

I AM MALALA

The Girl Who Stood Up for Education
and was Shot by the Taliban

Malala Yousafzai
with Christina Lamb

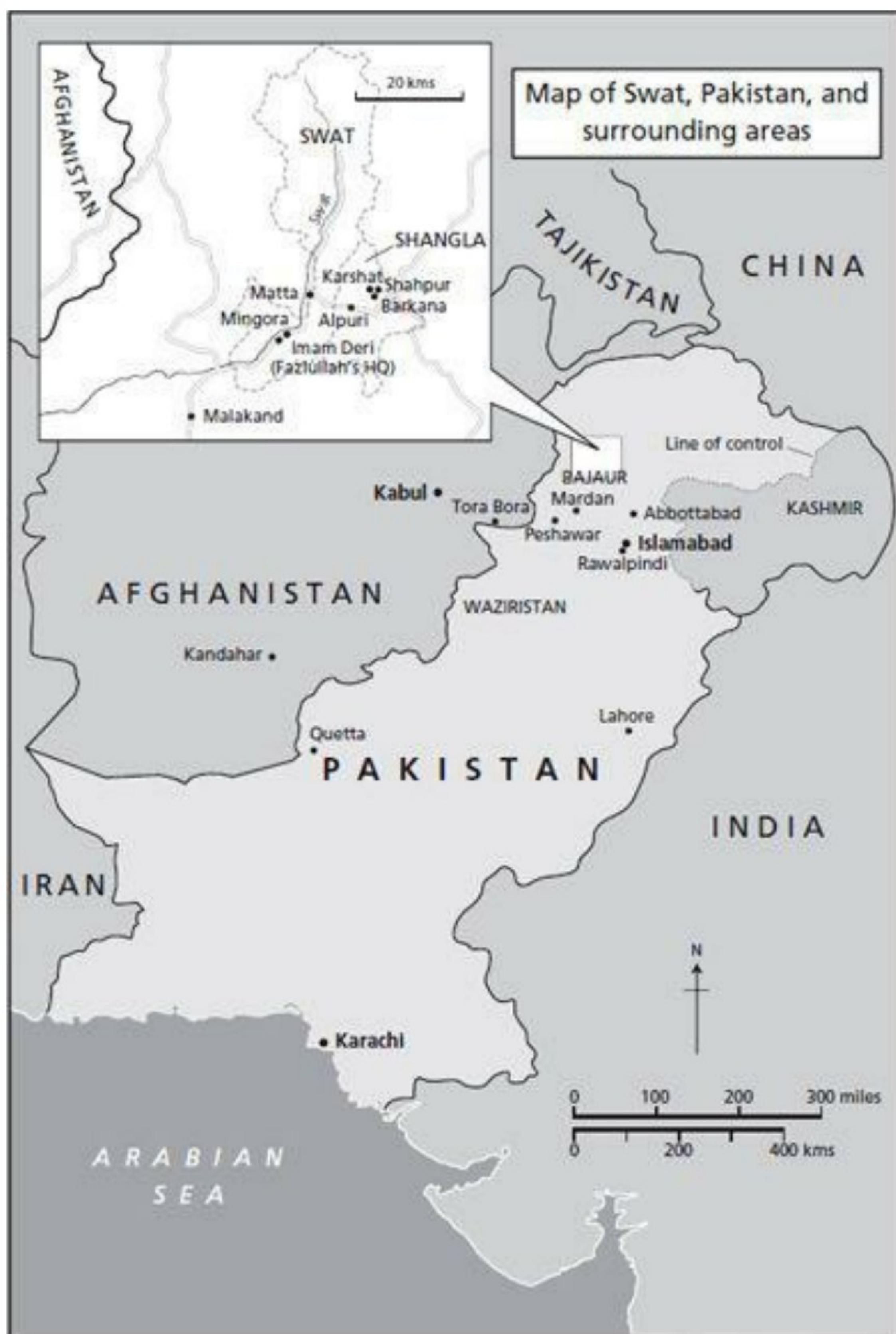


I AM MALALA

The Girl Who Stood Up for Education
and was Shot by the Taliban

Malala Yousafzai
with Christina Lamb

Weidenfeld & Nicolson
LONDON



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

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Prologue: The Day my World Changed](#)

[PART ONE: BEFORE THE TALIBAN](#)

- [1 A Daughter Is Born](#)
- [2 My Father the Falcon](#)
- [3 Growing up in a School](#)
- [4 The Village](#)
- [5 Why I Don't Wear Earrings and Pashtuns Don't Say Thank You](#)
- [6 Children of the Rubbish Mountain](#)
- [7 The *Mufti* Who Tried to Close Our School](#)
- [8 The Autumn of the Earthquake](#)

[PART TWO: THE VALLEY OF DEATH](#)

- [9 Radio Mullah](#)
- [10 Toffees, Tennis Balls and the Buddhas of Swat](#)
- [11 The Clever Class](#)
- [12 The Bloody Square](#)
- [13 The Diary of Gul Makai](#)
- [14 A Funny Kind of Peace](#)
- [15 Leaving the Valley](#)

[PART THREE: THREE BULLETS, THREE GIRLS](#)

- [16 The Valley of Sorrows](#)
- [17 Praying to Be Tall](#)
- [18 The Woman and the Sea](#)
- [19 A Private Talibanisation](#)
- [20 Who is Malala?](#)

[PART FOUR: BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH](#)

- [21 'God, I entrust her to you'](#)
- [22 Journey into the Unknown](#)

PART FIVE: A SECOND LIFE

23 ‘The Girl Shot in the Head, Birmingham’

24 ‘They have snatched her smile’

Epilogue: One Child, One Teacher, One Book, One Pen . . .

Glossary

Acknowledgements

Important Events in Pakistan and Swat

A Note on the Malala Fund

Picture Section

Additional Credits and Thanks

Copyright

Prologue: The Day my World Changed

I COME FROM a country which was created at midnight. When I almost died it was just after midday.

One year ago I left my home for school and never returned. I was shot by a Taliban bullet and was flown out of Pakistan unconscious. Some people say I will never return home but I believe firmly in my heart that I will. To be torn from the country that you love is not something to wish on anyone.

Now, every morning when I open my eyes, I long to see my old room full of my things, my clothes all over the floor and my school prizes on the shelves. Instead I am in a country which is five hours behind my beloved homeland Pakistan and my home in the Swat Valley. But my country is centuries behind this one. Here there is any convenience you can imagine. Water running from every tap, hot or cold as you wish; lights at the flick of a switch, day and night, no need for oil lamps; ovens to cook on that don't need anyone to go and fetch gas cylinders from the bazaar. Here everything is so modern one can even find food ready cooked in packets.

When I stand in front of my window and look out, I see tall buildings, long roads full of vehicles moving in orderly lines, neat green hedges and lawns, and tidy pavements to walk on. I close my eyes and for a moment I am back in my valley – the high snow-topped mountains, green waving fields and fresh blue rivers – and my heart smiles when it looks at the people of Swat. My mind transports me back to my school and there I am reunited with my friends and teachers. I meet my best friend Moniba and we sit together, talking and joking as if I had never left.

Then I remember I am in Birmingham, England.

The day when everything changed was Tuesday, 9 October 2012. It wasn't the best of days to start with as it was the middle of school exams, though as a bookish girl I didn't mind them as much as some of my classmates.

That morning we arrived in the narrow mud lane off Haji Baba Road in our usual procession of brightly painted rickshaws, sputtering diesel fumes, each one crammed with five or six girls. Since the time of the Taliban our school has had no sign and the ornamented brass door in a white wall across from the woodcutter's yard gives no hint of what lies beyond.

For us girls that doorway was like a magical entrance to our own special world. As we skipped through, we cast off our head-scarves like winds puffing away clouds to make way for the sun then ran helter-skelter up the steps. At the top of the steps was an open courtyard with doors to all the classrooms. We dumped our backpacks in our rooms then gathered for morning assembly under the sky, our backs to the mountains as we stood to attention. One girl commanded, '*Assaan bash!*' or 'Stand at ease!' and we clicked our heels and responded, '*Allah.*' Then she said, '*Hoo she yar!*' or 'Attention!' and we clicked our heels again. '*Allah.*'

The school was founded by my father before I was born, and on the wall above us KHUSHAL SCHOOL was painted proudly in red and white letters. We went to school six mornings a week and as a fifteen-year-old in Year 9 my classes were spent chanting chemical equations or studying Urdu grammar; writing stories in English with morals like 'Haste makes waste' or drawing diagrams of blood circulation – most of my classmates wanted to be doctors. It's hard to imagine that anyone would see that as a threat. Yet, outside the door to the school lay not only the noise and craziness of

Mingora, the main city of Swat, but also those like the Taliban who think girls should not go to school.

That morning had begun like any other, though a little later than usual. It was exam time so school started at nine instead of eight, which was good as I don't like getting up and can sleep through the crows of the cocks and the prayer calls of the muezzin. First my father would try to rouse me. 'Time to get up, *Jani mun*,' he would say. This means 'soulmate' in Persian, and he always called me that at the start of the day. 'A few more minutes, *Aba*, please,' I'd beg, then burrow deeper under the quilt. Then my mother would come. '*Pisho*,' she would call. This means 'cat' and is her name for me. At this point I'd realise the time and shout, '*Bhabi*, I'm late!' In our culture, every man is your 'brother' and every woman your 'sister'. That's how we think of each other. When my father first brought his wife to school, all the teachers referred to her as 'my brother's wife' or *Bhabi*. That's how it stayed from then on. We all call her *Bhabi* now.

I slept in the long room at the front of our house, and the only furniture was a bed and a cabinet which I had bought with some of the money I had been given as an award for campaigning for peace in our valley and the right for girls to go to school. On some shelves were all the gold-coloured plastic cups and trophies I had won for coming first in my class. Only twice had I not come top – both times when I was beaten by my class rival Malka e-Noor. I was determined it would not happen again.

The school was not far from my home and I used to walk, but since the start of last year I had been going with other girls in a rickshaw and coming home by bus. It was a journey of just five minutes along the stinky stream, past the giant billboard for Dr Humayun's Hair Transplant Institute where we joked that one of our bald male teachers must have gone when he suddenly started to sprout hair. I liked the bus because I didn't get as sweaty as when I walked, and I could chat with my friends and gossip with Usman Ali, the driver, who we called *Bhai Jan*, or 'Brother'. He made us all laugh with his crazy stories.

I had started taking the bus because my mother was scared of me walking on my own. We had been getting threats all year. Some were in the newspapers, some were notes or messages passed on by people. My mother was worried about me, but the Taliban had never come for a girl and I was more concerned they would target my father as he was always speaking out against them. His close friend and fellow campaigner Zahid Khan had been shot in the face in August on his way to prayers and I knew everyone was telling my father, 'Take care, you'll be next.'

Our street could not be reached by car, so coming home I would get off the bus on the road below by the stream and go through a barred iron gate and up a flight of steps. I thought if anyone attacked me it would be on those steps. Like my father I've always been a daydreamer, and sometimes in lessons my mind would drift and I'd imagine that on the way home a terrorist might jump out and shoot me on those steps. I wondered what I would do. Maybe I'd take off my shoes and hit him, but then I'd think if I did that there would be no difference between me and a terrorist. It would be better to plead, 'OK, shoot me, but first listen to me. What you are doing is wrong. I'm not against you personally, I just want every girl to go to school.'

I wasn't scared but I had started making sure the gate was locked at night and asking God what happens when you die. I told my best friend Moniba everything. We'd lived on the same street when we were little and been friends since primary school and we shared everything, Justin Bieber songs and Twilight movies, the best face-lightening creams. Her dream was to be a fashion designer

although she knew her family would never agree to it, so she told everyone she wanted to be a doctor. It's hard for girls in our society to be anything other than teachers or doctors if they can work at all. I was different – I never hid my desire when I changed from wanting to be a doctor to wanting to be an inventor or a politician. Moniba always knew if something was wrong. ‘Don’t worry,’ I told her. ‘The Taliban have never come for a small girl.’

When our bus was called, we ran down the steps. The other girls all covered their heads before emerging from the door and climbing up into the back. The bus was actually what we call a *dyna*, a white Toyota TownAce truck with three parallel benches, one along either side and one in the middle. It was cramped with twenty girls and three teachers. I was sitting on the left between Moniba and a girl from the year below called Shazia Ramzan, holding our exam folders to our chests and our school bags under our feet.

After that it is all a bit hazy. I remember that inside the *dyna* it was hot and sticky. The cooler days were late coming and only the faraway mountains of the Hindu Kush had a frosting of snow. The back where we sat had no windows, just thick plastic sheeting at the sides which flapped and was too yellowed and dusty to see through. All we could see was a little stamp of open sky out of the back and glimpses of the sun, at that time of day a yellow orb floating in the dust that streamed over everything.

I remember that the bus turned right off the main road at the army checkpoint as always and rounded the corner past the deserted cricket ground. I don't remember any more.

In my dreams about the shooting my father is also in the bus and he is shot with me, and then there are men everywhere and I am searching for my father.

In reality what happened was we suddenly stopped. On our left was the tomb of Sher Mohammad Khan, the finance minister of the first ruler of Swat, all overgrown with grass, and on our right the snack factory. We must have been less than 200 metres from the checkpoint.

We couldn't see in front, but a young bearded man in light-coloured clothes had stepped into the road and waved the van down.

‘Is this the Khushal School bus?’ he asked our driver. Usman Bhai Jan thought this was a stupid question as the name was painted on the side. ‘Yes,’ he said.

‘I need information about some children,’ said the man.

‘You should go to the office,’ said Usman Bhai Jan.

As he was speaking another young man in white approached the back of the van. ‘Look, it’s one of those journalists coming to ask for an interview,’ said Moniba. Since I’d started speaking at events with my father to campaign for girls’ education and against those like the Taliban who want to hide us away, journalists often came, even foreigners, though not like this in the road.

The man was wearing a peaked cap and had a handkerchief over his nose and mouth as if he had flu. He looked like a college student. Then he swung himself onto the tailboard at the back and leaned in right over us.

‘Who is Malala?’ he demanded.

No one said anything, but several of the girls looked at me. I was the only girl with my face not covered.

That’s when he lifted up a black pistol. I later learned it was a Colt 45. Some of the girls screamed. Moniba tells me I squeezed her hand.

My friends say he fired three shots, one after another. The first went through my left eye socket and out under my left shoulder. I slumped forward onto Moniba, blood coming from my left ear, so the

other two bullets hit the girls next to me. One bullet went into Shazia's left hand. The third went through her left shoulder and into the upper right arm of Kainat Riaz.

My friends later told me the gunman's hand was shaking as he fired.

By the time we got to the hospital my long hair and Moniba's lap were full of blood.

Who is Malala? I am Malala and this is my story.

PART ONE

Before the Taliban

سوري سوري په ګولو راشي د بي ننگي اواز درامه شه مئنه

Sorey sorey pa golo rashey

Da be nangai awaz de ra ma sha mayena

Rather I receive your bullet-riddled body with honour

Than news of your cowardice on the battlefield

(Traditional Pashto couplet)

A Daughter Is Born

WHEN I WAS born, people in our village commiserated with my mother and nobody congratulated my father. I arrived at dawn as the last star blinked out. We Pashtuns see this as an auspicious sign. My father didn't have any money for the hospital or for a midwife so a neighbour helped at my birth. My parents' first child was stillborn but I popped out kicking and screaming. I was a girl in a land where rifles are fired in celebration of a son, while daughters are hidden away behind a curtain, their role in life simply to prepare food and give birth to children.

For most Pashtuns it's a gloomy day when a daughter is born. My father's cousin Jehan Sher Khan Yousafzai was one of the few who came to celebrate my birth and even gave a handsome gift of money. Yet, he brought with him a vast family tree of our clan, the Dalokhel Yousafzai, going right back to my great-great-grandfather and showing only the male line. My father, Ziauddin, is different from most Pashtun men. He took the tree, drew a line like a lollipop from his name and at the end of it he wrote, 'Malala'. His cousin laughed in astonishment. My father didn't care. He says he looked into my eyes after I was born and fell in love. He told people, 'I know there is something different about this child.' He even asked friends to throw dried fruits, sweets and coins into my cradle, something we usually only do for boys.

I was named after Malalai of Maiwand, the greatest heroine of Afghanistan. Pashtuns are a proud people of many tribes split between Pakistan and Afghanistan. We live as we have for centuries by a code called *Pashtunwali*, which obliges us to give hospitality to all guests and in which the most important value is *nang* or honour. The worst thing that can happen to a Pashtun is loss of face. Shame is a very terrible thing for a Pashtun man. We have a saying, 'Without honour, the world counts for nothing.' We fight and feud among ourselves so much that our word for cousin – *tarbur* – is the same as our word for enemy. But we always come together against outsiders who try to conquer our lands. All Pashtun children grow up with the story of how Malalai inspired the Afghan army to defeat the British in 1880 in one of the biggest battles of the Second Anglo-Afghan War.

Malalai was the daughter of a shepherd in Maiwand, a small town on the dusty plains west of Kandahar. When she was a teenager, both her father and the man she was supposed to marry were among thousands of Afghans fighting against the British occupation of their country. Malalai went to the battlefield with other women from the village to tend the wounded and take them water. She saw their men were losing, and when the flag-bearer fell she lifted her white veil up high and marched onto the battlefield in front of the troops.

'Young love!' she shouted. 'If you do not fall in the battle of Maiwand then, by God, someone is saving you as a symbol of shame.'

