabet board so I could point to the letters. The first words I spelled out were "father" and "country." The nurse told me I was in Birmingham, but I had no idea where that was. Only later did they bring me an atlas so I could see it was in England. I didn't know what had happened. The nurses weren't telling me anything. Even my name. Was I still Malala?

My head was aching so much that even the injections they gave me couldn't stop the pain. My left ear kept bleeding and my left hand felt funny. Nurses and doctors kept coming in and out. The nurses asked me questions and told me to blink twice for yes. No one told me what was going on or who had brought me to the hospital. I thought they didn't know themselves. I could feel that the left side of my face wasn't working properly. If I looked at the nurses or doctors for too long, my left eye watered. I didn't seem to be able to hear from my left ear, and my jaw wouldn't move properly. I gestured to people to stand on my right.

Then a kind lady called Dr. Fiona came and gave me a white teddy bear. She said I should call it Junaid and she would explain why later. I didn't know who Junaid was, so I named it Lily. She also brought me a pink exercise book to write in. The first two questions my pen wrote were "Why have I no father?" and "My father has no money. Who will pay for all this?"

"Your father is safe," she replied. "He is in Pakistan. Don't worry about payment."

I repeated the questions to anyone who came in. They all said the same. But I was not convinced. I had no idea what had happened to me and I didn't trust anyone. If my father was fine, why wasn't he here? I thought my parents didn't know where I was and could be searching for me in the chowks and bazaars of Mingora. I didn't believe my parents were safe. Those first days my mind kept drifting in and out of a dreamworld. I kept having flashbacks to lying on a bed with men around me, so many that you couldn't count, and asking, "Where is my father?" I thought I had been shot but wasn't sure—were these dreams or memories?

I was obsessed by how much this must be costing. The money from the awards had almost all gone on the school and buying a plot of land in our village in Shangla. Whenever I saw the doctors talking to one another I thought they were saying, "Malala doesn't have any money. Malala can't pay for her treatment." One of the doctors was a Polish man who always looked sad. I thought he was the owner of the hospital and was unhappy because I couldn't pay. So I gestured at a nurse for paper and wrote, "Why are you sad?"

He replied, "No, I am not sad." "Who will pay?" I wrote. "We don't have any money." "Don't worry, your government will pay," he said. Afterward he always smiled when he saw me.

I always think about solutions to problems, so I thought maybe I could go down to the reception of the hospital and ask for a phone to call my mother and father. But my brain was telling me, *You don't have the money to pay for the call, nor do you know the country code.* Then I thought, *I need to go out and start working to earn money so I can buy a phone and call my father so we can all be together again.*

Everything was so mixed up in my mind. I thought the teddy bear Dr. Fiona had given me was green and had been swapped with a white one. "Where's the green teddy?" I kept asking, even though I was told over and over there was no green teddy. The green was probably the glow of the walls in the intensive care unit, but I'm still convinced there was a green teddy.

I kept forgetting English words. One note to the nurses was "A wire to clean my teeth." It felt like something was stuck between them and I meant floss. Actually my tongue was numb and my teeth were fine. The only thing that calmed me was when Rehanna came. She said healing prayers and I started moving my lips to some of them and mouthing *"Amin"* (our word for "amen") at the end. The television was kept off, except once when they let me watch *Masterchef,* which I used to watch in Mingora and loved, but everything was blurred. It was only later I learned that people were not allowed to bring in newspapers or tell me anything, as the doctors were worried it could traumatize me.

I was terrified that my father could be dead. Then Fiona brought in a Pakistani newspaper from the week before which had a photograph of my father talking to General Kayani with a shawled figure sitting at the back next to my brother. I could just see her feet. "That's my mother!" I wrote.

Later that day Dr. Javid came in with his mobile phone. "We're going to call your parents," he said. My eyes shone with excitement. "You won't cry, you won't weep," he instructed me. He was gruff but very kind, like he had known me forever. "I will give you the mobile and be strong." I nodded. He dialed the number, spoke and then gave me the phone.

