

Excerpts from *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai

Just in front of the school on Khushal Street, where I was born, was the house of a tall handsome mullah and his family. His name was Ghulamullah and he called himself a *mufti*, which means he is an Islamic scholar and authority on Islamic law, though my father complains that anyone with a turban can call himself a *maulana* or *mufti*. The school was doing well, and my father was building an impressive reception area with an arched entrance in the boys' high school. For the first time my mother could buy nice clothes and even send out for food as she had dreamed of doing back in the village. But all this time the *mufti* was watching. He watched the girls going in and out of our school every day and became angry, particularly as some of the girls were teenagers. "That *maulana* has a bad eye on us," said my father one day. He was right.

Shortly afterward the *mufti* went to the woman who owned the school premises and said, "Ziauddin is running a *haram* [prohibited by Islam] school in your building and bringing shame on the *mohalla* [neighborhood]. These girls should be in purdah [seclusion of women]." He told her, "Take this building back from him and I will rent it for my madrasa. If you do this you will get paid now and also receive a reward in the next world."

She refused and her son came to my father in secret. "This *maulana* is starting a campaign against you," he warned. "We won't give him the building but be careful."

My father was angry. "Just as we say, '*Nim hakim khatrai jan*' — Half a doctor is a danger to one's life,' so, '*Nim mullah khatrai iman* — 'A mullah who is not fully learned is a danger to faith,'" he said. ...

... The *mufti* on Khushal Street was a member of Tablighi Jamaat, a Deobandi group that holds a huge rally every year at its headquarters in Raiwind, near Lahore, attended by millions of people. Our last dictator General Zia used to go there, and in the 1980s, under his regime, the Tablighis became very powerful. Many of the imams appointed to preach in army barracks were Tablighis and army officers would often take leave and go on preaching tours for the group.

One night, after the *mufti* had failed to persuade our landlady to cancel our lease, he gathered some of the influential people and elders of our *mohalla* into a delegation and turned up at our door. There were seven people—some other senior Tablighis, a mosque keeper, a former jihadi and a shopkeeper—and they filled our small house.

My father seemed worried and shooed us into the other room, but the house was small, so we could hear every word. "I am representing the Ulema and Tablighian and Taliban," Mullah Ghulamullah said, referring to not just one but two organizations of Muslim scholars to give himself gravitas. "I am representing good Muslims and we all think your girls' school is *haram* and a blasphemy. You should close it. Girls should not be going to school," he continued. "A girl is so sacred she should be in purdah, and so private that there is no lady's name in the Quran, as God doesn't want her to be named."

My father could listen no more. "Maryam is mentioned everywhere in the Quran. Was she not a woman and a good woman at that?"

"No," said the mullah. "She is only there to prove that Jesus was the son of Maryam, not the son of God!"

"That may be," replied my father. "But I am pointing out that the Quran names Maryam."

The *mufti* started to object, but my father had had enough. Turning to the group, he said, "When this gentleman passes me on the street, I look to him and greet him, but he doesn't answer, he just bows his head."

The mullah looked down, embarrassed, because greeting someone properly is important in Islam. "You run the *haram* school," he said. "That's why I don't want to greet you."

Then one of the other men spoke up. "I'd heard you were an infidel," he said to my father, "but there are Qurans in your room."

"Of course there are!" replied my father, astonished that his faith would be questioned. "I am a Muslim."

“Let’s get back to the subject of the school,” said the *mufti*, who could see the discussion was not going his way. “There are men in the reception area of the school, and they see the girls enter, and this is very bad.”

“I have a solution,” said my father. “The school has another gate. The girls will enter through that.”

The *mufti* dearly wasn’t happy, as he wanted the school closed altogether. But the elders were happy with this compromise and they left. ...

...The MMA government [Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal a political alliance consisting of far right and religious parties of Pakistan] banned CD and DVD shops and wanted to create a morality police like the Mghan Taliban had set up. The idea was they would be able to stop a woman accompanied by a man and require her to prove that the man was her relative. Thankfully, our supreme court stopped this. Then MMA activists launched attacks on cinemas and tore down billboards with pictures of women or blacked them out with paint. They even snatched female mannequins from clothing shops. They harassed men wearing Western-style shirts and trousers instead of the traditional shalwar kamiz and insisted women cover their heads. It was as though they wanted to remove all traces of womankind from public life.