Malalai was killed under fire, but her words and bravery inspired the men to turn the battle around. They destroyed an entire brigade, one of the worst defeats in the history of the British army. The Afghans were so proud that the last Afghan king built a Maiwand victory monument in the centre of Kabul. In high school I read some Sherlock Holmes and laughed to see that this was the same battle where Dr Watson was wounded before becoming partner to the great detective. In Malalai we Pashtuns have our very own Joan of Arc. Many girls' schools in Afghanistan are named after her. But

my grandfather, who was a religious scholar and village cleric, didn't like my father giving me that name. 'It's a sad name,' he said. 'It means grief-stricken.'

When I was a baby my father used to sing me a song written by the famous poet Rahmat Shah Sayel of Peshawar. The last verse ends,

O Malalai of Maiwand,
Rise once more to make Pashtuns understand the song of honour,
Your poetic words turn worlds around,
I beg you, rise again

My father told the story of Malalai to anyone who came to our house. I loved hearing the story and the songs my father sang to me, and the way my name floated on the wind when people called it.

We lived in the most beautiful place in all the world. My valley, the Swat Valley, is a heavenly kingdom of mountains, gushing waterfalls and crystal-clear lakes. WELCOME TO PARADISE, it says on a sign as you enter the valley. In olden times Swat was called Uddyana, which means 'garden'. We have fields of wild flowers, orchards of delicious fruit, emerald mines and rivers full of trout. People often call Swat the Switzerland of the East – we even had Pakistan's first ski resort. The rich people of Pakistan came on holiday to enjoy our clean air and scenery and our Sufi festivals of music and dancing. And so did many foreigners, all of whom we called *angrezan* – 'English' – wherever they came from. Even the Queen of England came, and stayed in the White Palace that was built from the same marble as the Taj Mahal by our king, the first wali of Swat.

We have a special history too. Today Swat is part of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, or KPK, as many Pakistanis call it, but Swat used to be separate from the rest of Pakistan. We were once a princely state, one of three with the neighbouring lands of Chitral and Dir. In colonial times our kings owed allegiance to the British but ruled their own land. When the British gave India independence in 1947 and divided it, we went with the newly created Pakistan but stayed autonomous. We used the Pakistani rupee, but the government of Pakistan could only intervene on foreign policy. The wali administered justice, kept the peace between warring tribes and collected *ushur* – a tax of ten per cent of income – with which he built roads, hospitals and schools.

We were only a hundred miles from Pakistan's capital Islamabad as the crow flies but it felt as if it was in another country. The journey took at least five hours by road over the Malakand Pass, a vast bowl of mountains where long ago our ancestors led by a preacher called Mullah Saidullah (known by the British as the Mad Fakir) battled British forces among the craggy peaks. Among them was Winston Churchill, who wrote a book about it, and we still call one of the peaks Churchill's Picket even though he was not very complimentary about our people. At the end of the pass is a green-domed shrine where people throw coins to give thanks for their safe arrival.

No one I knew had been to Islamabad. Before the troubles came, most people, like my mother, had never been outside Swat.

We lived in Mingora, the biggest town in the valley, in fact the only city. It used to be a small place but many people had moved in from surrounding villages, making it dirty and crowded. It has hotels, colleges, a golf course and a famous bazaar for buying our traditional embroidery, gemstones and anything you can think of. The Marghazar stream loops through it, milky brown from the plastic bags and rubbish thrown into it. It is not clear like the streams in the hilly areas or like the wide River Swat just outside town, where people fished for trout and which we visited on holidays. Our house was in Gulkada, which means 'place of flowers', but it used to be called Butkara, or 'place of the

Buddhist statues'. Near our home was a field scattered with mysterious ruins – statues of lions on their haunches, broken columns, headless figures and, oddest of all, hundreds of stone umbrellas.

Islam came to our valley in the eleventh century when Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni invaded from Afghanistan and became our ruler, but in ancient times Swat was a Buddhist kingdom. The Buddhists had arrived here in the second century and their kings ruled the valley for more than 500 years. Chinese explorers wrote stories of how there were 1,400 Buddhist monasteries along the banks of the River Swat, and the magical sound of temple bells would ring out across the valley. The temples are long gone, but almost anywhere you go in Swat, amid all the primroses and other wild flowers, you find their remains. We would often picnic among rock carvings of a smiling fat Buddha sitting cross-legged on a lotus flower. There are many stories that Lord Buddha himself came here because it is a place of such peace, and some of his ashes are said to be buried in the valley in a giant stupa.

Our Butkara ruins were a magical place to play hide and seek. Once some foreign archaeologists arrived to do some work there and told us that in times gone by it was a place of pilgrimage, full of beautiful temples domed with gold where Buddhist kings lay buried. My father wrote a poem, 'The Relics of Butkara', which summed up perfectly how temple and mosque could exist side by side: 'When the voice of truth rises from the minarets,/ The Buddha smiles,/ And the broken chain of history reconnects.'

We lived in the shadow of the Hindu Kush mountains, where the men went to shoot ibex and golden cockerels. Our house was one storey and proper concrete. On the left were steps up to a flat roof big enough for us children to play cricket on. It was our playground. At dusk my father and his friends often gathered to sit and drink tea there. Sometimes I sat on the roof too, watching the smoke rise from the cooking fires all around and listening to the nightly racket of the crickets.

Our valley is full of fruit trees on which grow the sweetest figs and pomegranates and peaches, and in our garden we had grapes, guavas and persimmons. There was a plum tree in our front yard which gave the most delicious fruit. It was always a race between us and the birds to get to them. The birds loved that tree. Even the woodpeckers.

For as long as I can remember my mother has talked to birds. At the back of the house was a veranda where the women gathered. We knew what it was like to be hungry so my mother always cooked extra and gave food to poor families. If there was any left she fed it to the birds. In Pashto we love to sing *tapey*, two-line poems, and as she scattered the rice she would sing one: 'Don't kill doves in the garden./ You kill one and the others won't come.'

I liked to sit on the roof and watch the mountains and dream. The highest mountain of all is the pyramid-shaped Mount Elum. To us it's a sacred mountain and so high that it always wears a necklace of fleecy clouds. Even in summer it's frosted with snow. At school we learned that in 327 BC, even before the Buddhists came to Swat, Alexander the Great swept into the valley with thousands of elephants and soldiers on his way from Afghanistan to the Indus. The Swati people fled up the mountain, believing they would be protected by their gods because it was so high. But Alexander was a determined and patient leader. He built a wooden ramp from which his catapults and arrows could reach the top of the mountain. Then he climbed up so he could catch hold of the star of Jupiter as a symbol of his power.

From the rooftop I watched the mountains change with the seasons. In the autumn chill winds would come. In the winter everything was white snow, long icicles hanging from the roof like daggers, which we loved to snap off. We raced around, building snowmen and snow bears and trying to catch

snowflakes. Spring was when Swat was at its greenest. Eucalyptus blossom blew into the house, coating everything white, and the wind carried the pungent smell of the rice fields. I was born in summer, which was perhaps why it was my favourite time of year, even though in Mingora summer was hot and dry and the stream stank where people dumped their garbage.

When I was born we were very poor. My father and a friend had founded their first school and we lived in a shabby shack of two rooms opposite the school. I slept with my mother and father in one room and the other was for guests. We had no bathroom or kitchen, and my mother cooked on a wood fire on the ground and washed our clothes at a tap in the school. Our home was always full of people visiting from the village. Hospitality is an important part of Pashtun culture.

Two years after I was born my brother Khushal arrived. Like me he was born at home as we still could not afford the hospital, and he was named Khushal like my father's school, after the Pashtun hero Khushal Khan Khattak, a warrior who was also a poet. My mother had been waiting for a son and could not hide her joy when he was born. To me he seemed very thin and small, like a reed that could snap in the wind, but he was the apple of her eye, her *ladla*. It seemed to me that his every wish was her command. He wanted tea all the time, our traditional tea with milk and sugar and cardamom, but even my mother tired of this and eventually made some so bitter that he lost the taste for it. She wanted to buy a new cradle for him – when I was born my father couldn't afford one so they used an old wooden one from the neighbours which was already third or fourth hand – but my father refused. 'Malala swung in that cradle,' he said. 'So can he.' Then, nearly five years later, another boy was born – Atal, bright-eyed and inquisitive like a squirrel. After that, said my father, we were complete. Three children is a small family by Swati standards, where most people have seven or eight.

I played mostly with Khushal because he was just two years younger than me, but we fought all the time. He would go crying to my mother and I would go to my father. 'What's wrong, *Jani*?' he would ask. Like him I was born double-jointed and can bend my fingers right back on themselves. And my ankles click when I walk, which makes adults squirm.

My mother is very beautiful and my father adored her as if she were a fragile china vase, never laying a hand on her, unlike many of our men. Her name Tor Pekai means 'raven tresses' even though her hair is chestnut brown. My grandfather, Janser Khan, had been listening to Radio Afghanistan just before she was born and heard the name. I wished I had her white-lily skin, fine features and green eyes, but instead had inherited the sallow complexion, wide nose and brown eyes of my father. In our culture we all have nicknames – aside from *Pisho*, which my mother had called me since I was a baby, some of my cousins called me *Lachi*, which is Pashto for 'cardamom'. Black-skinned people are often called white and short people tall. We have a funny sense of humour. My father was known in the family as *Khaista dada*, which means beautiful.

When I was around four years old I asked my father, 'Aba, what colour are you?' He replied, 'I don't know, a bit white, a bit black.'

'It's like when one mixes milk with tea,' I said.

He laughed a lot, but as a boy he had been so self-conscious about being dark-skinned that he went to the fields to get buffalo milk to spread on his face, thinking it would make him lighter. It was only when he met my mother that he became comfortable in his own skin. Being loved by such a beautiful girl gave him confidence.

In our society marriages are usually arranged by families, but theirs was a love match. I could listen endlessly to the story of how they met. They came from neighbouring villages in a remote valley

in the upper Swat called Shangla and would see each other when my father went to his uncle's house to study, which was next door to that of my mother's aunt. They glimpsed enough of each other to know they liked one another, but for us it is taboo to express such things. Instead he sent her poems she could not read.

'I admired his mind,' she says.

'And me, her beauty,' he laughs.

There was one big problem. My two grandfathers did not get on. So when my father announced his desire to ask for the hand of my mother, Tor Pekai, it was clear neither side would welcome the marriage. His own father said it was up to him and agreed to send a barber as a messenger, which is the traditional way we Pashtuns do this. Malik Janser Khan refused the proposal, but my father is a stubborn man and persuaded my grandfather to send the barber again. Janser Khan's *hujra* was a gathering place for people to talk politics, and my father was often there, so they had got to know each other. He made him wait nine months but finally agreed.

My mother comes from a family of strong women as well as influential men. Her grandmother – my great-grandmother – was widowed when her children were young, and her eldest son Janser Khan was locked up because of a tribal feud with another family when he was only nine. To get him released she walked forty miles alone over mountains to appeal to a powerful cousin. I think my mother would do the same for us. Though she cannot read or write, my father shares everything with her, telling her about his day, the good and the bad. She teases him a lot and gives him advice about who she thinks is a genuine friend and who is not, and my father says she is always right. Most Pashtun men never do this, as sharing problems with women is seen as weak. 'He even asks his wife!' they say as an insult. I see my parents happy and laughing a lot. People would see us and say we are a sweet family.

My mother is very pious and prays five times a day, though not in the mosque as that is only for the men. She disapproves of dancing because she says God would not like it, but she loves to decorate herself with pretty things, embroidered clothes and golden necklaces and bangles. I think I am a bit of a disappointment to her as I am so like my father and don't bother with clothes and jewels. I get bored going to the bazaar but I love to dance behind closed doors with my school friends.

Growing up, we children spent most of our time with our mother. My father was out a lot as he was busy, not just with his school, but also with literary societies and *jirgas*, as well as trying to save the environment, trying to save our valley. My father came from a backward village yet through education and force of personality he made a good living for us and a name for himself.

People liked to hear him talk, and I loved the evenings when guests visited. We would sit on the floor around a long plastic sheet which my mother laid with food, and eat with our right hand as is our custom, balling together rice and meat. As darkness fell we sat by the light of oil lamps, batting away the flies as our silhouettes made dancing shadows on the walls. In the summer months there would often be thunder and lightning crashing outside and I would crawl closer to my father's knee.

I would listen rapt as he told stories of warring tribes, Pashtun leaders and saints, often through poems that he read in a melodious voice, crying sometimes as he read. Like most people in Swat we are from the Yousafzai tribe. We Yousafzai (which some people spell Yusufzai or Yousufzai) are originally from Kandahar and are one of the biggest Pashtun tribes, spread across Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Our ancestors came to Swat in the sixteenth century from Kabul, where they had helped a Timurid

emperor win back his throne after his own tribe removed him. The emperor rewarded them with important positions in the court and army, but his friends and relatives warned him that the Yousafzai were becoming so powerful they would overthrow him. So one night he invited all the chiefs to a banquet and set his men on them while they were eating. Around 600 chiefs were massacred. Only two escaped, and they fled to Peshawar along with their tribesmen. After some time they went to visit some tribes in Swat to win their support so they could return to Afghanistan. But they were so captivated by the beauty of Swat they instead decided to stay there and forced the other tribes out.

The Yousafzai divided up all the land among the male members of the tribe. It was a peculiar system called *wesh* under which every five or ten years all the families would swap villages and redistribute the land of the new village among the men so that everyone had the chance to work on good as well as bad land. It was thought this would then keep rival clans from fighting. Villages were ruled by khans, and the common people, craftsmen and labourers, were their tenants. They had to pay them rent in kind, usually a share of their crop. They also had to help the khans form a militia by providing an armed man for every small plot of land. Each khan kept hundreds of armed men both for feuds and to raid and loot other villages.

As the Yousafzai in Swat had no ruler, there were constant feuds between the khans and even within their own families. Our men all have rifles, though these days they don't walk around with them like they do in other Pashtun areas, and my great-grandfather used to tell stories of gun battles when he was a boy. In the early part of the last century they became worried about being taken over by the British, who by then controlled most of the surrounding lands. They were also tired of the endless bloodshed. So they decided to try and find an impartial man to rule the whole area and resolve their disputes.

After a couple of rulers who did not work out, in 1917 the chiefs settled on a man called Miangul Abdul Wadood as their king. We know him affectionately as Badshah Sahib, and though he was completely illiterate, he managed to bring peace to the valley. Taking a rifle away from a Pashtun is like taking away his life, so he could not disarm the tribes. Instead he built forts on mountains all across Swat and created an army. He was recognised by the British as the head of state in 1926 and installed as wali, which is our word for ruler. He set up the first telephone system and built the first primary school and ended the *wesh* system because the constant moving between villages meant no one could sell land or had any incentive to build better houses or plant fruit trees.

In 1949, two years after the creation of Pakistan, he abdicated in favour of his elder son Miangul Abdul Haq Jehanzeb. My father always says, 'While Badshah Sahib brought peace, his son brought prosperity.' We think of Jehanzeb's reign as a golden period in our history. He had studied in a British school in Peshawar, and perhaps because his own father was illiterate he was passionate about schools and built many, as well as hospitals and roads. In the 1950s he ended the system where people paid taxes to the khans. But there was no freedom of expression, and if anyone criticised the wali, they could be expelled from the valley. In 1969, the year my father was born, the wali gave up power and we became part of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province, which a few years ago changed its name to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

So I was born a proud daughter of Pakistan, though like all Swatis I thought of myself first as Swati and then Pashtun, before Pakistani.

Near us on our street there was a family with a girl my age called Safina and two boys similar in age to my brothers, Babar and Basit. We all played cricket on the street or rooftops together, but I knew

as we got older the girls would be expected to stay inside. We'd be expected to cook and serve our brothers and fathers. While boys and men could roam freely about town, my mother and I could not go out without a male relative to accompany us, even if it was a five-year-old boy! This was the tradition.

I had decided very early I would not be like that. My father always said, 'Malala will be free as a bird.' I dreamed of going to the top of Mount Elum like Alexander the Great to touch Jupiter and even beyond the valley. But, as I watched my brothers running across the roof, flying their kites and skilfully flicking the strings back and forth to cut each other's down, I wondered how free a daughter could ever be.

My Father the Falcon

I ALWAYS KNEW my father had trouble with words. Sometimes they would get stuck and he would repeat the same syllable over and over like a record caught in a groove as we all waited for the next syllable to suddenly pop out. He said it felt like a wall came down in his throat. M's, p's and k's were all enemies lying in wait. I teased him that one of the reasons he called me *Jani* was because he found it easier to say than Malala. A stutter was a terrible thing for a man who so loved words and poetry. On each side of the family he had an uncle with the same affliction. But it was almost certainly made worse by his father, whose own voice was a soaring instrument that could make words thunder and dance.

'Spit it out, son!' he'd roar whenever my father got stuck in the middle of a sentence. My grandfather's name was Rohul Amin, which means 'honest spirit' and is the holy name of the Angel Gabriel. He was so proud of the name that he would introduce himself to people with a famous verse in which his name appears. He was an impatient man at the best of times and would fly into a rage over the smallest thing – like a hen going astray or a cup getting broken. His face would redden and he would throw kettles and pots around. I never knew my grandmother, but my father says she used to joke with my grandfather, 'By God, just as you greet us only with a frown, when I die may God give you a wife who never smiles.'

My grandmother was so worried about my father's stutter that when he was still a young boy she took him to see a holy man. It was a long journey by bus, then an hour's walk up the hill to where he lived. Her nephew Fazli Hakim had to carry my father on his shoulders. The holy man was called Lewano Pir, Saint of the Mad, because he was said to be able to calm lunatics. When they were taken in to see the *pir*, he instructed my father to open his mouth and then spat into it. Then he took some *gur*, dark molasses made from sugar cane, and rolled it around his mouth to moisten it with spit. He then took out the lump and presented it to my grandmother to give to my father, a little each day. The treatment did not cure the stutter. Actually some people thought it got worse. So when my father was thirteen and told my grandfather he was entering a public speaking competition he was stunned. 'How can you?' Rohul Amin asked, laughing. 'You take one or two minutes to utter just one sentence.'