There was my father's voice. I couldn't talk because of the tube in my neck. But I was so happy to hear him. I couldn't smile because of my face, but it was as if there were a smile inside. "I'll come soon," he promised. "Now have a rest and in two days we will be there." Later he told me that Dr. Javid had also ordered him not to cry, as that would make us all sadder. The doctor wanted us to be strong for each other. The call did not last long because my parents did not want to tire me out. My mother blessed me with prayers.

I still presumed that the reason they weren't with me was because my father didn't have the money to pay for my treatment. That's why he was still in Pakistan, to sell our land in the village and also our school. But our land was small and I knew our school buildings and our house were rented, so what could he sell? Perhaps he was asking rich people for a loan.

Even after the call, my parents were not completely reassured. They hadn't actually heard my voice and were still cut off from the outside world. People who visited them were bringing conflicting reports. One of those visitors was Major General Ghulam Qamar, head of military operations in Swat. "There is good news coming from the UK," he told my father. "We are very happy our daughter has survived." He said "our" because now I was seen as the daughter of the nation.

The general told my father that they were carrying out door-to-door searches throughout Swat and monitoring the borders. He said they knew that the people who had targeted me came from a gang of twenty-two Taliban men and that they were the same gang who had attacked Zahid Khan, my father's friend who had been shot two months earlier.

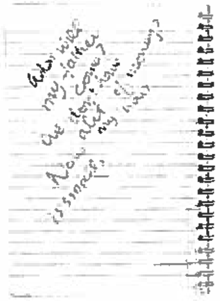
My father said nothing, but he was outraged. The army had been saying for ages that there were no Taliban in Mingora and that they had cleared them all out. Now this general was telling him that there had been twenty-two of them in our town for at least two months. The army had also insisted Zahid Khan was shot in a family feud and not by the Taliban. Now they were saying I had been targeted by the same Taliban as him. My father wanted to say, "You knew there were Taliban in the valley for two months. You knew they wanted to kill my daughter and you didn't stop them?" But he realized it would get him nowhere.

The general hadn't finished. He told my father that although it was good news that I had regained consciousness, there was a problem with my eyesight. My father was confused. How could the officer have information he didn't? He was worried that I would be blind. He imagined his beloved daughter, her face shining, walking around in lifelong darkness, asking, "*Aba,* where am I?" So awful was this news that he couldn't tell my mother, even though he is usually hopeless at keeping secrets, particularly from her. Instead he told God, "This is unacceptable. I will give her one of my own eyes." But then he was worried that at forty-three years old, his own eyes might not be very good. He hardly slept that night. The next morning he asked the major in charge of security if he could borrow his phone to call Colonel Junaid. "I have heard that Malala can't see," my father told him in distress.

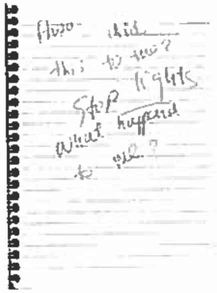
"That's nonsense," he replied. "If she can read and write, how can she not see? Dr. Fiona has kept me updated, and one of the first notes Malala wrote was to ask about you."

Far away in Birmingham, not only could I see, but I was asking for a mirror. "Mirror," I wrote in the pink diary—I wanted to see my face and hair. The nurses brought me a small white mirror, which I still have. When I saw myself, I was distraught. My long hair, which I used to spend ages styling, had gone, and the left side of my head had none at all. "Now my hair is small," I wrote in the book. I thought the Taliban had cut it off.

In fact the Pakistani doctors had shaved my head with no mercy. My face was distorted like someone had pulled it down on one side, and there was a scar to the side of my left eye.



"Hwo did this to me?" I wrote, my letters still scrambled. "What happened to me?"



I also wrote "Stop lights," as the bright lights were making my head ache.

"Something bad happened to you," said Dr. Fiona.

"Was I shot? Was my father shot?" I wrote.

She told me that I had been shot on the school bus. She said two of my friends on the bus had also been shot, but I didn't recognize their names. She explained that the bullet had entered through the side of my left eye where there was a scar, traveled eighteen inches down to my left shoulder and stopped there. It could have taken out my eye or gone into my brain. It was a miracle I was alive.

I felt nothing, maybe just a bit satisfied. "So they did it." My only regret was that I hadn't had a chance to speak to them before they shot me. Now they'd never hear what I had to say. I didn't even think a single bad thought about the man who shot me—I had no thoughts of revenge—I just wanted to go back to Swat. I wanted to go home.