My father’s high school opened in 2003. That first year they had boys and girls together, but by 2004 the climate had changed so it was unthinkable to have girls and boys in the same class. That changing climate made Ghulamullahand bold. One of the school clerks told my father that the *mufti* kept coming into school and demanding to know why we girls were still using the main entrance. He said that one day, when a male member of staff took a female teacher out to the main road to get a rickshaw, the *maulana* asked, “Why did this man escort her to the road, is he her brother?”

“No,” replied the clerk, “he is a colleague.”

“That is wrong!” said the *maulana*.

My father told the clerk to call him next time he saw the *maulana*. When the call came, my father and the Islamic studies teacher went out to confront him.

“Maulana, you have driven me to the wall!” my father said.

“Who are you? You are crazy! You need to go to a doctor. You think I enter the school and take my clothes off? When you see a boy and a girl you *see* a scandal. They are schoolchildren. I think you should go and see Dr. Haider Ali!”

Dr. Haider Ali was a well-known psychiatrist in our area, so to say, “Shall we take you to Dr. Haider Ali?” meant “Are you mad? The *mufti* went quiet. He took off his turban and put it in my father’s lap. For us a turban is a public symbol of chivalry and Pashtun-ness, and for a man to lose his turban is considered a great humiliation. But then he started up again. “I never said those things to your clerk. He is lying.”

My father had had enough. “You have no business here,” he shouted. “Go away!”

The *mufti* had failed to close our school, but his interference was an indication of how our country was changing. My father was worried. He and his fellow activists were holding endless meetings. These were no longer just about stopping people cutting down trees but also about education and democracy. ...

... One day I went on Geo, which is one of the biggest news channels in our country. There was a wall of screens in their office. I was astonished to see so many channels. Afterward I thought, *The media needs interviews. They want to interview a small girl, but the girls are scared and even if they’re not, their parents won’t allow it. I have a father who isn’t scared, who stands by me. He said, “You are a child and it’s your right to speak.* , The more interviews I gave, the stronger I felt and the more support we received. I was only eleven, but I looked older, and the media seemed to like hearing from a young girl. One journalist called me *takra jenai-a* “bright shining young lady” and another said I was *pakha jenai*—wise beyond my years. In my heart was the belief that God would protect me. If I am speaking for my rights, for the rights of girls, I am not doing anything wrong. It’s my duty to do so. God wants to see how we behave in such situations. There is a saying in the Quran, “The falsehood has to go and the truth will prevail.” *If one man, can destroy everything, why can’t one girl change it?* I wondered. I prayed to God every night to give me

strength. The media in Swat were under pressure to give positive coverage to the Taliban—some even respectfully called the Taliban spokesman Muslim Khan *School Dada*, when in reality he was destroying schools. But many local journalists were unhappy about what was happening to their valley and they gave us a powerful platform, as we would say things they didn't dare to.

We didn't have a car, so we went by rickshaw, or one of my father's friends would take us to the interviews. One day my father and I went to Peshawar to appear on a BBC Urdu talk show hosted by a famous columnist called Wasatullah Khan. We went with my father's friend Fazal Maula and his daughter. Two fathers and two daughters. To represent the Taliban they had Muslim Khan, who wasn't in the studio. I was a bit nervous, but I knew it was important, as many people all over Pakistan would be listening. "How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?" I said. There was no response from Muslim Khan because his phone interview had been prerecorded. How can a recording respond to live questions?

Afterward people congratulated me. My father laughed and said I should go into politics. "Even as a toddler you talked like a politician," he teased. But I never listened to my interviews. I knew these were very small steps.