'Don't worry,' replied my father. 'You write the speech and I will learn it.'

My grandfather was famous for his speeches. He taught theology in the government high school in the village of Shahpur. He was also an imam at the local mosque. He was a mesmerising speaker. His sermons at Friday prayers were so popular that people would come down from the mountains by donkey or on foot to hear him.

My father comes from a large family. He had one much older brother, Saeed Ramzan who I call Uncle *Khan dada*, and five sisters. Their village of Barkana was very primitive and they lived crammed together in a one-storey ramshackle house with a mud roof which leaked whenever it rained or snowed. As in most families, the girls stayed at home while the boys went to school. 'They were just waiting to be married,' says my father.

School wasn't the only thing my aunts missed out on. In the morning when my father was given cream or milk, his sisters were given tea with no milk. If there were eggs, they would only be for the

boys. When a chicken was slaughtered for dinner, the girls would get the wings and the neck while the luscious breast meat was enjoyed by my father, his brother and my grandfather. ‘From early on I could feel I was different from my sisters,’ my father says.

There was little to do in my father’s village. It was too narrow even for a cricket pitch and only one family had a television. On Fridays the brothers would creep into the mosque and watch in wonder as my grandfather stood in the pulpit and preached to the congregation for an hour or so, waiting for the moment when his voice would rise and practically shake the rafters.

My grandfather had studied in India, where he had seen great speakers and leaders including Mohammad Ali Jinnah (the founder of Pakistan), Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, our great Pashtun leader who campaigned for independence. *Baba*, as I called him, had even witnessed the moment of freedom from the British colonialists at midnight on 14 August 1947. He had an old radio set my uncle still has, on which he loved to listen to the news. His sermons were often illustrated by world events or historical happenings as well as stories from the Quran and the Hadith, the sayings of the Prophet. He also liked to talk about politics. Swat became part of Pakistan in 1969, the year my father was born. Many Swatis were unhappy about this, complaining about the Pakistani justice system, which they said was much slower and less effective than their old tribal ways. My grandfather would rail against the class system, the continuing power of the khans and the gap between the haves and have-nots.

My country may not be very old but unfortunately it already has a history of military coups, and when my father was eight a general called Zia ul-Haq seized power. There are still many pictures of him around. He was a scary man with dark panda shadows around his eyes, large teeth that seemed to stand to attention and hair pomaded flat on his head. He arrested our elected prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and had him tried for treason then hanged from a scaffold in Rawalpindi jail. Even today people talk of Mr Bhutto as a man of great charisma. They say he was the first Pakistani leader to stand up for the common people, though he himself was a feudal lord with vast estates of mango fields. His execution shocked everybody and made Pakistan look bad all around the world. The Americans cut off aid.

To try to get people at home to support him, General Zia launched a campaign of Islamisation to make us a proper Muslim country with the army as the defenders of our country’s ideological as well as geographical frontiers. He told our people it was their duty to obey his government because it was pursuing Islamic principles. Zia even wanted to dictate how we should pray, and set up *salat* or prayer committees in every district, even in our remote village, and appointed 100,000 prayer inspectors. Before then mullahs had almost been figures of fun – my father said at wedding parties they would just hang around in a corner and leave early – but under Zia they became influential and were called to Islamabad for guidance on sermons. Even my grandfather went.

Under Zia’s regime life for women in Pakistan became much more restricted. Jinnah said, ‘No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men. There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a third power stronger than both, that of women.’ But General Zia brought in Islamic laws which reduced a woman’s evidence in court to count for only half that of a man’s. Soon our prisons were full of cases like that of a thirteen-year-old girl who was raped and become pregnant and was then sent to prison for adultery because she couldn’t produce four male witnesses to prove it was a crime. A woman couldn’t even open a bank account without a man’s permission. As a nation we have always been good at hockey, but Zia made

our female hockey players wear baggy trousers instead of shorts, and stopped women playing some sports altogether.

Many of our madrasas or religious schools were opened at that time, and in all schools religious studies, what we call *deeniyat*, was replaced by *Islamiyat*, or Islamic studies, which children in Pakistan still have to do today. Our history textbooks were rewritten to describe Pakistan as a ‘fortress of Islam’, which made it seem as if we had existed far longer than since 1947, and denounced Hindus and Jews. Anyone reading them might think we won the three wars we have fought and lost against our great enemy India.

Everything changed when my father was ten. Just after Christmas 1979 the Russians invaded our neighbour Afghanistan. Millions of Afghans fled across the border and General Zia gave them refuge. Vast camps of white tents sprang up mostly around Peshawar, some of which are still there today. Our biggest intelligence service belongs to the military and is called the ISI. It started a massive programme to train Afghan refugees recruited from the camps as resistance fighters or mujahideen. Though Afghans are renowned fighters, Colonel Imam, the officer heading the programme, complained that trying to organise them was ‘like weighing frogs’.

The Russian invasion transformed Zia from an international pariah to the great defender of freedom in the Cold War. The Americans became friends with us once again, as in those days Russia was their main enemy. Next door to us the Shah of Iran had been overthrown in a revolution a few months earlier so the CIA had lost their main base in the region. Pakistan took its place. Billions of dollars flowed into our exchequer from the United States and other Western countries, as well as weapons to help the ISI train the Afghans to fight the communist Red Army. General Zia was invited to meet President Ronald Reagan at the White House and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at 10 Downing Street. They lavished praise on him.

Prime Minister Zulfikar Bhutto had appointed Zia as his army chief because he thought he was not very intelligent and would not be a threat. He called him his ‘monkey’. But Zia turned out to be a very wily man. He made Afghanistan a rallying point not only for the West, which wanted to stop the spread of communism from the Soviet Union, but also for Muslims from Sudan to Tajikistan, who saw it as a fellow Islamic country under attack from infidels. Money poured in from all over the Arab world, particularly Saudi Arabia, which matched whatever the US sent, and volunteer fighters too, including a Saudi millionaire called Osama bin Laden.

We Pashtuns are split between Pakistan and Afghanistan and don’t really recognise the border that the British drew more than 100 years ago. So our blood boiled over the Soviet invasion for both religious and nationalist reasons. The clerics of the mosques would often talk about the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in their sermons, condemning the Russians as infidels and urging people to join the jihad, saying it was their duty as good Muslims. It was as if under Zia jihad had become the sixth pillar of our religion on top of the five we grow up to learn – the belief in one God, *namaz* or prayers five times a day, giving *zakat* or alms, *roza* – fasting from dawn till sunset during the month of Ramadan – and *haj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, which every able-bodied Muslim should do once in their lifetime. My father says that in our part of the world this idea of jihad was very much encouraged by the CIA. Children in the refugee camps were even given school textbooks produced by an American university which taught basic arithmetic through fighting. They had examples like, ‘If out of 10 Russian infidels, 5 are killed by one Muslim, 5 would be left’ or ‘15 bullets – 10 bullets = 5 bullets’.

Some boys from my father's district went off to fight in Afghanistan. My father remembers that one day a *maulana* called Sufi Mohammad came to the village and asked young men to join him to fight the Russians in the name of Islam. Many did, and they set off, armed with old rifles or just axes and bazookas. Little did we know that years later the same *maulana*'s organisation would become the Swat Taliban. At that time my father was only twelve years old and too young to fight. But the Russians ended up stuck in Afghanistan for ten years, through most of the 1980s, and when he became a teenager my father decided he too wanted to be a jihadi. Though later he became less regular in his prayers, in those days he used to leave home at dawn every morning to walk to a mosque in another village, where he studied the Quran with a senior *talib*. At that time *talib* simply meant 'religious student'. Together they studied all the thirty chapters of the Quran, not just recitation but also interpretation, something few boys do.

The *talib* talked of jihad in such glorious terms that my father was captivated. He would endlessly point out to my father that life on earth was short and that there were few opportunities for young men in the village. Our family owned little land, and my father did not want to end up going south to work in the coal mines like many of his classmates. That was tough and dangerous work, and the coffins of those killed in accidents would come back several times a year. The best that most village boys could hope for was to go to Saudi Arabia or Dubai and work in construction. So heaven with its seventy-two virgins sounded attractive. Every night my father would pray to God, 'O Allah, please make war between Muslims and infidels so I can die in your service and be a martyr.'

For a while his Muslim identity seemed more important than anything else in his life. He began to sign himself 'Ziauddin Panchpiri' (the Panchpiri are a religious sect) and sprouted the first signs of a beard. It was, he says, a kind of brainwashing. He believes he might even have thought of becoming a suicide bomber had there been such a thing in those days. But from an early age he had been a questioning kind of boy who rarely took anything at face value, even though our education at government schools meant learning by rote and pupils were not supposed to question teachers.

It was around the time he was praying to go to heaven as a martyr that he met my mother's brother, Faiz Mohammad, and started mixing with her family and going to her father's *hujra*. They were very involved in local politics, belonged to secular nationalist parties and were against involvement in the war. A famous poem was written at that time by Rahmat Shah Sayel, the same Peshawar poet who wrote the poem about my namesake. He described what was happening in Afghanistan as a 'war between two elephants' – the US and the Soviet Union – not our war, and said that we Pashtuns were 'like the grass crushed by the hooves of two fierce beasts'. My father often used to recite the poem to me when I was a child but I didn't know then what it meant.

My father was very impressed by Faiz Mohammad and thought he talked a lot of sense, particularly about wanting to end the feudal and capitalist systems in our country, where the same big families had controlled things for years while the poor got poorer. He found himself torn between the two extremes, secularism and socialism on one side and militant Islam on the other. I guess he ended up somewhere in the middle.

My father was in awe of my grandfather and told me wonderful stories about him, but he also told me that he was a man who could not meet the high standards he set for others. *Baba* was such a popular and passionate speaker that he could have been a great leader if he had been more diplomatic and less consumed by rivalries with cousins and others who were better off. In Pashtun society it is very hard to stomach a cousin being more popular, wealthier or more influential than you are. My

grandfather had a cousin who also joined his school as a teacher. When he got the job he gave his age as much younger than my grandfather. Our people don't know their exact dates of birth – my mother, for example, does not know when she was born. We tend to remember years by events, like an earthquake. But my grandfather knew that his cousin was actually much older than him. He was so angry that he made the day-long bus journey to Mingora to see the Swat minister of education. 'Sahib,' he told him, 'I have a cousin who is ten years older than me and you have certified him ten years younger.' So the minister said, 'OK, *Maulana*, what shall I write down for you? Would you like to have been born in the year of the earthquake of Quetta?' My grandfather agreed, so his new date of birth became 1935, making him much younger than his cousin.

This family rivalry meant that my father was bullied a lot by his cousins. They knew he was insecure about his looks because at school the teachers always favoured the handsome boys for their fair skin. His cousins would stop my father on his way home from school and tease him about being short and dark-skinned. In our society you have to take revenge for such slights, but my father was much smaller than his cousins.

He also felt he could never do enough to please my grandfather. *Baba* had beautiful handwriting and my father would spend hours painstakingly drawing letters but *Baba* never once praised him.

My grandmother kept his spirits up – he was her favourite and she believed great things lay in store for him. She loved him so much that she would slip him extra meat and the cream off the milk while she went without. But it wasn't easy to study as there was no electricity in the village in those days. He used to read by the light of the oil lamp in the *hujra*, and one evening he went to sleep and the oil lamp fell over. Fortunately my grandmother found him before a fire started. It was my grandmother's faith in my father that gave him the courage to find his own proud path he could travel along. This is the path that he would later show me.

Yet she too got angry with him once. Holy men from a spiritual place called Derai Saydan used to travel the villages in those days begging for flour. One day while his parents were out some of them came to the house. My father broke the seal on the wooden storage box of maize and filled their bowls. When my grandparents came home they were furious and beat him.

Pashtuns are famously frugal (though generous with guests), and *Baba* was particularly careful with money. If any of his children accidentally spilt their food he would fly into a rage. He was an extremely disciplined man and could not understand why they were not the same. As a teacher he was eligible for a discount on his sons' school fees for sports and joining the Boy Scouts. It was such a small discount that most teachers did not bother, but he forced my father to apply for the rebate. Of course my father detested doing this. As he waited outside the headmaster's office, he broke out into a sweat, and once inside his stutter was worse than ever. 'It felt as if my honour was at stake for five rupees,' he told me. My grandfather never bought him new books. Instead he would tell his best students to keep their old books for my father at the end of the year and then he would be sent to their homes to get them. He felt ashamed but had no choice if he didn't want to end up illiterate. All his books were inscribed with other boys' names, never his own.

'It's not that passing books on is a bad practice,' he says. 'It's just I so wanted a new book, unmarked by another student and bought with my father's money.'

My father's dislike of *Baba*'s frugality has made him a very generous man both materially and in spirit. He became determined to end the traditional rivalry between him and his cousins. When his headmaster's wife fell ill, my father donated blood to help save her. The man was astonished and

apologised for having tormented him. When my father tells me stories of his childhood, he always says that though *Baba* was a difficult man he gave him the most important gift – the gift of education. He sent my father to the government high school to learn English and receive a modern education rather than to a madrasa, even though as an imam people criticised him for this. *Baba* also gave him a deep love of learning and knowledge as well as a keen awareness of people's rights, which my father has passed on to me. In my grandfather's Friday addresses he would talk about the poor and the landowners and how true Islam is against feudalism. He also spoke Persian and Arabic and cared deeply for words. He read the great poems of Saadi, Allama Iqbal and Rumi to my father with such passion and fire it was as if he was teaching the whole mosque.

My father longed to be eloquent with a voice that boomed out with no stammer, and he knew my grandfather desperately wanted him to be a doctor, but though he was a very bright student and a gifted poet, he was poor at maths and science and felt he was a disappointment. That's why he decided he would make his father proud by entering the district's annual public speaking competition. Everyone thought he was mad. His teachers and friends tried to dissuade him and his father was reluctant to write the speech for him. But eventually *Baba* gave him a fine speech, which my father practised and practised. He committed every word to memory while walking in the hills, reciting it to the skies and birds as there was no privacy in their home.

There was not much to do in the area where they lived so when the day arrived there was a huge gathering. Other boys, some known as good speakers, gave their speeches. Finally my father was called forward. 'I stood at the lectern,' he told me, 'hands shaking and knees knocking, so short I could barely see over the top and so terrified the faces were a blur. My palms were sweating and my mouth was as dry as paper.' He tried desperately not to think about the treacherous consonants lying ahead of him, just waiting to trip him up and stick in his throat, but when he spoke, the words came out fluently like beautiful butterflies taking flight. His voice did not boom like his father's, but his passion shone through and as he went on he gained confidence.

At the end of the speech there were cheers and applause. Best of all, as he went up to collect the cup for first prize, he saw his father clapping and enjoying being patted on the back by those standing around him. 'It was,' he says, 'the first thing I'd done that made him smile.'

After that my father entered every competition in the district. My grandfather wrote his speeches and he almost always came first, gaining a reputation locally as an impressive speaker. My father had turned his weakness into strength. For the first time *Baba* started praising him in front of others. He'd boast, 'Ziauddin is a *shaheen*' – a falcon – because this is a creature that flies high above other birds. 'Write your name as "Ziauddin Shaheen",' he told him. For a while my father did this but stopped when he realised that although a falcon flies high it is a cruel bird. Instead he just called himself Ziauddin Yousafzai, our clan name.

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 just to 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 realise 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 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 realise 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 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. He 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 organisations 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 student organisation 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 favourite 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 Prophet's life 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 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 Centre – 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 believes strongly in freedom of speech. 'First, let's read the book and then why not respond with our own book,' he suggested. 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 £12), 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 bachelors and masters 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 at 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-storey 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 smelt 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 enrolment 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 honour.' 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 a superintendent 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 superintendent 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 organisation 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 organisation 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 tuck 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 enrol 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 jewellery is a bond between the couple. Often women sell their jewellery 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 Khan had stepped in – and she did not realise 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 paralysed 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 neighbour 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 afterwards 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 neighbour 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 was a teacher. Some of the female staff like Miss Ulfat would pick me up and put me on their lap as if I was 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 storeys. 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 realise then that 9/11 would change our world too, and would bring war into our valley.

IN OUR TRADITION on the seventh day of a child's life we have a celebration called *Woma* (which means 'seventh') for family, friends and neighbours to come and admire the newborn. My parents had not held one for me because they could not afford the goat and rice needed to feed the guests, and my grandfather would not help them out because I was not a boy. When my brothers came along and *Baba* wanted to pay, my father refused as he hadn't done this for me. But *Baba* was the only grandfather I had as my mother's father had died before I was born and we became close. My parents say I have qualities of both grandfathers – humorous and wise like my mother's father and vocal like my father's father! *Baba* had grown soft and white-bearded in his old age and I loved going to visit him in the village.

Whenever he saw me he would greet me with a song as he was still concerned about the sad meaning of my name and wanted to lend some happiness to it: '*Malala Maiwand wala da. Pa tool jehan ke da khushala da,*' he sang. 'Malala is of Maiwand and she's the happiest person in the whole world.'

We always went to the village for the Eid holidays. We would dress in our finest clothes and pile into the Flying Coach, a minibus with brightly painted panels and jangling chains, and drive north to Barkana, our family village in Shangla. Eid happens twice a year – Eid ul-Fitr or 'Small Eid' marks the end of the Ramadan fasting month, and Eid ul-Azha or 'Big Eid' commemorates the Prophet Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son Ismail to God. The dates of the feasts are announced by a special panel of clerics who watch for the appearance of the crescent moon. As soon as we heard the broadcast on the radio, we set off.

