

Rwandan Courage & Survival

My name is Ange Cendrine Mukayitesi. I was born in 1983 to Habiya mbere Etienne and Kabagwira Acassilde. I was in primary 4 when the genocide began. I had three siblings, one sister and two brothers. We all survived although I was attacked with a machete and sustained severe injuries. I was born in Cyangugu Prefecture, in Murambi Commune, the district of Giheke. I lived there until the genocide of 1994 and moved to Kigali after the genocide.



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Before the Genocide

Before the 1994 genocide, my father had a job at Shagisha local Tea Factory and my mother was a farmer. My childhood seemed normal and happy. My father's job provided for the family. My mother had enough food for the family and sold some for money. We lived close to my father's relatives; we lived in harmony with our neighbours.

The only exception was at school where my teacher used to separate Tutsis and send them out of class while the rest of the students went on with their work. I didn't really understand the implications of being a Tutsi. My parents never discussed it with me so when the teacher filled the registration form and put me down as a Tutsi, I didn't mind. During the genocide I learned what it meant to be a Tutsi. I ended up in Congo in a refugee camp with no close family to help me. I had been sheltered from the hate and discrimination, because we lived close to my father's relatives. The only people I ever encountered, apart from my teachers, were my relatives. I felt safe and protected all the time. My name Mukayitesi translates to 'one who deserves spoiling'; I grew up believing I was a princess until the genocide shattered my dreams.

During the Genocide

On the morning of 7th April it was announced on the radio that President Habyarimana had died. My father told us to leave the house and go into hiding and that the killers would murder us if they found us. We spent the night in the bush. People were starting to be killed and houses were being torched. We hid together as a family, my mother, three siblings, my three uncles, their wives and children. My father was not with us.

We spent days moving from one hiding place to another as the hunting of Tutsis intensified. Guns and machetes were being supplied by the director of the Shangisha

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Tea Factory where my father worked. We met with many people looking for a hiding place who told us that the Tutsis were being hunted, that many *Interahamwe* were getting reinforcements, and that we would be discovered soon.

We decided to go to a river called Nyakagezi and hide in another community where we were not known. My mother and siblings separated from the rest of the family, we went to seek refuge with a friend of my mother. At first she was kind, she gave us food and hid us for two days. Then one day she said, 'I can't bring myself to kill you and your children. You have to leave and hopefully someone else will kill you along the way'. My mother was shocked and resigned herself to returning home. We went back near our house and hid in the bush again. We were hungry, so we hid near enough so that at night we could sneak home and get something to eat. I don't know how long we had been gone, days and nights seem to come and go. Fear of death and re-counting who had been killed became our preoccupation. We stayed in the bush but we had become separated from our relatives and had no news of their whereabouts.

Things almost seemed settled but then the killers would come with their dogs and machetes and smoke us out of the bush. Mum told us to stay and not run, because the killers would chase those who escaped but wouldn't check who had stayed behind. We hid in this bush for three days; then my mother decided to bring our cows and went to hide further from home. She was going to give the killers cows so that they would not kill us. But soon the killers found us. They didn't wait to be given the cows, they started fighting over them, and in the confusion we escaped. We returned to the same hiding place; we could see our house from the bushes. We watched a group of killers stealing our family belongings and then setting the house on fire before they left. To our surprise someone seemed to put out the fire; part of the house fell on him and collapsed. It was my father. He broke his leg and suffered burns, he couldn't move.

We went to hide at the house of a neighbour called Dominiko, his wife was my mother's distant cousin. We arrived at their house, and Dominiko was away with the *interahamwe*, he was among those who killed Tutsis who had taken refuge at the church. My mother and her cousin went to check on my father. He was still lying under the burning rubble that had fallen on him. They moved him and hid him in banana plantations, and every day my mother's cousin would smuggle food to my father. Dominiko's wife didn't tell him she was hiding us. Dominiko would come back every day with stolen property, meat and food. When he left the next morning, his wife would bring us food though my mother would not touch it. Eventually Dominiko got to know we were hiding in his home, but he didn't seem bothered as he was preoccupied with killing in other areas. The *Interahamwe* found us but my mother and her cousin were short, they pretended that had come from Burundi and they were not Rwandans so they left them alone. They seemed suspicious so we kept a low profile. We would hide during the day and come out at night when Dominiko was at home.