After that, images started to swim around in my head, but I wasn't sure what was a dream and what was reality. The story I remember of being shot is quite different from what really happened. I was in another school bus with my father and friends and another girl called Gul. We were on our way home when suddenly two Taliban appeared dressed in black. One of them put a gun to my head, and the small bullet that came out of it entered my body. In this dream he also shot my father. Then everything is dark, I'm lying on a stretcher and there is a crowd of men, a lot of men, and my eyes are searching for my father. Finally I see him and try to talk to him, but I can't get the words out. Other times I am in a lot of places, in Jinnah Market in Islamabad, in Cheena Bazaar, and I am shot. I even dreamed that the doctors were Taliban.

As I grew more alert, I wanted more details. People coming in were not allowed to bring their phones, but Dr. Fiona always had her iPhone with her because she is an emergency doctor. When she put it down, I grabbed it to search for my name on Google. It was hard, as my double vision meant I kept typing in the wrong letters. I also wanted to check my email, but I couldn't remember the password.

On the fifth day, I got my voice back, but it sounded like someone else. When Rehanna came in, we talked about the shooting from an Islamic perspective. "They shot at me," I told her.

"Yes, that's right," she replied. "Too many people in the Muslim world can't believe a Muslim can do such a thing," she said. "My mother, for example, would say they can't be Muslims. Some people call themselves Muslims, but their actions are not Islamic." We talked about how things happen for different reasons, this happened to

me, and how education for females not just males is one of our Islamic rights. I was speaking up for my right as a Muslim woman to be able to go to school.

Once I got my voice back, I talked to my parents on Dr. Javid's phone. I was worried about sounding strange. "Do I sound different?" I asked my father.

"No," he said. "You sound the same and your voice will only get better. Are you OK?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, "but this headache is so severe, I can't bear the pain."

My father got really worried. I think he ended up with a bigger headache than me. In all the calls after that he would ask, "Is the headache increasing or decreasing?"

After that I just said to him, "I'm okay." I didn't want to upset him and didn't complain even when they took the staples from my head and gave me big injections in my neck. "When are you coming?" I kept asking.

By then they had been stuck in the army hostel at the hospital in Rawalpindi for a week with no news about when they might come to Birmingham. My mother was so desperate that she told my father, "If there is no news by tomorrow, I will go on a hunger strike." Later that day my father went to see the major in charge of security and told him. The major looked alarmed. Within ten minutes my father was told arrangements would be made for them to move to Islamabad later that day. Surely there they could arrange everything?

When my father returned to my mother, he said to her, "You are a great woman. All along I thought Malala and I were the campaigners, but you really know how to protest!"

They were moved to Kashmir House in Islamabad, a hostel for members of parliament. Security was still so tight that when my father asked for a barber to give him a shave, a policeman sat with them all the way through so the man wouldn't cut his throat.

At least now they had their phones back and we could speak more easily. Each time, Dr. Javid would call my father in advance to tell him what time he could speak to me and to make sure he was free. But when the doctor called, the line was usually busy. My father is always on the phone! I rattled off my mother's eleven-digit mobile number and Dr. Javid looked astonished. He knew then that my memory was fine. But my parents were still in darkness about why they weren't flying to me. Dr. Javid was also baffled why they weren't coming. When they said they didn't know, he made a call and then assured them the problem was not with the army but the civilian government.

Later they would discover that, rather than do whatever it took to get my parents on the first plane to Birmingham to join their sick daughter, Interior Minister Rehman Malik was hoping to fly with them so they could have a joint press conference at the hospital, and it was taking some time to make the arrangements. He also wanted to make sure they didn't ask for political asylum in Britain, which would be embarrassing for his government. Eventually he asked my parents outright if this was their plan. It was funny because my mother had no idea what asylum was and my father had never even thought about it—there were other things on his mind.

