fighting. The Taliban agreed to a ten-day truce and, as a peace gesture, released a Chinese telephone engineer who they had kidnapped six months before.

We were happy too – my father and I had often spoken in favour of a peace deal – but we questioned how it would work. People hoped that the Taliban would settle down, go back to their homes and live as peaceful citizens. They convinced themselves that the *shariat* in Swat would be different to the Afghan version – we would still have our girls' schools and there would be no morality police. Swat would be Swat just with a different justice system. I wanted to believe this but I was worried. I thought, *Surely how the system works depends on the people overseeing it? The Taliban.*

And it was hard to believe it was all over! More than a thousand ordinary people and police had been killed. Women had been kept in purdah, schools and bridges had been blown up, businesses had closed. We had suffered barbaric public courts and violent justice and had lived in a constant state of fear. And now it was all to stop.

At breakfast I suggested to my brothers that we should talk of peace now and not of war. As ever, they ignored me and carried on with their war games. Khushal had a toy helicopter and Atal a pistol made of paper, and one would shout, 'Fire!' and the other, 'Take position.' I didn't care. I went and looked at my uniform, happy that I would soon be able to wear it openly. A message came from our headmistress that exams would take place in the first week of March. It was time to get back to my books.

Our excitement did not last long. Just two days later I was on the roof of the Taj Mahal Hotel giving an interview about the peace deal to a well-known reporter called Hamid Mir when we got the news that another TV reporter we knew had been killed. His name was Musa Khan Khel, and he had often interviewed my father. That day he had been covering a peace march led by Sufi Mohammad. It wasn't really a march but a cavalcade of cars. Afterwards Musa Khan's body was found nearby. He had been shot several times and his throat partly slit. He was twenty-eight years old.

My mother was so upset when we told her that she went to bed in tears. She was worried that violence had returned to the valley so soon after the peace deal. Was the deal merely an illusion? she wondered.

A few days later, on 22 February, a 'permanent ceasefire' was announced by Deputy Commissioner Syed Javid at the Swat Press Club in Mingora. He appealed to all Swatis to return. The Taliban spokesman Muslim Khan then confirmed they had agreed an indefinite ceasefire. President Zardari would sign the peace deal into law. The government also agreed to pay compensation to the families of victims.

Everyone in Swat was jubilant, but I felt the happiest because it meant school would reopen properly. The Taliban said girls could go to school after the peace agreement but they should be veiled and covered. We said OK, if that's what you want, as long as we can live our lives.

Not everyone was happy about the deal. Our American allies were furious. 'I think the Pakistan government is basically abdicating to the Taliban and the extremists,' said Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State. The Americans were worried the deal meant surrender. The Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* wrote in an editorial that the deal sent 'a disastrous signal – fight the state militarily and it will give you what you want and get nothing in return'.

But none of those people had to live here. We needed peace whoever brought it. In our case it happened to be a white-bearded militant called Sufi Mohammad. He made a 'peace camp' in Dir and