

I wrote a lot about school as that was at the centre of our lives. I loved my royal-blue school uniform but we were advised to wear plain clothes instead and hide our books under our shawls. One extract was called DO NOT WEAR COLOURFUL CLOTHES. In it I wrote, 'I was getting ready for school one day and was about to put on my uniform when I remembered the advice of our principal, so that day I decided to wear my favourite pink dress.'

I also wrote about the burqa. When you're very young, you love the burqa because it's great for dressing up. But when you are made to wear it, that's a different matter. Also it makes walking difficult! One of my diary entries was about an incident that happened when I was out shopping with my mother and cousin in the Cheena Bazaar: 'There we heard gossip that one day a woman was wearing a shuttlecock burqa and fell over. When a man tried to help her she refused and said. "Don't help me, brother, as this will bring immense pleasure to Fazlullah." When we entered the shop we were going to, the shopkeeper laughed and told us he got scared thinking we might be suicide bombers as many suicide bombers wore the burqa.'

At school people started talking about the diary. One girl even printed it out and brought it in to show my father.

'It's very good,' he said with a knowing smile.

I wanted to tell people it was me, but the BBC correspondent had told me not to as it could be dangerous. I didn't see why as I was just a child and who would attack a child? But some of my friends recognised incidents in it. And I almost gave the game away in one entry when I said, 'My mother liked my pen name Gul Makai and joked to my father we should change my name . . . I also like the name because my real name means "grief-stricken".'

The diary of Gul Makai received attention further afield. Some newspapers printed extracts. The BBC even made a recording of it using another girl's voice, and I began to see that the pen and the words that come from it can be much more powerful than machine guns, tanks or helicopters. We were learning how to struggle. And we were learning how powerful we are when we speak.

Some of our teachers stopped coming to school. One said he had been ordered by Mullah Fazlullah to help build his centre in Imam Deri. Another said he'd seen a beheaded corpse on the way in and could no longer risk his life to teach. Many people were scared. Our neighbours said the Taliban were instructing people to make it known to the mosque if their daughters were unmarried so they could be married off, probably to militants.

By the start of January 2009 there were only ten girls in my class when once there had been twenty-seven. Many of my friends had left the valley so they could be educated in Peshawar, but my father insisted we would not leave. 'Swat has given us so much. In these tough days we must be strong for our valley,' he said.

One night we all went for dinner at the house of my father's friend Dr Afzal, who runs a hospital. After dinner, when the doctor was driving us home, we saw masked Taliban on both sides of the road carrying guns. We were terrified. Dr Afzal's hospital was in an area that had been taken over by the Taliban. The constant gunfire and curfews had made it impossible for the hospital to function, so he had moved it to Barikot. There had been an outcry, and the Taliban spokesman Muslim Khan had called on the doctor to reopen it. He had asked for my father's advice. My father told him, 'Don't accept good things from bad people.' A hospital protected by the Taliban was not a good idea so he refused.

Dr Afzal did not live far from us, so once we were safely home, my father insisted on going back