the government for schools which never saw a single pupil. Instead they used the buildings for their *hujras* or even to keep their animals. There was even a case of a man drawing a teacher's pension when he had never taught a day in his life. Aside from corruption and bad government, my father's main concern in those days was the environment. Mingora was expanding quickly – around 175,000 people now called it home – and our once-fresh air was becoming very polluted from all the vehicles and cooking fires. The beautiful trees on our hills and mountains were being chopped down for timber. My father said only around half the town's population had access to safe drinking water and most, like us, had no sanitation. So he and his friends set up something called the Global Peace Council which, despite its name, had very local concerns. The name was ironic and my father often laughed about it, but the organisation's aim was serious: to preserve the environment of Swat and promote peace and education among local people.

My father also loved to write poetry, sometimes about love, but often on controversial themes such as honour killings and women's rights. Once he visited Afghanistan for a poetry festival at the Kabul Intercontinental Hotel, where he read a poem about peace. It was mentioned as the most inspiring in the closing speech, and some in the audience asked him to repeat whole stanzas and couplets, exclaiming '*Wah wah'* when a particular line pleased them, which is a bit like 'Bravo'. Even my grandfather was proud. 'Son, may you be the star in the sky of knowledge,' he used to say.

We too were proud, but his higher profile meant we didn't see him very much. It was always our mother who shopped for our clothes and took us to hospital if we were ill, even though in our culture, particularly for those of us from villages, a woman is not supposed to do these things alone. So one of my father's nephews would have to go along. When my father was at home, he and his friends sat on the roof at dusk and talked politics endlessly. There was really only one subject – 9/11. It might have changed the whole world but we were living right in the epicentre of everything. Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda, had been living in Kandahar when the attack on the World Trade Center happened, and the Americans had sent thousands of troops to Afghanistan to catch him and overthrow the Taliban regime which had protected him.

In Pakistan we were still under a dictatorship, but America needed our help, just as it had in the 1980s to fight the Russians in Afghanistan. Just as the Russian invasion of Afghanistan had changed everything for General Zia, so 9/11 transformed General Musharraf from an international outcast. Suddenly he was being invited to the White House by George W. Bush and to 10 Downing Street by Tony Blair. There was a major problem, however. Our own intelligence service, ISI, had virtually created the Taliban. Many ISI officers were close to its leaders, having known them for years, and shared some of their beliefs. The ISI's Colonel Imam boasted he had trained 90,000 Taliban fighters and even became Pakistan's consul general in Herat during the Taliban regime.

We were not fans of the Taliban as we had heard they destroyed girls' schools and blew up giant Buddha statues – we had many Buddhas of our own that we were proud of. But many Pashtuns did not like the bombing of Afghanistan or the way Pakistan was helping the Americans, even if it was only by allowing them to cross our airspace and stopping weapons supplies to the Taliban. We did not know then that Musharraf was also letting the Americans use our airfields.

Some of our religious people saw Osama bin Laden as a hero. In the bazaar you could buy posters of him on a white horse and boxes of sweets with his picture on them. These clerics said 9/11 was revenge on the Americans for what they had been doing to other people round the world, but they ignored the fact that the people in the World Trade Center were innocent and had nothing to do with