

My father's friend Ahmad Shah called it a 'controlled peace, not a durable peace'. But gradually people returned to the valley because Swat is beautiful and we cannot bear to be away from it for long.

Our school bell rang again for the first time on 1 August. It was wonderful to hear that sound and run through the doorway and up the steps as we used to. I was overjoyed to see all my old friends. We had so many stories from our time as IDPs. Most of us had stayed with friends or family but some had been in the camps. We knew we were lucky. Many children had to have their classes in tents because the Taliban had destroyed their schools. And one of my friends, Sundus, had lost her father, who had been killed in an explosion.

It seemed like everyone knew I had written the BBC diary. Some thought my father had done it for me but Madam Maryam, our principal, told them, 'No. Malala is not just a good speaker but also a good writer.'

That summer there was only one topic of conversation in my class. Shiza Shahid, our friend from Islamabad, had finished her studies in Stanford and invited twenty-seven girls from the Khushal School to spend a few days in the capital seeing the sights and taking part in workshops to help us get over the trauma of living under the Taliban. Those from my class were me, Moniba, Malka-e-Noor, Rida, Karishma and Sundus, and we were chaperoned by my mother and Madam Maryam.

We left for the capital on Independence Day, 14 August, and travelled by bus, everyone brimming with excitement. Most of the girls had only ever left the valley when we became IDPs. This was different and very much like the holidays we read about in novels. We stayed in a guesthouse and did lots of workshops on how to tell our stories so people outside would know what was going on in our valley and help us. Right from the first session I think Shiza was surprised how strong-willed and vocal we all were. 'It's a room full of Malalas!' she told my father.

We also had fun doing things like going to the park and listening to music, which might seem ordinary for most people but which in Swat had become acts of political protest. And we saw the sights. We visited the Faisal Mosque at the base of the Margalla Hills, which was built by the Saudis for millions of rupees. It is huge and white and looks like a shimmering tent suspended between minarets. We went on our first ever visit to the theatre to see an English play called *Tom, Dick and Harry* and had art classes. We ate at restaurants and had our first visit to a McDonald's. There were lots of firsts although I had to miss a meal in a Chinese restaurant because I was on a TV show called *Capital Talk*. To this day I still haven't got to try duck pancakes!

Islamabad was totally different to Swat. It was as different for us as Islamabad is to New York. Shiza introduced us to women who were lawyers and doctors and also activists, which showed us that women could do important jobs yet still keep their culture and traditions. We saw women in the streets without purdah, their heads completely uncovered. I stopped wearing my shawl over my head in some of the meetings, thinking I had become a modern girl. Later I realised that simply having your head uncovered isn't what makes you modern.

We were there one week and predictably Moniba and I quarrelled. She saw me gossiping with a girl in the year above and told me, 'Now you are with Resham and I am with Rida.'

Shiza wanted to introduce us to influential people. In our country of course this often means the military. One of our meetings was with Major General Athar Abbas, the chief spokesman for the army and its head of public relations. We drove to Islamabad's twin city of Rawalpindi to see him in his