

After that my father was restless and could not enjoy Karachi. I could see my mother and father were both very upset. I knew my mother was still mourning my aunt and they had been feeling uneasy about me receiving so many awards, but it seemed to be about more than that. ‘Why are you like this?’ I asked. ‘You’re worried about something but you’re not telling us.’

Then they told me about the call from home and that they were taking the threats seriously. I don’t know why, but hearing I was being targeted did not worry me. It seemed to me that everyone knows they will die one day. My feeling was that nobody can stop death; it doesn’t matter if it comes from a *talib* or cancer. So I should do whatever I want to do.

‘Maybe we should stop our campaigning, *Jani*, and go into hibernation for a time,’ said my father.

‘How can we do that?’ I replied. ‘You were the one who said if we believe in something greater than our lives, then our voices will only multiply even if we are dead. We can’t disown our campaign!’

People were asking me to speak at events. How could I refuse, saying there was a security problem? We couldn’t do that, especially not as proud Pashtuns. My father always says that heroism is in the Pashtun DNA.

Still, it was with a heavy heart that we returned to Swat. When my father went to the police they showed him a file on me. They told him that my national and international profile meant I had attracted attention and death threats from the Taliban and that I needed protection. They offered us guards but my father was reluctant. Many elders in Swat had been killed despite having bodyguards and the Punjab governor had been killed by his own bodyguard. He also thought armed guards would alarm the parents of the students at school, and he didn’t want to put others at risk. When he had had threats before he always said, ‘Let them kill me but I’ll be killed alone.’

He suggested sending me to boarding school in Abbottabad like Khushal, but I didn’t want to go. He also met the local army colonel, who said being in college in Abbottabad would not really be any safer and that as long as I kept a low profile we would be OK in Swat. So when the government of KPK offered to make me a peace ambassador, my father said it was better to refuse.

At home I started bolting the main gate of our house at night. ‘She smells the threat,’ my mother told my father. He was very unhappy. He kept telling me to draw the curtains in my room at night, but I would not.

‘*Aba*, this is a very strange situation,’ I told him. ‘When there was Talibanisation we were safe; now there are no Taliban we are unsafe.’

‘Yes, Malala,’ he replied. ‘Now the Talibanisation is especially for us, for those like you and me who continue to speak out. The rest of Swat is OK. The rickshaw drivers, the shopkeepers are all safe. This is Talibanisation for particular people, and we are among them.’

There was another downside to receiving those awards – I was missing a lot of school. After the exams in March the cup that went into my new cabinet was for second place.