When my parents moved to Kashmir House they were visited by Sonia Shahid, the mother of Shiza, our friend who had arranged the trip for all us Khushal School girls to Islamabad. She had assumed they had gone to the UK with me, and when she found out they were still in Pakistan, she was horrified. They said they had been told there were no plane tickets to Birmingham. Sonia brought them clothes, as they had left everything in Swat, and got my father the number for President Zardari's office. He called and left a message. That night the president spoke to him and promised everything would be sorted out. "I know what it's like to be kept from one's children," he said, referring to his years in jail.

When I heard they would be in Birmingham in two days, I had one request. "Bring my school bag," I pleaded to my father. "If you can't go to Swat to fetch it, no matter—buy new books for me, because in March it's my board examination." Of course I wanted to come first in class. I especially wanted my physics book because physics is difficult for me, and I needed to practice numericals, as my math is not so good and they are hard for me to solve.

I thought I'd be back home by November.

It ended up being ten days before my parents came. Those ten days I spent in hospital without them felt like a hundred days. It was boring and I wasn't sleeping well. I stared at the clock in my room. The changing time reassured me I was alive, and I saw for the first time in my life I was waking early. Every morning I longed for 7 a.m., when the nurses would come. The nurses and Dr. Fiona played games with

me. QEH is not a children's hospital, so they brought over a play coordinator with games. One of my favorites was Connect 4. I usually drew with Dr. Fiona, but I could beat everyone else. The nurses and hospital staff felt sorry for me in a far-off land away from my family and were very kind, particularly Yma Choudhury, the jolly director of operations, and Julie Tracy, the head nurse, who would sit and hold my hand.

The only thing I had with me from Pakistan was a beige shawl which Colonel Junaid had given to Dr. Fiona as a present for me, so they went clothes shopping to buy me things. They had no idea how conservative I was or what a teenage girl from the Swat Valley would wear. They went to Next and British Home Stores and came back with bags of T-shirts, pajamas, socks and even bras. Yma asked me if I would like shalwar kamiz and I nodded. "What's your favorite color?" she asked. Pink was of course my reply.

They were worried I wasn't eating. But I didn't like the hospital food and I was worried it was not halal. The only things I'd eat there were the nutritional milkshakes. Nurse Julie discovered I liked Cheesy Wotsits so brought me those. "What do you like?" they asked me. "Fried chicken," I replied. Yma discovered there was a halal Kentucky Fried Chicken at Small Heath so would go there every afternoon to buy me chicken and chips. One day she even cooked me a curry.

To keep me occupied they brought me a DVD player. One of the first movies they got me was *Bend It Like Beckham,* thinking the story of a Sikh girl challenging her cultural norms and playing football would appeal to me. I was shocked when the girls took off their shirts to practice in sports bras and I made the nurses switch it off. After that they brought cartoons and Disney movies. I watched all three Shrek movies and *A Shark's Tale.* My left eye was still blurry, so I covered it when I watched, and my left ear would bleed, so I had to keep putting in cotton balls. One day I asked a nurse, "What is this lump?" placing her hand on my tummy. My stomach was big and hard and I didn't know why.

"It's the top of your skull," she replied. I was shocked.

After I started to speak, I also walked again for the first time. I hadn't felt any problem with my arms or legs in bed apart from my left hand, which was stiff because the bullet had ended up by my shoulder, so I didn't realize I couldn't walk

properly. My first few steps were such hard work it felt like I'd run a hundred kilometers. The doctors told me I would be fine; I just needed lots of physiotherapy to get my muscles working again.

One day another Fiona came, Fiona Alexander, who told me she was in charge of the hospital press office. I thought this was funny. I couldn't imagine Swat Central Hospital having a press office. Until she came I had no idea of the attention I'd attracted. When I was flown from Pakistan, there was supposed to be a news blackout, but photographs were leaked from Pakistan of me leaving for the UK, and the media found out my destination was Birmingham. A Sky News helicopter was soon circling above, and as many as 250 journalists came to the hospital from as far away as Australia and Japan. Fiona Alexander had spent twenty years as a journalist herself, and had been editor of the *Birmingham Post,* so she knew exactly how to feed them material and stop them trying to get in. The hospital started giving daily news briefings on my condition.