The night before we hardly slept because we were so excited. The journey usually took about five hours as long as the road had not been washed away by rains or landslides, and the Flying Coach left early in the morning. We struggled to Mingora bus station, our bags laden with gifts for our family – embroidered shawls and boxes of rose and pistachio sweets as well as medicine they could not get in the village. Some people took sacks of sugar and flour, and most of the baggage was tied to the top of the bus in a towering pile. Then we crammed in, fighting over the window seats even though the panes were so encrusted with dirt it was hard to see out of them. The sides of Swat buses are painted with scenes of bright pink and yellow flowers, neon-orange tigers and snowy mountains. My brothers liked it if we got one with F-16 fighter jets or nuclear missiles, though my father said if our politicians hadn't spent so much money on building an atomic bomb we might have had enough for schools.

We drove out of the bazaar, past the grinning red mouth signs for dentists, the carts stacked with wooden cages crammed with beady-eyed white chickens with scarlet beaks, and jewellery stores with windows full of gold wedding bangles. The last few shops as we headed north out of Mingora were wooden shacks that seemed to lean on each other, in front of which were piles of reconditioned tyres for the bad roads ahead. Then we were on the main road built by the last wali, which follows the wide Swat River on the left and hugs the cliffs to the right with their emerald mines. Overlooking the river were tourist restaurants with big glass windows we had never been to. On the road we passed dusty-faced children bent double with huge bundles of grass on their backs and men leading

flocks of shaggy goats that wandered hither and thither.

As we drove on, the landscape changed to paddy fields of deep lush green that smelt so fresh and orchards of apricot and fig trees. Occasionally we passed small marble works over streams which ran milky white with the discharge of chemicals. This made my father cross. ‘Look at what these criminals are doing to pollute our beautiful valley,’ he always said. The road left the river and wound up through narrow passes over steep fir-clad heights, higher and higher, until our ears popped. On top of some of the peaks were ruins where vultures circled, the remains of forts built by the first wali. The bus strained and laboured, the driver cursing as trucks overtook us on blind bends with steep drops below. My brothers loved this, and they would taunt me and my mother by pointing out the wreckage of vehicles on the mountainside.

Finally we made it up onto Sky Turn, the gateway to Shangla Top, a mountain pass which feels as if it’s on top of the world. Up there we were higher than the rocky peaks all around us. In the far distance we could see the snows of Malam Jabba, our ski resort. By the roadside were fresh springs and waterfalls, and when we stopped for a break and to drink some tea, the air was clean and fragrant with cedar and pine. We breathed it into our lungs greedily. Shangla is all mountain, mountain, mountain and just a small sky. After this the road winds back down for a while then follows the Gwurban River and peters out into a rocky track. The only way to cross the river is by rope bridges or on a pulley system by which people swing themselves across in a metal box. Foreigners call them suicide bridges but we loved them.

If you look at a map of Swat you’ll see it is one long valley with little valleys we call *darae* off to the sides like the branches of a tree. Our village lies about halfway along on the east. It’s in the Kana *dara*, which is enclosed by craggy mountain walls and so narrow there is not even room for a cricket ground. We call our village Shahpur, but really there is a necklace of three villages along the bottom of the valley – Shahpur, the biggest; Barkana, where my father grew up; and Karshat, which is where my mother lived. At either end is a huge mountain – Tor Ghar, the Black Mountain to the south, and Spin Ghar, the White Mountain, to the north.

We usually stayed in Barkana at my grandfather’s house, where my father grew up. Like almost all the houses in the area, it was flat-roofed and made of stone and mud. I preferred staying in Karshat with my cousins on my maternal side because they had a concrete house with a bathroom and there were lots of children to play with. My mother and I stayed in the women’s quarters downstairs. The women spent their days looking after the children and preparing food to serve to the men in their *hujra* upstairs. I slept with my cousins Aneesa and Sumbul in a room which had a clock in the shape of a mosque and a cabinet on the wall containing a rifle and some packets of hair dye.

In the village the day started early and even I, who liked to sleep late, woke with the sound of cocks crowing and the clatter of dishes as the women prepared breakfast for the men. In the morning the sun reflected off the top of Tor Ghar; when we got up for the *fajr* prayers, the first of our five daily prayers, we would look left and see the golden peak of Spin Ghar lit with the first rays of the sun like a white lady wearing a *jumar tika* – a gold chain on her forehead.

Often rain would then come to wash everything clean, and the clouds would linger on the green terraces of the hills where people grew radishes and walnut trees. Dotted around were hives of bees. I loved the gloopy honey, which we ate with walnuts. Down on the river at the Karshat end were water buffaloes. There was also a shed with a wooden waterwheel providing power to turn huge millstones to grind wheat and maize into flour, which young boys would then pour into sacks. Next to

that was a smaller shed containing a panel with a confusion of wires sprouting from it. The village received no electricity from the government so many villagers got their power from these makeshift hydroelectric projects.

As the day went on and the sun climbed higher in the sky, more and more of the White Mountain would be bathed in golden sun. Then as evening came it fell in shadow as the sun moved up the Black Mountain. We timed our prayers by the shadow on the mountains. When the sun hit a certain rock, we used to say our *asr* or afternoon prayers. Then in the evening, when the white peak of Spin Ghar was even more beautiful than in the morning, we said the *makkam* or evening prayers. You could see the White Mountain from everywhere, and my father told me he used to think of it as a symbol of peace for our land, a white flag at the end of our valley. When he was a child he thought this small valley was the entire world and that if anyone went beyond the point where either mountain kissed the sky, they would fall off.

Though I had been born in a city, I shared my father's love of nature. I loved the rich soil, the greenness of the plants, the crops, the buffaloes and the yellow butterflies that fluttered about me as I walked. The village was very poor, but when we arrived our extended family would lay on a big feast. There would be bowls of chicken, rice, local spinach and spicy mutton, all cooked over the fire by the women, followed by plates of crunchy apples, slices of yellow cake and a big kettle of milky tea. None of the children had toys or books. The boys played cricket in a gully and even the ball was made from plastic bags tied together with elastic bands.

The village was a forgotten place. Water was carried from the spring. The few concrete houses had been built by families whose sons or fathers had gone south to work in the mines or to the Gulf, from where they sent money home. There are forty million of us Pashtuns, of which ten million live outside our homeland. My father said it was sad that they could never return as they needed to keep working to maintain their families' new lifestyle. There were many families with no men. They would visit only once a year, and usually a new baby would arrive nine months later.

Scattered up and down the hills there were houses made of wattle and daub, like my grandfather's, and these often collapsed when there were floods. Children sometimes froze to death in winter. There was no hospital. Only Shahpur had a clinic, and if anyone fell ill in the other villages they had to be carried there by their relatives on a wooden frame which we jokingly called the Shangla Ambulance. If it was anything serious they would have to make the long bus journey to Mingora unless they were lucky enough to know someone with a car.

Usually politicians only visited during election time, promising roads, electricity, clean water and schools and giving money and generators to influential local people we called stakeholders, who would instruct their communities on how to vote. Of course this only applied to the men; women in our area don't vote. Then they disappeared off to Islamabad if they were elected to the National Assembly, or Peshawar for the Provincial Assembly, and we'd hear no more of them or their promises.

My cousins made fun of me for my city ways. I did not like going barefoot. I read books and I had a different accent and used slang expressions from Mingora. My clothes were often from shops and not home-made like theirs. My relatives would ask me, 'Would you like to cook chicken for us?' and I'd say, 'No, the chicken is innocent. We should not kill her.' They thought I was modern because I came from town. They did not realise people from Islamabad or even Peshawar would think me very backward.

Sometimes we went up to the mountains and sometimes down to the river on family trips. It was a big stream, too deep and fast to cross when the snows melted in summer. The boys would fish using earthworms threaded like beads on a string hanging from a long stick. Some of them whistled, believing this would attract the fish. They weren't particularly tasty fish. Their mouths were very rough and horny. We called them *chaqwartee*. Sometimes a group of girls would go down to the river for a picnic with pots of rice and sherbet. Our favourite game was 'weddings'. We would get into two groups, each supposed to be a family, then each family would have to betroth a girl so we could perform a marriage ceremony. Everyone wanted me in their family as I was from Mingora and modern. The most beautiful girl was Tanzela, and we often gave her to the other group so we could then have her as our bride.

The most important part of the mock wedding was jewellery. We took earrings, bangles and necklaces to decorate the bride, singing Bollywood songs as we worked. Then we would put make-up on her face that we'd taken from our mothers, dip her hands in hot limestone and soda to make them white, and paint her nails red with henna. Once she was ready, the bride would start crying and we would stroke her hair and try to convince her not to worry. 'Marriage is part of life,' we said. 'Be kind to your mother-in-law and father-in-law so they treat you well. Take care of your husband and be happy.'

Occasionally there would be real weddings with big feasts which went on for days and left the family bankrupt or in debt. The brides would wear exquisite clothes and be draped in gold, necklaces and bangles given by both sides of the family. I read that Benazir Bhutto insisted on wearing glass bangles at her wedding to set an example but the tradition of adorning the bride still continued. Sometimes a plywood coffin would be brought back from one of the mines. The women would gather at the house of the dead man's wife or mother and a terrible wailing would start and echo round the valley, which made my skin crawl.

At night the village was very dark with just oil lamps twinkling in houses on the hills. None of the older women had any education but they all told stories and recited what we call *tapey*, Pashto couplets. My grandmother was particularly good at them. They were usually about love or being a Pashtun. 'No Pashtun leaves his land of his own sweet will,' she would say. 'Either he leaves from poverty or he leaves for love.' Our aunts scared us with ghost stories, like the one about Shalgwatay, the twenty-fingered man, who they warned would sleep in our beds. We would cry in terror, though in fact as 'toe' and 'finger' in Pashto is the same, we were all twenty-fingered, but we didn't realise. To make us wash, our aunts told stories about a scary woman called Shashaka, who would come after you with her muddy hands and stinking breath if you didn't take a bath or wash your hair, and turn you into a dirty woman with hair like rats' tails filled with insects. She might even kill you. In the winter when parents didn't want their children to stay outside in the snow they would tell the story about the lion or tiger which must always make the first step in the snow. Only when the lion or tiger has left their footprint were we allowed to go outside.

As we got older the village began to seem boring. The only television was in the *hujra* of one of the wealthier families, and no one had a computer.

Women in the village hid their faces whenever they left their purdah quarters and could not meet or speak to men who were not their close relatives. I wore more fashionable clothes and didn't cover my face even when I became a teenager. One of my male cousins was angry and asked my father, 'Why isn't she covered?' He replied, 'She's my daughter. Look after your own affairs.' But some of the

family thought people would gossip about us and say we were not properly following *Pashtunwali*.

I am very proud to be a Pashtun but sometimes I think our code of conduct has a lot to answer for, particularly where the treatment of women is concerned. A woman named Shahida who worked for us and had three small daughters, told me that when she was only ten years old her father had sold her to an old man who already had a wife but wanted a younger one. When girls disappeared it was not always because they had been married off. There was a beautiful fifteen-year-old girl called Seema. Everyone knew she was in love with a boy, and sometimes he would pass by and she would look at him from under her long dark lashes, which all the girls envied. In our society for a girl to flirt with any man brings shame on the family, though it's all right for the man. We were told she had committed suicide, but we later discovered her own family had poisoned her.

We have a custom called *swara* by which a girl can be given to another tribe to resolve a feud. It is officially banned but still continues. In our village there was a widow called Soraya who married a widower from another clan which had a feud with her family. Nobody can marry a widow without the permission of her family. When Soraya's family found out about the union they were furious. They threatened the widower's family until a *jirga* was called of village elders to resolve the dispute. The *jirga* decided that the widower's family should be punished by handing over their most beautiful girl to be married to the least eligible man of the rival clan. The boy was a good-for-nothing, so poor that the girl's father had to pay all their expenses. Why should a girl's life be ruined to settle a dispute she had nothing to do with?

When I complained about these things to my father he told me that life was harder for women in Afghanistan. The year before I was born a group called the Taliban led by a one-eyed mullah had taken over the country and was burning girls' schools. They were forcing men to grow beards as long as a lantern and women to wear burqas. Wearing a burqa is like walking inside big fabric shuttlecock with only a grille to see through and on hot days it's like an oven. At least I didn't have to wear one. He said that the Taliban had even banned women from laughing out loud or wearing white shoes as white was 'a colour that belonged to men'. Women were being locked up and beaten just for wearing nail varnish. I shivered when he told me such things.

I read my books like *Anna Karenina* and the novels of Jane Austen and trusted in my father's words: 'Malala is free as a bird.' When I heard stories of the atrocities in Afghanistan I felt proud to be in Swat. 'Here a girl can go to school,' I used to say. But the Taliban were just around the corner and were Pashtuns like us. For me the valley was a sunny place and I couldn't see the clouds gathering behind the mountains. My father used to say, 'I will protect your freedom, Malala. Carry on with your dreams.'

Why I Don't Wear Earrings and Pashtuns Don't Say Thank You

BY THE AGE of seven I was used to being top of my class. I was the one who would help other pupils who had difficulties. ‘Malala is a genius girl,’ my class fellows would say. I was also known for participating in everything – badminton, drama, cricket, art, even singing, though I wasn’t much good. So when a new girl named Malka-e-Noor joined our class, I didn’t think anything of it. Her name means ‘Queen of Light’ and she said she wanted to be Pakistan’s first female army chief. Her mother was a teacher at a different school, which was unusual as none of our mothers worked. To begin with she didn’t say much in class. The competition was always between me and my best friend Moniba, who had beautiful writing and presentation, which the examiners liked, but I knew I could beat her on content. So when we did the end-of-year exams and Malka-e-Noor came first, I was shocked. At home I cried and cried and had to be comforted by my mother.

Around that time we moved away from where we had been living on the same street as Moniba to an area where I didn’t have any friends. On our new road there was a girl called Safina, who was a bit younger than me, and we started to play together. She was a pampered girl who had lots of dolls and a shoebox full of jewellery. But she kept eyeing up the pink plastic pretend mobile phone my father had bought me, which was one of the only toys I had. My father was always talking on his mobile so I loved to copy him and pretend to make calls on mine. One day it disappeared.

A few days later I saw Safina playing with a phone exactly the same as mine. ‘Where did you get that?’ I asked. ‘I bought it in the bazaar,’ she said.

I realise now she could have been telling the truth but back then I thought, *She is doing this to me and I will do the same to her*. I used to go to her house to study, so whenever I was there I would pocket her things, mostly toy jewellery like earrings and necklaces. It was easy. At first stealing gave me a thrill, but that did not last long. Soon it became a compulsion. I did not know how to stop.

One afternoon I came home from school and rushed into the kitchen as usual for a snack. ‘Hello, *Bhabi!*’ I called. ‘I’m starving!’ There was silence. My mother was sitting on the floor pounding spices, brightly coloured turmeric and cumin, filling the air with their aroma. Over and over she pounded. Her eyes would not meet mine. What had I done? I was very sad and went to my room. When I opened my cupboard, I saw that all the things I had taken were gone. I had been caught.

My cousin Reena came into my room. ‘They knew you were stealing,’ she said. ‘They were waiting for you to come clean but you just kept on.’

I felt a terrible sinking feeling in my stomach. I walked back to my mother with my head bowed. ‘What you did was wrong, Malala,’ she said. ‘Are you trying to bring shame on us that we can’t afford to buy such things?’

‘It’s not true!’ I lied. ‘I didn’t take them.’

But she knew I had. ‘Safina started it,’ I protested. ‘She took the pink phone that *Aba* bought me.’

My mother was unmoved. ‘Safina is younger than you and you should have taught her better,’ she said. ‘You should have set an example.’

I started crying and apologised over and over again. ‘Don’t tell *Aba*,’ I begged. I couldn’t bear for him to be disappointed in me. It’s horrible to feel unworthy in the eyes of your parents.

It wasn't the first time. When I was little I went to the bazaar with my mother and spotted a pile of almonds on a cart. They looked so tasty that I couldn't resist grabbing a handful. My mother told me off and apologised to the cart owner. He was furious and would not be placated. We still had little money and my mother checked her purse to see what she had. 'Can you sell them to me for ten rupees?' she asked. 'No,' he replied. 'Almonds are very costly.'

My mother was very upset and told my father. He immediately went and bought the whole lot from the man and put them in a glass dish.

'Almonds are good,' he said. 'If you eat them with milk just before bed it makes you brainy.' But I knew he didn't have much money and the almonds in the dish were a reminder of my guilt. I promised myself I'd never do such a thing again. And now I had. My mother took me to say sorry to Safina and her parents. It was very hard. Safina said nothing about my phone, which didn't seem fair, but I didn't mention it either.

Though I felt bad, I was also relieved it was over. Since that day I have never lied or stolen. Not a single lie nor a single penny, not even the coins my father leaves around the house, which we're allowed to buy snacks with. I also stopped wearing jewellery because I asked myself, *What are these baubles which tempt me? Why should I lose my character for a few metal trinkets?* But I still feel guilty, and to this day I say sorry to God in my prayers.

My mother and father tell each other everything so *Aba* soon found out why I was so sad. I could see in his eyes that I had failed him. I wanted him to be proud of me, like he was when I was presented with the first-in-year trophies at school. Or the day our kindergarten teacher Miss Ulfat told him I had written, 'Only Speak in Urdu,' on the blackboard for my classmates at the start of an Urdu lesson so we would learn the language faster.

