rather than performing live. We enjoyed peace festivals with music and dancing, unheard of under the Taliban. My father organised one of the festivals in Marghazar and invited those who had hosted the IDPs in the lower districts as a thank you. There was music all night long.

Things often seemed to happen around my birthday, and around the time I turned thirteen in July 2010 the rain came. We normally don't have monsoons in Swat and at first we were happy, thinking the rain would mean a good harvest. But it was relentless and so heavy that you couldn't even see the person standing in front of you. Environmentalists had warned that our mountains had been stripped of trees by the Taliban and timber smugglers. Soon muddy floods were raging down the valleys, sweeping away everything in their wake.

We were in school when the floods started and were sent home. But there was so much water that the bridge across the dirty stream was submerged so we had to find another way. The next bridge we came to was also submerged but the water wasn't too deep so we splashed our way across. It smelt foul. We were wet and filthy by the time we got home.

The next day we heard that the school had been flooded. It took days for the water to drain away and when we returned we could see chest-high tide marks on the walls. There was mud, mud, mud everywhere. Our desks and chairs were covered with it. The classrooms smelt disgusting. There was so much damage that it cost my father 90,000 rupees to repair – equivalent to the monthly fees for ninety students.

It was the same story throughout Pakistan. The mighty Indus River, which flows from the Himalayas down through KPK and Punjab to Karachi and the Arabian Sea, and of which we are so proud, had turned into a raging torrent and burst its banks. Roads, crops and entire villages were washed away. Around 2,000 people drowned and 14 million people were affected. Many of them lost their homes and 7,000 schools were destroyed. It was the worst flood in living memory. The head of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, called it a 'slow-motion tsunami'. We read that more lives had been affected and more damage had been caused by the floods than the Asian tsunami, our 2005 earthquake, Hurricane Katrina and the Haiti earthquake combined.

Swat was one of the places most affected. Thirty-four of our forty-two bridges had been washed away, cutting off much of the valley. Electric pylons had been smashed into pieces so we had no power. Our own street was on a hill so we were a bit better protected from the overflowing river, but we shivered at the sound of it, a growling, heavy-breathing dragon devouring everything in its path. The riverside hotels and restaurants where tourists used to eat trout and enjoy the views were all destroyed. The tourist areas were the hardest hit parts of Swat. Hill station resorts like Malam Jabba, Madyan and Bahrain were devastated, their hotels and bazaars in ruins.

We soon heard from our relatives that the damage in Shangla was unimaginable. The main road to our village from Alpuri, the capital of Shangla, had been washed away, and entire villages were submerged. Many of the houses on the hilly terraces of Karshat, Shahpur and Barkana had been taken by mudslides. My mother's family home, where Uncle Faiz Mohammad lived, was still standing but the road it stood on had vanished.

People had desperately tried to protect what little they owned, moving their animals to higher ground, but the floods saturated the corn they had harvested, destroyed the orchards and drowned many of the buffaloes. The villagers were helpless. They had no power, as all their makeshift hydroelectric projects had been smashed to pieces. They had no clean water as the river was brown with wreckage and debris. So strong was the force of the water that even concrete buildings had been