People just turned up wanting to see me—government ministers, diplomats, politicians, even an envoy from the archbishop of Canterbury. Most brought bouquets, some of them exquisitely beautiful. One day Fiona Alexander brought me a bag of cards and toys and pictures. It was Eid ul-Azha, "Big Eid," our main religious holiday, so I thought maybe some Muslims had sent them. Then I saw the postage dates, from 10 October, 11 October, days before, and I realized it was nothing to do with Eid. They were from people all over the world wishing me a speedy recovery, many of them schoolchildren. I was astonished and Fiona laughed. "You haven't seen anything yet." She told me there were sacks and sacks more, about 8,000 cards in total, many just addressed "Malala, Birmingham Hospital." One was even addressed "The Girl Shot in the Head, Birmingham," yet it had got there. There were offers to adopt me as if I had no family and even a marriage proposal.

Rehanna told me that thousands and millions of people and children around the world had supported me and prayed for me. Then I realized that people had saved my life. I had been spared for a reason. People had sent other presents too. There were boxes and boxes of chocolates and teddy bears of every shape and size. Most precious of all, perhaps, was the parcel that came from Benazir Bhutto's children Bilawal and Bakhtawar. Inside were two shawls that had belonged to their late mother. I buried

my nose in them to try and smell her perfume. Later I found a long black hair on one of them, which made it even more special.

I realized what the Taliban had done was make my campaign global. While I was lying in that bed waiting to take my first steps in a new world, Gordon Brown, the UN special envoy for education and former prime minister of Britain, had launched a petition under the slogan "I am Malala" to demand no child be denied a school by 2015. There were messages from heads of state and ministers and movie stars and one from the granddaughter of Sir Olaf Caroe, the last British governor of our province. She said she was ashamed at not being able to read and write Pashto, although her grandfather had been fluent. Beyoncé had written me a card and posted a photo of it on Facebook, Selena Gomez had tweeted about me and Madonna had dedicated a song. There was even a message from my favorite actress and social activist, Angelina Jolie—I couldn't wait to tell Moniba.

I didn't realize then I wouldn't be going home.

## Epilogue

# One Child, One Teacher, One Book, One Pen . . .

*Birmingham, August 2013*

In March we moved from the apartment to a rented house on a leafy street, but it feels as if we are camping in it. All our belongings are still in Swat. Everywhere there are cardboard boxes full of the kind letters and cards that people send, and in one room stands a piano none of us can play. My mother complains about the murals of Greek gods on the walls and carved cherubs on the ceilings watching her

Our house feels big and empty. It sits behind an electric iron gate and it sometimes seems as if we are in what we in Pakistan call a sub-jail, a kind of luxury house arrest. At the back there is a large garden with lots of trees and a green lawn for me and my brothers to play cricket on. But there are no rooftops to play on, no children fighting with kites in the streets, no neighbors coming in to borrow a plate of rice or for us to ask for three tomatoes. We are just a wall's distance from the next house, but it feels miles away.

If I look out, I see my mother wandering around the garden, her head covered by a shawl, feeding the birds. She looks as if she is singing, maybe that *tapa* she likes: "Don't kill doves in the garden. / You kill one and the others won't come." She is giving the birds the remains of our dinner from the night before and there are tears in her eyes. We eat much the same here as we did back home—rice and meat for lunch and dinner, while breakfast is fried eggs, chapatis and sometimes also honey, a tradition started by my little brother Atal, though his favorite Birmingham discovery is Nutella sandwiches. But there are always leftovers. My mother is sad about the waste of food. I know she is remembering all the children we fed in our house so they would not go to school on empty stomachs and wondering how they are faring now.

When I came home from school in Mingora I never found my house without people in it; now I can't believe that I used to plead for a day of peace and some privacy to do my schoolwork. Here the

only sound is of the birds and Khushal's Xbox. I sit alone in my room doing a jigsaw puzzle and long for guests.

We didn't have much money and my parents knew what it was like to be hungry. My mother never turned anyone away. Once a poor woman came, hot, hungry and thirsty, to our door. My mother let her in and gave her food, and the woman was so happy. "I touched every door in the *mohalla* and this was the only one open," she said. "May God always keep your door open, wherever you are."

I know my mother is lonely. She was very sociable—all the women of the neighborhood used to gather in the afternoons on our back porch, and women who worked in other houses came to rest. Now she is always on the phone to everyone back home. It's hard for her here, as she does not speak any English. Our house has all these facilities, but when she arrived they were all mysteries to her and someone had to show us how to use the oven, washing machine and the TV.