My father consoled me by telling me about the mistakes great heroes made when they were children. He told me that Mahatma Gandhi said, 'Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes.' At school we had read stories about Mohammad Ali Jinnah. As a boy in Karachi he would study by the glow of street lights because there was no light at home. He told other boys to stop playing marbles in the dust and to play cricket instead so their clothes and hands wouldn't get dirty. Outside his office my father had a framed copy of a letter written by Abraham Lincoln to his son's teacher, translated into Pashto. It is a very beautiful letter, full of good advice. 'Teach him, if you can, the wonder of books . . . But also give him quiet time to ponder the eternal mystery of birds in the sky, bees in the sun, and the flowers on a green hillside,' it says. 'Teach him it is far more honourable to fail than to cheat.'

I think everyone makes a mistake at least once in their life. The important thing is what you learn from it. That's why I have problems with our *Pashtunwali* code. We are supposed to take revenge for wrongs done to us, but where does that end? If a man in one family is killed or hurt by another man, revenge must be exacted to restore *nang*. It can be taken by killing any male member of the attacker's family. Then that family in turn must take revenge. And on and on it goes. There is no time limit. We have a saying: 'The Pashtun took revenge after twenty years and another said it was taken too soon.'

We are a people of many sayings. One is 'The stone of Pashto does not rust in water,' which means we neither forget nor forgive. That's also why we rarely say thank you, *manana*, because we believe a Pashtun will never forget a good deed and is bound to reciprocate at some point, just as he will a bad one. Kindness can only be repaid with kindness. It can't be repaid with expressions like 'thank you'.

Many families live in walled compounds with watchtowers so they can keep an eye out for their enemies. We knew many victims of feuds. One was Sher Zaman, a man who had been in my father's class and always got better grades than him. My grandfather and uncle used to drive my father mad, teasing him, 'You're not as good as Sher Zaman,' so much he once wished that rocks would come down the mountain and flatten him. But Sher Zaman did not go to college and ended up becoming a dispenser in the village pharmacy. His family became embroiled in a dispute with their cousins over a small plot of forest. One day, as Sher Zaman and two of his brothers were on their way to the land, they were ambushed by his uncle and some of his men. All three brothers were killed.

As a respected man in the community, my father was often called on to mediate feuds. He did not believe in *badal* – revenge – and would try to make people see that neither side had anything to gain from continuing the violence, and it would be better for them to get on with their lives. There were two families in our village he could not convince. They had been locked in a feud for so long no one even seemed to remember how it had started – probably some small slight as we are a hot-headed people. First a brother on one side would attack an uncle on the other. Then vice versa. It consumed their lives.

Our people say it is a good system, and our crime rate is much lower than in non-Pashtun areas. But I think that if someone kills your brother, you shouldn't kill them or their brother, you should teach them instead. I am inspired by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the man who some call the Frontier Gandhi, who introduced a non-violent philosophy to our culture.

It's the same with stealing. Some people, like me, get caught and vow they will never do it again. Others say, 'Oh it's no big deal – it was just a little thing.' But the second time they will steal something bigger and the third something bigger still. In my country too many politicians think nothing of stealing. They are rich and we are a poor country yet they loot and loot. Most of them don't pay tax, but that's the least of it. They take out loans from state banks but they don't pay them back. They get kickbacks on government contracts from friends or the companies they award them to. Many of them own expensive flats in London.

I don't know how they can live with their consciences when they see our people going hungry or sitting in the darkness of endless power cuts, or children unable to go to school as their parents need them to work. My father says that Pakistan has been cursed with more than its fair share of politicians who only think about money. They don't care if the army is actually flying the plane, they are happy to stay out of the cockpit and sit in business class, close the curtains and enjoy the fine food and service while the rest of us are squashed in economy.

I had been born into a sort of democracy in which for ten years Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif kept replacing each other, none of their governments ever completing a term and always accusing each other of corruption. But two years after I was born the generals again took over. It happened in a manner so dramatic that it sounds like something out of a movie. Nawaz Sharif was prime minister at the time and had fallen out with his army chief General Pervez Musharraf and sacked him. At the time General Musharraf was on a plane of our national airline PIA coming back from Sri Lanka. Nawaz Sharif was so worried about his reaction that he tried to stop the plane from landing in Pakistan. He ordered Karachi airport to switch off its landing lights and to park fire engines on the runway to block the plane even though it had 200 other passengers on board and not enough fuel to get to another country. Within an hour of the announcement on television of Musharraf's sacking, tanks were on the streets and troops had taken over the newsrooms and the airports. The local commander, General

Iftikhar, stormed the control tower at Karachi so that Musharraf's plane could land. Musharraf then seized power and threw Sharif into a dungeon in Attock Fort. Some people celebrated by handing out sweets as Sharif was unpopular, but my father cried when he heard the news. He had thought we were done with military dictatorships. Sharif was accused of treason and only saved by his friends in the Saudi royal family, who arranged his exile.

Musharraf was our fourth military ruler. Like all our dictators, he started by addressing the nation on TV, beginning, '*Mere aziz hamwatano*' – 'My dear countrymen' – then went into a long tirade against Sharif, saying that under him Pakistan had 'lost our honour, dignity and respect'. He vowed to end corruption and go after those 'guilty of plundering and looting the national wealth'. He promised he would make his own assets and tax return public. He said he would only run the country for a short time, but no one believed him. General Zia had promised to be in power for ninety days and had stayed more than eleven years until he was killed in an air crash.

It's the same old story, my father said, and he was right. Musharraf promised to end the old feudal system by which the same few dozen families controlled our entire country, and bring fresh young clean faces into politics. Instead his cabinet was made up of the very same old faces. Once again our country was expelled from the Commonwealth and became an international black sheep. The Americans had already suspended most aid the year before when we conducted nuclear tests, but now almost everyone boycotted us.

With such a history, you can see why the people of Swat did not always think it was a good idea to be part of Pakistan. Every few years Pakistan sent us a new deputy commissioner, or DC, to govern Swat, just as the British had done in colonial days. It seemed to us that these bureaucrats came to our province simply to get rich, then went back home. They had no interest in developing Swat. Our people are used to being subservient because under the wali no criticism was tolerated. If anyone offended him, their entire family could be expelled from Swat. So when the DCs came from Pakistan, they were the new kings and no one questioned them. Older people often looked back nostalgically to the days of the last wali. Back then, they said, the mountains were all still covered in trees, there were schools every five kilometres and the wali sahib would visit them in person to resolve problems.

After what happened with Safina, I vowed that I would never treat a friend badly again. My father always says it's important to treat friends well. When he was at college and had no money for food or books many of his friends helped him out and he never forgot that. I have three good friends – Safina from my area, Sumbul from the village and Moniba from school. Moniba had become my best friend in primary school when we lived near each other, and I persuaded her to come to our school. She is a wise girl, though we often fall out, particularly when we go on school trips. She comes from a large family with three sisters and four brothers. I think of her as my big sister even though I am six months older than her. Moniba sets down rules which I try to follow. We don't have secrets from each other and we don't share our secrets with anyone else. She doesn't like me talking to other girls and says we must be careful of associating with people who are badly behaved or have a reputation for trouble. She always says, 'I have four brothers, and if I do even the slightest thing wrong they can stop me going to school.'

I was so eager not to disappoint my parents that I ran errands for anyone. One day our neighbours asked me to buy some maize for them from the bazaar. On the way a boy on a bicycle crashed into me and my left shoulder hurt so much that my eyes watered. But I still went and bought the maize, took it to my neighbours and then went home. Only then did I cry. Shortly after that I found the perfect way to

try to win back the respect of my father. Notices had gone up at school for a public speaking competition and Moniba and I both decided to enter. I remembered the story of my father surprising my grandfather and longed to do the same.

When we got the topic, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was 'Honesty is the best policy'.

The only practice we'd had was reading out poems at morning assembly, but there was an older girl at school called Fatima who was a very good speaker. She was beautiful and spoke in an animated way. She could speak confidently in front of hundreds of people and they would hang on her every word. Moniba and I longed to be like her and studied her carefully.

In our culture speeches are usually written by our fathers, uncles or teachers. They tend to be in English or Urdu, not in our native Pashto. We thought speaking in English meant you were more intelligent. We were wrong, of course. It does not matter what language you choose, the important thing is the words you use to express yourself. Moniba's speech was written by one of her older brothers. She quoted beautiful poems by Allama Iqbal, our national poet. My father wrote my speech. In it he argued that if you want to do good, but do it in a bad way, that's still bad. In the same way, if you choose a good method to do something bad it's still bad. He ended it with Lincoln's words: 'it is far more honourable to fail than to cheat'.

On the day only eight or nine boys and girls turned up. Moniba spoke well – she was very composed and her speech was more emotional and poetic than mine, though mine might have had the better message. I was so nervous before the speech, I was trembling with fear. My grandfather had come to watch and I knew he really wanted me to win the competition, which made me even more nervous. I remembered what my father had said about taking a deep breath before starting, but then I saw that all eyes were on me and I rushed through. I kept losing my place as the pages danced in my shaking hands, but as I ended with Lincoln's words, I looked up at my father. He was smiling.

When the judges announced the results at the end, Moniba had won. I came second.

It didn't matter. Lincoln also wrote in the letter to his son's teacher, 'Teach him how to gracefully lose.' I was used to coming top of my class. But I realised that, even if you win three or four times, the next victory will not necessarily be yours without trying – and also that sometimes it's better to tell your own story. I started writing my own speeches and changing the way I delivered them, from my heart rather than from a sheet of paper.

Children of the Rubbish Mountain

AS THE KHUSHAL School started to attract more pupils, we moved again and finally had a television. My favourite programme was *Shaka Laka Boom Boom*, an Indian children's series about a boy called Sanju who has a magic pencil. Everything he drew became real. If he drew a vegetable or a policeman, the vegetable or policeman would magically appear. If he accidentally drew a snake he could erase it and the snake would disappear. He used his pencil to help people – he even saved his parents from gangsters – and I wanted that magic pencil more than anything else in the world.

At night I would pray, 'God, give me Sanju's pencil. I won't tell anyone. Just leave it in my cupboard. I will use it to make everyone happy.' As soon as I finished praying, I would check the drawer. The pencil was never there, but I knew who I would help first. Just along the street from our new house was an abandoned strip of land that people used as a rubbish dump – there is no rubbish collection in Swat. Quickly, it became a rubbish mountain. I didn't like walking near it as it smelt so bad. Sometimes we would spot rats running through it and crows would circle overhead.

One day my brothers were not home and my mother had asked me to throw away some potato peel and eggshells. I wrinkled my nose as I approached, swatting away flies and making sure I didn't step on anything in my nice shoes. As I threw the rubbish on the mountain of rotting food, I saw something move and I jumped. It was a girl about my age. Her hair was matted and her skin was covered in sores. She looked like I imagined Shashaka, the dirty woman they told us about in tales in the village to make us wash. The girl had a big sack and was sorting rubbish into piles, one for cans, one for bottle tops, another for glass and another for paper. Nearby there were boys fishing in the pile for metal using magnets on strings. I wanted to talk to the children but I was too scared.

That afternoon, when my father came home from school, I told him about the scavenger children and begged him to go with me to look. He tried to talk to them but they ran away. He explained that the children would sell what they had sorted to a garbage shop for a few rupees. The shop would then sell it on at a profit. On the way back home I noticed that he was in tears.

'Aba, you must give them free places at your school,' I begged. He laughed. My mother and I had already persuaded him to give free places to a number of girls.

Though my mother was not educated, she was the practical one in the family, the doer while my father was the talker. She was always out helping people. My father would get angry sometimes – he would arrive home at lunchtime and call out, 'Tor Pekai, I'm home!' only to find she was out and there was no lunch for him. Then he would find she was at the hospital visiting someone who was ill, or had gone to help a family, so he could not stay cross. Sometimes though she would be out because she was shopping for clothes in the Cheena Bazaar, and that would be a different matter.

Wherever we lived my mother filled our house with people. I shared my room with my cousin Aneesa from the village, who had come to live with us so she could go to school, and a girl called Shehnaz whose mother Sultana had once worked in our house. Shehnaz and her sister had also been sent out to collect garbage after their father had died leaving them very poor. One of her brothers was mentally ill and was always doing strange things like setting fire to their clothes or selling the electric fan we gave them to keep cool. Sultana was very short-tempered and my mother did not like having

her in the house, but my father arranged a small allowance for her and a place for Shehnaz and her other brother at his school. Shehnaz had never been to school, so even though she was two years older than me she was put two classes below, and she came to live with us so that I could help her.

There was also Nooria, whose mother Kharoo did some of our washing and cleaning, and Alishpa, one of the daughters of Khalida, the woman who helped my mother with the cooking. Khalida had been sold into marriage to an old man who used to beat her, and eventually she ran away with her three daughters. Her own family would not take her back because it is believed that a woman who has left her husband has brought shame on her family. For a while her daughters also had to collect rubbish to survive. Her story was like something out of the novels I had started reading.

The school had expanded a lot by then and had three buildings – the original one in Landikas was a primary school, and then there was a high school for girls on Yahya Street and one for boys with a big garden of roses near the remains of the Buddhist temple. We had about 800 students in total, and although the school was not really making money, my father gave away more than a hundred free places. One of them was to a boy whose father, Sharafat Ali, had helped my father when he was a penniless college student. They were friends from the village. Sharafat Ali worked at the electricity company and he would give my father a few hundred rupees whenever he could spare them. My father was happy to be able to repay his kindness. Another was a girl in my class called Kausar, whose father embroidered clothes and shawls – a trade our region is famous for. When we went on school trips to visit the mountains, I knew she couldn't afford them so I would pay for her with my pocket money.

Giving places to poor children didn't just mean my father lost their fees. Some of the richer parents took their children out of the school when they realised they were sharing classrooms with the sons and daughters of people who cleaned their houses or stitched their clothes. They thought it was shameful for their children to mix with those from poor families. My mother said it was hard for the poor children to learn when they were not getting enough food at home so some of the girls would come to our house for breakfast. My father joked that our home had become a boarding house.

Having so many people around made it hard to study. I had been delighted to have my own room, and my father had even bought me a dressing table to work on. But now I had two other girls in the room. 'I want space!' I'd cry. But then I felt guilty as I knew we were lucky. I thought back to the children working on the rubbish heap. I kept seeing the dirty face of the girl from the dump and continued to pester my father to give them places at our school.

He tried to explain that those children were breadwinners so if they went to school, even for free, the whole family would go hungry. However, he got a wealthy philanthropist, Azaday Khan, to pay for him to produce a leaflet asking, '*Kia hasool e elum in bachun ka haq nahe?*' – 'Is education not the right of these children?' My father printed thousands of these leaflets, left them at local meetings and distributed them around town.

By then my father was becoming a well-known figure in Swat. Even though he was not a khan or a rich man, people listened to him. They knew he would have something interesting to say at workshops and seminars and wasn't afraid to criticise the authorities, even the army, which was now running our country. He was becoming known to the army too, and friends told him that the local commander had called him 'lethal' in public. My father didn't know what exactly the brigadier meant, but in our country, where the army is so powerful, it did not bode well.

One of his pet hates was the 'ghost schools'. Influential people in remote areas took money from

the government for schools which never saw a single pupil. Instead they used the buildings for their *hujras* or even to keep their animals. There was even a case of a man drawing a teacher's pension when he had never taught a day in his life. Aside from corruption and bad government, my father's main concern in those days was the environment. Mingora was expanding quickly – around 175,000 people now called it home – and our once-fresh air was becoming very polluted from all the vehicles and cooking fires. The beautiful trees on our hills and mountains were being chopped down for timber. My father said only around half the town's population had access to safe drinking water and most, like us, had no sanitation. So he and his friends set up something called the Global Peace Council which, despite its name, had very local concerns. The name was ironic and my father often laughed about it, but the organisation's aim was serious: to preserve the environment of Swat and promote peace and education among local people.

My father also loved to write poetry, sometimes about love, but often on controversial themes such as honour killings and women's rights. Once he visited Afghanistan for a poetry festival at the Kabul Intercontinental Hotel, where he read a poem about peace. It was mentioned as the most inspiring in the closing speech, and some in the audience asked him to repeat whole stanzas and couplets, exclaiming '*Wah wah*' when a particular line pleased them, which is a bit like 'Bravo'. Even my grandfather was proud. 'Son, may you be the star in the sky of knowledge,' he used to say.

We too were proud, but his higher profile meant we didn't see him very much. It was always our mother who shopped for our clothes and took us to hospital if we were ill, even though in our culture, particularly for those of us from villages, a woman is not supposed to do these things alone. So one of my father's nephews would have to go along. When my father was at home, he and his friends sat on the roof at dusk and talked politics endlessly. There was really only one subject – 9/11. It might have changed the whole world but we were living right in the epicentre of everything. Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda, had been living in Kandahar when the attack on the World Trade Center happened, and the Americans had sent thousands of troops to Afghanistan to catch him and overthrow the Taliban regime which had protected him.

In Pakistan we were still under a dictatorship, but America needed our help, just as it had in the 1980s to fight the Russians in Afghanistan. Just as the Russian invasion of Afghanistan had changed everything for General Zia, so 9/11 transformed General Musharraf from an international outcast. Suddenly he was being invited to the White House by George W. Bush and to 10 Downing Street by Tony Blair. There was a major problem, however. Our own intelligence service, ISI, had virtually created the Taliban. Many ISI officers were close to its leaders, having known them for years, and shared some of their beliefs. The ISI's Colonel Imam boasted he had trained 90,000 Taliban fighters and even became Pakistan's consul general in Herat during the Taliban regime.

We were not fans of the Taliban as we had heard they destroyed girls' schools and blew up giant Buddha statues – we had many Buddhas of our own that we were proud of. But many Pashtuns did not like the bombing of Afghanistan or the way Pakistan was helping the Americans, even if it was only by allowing them to cross our airspace and stopping weapons supplies to the Taliban. We did not know then that Musharraf was also letting the Americans use our airfields.

