

and we had staged it so we could live overseas.

The new year of 2013 was a happy one when I was discharged from hospital in early January finally to live with my family again. The Pakistan High Commission had rented two serviced apartments for us in a building in a modern square in the centre of Birmingham. The apartments were on the tenth floor, which was higher than any of us had ever been before. I teased my mother, as after the earthquake when we were in a three-storey building she said she would never again live in an apartment block. My father told me that when they arrived she had been so scared that she had said, 'I will die in this lift!'

We were so happy to be a family again. My brother Khushal was as annoying as always. The boys were bored cooped up waiting for me to recover, away from school and their friends, though Atal was excited by everything new. I quickly realised I could treat them how I liked and I wouldn't get told off. It was a cold winter, and as I watched the snow falling outside through the big glass windows I wished I could run around and chase the snowflakes like we used to back home. Sometimes we went for walks to build up my strength though I tired easily.

In the square was a fountain and a Costa coffee bar with glass walls through which you could see men and women chatting and mixing in a way that would be unthinkable in Swat. The apartment was just off Broad Street, a famous road of shops, night clubs and stripbars. We went to the shops though I still did not like shopping. At nights our eyes were all out on stalks at the skimpy clothes that women wore – tiny shorts almost like knickers and bare legs on the highest heels even in the middle of winter. My mother was so horrified that she cried, '*Gharqa shoma!*' – 'I'm drowning' – and begged my father, 'Please take me to Dubai. I can't live here!' Later we laughed about it. 'Are their legs made of iron so they don't feel cold?' asked my mother.

We were warned not to be out late on Broad Street on weekend nights as it could be dangerous. This made us laugh. How could it be unsafe compared to where we had come from? Were there Taliban beheading people? I didn't tell my parents but I flinched if an Asian-looking man came close. I thought everyone had a gun.

Once a week I Skyped my friends back in Mingora, and they told me they were still keeping a seat in class for me. The teacher had brought to class my Pakistan Studies exam from that day, the day of the shooting. I had got 75 out of 75, but as I never did the others, Malka-e-Noor got first in class. Though I had been getting some schooling at the hospital, I worried that I was falling behind. Now the competition was between Malka-e-Noor and Moniba. 'It's boring without you to compete with,' Malka-e-Noor told me.

I was getting stronger every day, but my surgery wasn't over. I still had the top of my skull missing. The doctors were also concerned about my hearing. When I went for walks I could not understand the words of my mother and father in a crowd. And inside my ear was a tinny noise which only I could hear. On Saturday, 2 February I was back in QEH to be operated on – this time by a woman. Her name was Anwen White. First she removed the skull bone from my tummy, but after looking at it decided not to put it back as it had not kept well and there was a risk of infection. Instead she did something called a titanium cranioplasty (I now know lots of medical terms!) and fitted a specially moulded titanium plate in my head with eight screws to do the job of a skull and protect my brain.

While I was in surgery Mr Irving, the surgeon who had repaired my nerve, also had a solution for my damaged left eardrum. He put a small electronic device called a cochlear implant inside my head near the ear and told me that in a month they would fit the external part on my head, and then I should