As usual my father doesn't help in the kitchen. I tease him, "*Aba,* you talk of women's rights, but my mother manages everything! You don't even clear the tea things."

There are buses and trains, but we are unsure about using them. My mother misses going shopping in Cheena Bazaar. She is happier since my cousin Shah came to stay. He has a car and takes her shopping, but it's not the same, as she can't talk to her friends and neighbors about what she bought.

A door bangs in the house and my mother jumps—she jumps these days at the slightest noise. She often cries then hugs me. "Malala is alive," she says. Now she treats me as if I were her youngest rather than eldest child.

I know my father cries too. He cries when I push my hair to the side and he sees the scar on my head, and he cries when he wakes from an afternoon nap to hear his children's voices in the garden and realizes with relief that one of them is still mine. He knows people say it's his fault that I was shot, that he pushed me to speak up like a tennis dad trying to create a champion, as if I don't have my own mind. It's hard for him. All he worked for over almost twenty years has been left behind: the school he built up from nothing which now has three buildings with 1,100 pupils and seventy teachers. I know he felt proud of what he had created, a poor boy from that narrow village between the Black and White Mountains. He says, "It's as if you planted a tree and nurtured it—you have the right to sit in its shade."

His dream in life was to have a very big school in Swat providing quality education, to live peacefully and to have democracy in our country. In Swat he had achieved respect and status in society through his activities and the help he gave people. He never imagined living abroad and he gets upset when people suggest we wanted to come to the UK. "A person who has eighteen years of education, a nice life, a family, you throw him out just as you throw a fish out of water for speaking up for girls' education?" Sometimes he says we have gone from being IDPs to EDPs—externally displaced persons. Often over meals we talk about home and try to remember things. We miss everything, even the smelly stream. My father says, "If I had known this would happen, I would have looked back for a last time just as the Prophet, PBUH, did when he left Mecca to migrate to Medina. He looked back again and again." Already some of the things from Swat seem like stories from a distant place, like somewhere I have read about.

My father spends much of his time going to conferences on education. I know it's odd for him that now people want to hear him because of me, not the other way around. I used to be known as his daughter; now he's known as my father. When he went to France to collect an award for me, he told the audience, "In my part of the world most people are known by their sons. I am one of the few lucky fathers known by his daughter."

A smart new uniform hangs on my bedroom door, bottle-green instead of royal-blue, for a school where no one dreams of being attacked for going to classes or someone blowing up the building. In April I was well enough to start school in Birmingham. It's wonderful going to school and not having to feel scared as I did in Mingora, always looking around me on my way to school, terrified a Talib would jump out.

It's a good school. Many subjects are the same as at home, but the teachers have PowerPoint and computers rather than chalk and blackboards. We have some different subjects—music, art, computer studies, home economics, where we learn to cook—and we do practicals in science, which is rare in Pakistan. Even though I recently got just 40 percent in my physics exam, it is still my favorite subject. I love learning about Newton and the basic principles the whole universe obeys.

But like my mother I am lonely. It takes time to make good friends like I had at home, and the girls at school here treat me differently. People say, "Oh, that's Malala"—they see me as "Malala, girls' rights activist." Back in the Khushal School I was just Malala, the same double-jointed girl they had always known, who loved to tell jokes and drew pictures to explain things. Oh, and who was always quarreling with her brother and best friend! I think every class has a very well behaved girl, a very intelligent or genius girl, a very popular girl, a beautiful girl, a girl who is a bit shy, a notorious girl…but here I haven't worked out yet who is who.

As there is no one here I can tell my jokes to, I save them and tell them to Moniba when we Skype. My first question is always "What's the latest news at the school?" I love to hear who is fighting with who, and who got told off by which teacher. Moniba came first in class in the most recent exams. My classmates still keep a seat for me with my name on it, and at the boys' school Sir Amjad has put a big poster of me at the entrance and says he greets it every morning before going into his office.