Some of our religious people saw Osama bin Laden as a hero. In the bazaar you could buy posters of him on a white horse and boxes of sweets with his picture on them. These clerics said 9/11 was revenge on the Americans for what they had been doing to other people round the world, but they ignored the fact that the people in the World Trade Center were innocent and had nothing to do with

American policy and that the Holy Quran clearly says it is wrong to kill. Our people see conspiracies behind everything, and many argued that the attack was actually carried out by Jews as an excuse for America to launch a war on the Muslim world. Some of our newspapers printed stories that no Jews went to work at the World Trade Center that day. My father said this was rubbish.

Musharraf told our people that he had no choice but to cooperate with the Americans. He said they had told him, ‘Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists,’ and threatened to ‘bomb us back to the Stone Age’ if we stood against them. But we weren’t exactly cooperating as the ISI was still arming Taliban fighters and giving their leaders sanctuary in Quetta. They even persuaded the Americans to let them fly hundreds of Pakistani fighters out of northern Afghanistan. The ISI chief asked the Americans to hold off their attack on Afghanistan until he had gone to Kandahar to ask the Taliban leader Mullah Omar to hand over bin Laden; instead he offered the Taliban help.

In our province Maulana Sufi Mohammad, who had fought in Afghanistan against the Russians, issued a fatwa against the US. He held a big meeting in Malakand, where our ancestors had fought the British. The Pakistani government didn’t stop him. The governor of our province issued a statement that anyone who wanted to fight in Afghanistan against NATO forces was free to do so. Some 12,000 young men from Swat went to help the Taliban. Many never came back. They were most likely killed, but as there is no proof of death, their wives can’t be declared widows. It’s very hard on them. My father’s close friend Wahid Zaman’s brother and brother-in-law were among the many who went to Afghanistan. Their wives and children are still waiting for them. I remember visiting them and feeling their longing. Even so, it all seemed far, far away from our peaceful garden valley. Afghanistan is less than a hundred miles away, but to get there you have to go through Bajaur, one of the tribal areas between Pakistan and the border with Afghanistan.

Bin Laden and his men fled to the White Mountains of Tora Bora in eastern Afghanistan, where he had built a network of tunnels while fighting the Russians. They escaped through these and over the mountains into Kurram, another tribal agency. What we didn’t know then was that bin Laden came to Swat and stayed in a remote village for a year, taking advantage of the *Pashtunwali* hospitality code.

Anyone could see that Musharraf was double-dealing, taking American money while still helping the jihadis – ‘strategic assets’, as the ISI calls them. The Americans say they gave Pakistan billions of dollars to help their campaign against al-Qaeda but we didn’t see a single cent. Musharraf built a mansion by Rawal Lake in Islamabad and bought an apartment in London. Every so often an important American official would complain that we weren’t doing enough and then suddenly some big fish would be caught. Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, the mastermind of 9/11, was found in a house just a mile from the army chief’s official residence in Rawalpindi. But President Bush kept praising Musharraf, inviting him to Washington and calling him his buddy. My father and his friends were disgusted. They said the Americans always preferred dealing with dictators in Pakistan.

From an early age I was interested in politics and sat on my father’s knee listening to everything he and his friends discussed. But I was more concerned with matters closer to home – our own street to be exact. I told my friends at school about the rubbish-dump children and that we should help. Not everyone wanted to as they said the children were dirty and probably diseased, and their parents would not like them going to school with children like that. They also said it wasn’t up to us to sort out the problem. I didn’t agree. ‘We can sit by and hope the government will help but they won’t. If I can help support one or two children and another family supports one or two then between us we can help them all.’

I knew it was pointless appealing to Musharraf. In my experience, if my father couldn't help with matters like these, there was only one option. I wrote a letter to God. 'Dear God,' I wrote, 'I know you see everything, but there are so many things that maybe, sometimes, things get missed, particularly now with the bombing in Afghanistan. But I don't think you would be happy if you saw the children on my road living on a rubbish dump. God, give me strength and courage and make me perfect because I want to make this world perfect. Malala.'

The problem was I did not know how to get it to him. Somehow I thought it needed to go deep into the earth, so first I buried it in the garden. Then I thought it would get spoilt, so I put it in a plastic bag. But that didn't seem much use. We like to put sacred texts in flowing waters, so I rolled it up, tied it to a piece of wood, placed a dandelion on top and floated it in the stream which flows into the Swat River. Surely God would find it there.

The Mufti Who Tried to Close Our School

JUST IN FRONT of the school on Khushal Street, where I was born, was the house of a tall handsome mullah and his family. His name was Ghulamullah and he called himself a *mufti*, which means he is an Islamic scholar and authority on Islamic law, though my father complains that anyone with a turban can call themselves a *maulana* or *mufti*. The school was doing well, and my father was building an impressive reception with an arched entrance in the boy's high school. For the first time my mother could buy nice clothes and even send out for food as she had dreamed of doing back in the village. But all this time the *mufti* was watching. He watched the girls going in and out of our school every day and became angry, particularly as some of the girls were teenagers. 'That *maulana* has a bad eye on us,' said my father one day. He was right.

Shortly afterwards the *mufti* went to the woman who owned the school premises and said, 'Ziauddin is running a *haram* school in your building and bringing shame on the *mohalla* [neighbourhood]. These girls should be in purdah.' He told her, 'Take this building back from him and I will rent it for my madrasa. If you do this you will get paid now and also receive a reward in the next world.'

She refused and her son came to my father in secret. 'This *maulana* is starting a campaign against you,' he warned. 'We won't give him the building but be careful.'

My father was angry. 'Just as we say, "Nim hakim khatrai jan" – "Half a doctor is a danger to one's life," so, "Nim mullah khatrai iman" – "A mullah who is not fully learned is a danger to faith",' he said.

I am proud that our country was created as the world's first Muslim homeland, but we still don't agree on what this means. The Quran teaches us *sabar* – patience – but often it feels that we have forgotten the word and think Islam means women sitting at home in purdah or wearing burqas while men do jihad. We have many strands of Islam in Pakistan. Our founder Jinnah wanted the rights of Muslims in India to be recognised, but the majority of people in India were Hindu. It was as if there was a feud between two brothers and they agreed to live in different houses. So British India was divided in August 1947, and an independent Muslim state was born. It could hardly have been a bloodier beginning. Millions of Muslims crossed from India, and Hindus travelled in the other direction. Almost two million of them were killed trying to cross the new border. Many were slaughtered on trains which arrived at Lahore and Delhi full of bloodied corpses. My own grandfather narrowly escaped death in the riots when his train was attacked by Hindus on his way home from Delhi, where he had been studying. Now we are a country of 180 million and more than 96 per cent are Muslim. We also have around two million Christians and more than two million Ahmadis, who say they are Muslims though our government says they are not. Sadly those minority communities are often attacked.

Jinnah had lived in London as a young man and trained as a barrister. He wanted a land of tolerance. Our people often quote the famous speech he made a few days before independence: 'You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with

the business of the state.' My father says the problem is that Jinnah negotiated a piece of real estate for us but not a state. He died of tuberculosis just a year after the creation of Pakistan and we haven't stopped fighting since. We have had three wars against India and what seems like endless killing inside our own country.

We Muslims are split between Sunnis and Shias – we share the same fundamental beliefs and the same Holy Quran but we disagree over who was the right person to lead our religion when the Prophet died in the seventh century. The man chosen to be the leader or caliph was Abu Bakr, a close friend and adviser of the Prophet and the man he chose to lead prayers as he lay on his deathbed. 'Sunni' comes from the Arabic for 'one who follows the traditions of the Prophet'. But a smaller group believed that leadership should have stayed within the Prophet's family and that Ali, his son-in-law and cousin, should have taken over. They became known as Shias, shortened from *Shia-t-Ali*, the Party of Ali.

Every year Shias commemorate the killing of the Prophet's grandson Hussein Ibn Ali at the battle of Karbala in the year 680 with a festival called Muharram. They whip themselves into a bloody frenzy with metal chains or razor blades on strings until the streets run red. One of my father's friends is a Shia and he cries whenever he talks about Hussein's death at Karbala. He gets so emotional you would think the events had happened just the night before, not more than 1,300 years ago. Our own founder, Jinnah, was a Shia, and Benazir Bhutto's mother was also a Shia from Iran.

Most Pakistanis are Sunnis like us – more than eighty per cent – but within that we are again many groups. By far the biggest group is the Barelvis, who are named after a nineteenth-century madrasa in Bareilly, which lies in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Then we have the Deobandi, named after another famous nineteenth-century madrasa in Uttar Pradesh, this time in the village of Deoband. They are very conservative and most of our madrasas are Deobandi. We also have the Ahl-e-Hadith (people of the Hadith), who are Salafists. This group is more Arab-influenced and even more conservative than the others. They are what the West calls fundamentalists. They don't accept our saints and shrines – many Pakistanis are also mystical people and gather at Sufi shrines to dance and worship. Each of these strands has many different subgroups.

The *mufti* on Khushal Street was a member of Tablighi Jamaat, a Deobandi group that holds a huge rally every year at its headquarters in Raiwind, near Lahore, attended by millions of people. Our last dictator General Zia used to go there, and in the 1980s, under his regime, the Tablighis became very powerful. Many of the imams appointed to preach in army barracks were Tablighis and army officers would often take leave and go on preaching tours for the group.

One night, after the *mufti* had failed to persuade our landlady to cancel our lease, he gathered some of the influential people and elders of our *mohalla* into a delegation and turned up at our door. There were seven people – some other senior Tablighis, a mosque keeper, a former jihadi and a shopkeeper – and they filled our small house.

My father seemed worried and shooed us into the other room, but the house was small so we could hear every word. 'I am representing the Ulema and Tablighian and Taliban,' Mullah Ghulamullah said, referring to not just one but two organisations of Muslim scholars to give himself gravitas. 'I am representing good Muslims and we all think your girls' school is *haram* and a blasphemy. You should close it. Girls should not be going to school,' he continued. 'A girl is so sacred she should be in purdah, and so private that there is no lady's name in the Quran as God doesn't want her to be named.'

My father could listen no more. ‘Maryam is mentioned everywhere in the Quran. Was she not a woman and a good woman at that?’

‘No,’ said the mullah. ‘She is only there to prove that Isa [Jesus] was the son of Maryam, not the son of God!’

‘That may be,’ replied my father. ‘But I am pointing out that the Quran names Maryam.’

The *mufti* started to object but my father had had enough. Turning to the group, he said, ‘When this gentleman passes me on the street, I look to him and greet him but he doesn’t answer, he just bows his head.’

The mullah looked down embarrassed because greeting someone properly is important in Islam. ‘You run the *haram* school,’ he said. ‘That’s why I don’t want to greet you.’

Then one of the other men spoke up. ‘I’d heard you were an infidel,’ he said to my father, ‘but there are Qurans in your room.’

‘Of course there are!’ replied my father, astonished that his faith would be questioned. ‘I am a Muslim.’

‘Let’s get back to the subject of the school,’ said the *mufti*, who could see the discussion was not going his way. ‘There are men in the reception area of the school, and they see the girls enter, and this is very bad.’

‘I have a solution,’ said my father. ‘The school has another gate. The girls will enter through that.’

The mullah clearly wasn’t happy as he wanted the school closed altogether. But the elders were happy with this compromise and they left.

My father suspected this would not be the end of the matter. What we knew and they didn’t was that the *mufti*’s own niece attended the school in secret. So a few days later my father called the *mufti*’s elder brother, the girl’s father.

‘I am very tired of your brother,’ he said. ‘What kind of mullah is he? He’s driving us crazy. Can you help to get him off our backs?’

‘I’m afraid I can’t help you, Ziauddin,’ he replied. ‘I have trouble in my home too. He lives with us and has told his wife that she must observe purdah from us and that our wives must observe purdah from him, all in this small space. Our wives are like sisters to him and his is like a sister to us, but this madman has made our house a hell. I am sorry but I can’t help you.’

My father was right to think this man was not going to give up – mullahs had become more powerful figures since Zia’s rule and campaign of Islamisation.

In some ways General Musharraf was very different from General Zia. Though he usually dressed in uniform, he occasionally wore Western suits and he called himself chief executive instead of chief martial law administrator. He also kept dogs, which we Muslims regard as unclean. Instead of Zia’s Islamisation he began what he called ‘enlightened moderation’. He opened up our media, allowing new private TV channels and female newsreaders, as well as showing dancing on television. The celebration of Western holidays such as Valentine’s Day and New Year’s Eve was allowed. He even sanctioned an annual pop concert on the eve of Independence Day, which was broadcast to the nation. He did something which our democratic rulers hadn’t, even Benazir, and abolished the law that for a woman to prove she was raped, she had to produce four male witnesses. He appointed the first woman governor of the state bank and the first women airline pilots and coastguards. He even announced we would have female guards at Jinnah’s tomb in Karachi.

However in our Pashtun homeland of the North-West Frontier Province things were very different.

In 2002 Musharraf held elections for ‘controlled democracy’. They were strange elections as the main party leaders Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto were in exile. In our province these elections brought what we called a ‘mullah government’ to power. The Muttahida Majlis e-Amal (MMA) alliance was a group of five religious parties including the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), which ran the madrasas where the Taliban were trained. People jokingly referred to the MMA as the Mullah Military Alliance and said they got elected because they had Musharraf’s support. But some people supported them because the very religious Pashtuns were angry at the American invasion of Afghanistan and the removal of the Taliban from power there.

Our area had always been more conservative than most of the rest of Pakistan. During the Afghan jihad many madrasas had been built, most of them funded by Saudi money, and many young men had passed through them as it was free education. That was the start of what my father calls the ‘Arabisation’ of Pakistan. Then 9/11 had made this militancy more mainstream. Sometimes when I walked along the main road I saw chalked messages on the sides of buildings. CONTACT US FOR JIHAD TRAINING, they would say, listing a phone number to call. In those days jihadi groups were free to do whatever they wanted. You could see them openly collecting contributions and recruiting men. There was even a headmaster from Shangla who would boast that his greatest success was to send ten boys in Grade 9 for jihad training in Kashmir.

The MMA government banned CD and DVD shops and wanted to create a morality police like the Afghan Taliban had set up. The idea was they would be able to stop a woman accompanied by a man and require her to prove that the man was her relative. Thankfully, our supreme court stopped this. Then MMA activists launched attacks on cinemas and tore down billboards with pictures of women or blacked them out with paint. They even snatched female mannequins from clothing shops. They harassed men wearing Western-style shirts and trousers instead of the traditional shalwar kamiz and insisted women cover their heads. It was as though they wanted to remove all traces of womankind from public life.

My father’s high school opened in 2003. That first year they had boys and girls together, but by 2004 the climate had changed so it was unthinkable to have girls and boys in the same class. That changing climate made Ghulamullah bold. One of the school clerks told my father that the *mufti* kept coming into school and demanding why we girls were still using the main entrance. He said that one day, when a male member of staff took a female teacher out to the main road to get a rickshaw, the *maulana* asked, ‘Why did this man escort her to the road, is he her brother?’

‘No,’ replied the clerk, ‘he is a colleague.’

‘That is wrong!’ said the *maulana*.

My father told the clerk to call him next time he saw the *maulana*. When the call came, my father and the Islamic studies teacher went out to confront him.

‘*Maulana*, you have driven me to the wall!’ my father said. ‘Who are you? You are crazy! You need to go to a doctor. You think I enter the school and take my clothes off? When you see a boy and a girl you see a scandal. They are schoolchildren. I think you should go and see Dr Haider Ali!’

Dr Haider Ali was a well-known psychiatrist in our area, so to say, ‘Shall we take you to Dr Haider Ali?’ meant ‘Are you mad?’

The *mufti* went quiet. He took off his turban and put it in my father’s lap. For us a turban is a public symbol of chivalry and Pashtunness, and for a man to lose his turban is considered a great humiliation. But then he started up again. ‘I never said those things to your clerk. He is lying.’

My father had had enough. ‘You have no business here,’ he shouted. ‘Go away!’

The *mufti* had failed to close our school but his interference was an indication of how our country was changing. My father was worried. He and his fellow activists were holding endless meetings. These were no longer just about stopping people cutting down trees but were also about education and democracy.

In 2004, after resisting pressure from Washington for more than two and a half years, General Musharraf sent the army into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), seven agencies that lie along the border with Afghanistan, where the government had little control. The Americans claimed that al-Qaeda militants who had fled from Afghanistan during the US bombing were using the areas as a safe haven, taking advantage of our Pashtun hospitality. From there they were running training camps and launching raids across the border on NATO troops. For us in Swat this was very close to home. One of the agencies, Bajaur, is next to Swat. The people who live in the FATA are all from Pashtun tribes like us Yousafzai, and live on both sides of the border with Afghanistan.

The tribal agencies were created in British times as a buffer zone between Afghanistan and what was then India, and they are still run in the same way, administered by tribal chiefs or elders known as maliks. Unfortunately, the maliks make little difference. In truth the tribal areas are not governed at all. They are forgotten places of harsh rocky valleys where people scrape by on smuggling. (The average annual income is just \$250 – half the Pakistani average.) They have very few hospitals and schools, particularly for girls, and political parties were not allowed there until recently. Hardly any women from these areas can read. The people are renowned for their fierceness and independence, as you can see if you read any of the old British accounts.

Our army had never before gone into the FATA. Instead they had maintained indirect control in the same way the British had, relying on the Pashtun-recruited Frontier Corps rather than regular soldiers. Sending in the regular army was a tough decision. Not only did our army and ISI have long links with some of the militants, but it also meant our troops would be fighting their own Pashtun brothers. The first tribal area that the army entered was South Waziristan, in March 2004. Predictably the local people saw it as an attack on their way of life. All the men there carry weapons and hundreds of soldiers were killed when the locals revolted.

