

grandfather had a cousin who also joined his school as a teacher. When he got the job he gave his age as much younger than my grandfather. Our people don't know their exact dates of birth – my mother, for example, does not know when she was born. We tend to remember years by events, like an earthquake. But my grandfather knew that his cousin was actually much older than him. He was so angry that he made the day-long bus journey to Mingora to see the Swat minister of education. 'Sahib,' he told him, 'I have a cousin who is ten years older than me and you have certified him ten years younger.' So the minister said, 'OK, *Maulana*, what shall I write down for you? Would you like to have been born in the year of the earthquake of Quetta?' My grandfather agreed, so his new date of birth became 1935, making him much younger than his cousin.

This family rivalry meant that my father was bullied a lot by his cousins. They knew he was insecure about his looks because at school the teachers always favoured the handsome boys for their fair skin. His cousins would stop my father on his way home from school and tease him about being short and dark-skinned. In our society you have to take revenge for such slights, but my father was much smaller than his cousins.

He also felt he could never do enough to please my grandfather. *Baba* had beautiful handwriting and my father would spend hours painstakingly drawing letters but *Baba* never once praised him.

My grandmother kept his spirits up – he was her favourite and she believed great things lay in store for him. She loved him so much that she would slip him extra meat and the cream off the milk while she went without. But it wasn't easy to study as there was no electricity in the village in those days. He used to read by the light of the oil lamp in the *hujra*, and one evening he went to sleep and the oil lamp fell over. Fortunately my grandmother found him before a fire started. It was my grandmother's faith in my father that gave him the courage to find his own proud path he could travel along. This is the path that he would later show me.

Yet she too got angry with him once. Holy men from a spiritual place called Derai Saydan used to travel the villages in those days begging for flour. One day while his parents were out some of them came to the house. My father broke the seal on the wooden storage box of maize and filled their bowls. When my grandparents came home they were furious and beat him.

Pashtuns are famously frugal (though generous with guests), and *Baba* was particularly careful with money. If any of his children accidentally spilt their food he would fly into a rage. He was an extremely disciplined man and could not understand why they were not the same. As a teacher he was eligible for a discount on his sons' school fees for sports and joining the Boy Scouts. It was such a small discount that most teachers did not bother, but he forced my father to apply for the rebate. Of course my father detested doing this. As he waited outside the headmaster's office, he broke out into a sweat, and once inside his stutter was worse than ever. 'It felt as if my honour was at stake for five rupees,' he told me. My grandfather never bought him new books. Instead he would tell his best students to keep their old books for my father at the end of the year and then he would be sent to their homes to get them. He felt ashamed but had no choice if he didn't want to end up illiterate. All his books were inscribed with other boys' names, never his own.

'It's not that passing books on is a bad practice,' he says. 'It's just I so wanted a new book, unmarked by another student and bought with my father's money.'

My father's dislike of *Baba*'s frugality has made him a very generous man both materially and in spirit. He became determined to end the traditional rivalry between him and his cousins. When his headmaster's wife fell ill, my father donated blood to help save her. The man was astonished and