

nerve was such delicate work that it took eight and a half hours. The surgeon first cleared my ear canal of scar tissue and bone fragments and discovered that my left eardrum was damaged. Then he followed the facial nerve from the temporal bone where it enters the skull all the way to its exit, and on the way removed many more fragments of bone which had been restricting my jaw movement. He found two centimetres of my nerve completely missing where it leaves the skull and rerouted it in front of my ear from its normal passage behind the ear, to make up for the gap.

The operation went well, though it was a three-month wait before the left side of my face started working bit by bit. I had to do facial exercises every day in front of my small mirror. Mr Irving told me that after six months the nerve would start working though I would never be completely the same. To my delight I could soon smile and wink my eye, and week by week my parents saw more movement coming into my face. Though it was my face, I could see it was my parents who were happiest to have it back. Afterwards Mr Irving said it was the best outcome he had seen in twenty years of facial nerve surgery, and it was 86 per cent recovered.

The other good result was that finally my headaches lifted and I started reading again. I began with *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, one of a pile of books sent to me by Gordon Brown. I loved reading about Dorothy and how even though she was trying to get back home she stopped and helped those in need like the cowardly lion and the rusty tin man. She had to overcome a lot of obstacles to get where she was going, and I thought if you want to achieve a goal, there will be hurdles in your way but you must continue. I was so excited by the book that I read it quickly and afterwards told my father all about it. He was very happy because he thought if I could memorise and narrate such detail then my memory must be fine.

I knew my parents were worried about my memory as I told them I didn't remember anything about the shooting and kept forgetting the names of my friends. They weren't very subtle. One day my father asked, 'Malala, can you sing us some Pashto *tapey*?' I sang a verse we liked: 'When you start your journey from the end of a snake's tail,/ You will end up on its head in an ocean of poison.' To us that referred to how the authorities in Pakistan had initially used the militants and now were in a mess of their own making. Then I said, 'Actually there's a *tapa* I want to rewrite.'

My father looked intrigued. *Tapey* are the centuries-old collected wisdom of our society; you don't change them. 'Which one?' he asked.

'This one,' I said.

If the men cannot win the battle, O my country,  
Then the women will come forth and win you an honour.

که د زلمو نه پوره نه شوه  
گرانه وطنه جینکی به دې گټی نه

I wanted to change it to:

Whether the men are winning or losing the battle, O my country,  
The women are coming and the women will win you an honour.

که د زلمو نه شوه که نه شوه  
وطنه جینکی به دې گټی گرانه  
نه

He laughed and repeated the story to everyone, as he always does.

I worked hard in the gym and with the physiotherapist to get my arms and legs working properly