The army was in shock. Some men refused to fight, not wishing to battle their own people. They retreated after just twelve days and reached what they called a ‘negotiated peace settlement’ with local militant leaders like Nek Mohammad. This involved the army bribing them to halt all attacks and keep out foreign fighters. The militants simply used the cash to buy more weapons and resumed their activities. A few months later came the first attack on Pakistan by a US drone.

On 17 June 2004 an unmanned Predator dropped a Hellfire missile on Nek Mohammad in South Waziristan apparently while he was giving an interview by satellite phone. He and the men around him were killed instantly. Local people had no idea what it was – back then we did not know that the Americans could do such a thing. Whatever you thought about Nek Mohammad, we were not at war with the Americans and were shocked that they would launch attacks from the sky on our soil. Across the tribal areas people were angry and many joined militant groups or formed *lashkars*, local militias.

Then there were more attacks. The Americans said that bin Laden’s deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri was hiding in Bajaur and had taken a wife there. In January 2006 a drone supposedly targeting him landed on a village called Damadola, destroying three houses and killing eighteen people. The Americans said he had been tipped off and escaped. That same year, on 30 October, another US Predator hit a

madrasa on a hill near the main town of Khar, killing eighty-two people, many of them young boys. The Americans said it was the al-Qaeda training camp which had featured in the group's videos and that the hill was riddled with tunnels and gun emplacements. Within a few hours of the attack, an influential local cleric called Faqir Mohammad, who had run the madrasa, announced that the deaths would be avenged by suicide bombings against Pakistani soldiers.

My father and his friends were worried and called together local elders and leaders for a peace conference. It was a bitterly cold night in January but 150 people gathered.

'It's coming here,' my father warned. 'The fire is reaching the valley. Let's put out the flames of militancy before they reach here.'

But no one would listen. Some people even laughed, including a local political leader sitting in the front row.

'Mr Khan,' my father said to him, 'you know what happened to the people of Afghanistan. They are now refugees and they're living with us. The same is happening with Bajaur. The same will happen to us, mark my words, and we will have no shelter, no place to migrate to.'

But the expression on the man's face was mocking. 'Look at this man,' he seemed to be saying of my father. 'I am a khan. Who would dare kick me out of this area?'

My father came home frustrated. 'I have a school, but I am neither a khan nor a political leader. I have no platform,' he said. 'I am only one small man.'

The Autumn of the Earthquake

ONE FINE OCTOBER day when I was still in primary school our desks started to tremble and shake. Our classes were still mixed at that age, and all the boys and girls yelled, ‘Earthquake!’ We ran outside as we had been taught to do. All the children gathered around our teachers as chicks swarm to a mother hen.

Swat lies on a geological fault line and we often had earthquakes, but this felt different. All the buildings around us seemed to be shaking and the rumbling didn’t stop. Most of us were crying and our teachers were praying. Miss Rubi, one of my favourite teachers, told us to stop crying and to stay calm; it would soon be over.

Once the shaking had stopped we were all sent home. We found our mother sitting in a chair holding the Quran, reciting verses over and over. Whenever there is trouble people pray a lot. She was relieved to see us and hugged us, tears streaming down her face. But the aftershocks kept coming all afternoon so we remained very scared.

We had moved again – we would move seven times by the time I was thirteen – and were living in an apartment building. It was high for Mingora, two storeys with a big water tank on the roof. My mother was terrified it would collapse on top of us so we kept going outside. My father did not get home till late that evening as he had been busy checking all the other school buildings.

When nightfall came, there were still tremors and my mother was in a state of panic. Every time we felt a tremor we thought it was the Day of Judgement. ‘We will be buried in our beds!’ she cried. She insisted we leave, but my father was exhausted and we Muslims believe our fate is written by God. So he put me and my brothers Khushal and Atal, then just a baby, to bed.

‘Go wherever you want,’ he told my mother and cousin. ‘I am staying here. If you believe in God you will stay here.’ I think when there is a great disaster or our lives are in danger we remember our sins and wonder how we will meet God and whether we will be forgiven. But God has also given us the power to forget, so that when the tragedy is over we carry on as normal. I trusted in my father’s faith, but I also shared my mother’s very real concerns.

That earthquake of 8 October 2005 turned out to be one of the worst in history. It was 7.6 on the Richter Scale and was felt as far away as Kabul and Delhi. Our town of Mingora was largely spared – just a few buildings collapsed – but neighbouring Kashmir and the northern areas of Pakistan were devastated. Even in Islamabad buildings collapsed.

It took a while for us to realise how bad it was. When the TV news began to show the devastation we saw that entire villages had been turned to dust. Landslides blocked access to the worst affected parts and all the phones and power lines were down. The earthquake had affected 30,000 square kilometres, an area as big as the American state of Connecticut. The numbers were unbelievable. More than 73,000 people had been killed and 128,000 injured, many of them permanently disabled. Around three and a half million people had lost their homes. Roads, bridges, water and power had all gone. Places we had visited like Balakot were almost completely destroyed. Many of those killed were children who like me had been at school that morning. Some 6,400 schools were turned to rubble and 18,000 children lost their lives.

We remembered how scared we had been that morning and started raising money at school. Everyone brought what they could. My father went to everybody he knew, asking for donations of food, clothing and money, and I helped my mother collect blankets. My father raised money from the Swat Association of Private Schools and the Global Peace Council to add to what we had collected at school. The total came to more than one million rupees. A publishing company in Lahore which supplied our schoolbooks sent five trucks of food and other essentials.

We were terribly worried about our family in Shangla, jammed between those narrow mountains. Finally we got news from a cousin. In my father's small village eight people had been killed and many homes destroyed. One of them was the house of the local cleric, Maulana Khadim, which fell down crushing his four beautiful daughters. I wanted to go to Shangla with my father and the trucks but he told me it would be too dangerous.

When he returned a few days later he was ashen. He told us that the last part of the journey had been very difficult. Much of the road had collapsed into the river and large boulders had fallen and blocked the way. Our family and friends said they had thought it was the end of the world. They described the roar of rocks sliding down hills and everyone running out of their houses reciting the Quran, the screams as roofs crashed down and the howls of the buffaloes and goats. As the tremors continued they had spent the entire day outdoors and then the night too, huddling together for warmth, even though it was bitterly cold in the mountains.

To start with the only rescue workers who came were a few from a locally based foreign aid agency and volunteers from the Tehrike-Nifaz-e-Sharia-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) or Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law, the group founded by Sufi Mohammad that had sent men to fight in Afghanistan. Sufi Mohammad had been in jail since 2002 when Musharraf arrested a number of militant leaders after American pressure, but his organisation still continued and was being run by his son-in-law Maulana Fazlullah. It was hard for the authorities to reach places like Shangla because most of the roads and bridges had gone and local government had been wiped out throughout the region. We saw an official from the United Nations say on television that it was the 'worst logistical nightmare that the UN had ever faced'.

General Musharraf called it a 'test of the nation' and announced that the army had set up Operation Lifeline – our army likes giving their operations names. There were lots of pictures on the news of army helicopters laden with supplies and tents, but in many of the small valleys the helicopters could not land and the aid packages they dropped often rolled down slopes into rivers. In some places, when the helicopters flew in the locals all rushed underneath them, which meant they could not drop supplies safely.

But some aid did get in. The Americans were quick as they had thousands of troops and hundreds of helicopters in Afghanistan so could easily fly in supplies and show they were helping us in our hour of need, though some crews covered the American markings on their helicopters, fearing attack. For many in the remote areas it was the first time they had seen a foreigner.

Most of the volunteers came from Islamic charities or organisations but some of these were fronts for militant groups. The most visible of all was Jamaat-ul-Dawa (JuD), the welfare wing of Lashkare-Taiba. LeT had close links to the ISI and was set up to liberate Kashmir, which we believe should be part of Pakistan not India as its population is mostly Muslim. The leader of LeT is a fiery professor from Lahore called Hafiz Saeed, who is often on television calling on people to attack India. When the earthquake happened and our government did little to help, JuD set up relief camps patrolled by

men with Kalashnikovs and walkie-talkies. Everyone knew these men belonged to LeT, and soon their black and white banners with crossed swords were flying everywhere in the mountains and valleys. In the town of Muzaffarabad in Azad Kashmir the JuD even set up a large field hospital with X-ray machines, an operating theatre, a well-stocked pharmacy and a dental department. Doctors and surgeons offered their services along with thousands of young volunteers.

Earthquake victims praised the activists who had trudged up and down mountains and through shattered valleys carrying medical help to remote regions no one else had bothered with. They helped clear and rebuild destroyed villages as well as leading prayers and burying bodies. Even today, when most of the foreign aid agencies have gone, shattered buildings still line the roadside and people are still waiting for compensation from the government to build new houses, the JuD banners and helpers are still present. My cousin who was studying in the UK said they raised lots of money from Pakistanis living there. People later said that some of this money had been diverted to finance a plot to bomb planes travelling from Britain to the US.

With such a large number of people killed, there were many children orphaned – 11,000 of them. In our culture orphans are usually taken in by the extended family, but the earthquake was so bad that entire families had been wiped out or lost everything so were in no position to take in children. The government promised they would all be looked after by the state, but that felt as empty as most government promises. My father heard that many of the boys were taken in by the JuD and housed in their madrasas. In Pakistan, madrasas are a kind of welfare system as they give free food and lodging, but their teaching does not follow a normal curriculum. The boys learn the Quran by heart, rocking back and forth as they recite. They learn that there is no such thing as science or literature, that dinosaurs never existed and that man never went to the moon.

The whole nation was in shock for a long time after the earthquake. Already so unlucky with our politicians and military dictators, now, on top of everything else, we had to deal with a natural disaster. Mullahs from the TNSM preached that the earthquake was a warning from God. If we did not mend our ways and introduce *shariat* or Islamic law, they shouted in their thundering voices, more severe punishment would come.

PART TWO

The Valley of Death

رباب منگیه وخت د تیر شو د کلی خوا ته طالبان را غلی دینه

Rabab mangia wakht de teer sho

Da kali khwa ta Talibaan raaghali dena

Farewell Music! Even your sweetest tunes are best kept silent

The Taliban on the edge of the village have stilled all lips

Radio Mullah

I WAS TEN when the Taliban came to our valley. Moniba and I had been reading the Twilight books and longed to be vampires. It seemed to us that the Taliban arrived in the night just like vampires. They appeared in groups, armed with knives and Kalashnikovs, and first emerged in Upper Swat, in the hilly areas of Matta. They didn't call themselves Taliban to start with and didn't look like the Afghan Taliban we'd seen in pictures with their turbans and black-rimmed eyes.

These were strange-looking men with long straggly hair and beards and camouflage vests over their shalwar kamiz, which they wore with the trousers well above the ankle. They had jogging shoes or cheap plastic sandals on their feet, and sometimes stockings over their heads with holes for their eyes, and they blew their noses dirtily into the ends of their turbans. They wore black badges which said SHARIAT YA SHAHADAT – SHARIA LAW OR MARTYRDOM – and sometimes black turbans, so people called them Tor Patki or the Black-Turbaned Brigade. They looked so dark and dirty that my father's friend described them as 'people deprived of baths and barbers'.

Their leader was Maulana Fazlullah, a 28-year-old who used to operate the pulley chair to cross the Swat River and whose right leg dragged because of childhood polio. He had studied in the madrasa of Maulana Sufi Mohammad, the founder of the TNSM, and married his daughter. When Sufi Mohammad was imprisoned in a round-up of militant leaders in 2002, Fazlullah had taken over the movement's leadership. It was shortly before the earthquake that Fazlullah had appeared in Imam Deri, a small village just a few miles outside Mingora on the other side of the Swat River, and set up his illegal radio station.

In our valley we received most of our information from the radio because so many had no TV or are illiterate. Soon everyone seemed to be talking about the radio station. It became known as Mullah FM and Fazlullah as the Radio Mullah. It broadcast every night from eight to ten and again in the morning from seven to nine.

In the beginning Fazlullah was very wise. He introduced himself as an Islamic reformer and an interpreter of the Quran. My mother is very devout, and to start with she liked Fazlullah. He used his station to encourage people to adopt good habits and abandon practices he said were bad. He said men should keep their beards but give up smoking and using the tobacco they liked to chew. He said people should stop using heroin, and *chars*, which is our word for hashish. He told people the correct way to do their ablutions for prayers – which body part to wash first. He even told people how they should wash their private parts.

Sometimes his voice was reasonable, like when adults are trying to persuade you to do something you don't want to, and sometimes it was scary and full of fire. Often he would weep as he spoke of his love for Islam. Usually he spoke for a while, then his deputy Shah Douran came on air, a man who used to sell snacks from a tricycle in the bazaar. They warned people to stop listening to music, watching movies and dancing. Sinful acts like these had caused the earthquake, Fazlullah thundered, and if people didn't stop they would again invite the wrath of God. Mullahs often misinterpret the Quran and Hadith when they teach them in our country as few people understand the original Arabic. Fazlullah exploited this ignorance.

'Is he right, *Aba*?' I asked my father. I remembered how frightening the earthquake had been.

'No, *Jani*,' he replied. 'He is just fooling people.'

My father said the radio station was the talk of the staffroom. By then our schools had about seventy teachers, around forty men and thirty women. Some of the teachers were anti-Fazlullah but many supported him. People thought that he was a good interpreter of the Holy Quran and admired his charisma. They liked his talk of bringing back Islamic law as everyone was frustrated with the Pakistani justice system, which had replaced ours when we were merged into the country. Cases such as land disputes, common in our area, which used to be resolved quickly now took ten years to come to court. Everyone wanted to see the back of the corrupt government officials sent into the valley. It was almost as if they thought Fazlullah would recreate our old princely state from the time of the wali.

Within six months people were getting rid of their TVs, DVDs and CDs. Fazlullah's men collected them into huge heaps on the streets and set them on fire, creating clouds of thick black smoke that reached high into the sky. Hundreds of CD and DVD shops closed voluntarily and their owners were paid compensation by the Taliban. My brothers and I were worried as we loved our TV, but my father reassured us that we were not getting rid of it. To be safe we moved it into a cupboard and watched it with the volume low. The Taliban were known to listen at people's doors then force their way in, take the TVs and smash them to pieces on the street. Fazlullah hated the Bollywood movies we so loved, which he denounced as un-Islamic. Only the radio was allowed, and all music except for Taliban songs was declared *haram*.

One day my father went to visit a friend in hospital and found lots of patients listening to cassettes of Fazlullah's sermons. 'You must meet Maulana Fazlullah,' people told him. 'He's a great scholar'.

'He's actually a high-school dropout whose real name isn't even Fazlullah,' my father retorted, but they wouldn't listen. My father became depressed because people had begun to embrace Fazlullah's words and his religious romanticism. 'It's ridiculous,' my father would say, 'that this so-called scholar is spreading ignorance.'

Fazlullah was particularly popular in remote areas where people remembered how TNSM volunteers had helped during the earthquake when the government was nowhere to be seen. On some mosques they set up speakers connected to radios so his broadcasts could be heard by everyone in the village and in the fields. The most popular part of his show came every evening when he would read out people's names. He'd say, 'Mr So-and-so was smoking *chars* but has stopped because it's sinful,' or, 'Mr X has kept his beard and I congratulate him,' or, 'Mr Y voluntarily closed down his CD shop.' He told them they would have their reward in the hereafter. People liked to hear their names on the radio; they also liked to hear which of their neighbours were sinful so they could gossip: 'Have you heard about So-and-so?'

Mullah FM made jokes about the army. Fazlullah denounced Pakistani government officials as 'infidels' and said they were opposed to bringing in sharia law. He said that if they did not implement it, his men would 'enforce it and tear them to pieces'. One of his favourite subjects was the injustice of the feudal system of the khans. Poor people were happy to see the khans getting their comeuppance. They saw Fazlullah as a kind of Robin Hood and believed that when Fazlullah took over he would give the khans' land to the poor. Some of the khans fled. My father was against 'khanism' but he said the Taliban were worse.

My father's friend Hidayatullah had become a government official in Peshawar and warned us,

'This is how these militants work. They want to win the hearts and minds of the people so they first see what the local problems are and target those responsible, and that way they get the support of the silent majority. That's what they did in Waziristan when they went after kidnappers and bandits. After, when they get power, they behave like the criminals they once hunted down.'

Fazlullah's broadcasts were often aimed at women. He must have known that many of our men were away from home, working in coal mines in the south or on building sites in the Gulf. Sometimes he would say, 'Men, go outside now. I am talking to the women.' Then he'd say, 'Women are meant to fulfil their responsibilities in the home. Only in emergencies can they go outside, but then they must wear the veil.' Sometimes his men would display the fancy clothes that they said they had taken from 'decadent women' to shame them.

My friends at school said their mothers listened to the Radio Mullah although our headmistress Madam Maryam told us not to. At home we only had my grandfather's old radio, which was broken, but my mother's friends all listened and told her what they heard. They praised Fazlullah and talked of his long hair, the way he rode a horse and behaved like the Prophet. Women would tell him their dreams and he would pray for them. My mother enjoyed these stories, but my father was horrified.

I was confused by Fazlullah's words. In the Holy Quran it is not written that men should go outside and women should work all day in the home. In our Islamic studies class at school we used to write essays entitled 'How the Prophet Lived'. We learned that the first wife of the Prophet was a businesswoman called Khadijah. She was forty, fifteen years older than him, and she had been married before, yet he still married her. I also knew from watching my own mother that Pashtun women are very powerful and strong. Her mother, my grandmother, had looked after all eight children alone after my grandfather had an accident and broke his pelvis and could not leave his bed for eight years.

