

# My Soldiers of Education

**Mrs Farah Ali Butt**

I used to teach at a school in Muzaffarabad before the earthquake struck in 2005. I had two students, brothers, aged seven and eight, who used to come every day from Langar Pura to attend school. Everyday Hassan and Masood would make the forty five minute journey, partially by bus, partially on foot, to attend school. Their feet would be red from the cold by the time they made it to school. They were a little behind the other children in math but I was making the concepts clear to them using real life examples. They were making quick progress.

On 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2005, the day of that fatal earthquake, I had taken a day off from school. Everything changed after that day. The roof of our school collapsed. It fell on Hassan and Masood. My two soldiers of education died in action.

My husband got a spinal injury too and we moved him to a hospital in Islamabad. As I nursed my husband back to health, I also tutored other patients who were there at the hospital. There was four year old Anoosha and Sehrish who was in FA, Safiya who was in BA. I gave them English language classes and gave them notes for political science etc. This was usually from 7pm – 10pm.

Recognizing that this was my calling in life, I later set up an NGO for the education of special children, with the support of the Ministry of Welfare and Special Education. The organization provides support through awareness raising for example creating awareness about the effects of cousin marriages on future generations. We also provide leg-braces for children who need them.

Have you ever heard of the wounded healer? It is said that the best healer is one who has himself experienced the illness. I too am such a wounded healer.

*The author is a teacher at the Idara Taleem-o-Aagahi Drop-in center for children working as domestic labor. She is also running her own NGO by the name of Disabled People Development Organization, in Islamabad*