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It was during one of those dark days that my father received a call from his friend Abdul Hai Kakar, a BBC radio correspondent based in Peshawar. He was looking for a female teacher or a schoolgirl to write a diary about life under the Taliban. He wanted to show the human side of the catastrophe in Swat. Initially Madam Maryam's younger sister Ayesha agreed, but her father found out and refused his permission saying it was too risky. When I overheard my father talking about this, I said, "Why not me?" I wanted people to know what was happening. Education is our right, I said. Just as it is our right to sing. Islam has given us this right and says that every girl and boy should go to school. The Quran says we should seek knowledge, study hard and learn the mysteries of our world.

I had never written a diary before and didn't know how to begin. Although we had a computer, there were frequent power cuts and few places had Internet access. So Hai Kakar would call me in the evening on my mother's mobile. He used his wife's phone to protect us, as he said his own phone was bugged by the intelligence services. He would guide me, asking me questions about my day, and asking me to tell him small anecdotes or talk about my dreams. We would speak for half an hour or forty-five minutes in Urdu, even though we are both Pashtun, as the blog was to appear in Urdu and he wanted the voice to be as authentic as possible. Then he wrote up my words and once a week they would appear on the BBC Urdu website. He told me about Anne Frank, a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl who hid from the Nazis with her family in Amsterdam during the war. He told me she kept a diary about their lives all cramped together, about how they spent their days and about her own feelings. It was very sad, as in the end the family was betrayed and arrested and Anne died in a concentration camp when she was only fifteen. Later her diary was published and is a very powerful record.

Hai Kakar told me it could be dangerous to use my real name and gave me the pseudonym Gul Makai, which means "cornflower" and is the name of the heroine in a Pashtun folk story. It's a kind of *Romeo and Juliet* story in which Gul Makai and Musa Khan meet at school and fall in love. But they are from different tribes, so their love causes a war. However, unlike Shakespeare's play their story doesn't end in tragedy. Gul Makai uses the Quran to teach her elders that war is bad and they eventually stop fighting and allow the lovers to unite.

My first diary entry appeared on 3 January 2009 under the heading I AM AFRAID: "I had a terrible dream last night filled with military helicopters and Taliban. I have had such dreams since the launch of the military operation in Swat." I wrote about being afraid to go to school because of the Taliban edict and looking over my shoulder all the time. I also described something that happened on my way home from school: "I heard a man behind me saying, 'I will kill you.' I quickened my pace and after a while I looked

back to see if he was following me. To my huge relief! saw he was speaking on his phone, he must have been talking to someone else.”

It was thrilling to see my words on the website. I was a bit shy to start with, but after a while I got to know the kind of things Hai Kakar wanted me to talk about and became more confident. He liked personal feelings and what he called “pungent sentences” and also the mix of everyday family life with the terror of the Taliban. ...

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 recognized 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.

...By the start of January 2009 there were only ten girls in my class when once there had been twenty-seven. ...

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 Westernized. 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.

My mother used to tell me to hide my face when I spoke to the media because at my age I should be in purdah and she was afraid for my safety. But she never banned me from doing anything. It was a time of horror and fear. People often said the Taliban might kill my father but not me. “Malala is a child,” they would say, “and even the Taliban don’t kill children.”

But my grandmother wasn’t so sure. Whenever my grandmother saw me speaking on television, or leaving the house, she would pray, “Please God make Malala like Benazir Bhutto [former Pakistani Prime Minister, assassinated in 2007] but do not give her Benazir’s short life.”

After my school dosed down I continued to write the blog. Four days after the ban on girls’ schools, five more were destroyed. “I am quite surprised,” I wrote, “because these schools had closed, so why did they also need to be destroyed? No one has gone to school following the Taliban’s deadline. The army is doing nothing about it. They are sitting in their bunkers on top of the hills. They slaughter goats and eat with pleasure.” I also wrote about people going to watch the floggings announced on Mullah FM, and the fact that the police were nowhere to be seen.

One day we got a call from America, from a student at Stanford University. Her name was Shiza Shahid and she came from Islamabad. She had seen the *New York Times* documentary *Class Dismissed in Swat Valley* and tracked us down. We saw then the power of the media and she became a great support to us. My father was almost bursting with pride at how I came across on the documentary. “Look at her,” he told Adam Ellick. “Don’t you think she is meant for the skies?” Fathers can be very embarrassing. ...