

date was announced for the start of next term. Even so, some teachers still gave us homework. In the yard I hugged all my friends. I looked at the honours board and wondered if my name would ever appear on it again. Exams were due in March but how could they take place? Coming first didn't matter if you couldn't study at all. When someone takes away your pens you realise quite how important education is.

Before I closed the school door I looked back as if it were the last time I would ever be at school. That's the closing shot in one part of the documentary. In reality I went back inside. My friends and I didn't want that day to end so we decided to stay on for a while longer. We went to the primary school where there was more space to run around and played cops and robbers. Then we played mango mango, where you make a circle and sing, then when the song stops everyone has to freeze. Anyone who moves or laughs is out.

We came home from school late that day. Usually we leave at 1 p.m. but that day we stayed till three. Before we left, Moniba and I had an argument over something so silly I can't remember what it was. Our friends couldn't believe it. 'You two always argue when there's an important occasion!' they said. It wasn't a good way to leave things.

I told the documentary makers, 'They cannot stop me. I will get my education if it's at home, school or somewhere else. This is our request to the world – to save our schools, save our Pakistan, save our Swat.'

When I got home, I cried and cried. I didn't want to stop learning. I was only eleven years old but I felt as though I had lost everything. I had told everyone in my class that the Taliban wouldn't go through with it. 'They're just like our politicians – they talk the talk but they won't do anything,' I'd said. But then they went ahead and closed our school and I felt embarrassed. I couldn't control myself. I was crying, my mother was crying but my father insisted, 'You will go to school.'

For him the closing of the schools also meant the loss of business. The boys' school would reopen after the winter holidays but the loss of the girls' school represented a big cut in our income. More than half the school fees were overdue and my father spent the last day chasing money to pay the rent, the utility bills and the teachers' salaries.

That night the air was full of artillery fire and I woke up three times. The next morning everything had changed. I began to think that maybe I should go to Peshawar or abroad or maybe I could ask our teachers to form a secret school in our home, as some Afghans had done during Taliban rule. Afterwards I went on as many radio and TV channels as possible. 'They can stop us going to school but they can't stop us learning,' I said. I sounded hopeful but in my heart I was worried. My father and I went to Peshawar and visited lots of places to tell people what was happening. I spoke of the irony of the Taliban wanting female teachers and doctors for women yet not letting girls go to school to qualify for these jobs.

Once Muslim Khan had said girls should not go to school and learn Western ways. This from a man who had lived so long in America! He insisted he would have his own education system. 'What would Muslim Khan use instead of the stethoscope and the thermometer?' my father asked. 'Are there any Eastern instruments which will treat the sick?' The Taliban is against education because they think that when a child reads a book or learns English or studies science he or she will become Westernised.

But I said, 'Education is education. We should learn everything and then choose which path to follow.' Education is neither Eastern nor Western, it is human.