I describe life in England to Moniba. I tell her of the streets with rows of identical houses, unlike home, where everything is different and higgledypiggledy and a shack of mud and stones can stand next to a house as big as a castle. I tell her how they are lovely solid houses which could withstand floods and earthquakes but have no flat roofs to play on. I tell her I like England because people follow rules, they respect policemen and everything happens on time. The government is in charge and no one needs to know the name of the army chief. I see women having jobs we couldn't imagine in Swat. They are police and security guards; they run big companies and dress exactly as they like.

I don't often think about the shooting, though every day when I look in the mirror it is a reminder. The nerve operation has done as much as it can. I will never be exactly the same. I can't blink fully, and my left eye closes a lot when I speak. My father's friend Hidayatullah told him we should be proud of my eye. "It's the beauty of her sacrifice," he said.

It is still not definitely known who shot me, but a man named Ataullah Khan said he did it. The police have not managed to find him, but they say they are investigating and want to interview me.

Though I don't remember exactly what happened that day, sometimes I have flashbacks.

They come unexpectedly. The worst one was in June, when we were in Abu Dhabi on the way to perform *Umrah* in Saudi Arabia. I went to a shopping mall with my mother, as she wanted to buy a special burqa to pray in Mecca. I didn't want one. I said I would just wear my shawl, as it is not specified that a woman must wear a burqa. As we were walking through the mall, suddenly I could see so many men around me. I thought they were waiting for me with guns and would shoot. I was terrified, though I said nothing. I told myself, *Malala, you have already faced death. This is your second life. Don't be afraid—if you are afraid, you can't move forward.*

We believe that when we have our first sight of the Kaaba, the black-shrouded cube in Mecca that is our most sacred place, any wish in your heart is granted by God. When we prayed at the Kaaba, we prayed for peace in Pakistan and for girls' education, and I was surprised to find myself in tears. But when we went to the other holy places in the desert of Mecca where the Prophet, PBUH, lived and preached, I was shocked that they were littered with empty bottles and biscuit wrappers. It seemed that people had neglected to preserve history. I thought they had forgotten the Hadith that cleanliness is half of faith.

* * *

My world has changed so much. On the shelves of our rented living room are awards from around the world—America, India, France, Spain, Italy and Austria, and many other places. I've even been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, the youngest person ever. When I received prizes for my work at school I was happy, as I had worked hard for them, but these prizes are different. I am grateful for them, but they only remind me how much work still needs to be done to achieve the goal of education for every boy and girl. I don't want to be thought of as the "girl who was shot by the Taliban" but the "girl who fought for education." This is the cause to which I want to devote my life.

On my sixteenth birthday I was in New York to speak at the United Nations. Standing up to address an audience inside the vast hall where so many world leaders have spoken before was daunting, but I knew what I wanted to say. *This is your chance, Malala,* I said to myself. Only 400 people were sitting around me, but when I looked out, I imagined millions more. I did not write the speech only with the UN delegates in mind; I wrote it for every person around the

world who could make a difference. I wanted to reach all people living in poverty, those children forced to work and those who suffer from terrorism or lack of education. Deep in my heart I hoped to reach every child who could take courage from my words and stand up for his or her rights.

I wore one of Benazir Bhutto's white shawls over my favorite pink shalwar kamiz and I called on the world's leaders to provide free education to every child in the world. "Let us pick up our books and our pens," I said. "They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world." I didn't know how my speech was received until the audience gave me a standing ovation. My mother was in tears and my father said I had become everybody's daughter.

Something else happened that day. My mother allowed herself to be publicly photographed for the first time. As she has lived her life in purdah and never unveiled her face on camera before, it was a great sacrifice and very difficult for her.

At breakfast the next day, Atal said to me in the hotel, "Malala, I don't understand why you are famous. What have you done?" All the time we were in New York he was more excited by the

Statue of Liberty, Central Park and his favorite game, Beyblade!

After the speech I received messages of support from all over the world, but there was mostly silence from my own country, except that on Twitter and Facebook we could see my own Pakistani brothers and sisters turning against me. They accused me of speaking out of "a teen lust for fame." One said, "Forget the image of your country, forget about the school. She would eventually get what she was after, a life of luxury abroad."

