those days was the army and the Taliban and the feeling that we were caught between the two. Attiya used to tease me by saying, 'Taliban is good, army not good.' I replied, 'If there is a snake and a lion coming to attack us what would we say is good, the snake or lion?'

Our school was a haven from the horrors outside. All the other girls in my class wanted to be doctors, but I decided I wanted to be an inventor and make an anti-Taliban machine which would sniff them out and destroy their guns. But of course at school we were under threat too, and some of my friends dropped out. Fazlullah kept broadcasting that girls should stay at home and his men had started blowing up schools, usually during night-time curfew when the children were not there.

The first school to be blown up was Shawar Zangay, a government girls' primary school in Matta. We couldn't believe anyone would do such a thing. Then many more bombings followed, almost every day. Even in Mingora, there were explosions. Twice bombs went off when I was in the kitchen, so close by that the whole house rattled and the fan above the window fell down. I became very scared of going into the kitchen and would only run in and out.

On the last day of February 2008 I was in the kitchen when we heard an enormous blast. It was ear-shatteringly loud and obviously close by. As we always did, we called to each other to make sure we were all safe. '*Khaista*, *Pisho*, *Bhabi*, Khushal, Atal!' Then we heard sirens, one after another as if all the ambulances of Mingora were passing. A suicide bomber had struck in the basketball court at Haji Baba High School. Funeral prayers had been under way for a popular local police officer, Javid Iqbal, who had been killed by a suicide bomber in a remote area while trying to escape from the Taliban. He was from Mingora, and his body had been brought back for the funeral and a police salute. Now the Taliban had bombed the mourners. More than fifty-five people were killed, including Javid Iqbal's young son and many people we knew. Ten members of Moniba's family were there and were either killed or injured. Moniba was devastated and the whole town was in shock. There were condolences in every mosque.

'Are you scared now?' I asked my father.

'At night our fear is strong, *Jani*,' he told me, 'but in the morning, in the light, we find our courage again.' And this is true for my family. We were scared, but our fear was not as strong as our courage. 'We must rid our valley of the Taliban, and then no one has to feel this fear,' he said.

In times of crisis we Pashtuns resort to the old trusted ways, so in 2008 elders in Swat created an assembly called the Qaumi Jirga to challenge Fazlullah. Three local men, Mukhtar Khan Yousafzai, Khurshid Kakajee and Zahid Khan went from *hujra* to *hujra* persuading elders to join together. The senior elder was a white-bearded man of seventy-four called Abdul Khan Khaliq who had been one of the Queen's bodyguards when she had visited Swat to stay with our wali. Even though my father was not an elder or a khan, he was chosen as spokesperson as he was not afraid to speak out. Though he was more poetic in Pashto, he could speak our national language, Urdu, and English fluently, which meant he was an effective communicator outside Swat as well as inside.

Every day, on behalf of the Swat Council of Elders, he was at seminars or on the media challenging Fazlullah. 'What are you doing?' he would ask. 'You are playing havoc with our lives and our culture.'

My father would say to me, 'Any organisation which works for peace, I will join. If you want to resolve a dispute or come out from conflict, the very first thing is to speak the truth. If you have a headache and tell the doctor you have a stomach ache, how can the doctor help? You must speak the truth. The truth will abolish fear.'