A man goes out to work, he earns a wage, he comes back home, he eats, he sleeps. That's what he does. Our men think earning money and ordering around others is where power lies. They don't think power is in the hands of the woman who takes care of everyone all day long, and gives birth to their children. In our house my mother managed everything because my father was so busy. It was my mother who would wake up early in the morning, iron our school clothes, make our breakfast and teach us how to behave. It was my mother who would go to the market, shop for us and cook. All those things she did.

In the first year of the Taliban I had two operations, one to take out my appendix and the other to remove my tonsils. Khushal had his appendix out too. It was my mother who took us to hospital; my father just visited us and brought ice cream. Yet my mother still believed it was written in the Quran that women should not go out and women should not talk to men other than relatives they cannot marry. My father would say to her, 'Pekai, purdah is not only in the veil, purdah is in the heart.'

Lots of women were so moved by what Fazlullah said that they gave him gold and money, particularly in poor villages or households where the husbands were working abroad. Tables were set up for the women to hand over their wedding bangles and necklaces and women queued up to do so or sent their sons. Some gave their life savings, believing that this would make God happy. He began building a vast red-brick headquarters in Imam Dera complete with a madrasa, a mosque and walls and levees to protect it from the Swat River. No one knew where he got the cement and iron bars from but the workforce was local. Every village had to take turns sending their men for a day to help build it. One day one of our Urdu teachers, Nawab Ali, told my father, 'I won't be coming to

school tomorrow.' When my father asked why, he explained it was his village's turn to work on Fazlullah's buildings.

'Your prime responsibility is to teach the students,' replied my father.

'No, I have to do this,' said Nawab Ali.

My father came home fuming. 'If people volunteered in the same way to construct schools or roads or even clear the river of plastic wrappers, by God, Pakistan would become a paradise within a year,' he said. 'The only charity they know is to give to mosque and madrasa.'

A few weeks later the same teacher told him that he could no longer teach girls as 'the *maulana* doesn't like it'.

My father tried to change his mind. 'I agree that female teachers should educate girls,' he said. 'But first we need to educate our girls so they can become teachers!'

One day Sufi Mohammad proclaimed from jail that there should be no education for women even at girls' madrasas. 'If someone can show any example in history where Islam allows a female madrasa, they can come and piss on my beard,' he said. Then the Radio Mullah turned his attention to schools. He began speaking against school administrators and congratulating girls by name who left school. 'Miss So-and-so has stopped going to school and will go to heaven,' he'd say, or, 'Miss X of Y village has stopped education at Class 5. I congratulate her.' Girls like me who still went to school he called buffaloes and sheep.

My friends and I couldn't understand why it was so wrong. 'Why don't they want girls to go to school?' I asked my father.

'They are scared of the pen,' he replied.

Then another teacher at our school, a maths teacher with long hair, also refused to teach girls. My father fired him, but some other teachers were worried and sent a delegation to his office. 'Sir, don't do this,' they pleaded. 'These are bad days. Let him stay and we will cover for him.'

Every day it seemed a new edict came. Fazlullah closed beauty parlours and banned shaving so there was no work for barbers. My father, who only has a moustache, insisted he would not grow a beard for the Taliban. The Taliban told women not to go to the bazaar. I didn't mind not going to the Cheena Bazaar. I didn't enjoy shopping, unlike my mother, who liked beautiful clothes even though we didn't have much money. My mother always told me, 'Hide your face – people are looking at you.'

I would reply, 'It doesn't matter; I'm also looking at them,' and she'd get so cross.

My mother and her friends were upset about not being able to go shopping, particularly in the days before the Eid holidays, when we beautify ourselves and go to the stalls lit up by fairy lights that sell bangles and henna. All of that stopped. The women would not be attacked if they went to the markets, but the Taliban would shout at them and threaten them until they stayed at home. One Talib could intimidate a whole village. We children were cross too. Normally there are new film releases for the holidays, but Fazlullah had closed the DVD shops. Around this time my mother also got tired of Fazlullah, especially when he began to preach against education and insist that those who went to school would also go to hell.

Next Fazlullah began holding a *shura*, a kind of local court. People liked this as justice was speedy, unlike in Pakistani courts, where you could wait years and have to pay bribes to be heard. People began going to Fazlullah and his men to resolve grievances about anything from business matters to personal feuds. 'I had a thirty-year-old problem and it's been resolved in one go,' one man

told my father. The punishments decreed by Fazlullah's *shura* included public whippings, which we had never seen before. One of my father's friends told him he had seen three men publicly flogged after the *shura* had found them guilty of involvement in the abduction of two women. A stage was set up near Fazlullah's centre, and after going to hear him give Friday prayers, hundreds of people gathered to watch the foggings, shouting '*Allahu akbar!*' – 'God is great!' with each lash. Sometimes Fazlullah appeared galloping in on a black horse.

His men stopped health workers giving polio drops, saying the vaccinations were an American plot to make Muslim women infertile so that the people of Swat would die out. 'To cure a disease before its onset is not in accordance with sharia law,' said Fazlullah on the radio. 'You will not find a single child to drink a drop of the vaccine anywhere in Swat.'

Fazlullah's men patrolled the streets looking for offenders against his decrees just like the Taliban morality police we had heard about in Afghanistan. They set up volunteer traffic police called Falcon Commandos, who drove through the streets with machine guns mounted on top of their pick-up trucks.

Some people were happy. One day my father ran into his bank manager. 'One good thing Fazlullah is doing is banning ladies and girls from going to the Cheena Bazaar, which saves us men money,' he said. Few spoke out. My father complained that most people were like our local barber, who one day grumbled to my father that he had only eighty rupees in his till, less than a tenth of what his takings used to be. Just the day before the barber had told a journalist that the Taliban were good Muslims.

After Mullah FM had been on air for about a year, Fazlullah became more aggressive. His brother Maulana Liaquat, along with three of Liaquat's sons, were among those killed in an American drone attack on the madrasa in Bajaur at the end of October 2006. Eighty people were killed including boys as young as twelve, some of whom had come from Swat. We were all horrified by the attack and people swore revenge. Ten days later a suicide bomber blew himself up in the army barracks at Dargai, on the way from Islamabad to Swat, and killed forty-two Pakistani soldiers. At that time suicide bombings were rare in Pakistan – there were six in total that year – and it was the biggest attack that had ever been carried out by Pakistani militants.

At Eid we usually sacrifice animals like goats or sheep. But Fazlullah said, 'On this Eid two-legged animals will be sacrificed.' We soon saw what he meant. His men began killing khans and political activists from secular and nationalist parties, especially the Awami National Party (ANP). In January 2007 a close friend of one of my father's friends was kidnapped in his village by eighty masked gunmen. His name was Malak Bakht Baidar. He was from a wealthy khan family and the local vice president of the ANP. His body was found dumped in his family's ancestral graveyard. His legs and arms had all been broken. It was the first targeted killing in Swat, and people said it was because he had helped the army find Taliban hideouts.

The authorities turned a blind eye. Our provincial government was still made up of mullah parties who wouldn't criticise anyone who claimed to be fighting for Islam. At first we thought we were safe in Mingora, the biggest town in Swat. But Fazlullah's headquarters were just a few miles away, and even though the Taliban were not near our house they were in the markets, in the streets and the hills. Danger began to creep closer.

During Eid we went to our family village as usual. I was in my cousin's car, and as we drove through a river where the road had been washed away we had to stop at a Taliban checkpoint. I was in the back with my mother. My cousin quickly gave us his music cassettes to hide in our purses. The Taliban were dressed in black and carried Kalashnikovs. They told us, 'Sisters, you are bringing

shame. You must wear burqas.'

When we arrived back at school after Eid, we saw a letter taped to the gate. 'Sir, the school you are running is Western and infidel,' it said. 'You teach girls and have a uniform that is un-Islamic. Stop this or you will be in trouble and your children will weep and cry for you.' It was signed, '*Fedayeen of Islam*'.

My father decided to change the boys' uniform from shirt and trousers to shalwar kamiz, baggy pyjama-like trousers and a long shirt. Ours remained a royal-blue shalwar kamiz with a white *dupatta*, or headscarf, and we were advised to keep our heads covered coming in and out of school.

His friend Hidayatullah told him to stand firm. 'Ziauddin, you have charisma; you can speak up and organise against them,' he said. 'Life isn't just about taking in oxygen and giving out carbon dioxide. You can stay there accepting everything from the Taliban or you can make a stand against them.'

My father told us what Hidayatullah had said. He then wrote a letter to the *Daily Azadi*, our local newspaper. 'To the *Fedayeen* of Islam [or Islamic sacrificers], this is not the right way to implement Islam,' he wrote. 'Please don't harm my children because the God you believe in is the same God they pray to every day. You can take my life but please don't kill my schoolchildren.' When my father saw the newspaper he was very unhappy. The letter had been buried on an inside page and the editor had published his name and the address of the school, which my father had not expected him to do. But lots of people called to congratulate him. 'You have put the first stone in standing water,' they said. 'Now we will have the courage to speak.'

Toffees, Tennis Balls and the Buddhas of Swat

FIRST THE TALIBAN took our music, then our Buddhas, then our history. One of our favourite things was going on school trips. We were lucky to live in a paradise like Swat with so many beautiful places to visit – waterfalls, lakes, the ski resort, the wali's palace, the Buddha statues, the tomb of Akhund of Swat. All these places told our special story. We would talk about the trips for weeks beforehand, then, when the day finally came, we dressed up in our best clothes and piled into buses along with pots of chicken and rice for a picnic. Some of us had cameras and took photographs. At the end of the day my father would make us all take turns standing on a rock and tell stories about what we had seen. When Fazlullah came there were no more school trips. Girls were not supposed to be seen outside.

The Taliban destroyed the Buddhist statues and stupas where we played, which had been there for thousands of years and were a part of our history from the time of the Kushan kings. They believed any statue or painting was *haram*, sinful and therefore prohibited. One black day they even dynamited the face of the Jehanabad Buddha, which was carved into a hillside just half an hour's drive from Mingora and towered twenty-three feet into the sky. Archaeologists say it was almost as important as the Buddhas of Bamiyan, which the Afghan Taliban blew up.

It took them two goes to destroy it. The first time they drilled holes in the rock and filled them with dynamite, but that didn't work. A few weeks later, on 8 October 2007, they tried again. This time they obliterated the Buddha's face, which had watched over the valley since the seventh century. The Taliban became the enemy of fine arts, culture and our history. The Swat museum moved its collection away for safekeeping. They destroyed everything old and brought nothing new. The Taliban took over the Emerald Mountain with its mine and began selling the beautiful stones to buy their ugly weapons. They took money from the people who chopped down our precious trees for timber and then demanded more money to let their trucks pass.

Their radio coverage spread across the valley and neighbouring districts. Though we still had our television they had switched off the cable channels. Moniba and I could no longer watch our favourite Bollywood shows like *Shararat* or *Making Mischief*. It seemed like the Taliban didn't want us to do anything. They even banned one of our favourite board games called Carrom in which we flick counters across a wooden board. We heard stories that the Taliban would hear children laughing and burst into the room and smash the boards. We felt like the Taliban saw us as little dolls to control, telling us what to do and how to dress. I thought if God wanted us to be like that He wouldn't have made us all different.

One day we found our teacher Miss Hammeda in floods of tears. Her husband was a policeman in the small town of Matta, and Fazlullah's men had stormed in and some police officers had been killed, including her husband. It was the first Taliban attack on the police in our valley. Soon they had taken over many villages. The black and white flags of Fazlullah's TNSM started appearing on police stations. The militants would enter villages with megaphones and the police would flee. In a short time they had taken over fifty-nine villages and set up their own parallel administrations. Policemen were so scared of being killed that they took out adverts in the newspapers to announce they had left

the force.

All this happened and nobody did a thing. It was as though everyone was in a trance. My father said people had been seduced by Fazlullah. Some joined his men, thinking they would have better lives. My father tried to counter their propaganda but it was hard. ‘I have no militants and no FM radio,’ he joked. He even dared to enter the Radio Mullah’s own village one day to speak at a school. He crossed the river in one of the metal boxes suspended from a pulley that we use as makeshift bridges. On the way he saw smoke so high it touched the clouds, the blackest smoke he’d ever seen. At first he thought it might be a brick factory, but as he approached he saw bearded figures in turbans burning TVs and computers.

In the school my father told the people, ‘I saw your villagers burning these things. Don’t you realise the only ones who will profit are the companies in Japan, who will just make more?’

Someone came up to him and whispered, ‘Don’t speak any more in this way – it’s risky.’

Meanwhile the authorities, like most people, did nothing.

It felt as though the whole country was going mad. The rest of Pakistan was preoccupied with something else – the Taliban had moved right into the heart of our nation’s capital, Islamabad. We saw pictures on the news of what people were calling the Burqa Brigade – young women and girls like us in burqas with sticks, attacking CD and DVD shops in bazaars in the centre of Islamabad.

The women were from Jamia Hafsa, the biggest female madrasa in our country and part of Lal Masjid – the Red Mosque in Islamabad. It was built in 1965 and got its name from its red walls. It’s just a few blocks from parliament and the headquarters of ISI, and many government officials and military used to pray there. The mosque has two madrasas, one for girls and one for boys, which had been used for years to recruit and train volunteers to fight in Afghanistan and Kashmir. It was run by two brothers, Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid, and had become a centre for spreading propaganda about bin Laden whom Abdul Rashid had met in Kandahar when visiting Mullah Omar. The brothers were famed for their fiery sermons and attracted thousands of worshippers, particularly after 9/11. When President Musharraf agreed to help America in the ‘War on Terror’, the mosque broke off its long links with the military and became a centre of protest against the government. Abdul Rashid was even accused of being part of a plot to blow up Musharraf’s convoy in Rawalpindi in December 2003. Investigators said the explosives used had been stored in Lal Masjid. But a few months later he was cleared.

When Musharraf sent troops into the FATA, starting with Waziristan in 2004, the brothers led a campaign declaring the military action un-Islamic. They had their own website and pirate FM station on which they broadcast, just like Fazlullah.

Around the same time as our Taliban were emerging in Swat, the girls of the Red Mosque madrasa began terrorising the streets of Islamabad. They raided houses they claimed were being used as massage centres, they kidnapped women they said were prostitutes and closed down DVD shops, again making bonfires of CDs and DVDs. When it suits the Taliban, women can be vocal and visible. The head of the madrasa was Umme Hassan, the wife of the elder brother, Abdul Aziz, and she even boasted that she had trained many of her girls to become suicide bombers. The mosque also set up its own courts to dispense Islamic justice, saying the state had failed. Their militants kidnapped policemen and ransacked government buildings.

The Musharraf government didn’t seem to know what to do. This was perhaps because the military had been so attached to the mosque. But by the middle of 2007 the situation was so bad that people

began to worry the militants could take over the capital. It was almost unbelievable – Islamabad is usually a quiet, orderly place, very different to the rest of our country. Finally on the evening of 3 July commandos with tanks and armoured personnel carriers surrounded the mosque. They cut off the electricity in the area, and as dusk fell there was a sudden burst of gunfire and explosions. The troops blasted holes in the wall surrounding the mosque and fired mortars at the compound as helicopter gunships hovered overhead. Over loudspeakers they called for the girls to surrender.

Many of the militants in the mosque had fought in Afghanistan or Kashmir. They barricaded themselves and the madrasa students inside concrete bunkers with sandbags. Worried parents gathered outside, calling their daughters on mobile phones, begging them to come out. Some of the girls refused, saying their teachers had taught them that to become a martyr is a glorious thing.

The next evening a small group of girls emerged. Hidden among them was Abdul Aziz, disguised in a burqa, along with his daughter. But his wife and younger brother stayed inside, along with many students, and there were daily exchanges of gunfire between the militants and the troops outside. The militants had RPGs and petrol bombs made from Sprite bottles. The siege went on until late on 9 July, when the commander of the special forces outside was killed by a sniper in one of the minarets. The military finally lost patience and stormed the compound.

They called it Operation Silence although it was very loud. Never had there been such a battle in the heart of our capital. Commandos fought from room to room for hours until they finally tracked Abdul Rashid and his followers to a basement where they killed him. By nightfall on 10 July, when the siege was finally over, around a hundred people had been killed including several soldiers and a number of children. The news showed shocking pictures of the wreckage, everywhere blood and broken glass, and dead bodies. We all watched in horror. Some of the students at the two madrasas were from Swat. How could something like that happen in our capital city and in a mosque? A mosque is a sacred place for us.

It was after the Red Mosque siege that the Swat Taliban changed. On 12 July – which I remember because it was my birthday – Fazlullah gave a radio address that was quite different to his previous ones. He raged against the Lal Masjid attack and vowed to avenge the death of Abdul Rashid. Then he declared war on the Pakistani government.

This was the start of real trouble. Fazlullah could now carry out his threats and mobilise support for his Taliban in the name of Lal Masjid. A few days later they attacked an army convoy travelling in the direction of Swat and killed thirteen soldiers. The backlash wasn't just in Swat. There was an enormous protest by tribesmen in Bajaur and a wave of suicide bombings across the country. There was one ray of hope – Benazir Bhutto was returning. The Americans were worried that their ally General Musharraf was too unpopular in Pakistan to be effective against the Taliban so they had helped broker an unlikely power-sharing deal. The plan was that Musharraf would finally take off his uniform and be a civilian president, supported by Benazir's party. In return he would drop corruption charges against her and her husband and agree to hold elections, which everyone assumed would result in Benazir becoming prime minister. No Pakistani, including my father, thought this deal would work as Musharraf and Benazir hated each other.

Benazir had been in exile since I was two years old, but I had heard so much about her from my father and was very excited that she would return and we might have a woman leader once more. It was because of Benazir that girls like me could think of speaking out and becoming politicians. She was our role model. She symbolised the end of dictatorship and the beginning of democracy as well