I don't mind. I know people say these things because they have seen leaders and politicians in our country who make promises they never keep. Instead things in Pakistan are getting worse every day. The endless terrorist attacks have left the whole nation in shock. People have lost trust in each other, but I would like everyone to know that I don't want support for myself, I want the support to be for my cause of peace and education.

The most surprising letter I got after my speech was from a Taliban commander who recently escaped from prison. His name was Adnan Rashid and he used to be in the Pakistan air force. He had been in jail since 2003 for attempting to assassinate President Musharraf. He said the Taliban had attacked me not for my campaign for education but because I tried to "malign [their] efforts to establish the Islamic system." He said he was writing to me because he was shocked by my shooting and wished he could have warned me beforehand. He wrote that they would forgive me if I came back to Pakistan, wore a burqa and went to a madrasa.

Journalists urged me to answer him, but I thought, *Who is this man to say that?* The Taliban are not our rulers. It's my life; how I live it is my choice. But Mohammed Hanif wrote an article pointing out that the good thing about the Taliban letter was that many people claim I wasn't shot, yet here they were accepting responsibility.

I know I will go back to Pakistan, but whenever I tell my father I want to go home, he finds excuses. "No, *Jani,* your treatment is not complete," he says, or, "These schools are good. You should stay here and gather knowledge so you can use your words powerfully."

He is right. I want to learn and be trained well with the weapon of knowledge. Then I will be able to fight more effectively for my cause.

Today we all know education is our basic right. Not just in the West; Islam too has given us this right. Islam says every girl and every boy should go to school. In the Quran it is written, God wants us to have knowledge. He wants us to know why the sky is blue and about oceans and stars. I know it's a big struggle—around the world there are fifty-seven million children who are not in primary school, thirty-two million of them girls. Sadly, my own country, Pakistan, is one of the worst places: 5.1 million children don't even go to primary school even though in our constitution it says every child has that right. We have almost fifty million illiterate adults, two thirds of whom are women, like my own mother.

Girls continue to be killed and schools blown up. In March there was an attack on a girls' school in Karachi that we had visited. A bomb and a grenade were tossed into the school playground just as a prize-giving ceremony was about to start. The headmaster, Abdur Rasheed, was killed and eight children hurt between the ages of five and ten. One eight-year-old was left disabled. When my mother heard the news, she cried and cried. "When our children are sleeping we wouldn't even disturb a hair on their heads," she said, "but there are people who have guns and shoot them or hurl bombs. They don't care that their victims are children." The most shocking attack was in June in the city of Quetta, when a suicide bomber

blew up a bus taking forty pupils to their all-girls' college. Fourteen of them were killed. The wounded were followed to the hospital and some nurses were shot.

It's not just the Taliban killing children. Sometimes it's drone attacks, sometimes it's wars, sometimes it's hunger. And sometimes it's their own family. In June two girls my age were murdered in Gilgit, which is a little north of Swat, for posting a video online showing themselves dancing in the rain wearing traditional dress and headscarves. Apparently their own stepbrother shot them.

Today Swat is more peaceful than other places, but there are still military everywhere, four years after they supposedly removed the Taliban. Fazlullah is still on the loose, and our bus driver still under house arrest. Our valley, which was once a haven for tourists, is now seen as a place of fear. Foreigners who want to visit have to get a No Objection Certificate from the authorities in Islamabad. Hotels and craft shops are empty. It will be a long time before tourists return.

Over the last year I've seen many other places, but my valley remains to me the most beautiful place in the world. I don't know when I will see it again, but I know that I will. I wonder what happened to the mango seed I planted in our garden at Ramadan. I wonder if anyone is watering it so that one day future generations of daughters and sons can enjoy its fruit.

Today I looked at myself in a mirror and thought for a second. Once I had asked God for one or two extra inches in height, but instead he made me as tall as the sky, so high that I could not measure myself. So I offered the hundred *raakat nafl* that I had promised if I grew.

I love my God. I thank my Allah. I talk to him all day. He is the greatest. By giving me this height to reach people, he has also given me great responsibilities. Peace in every home, every street, every village, every country—this is my dream. Education for every boy and every girl in the world. To sit down on a chair and read my books with all my friends at school is my right. To see each and every human being with a smile of happiness is my wish.

I am Malala. My world has changed but I have not.