

there would be lines of people waiting to fill jugs, bottles and drums. One of the neighbours got frightened. 'What are you doing?' he asked. 'If the Taliban find out you're giving water in the month of Ramadan they will bomb us!'

My father replied that people would die either of thirst or bombings.

The days when we used to go for trips or for picnics seemed like a dream. No one would venture from their homes after sunset. The terrorists even blew up the ski lift and the big hotel in Malam Jabba where tourists used to stay. A holiday paradise turned into a hell where no tourist would venture.

Then, at the end of 2008, Fazlullah's deputy Maulana Shah Dauran announced on the radio that all girls' schools would close. From 15 January girls must not go to school, he warned. First I thought it was a joke. 'How can they stop us from going to school?' I asked my friends. 'They don't have the power. They are saying they will destroy the mountain but they can't even control the road.'

The other girls didn't agree with me. 'Who will stop them?' they asked. 'They have already blown up hundreds of schools and no one has done anything.'

My father used to say the people of Swat and the teachers would continue to educate our children until the last room, the last teacher and the last student was alive. My parents never once suggested I should withdraw from school, ever. Though we loved school, we hadn't realised how important education was until the Taliban tried to stop us. Going to school, reading and doing our homework wasn't just a way of passing time, it was our future.

That winter it snowed and we built snow bears but without much joy. In winter the Taliban used to disappear into the mountains, but we knew they would be back and had no idea what was coming next. We believed school would start again. The Taliban could take our pens and books, but they couldn't stop our minds from thinking.