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For days, food was smuggled secretly to my father, but he was suffering and he had no treatment. In the end he couldn't take the pain anymore so he asked my mother to go and report him to a local Interahamwe leader. It was around the 13th April when my mother came out of hiding and went to tell the local leader that my father was asking for forgiveness or a quick death. She pretended she had stumbled on my father when she went to pick bananas from our plantation. They had been searching for my father. When my mother went to see the local leader, I sneaked out and went to visit my father. We heard them chanting and singing coming to where my father was hiding, my father forced me to run and hide in a nearby bush.

I heard them mocking my father, beating him with clubs and sticks, he was crying in agony. I couldn't take it anymore, I got up to give myself up and die with him. I saw a man cut his leg off with a machete, I became numb, then his second leg, his arms, and finally they hit him on the head with something big, I can't remember what it was they used. There were many men, all happily congratulating themselves for finding my father. They dragged him from the banana plantation and left him dead by the roadside. When he had died they all left.

When the killers left, I stumbled back home to tell my mother that my father had been killed. My mother and I returned to carry my father to where he had been hiding in our banana plantation. We covered the shallow grave with banana leaves to disguise it in case the killers pulled him out to mock him again.

We settled into the routine of hiding and keeping a low profile. In the middle of May a man by the name of Visenti came back with Dominiko from their day's killing spree, and announced that women would not be killed, that we should go back home and no harm would come to us. All men by this time had been killed. My elder brother and younger brother had not ventured out all this time. Visenti insisted that we go back home, but our house had been burnt down, there was nowhere to go. Nonetheless, we went back and lived in a kitchen extension that had not caught fire.

On the second day living in the kitchen, at night, two men came and knocked on the door. They claimed they were looking for cockroaches, that they had they had arrived in Cyangu. There seemed to be more than two people outside the kitchen. My mother told them there was no one in the house and refused to open the door. In the kitchen were myself, my mother, my elder brother and my younger brother (whom we had dressed up as a girl). The two men broke the door and seized my mother and myself. The boys managed to run and escaped. My mother and I were raped by countless men all night. My brothers went and hid near my father's grave, under the banana leaves we had used to cover the gravesite.

In the morning, the two men searched around for my two brothers, but they could not find them. They came back and hit my mother and I. We asked them to kill us instead of torturing us. The man who raped me was called Seteme and Yohani raped my mother. The next day, both men continued to rape us, they would move from me to my mother and visa versa, meanwhile they continued to beat us demanding that

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we tell them where my brothers were hiding. Seteme ordered Yohani to take my mother outside the kitchen to spare her the shock, he then lifted a machete and cut through my neck. I felt a deep pain, then I heard my mother scream in deep agony; I knew she was dying. I blacked out at that point.

My brothers returned when the two men left, my mother had been struck with a machete and had died immediately. They found me nearly dead and carried me to my mother's cousin for help. I had been left for dead but I was still breathing. My brother went back to my mother's cousin to ask for help for me. Dominiko and his wife informed the community leader and asked for permission to take me for treatment. They were told they should not treat me but wait for me to die - after all I was nearly dead. I wasn't told all this. In the beginning they used local herbs but infection kicked in; my neck was rotting and water seeped through my neck. Dominiko raided a pharmacy and brought back injections and antiseptic creams and tried to treat me. He was not trained, he just injected me with whatever he brought back with him. Some friends of his also tried to help. All this time I was unconscious, then word reached my godmother, who was Hutu, and whose son was head of interahamwe in Muyonvi commune. She made the journey and took me back with her, leaving my two brothers behind. I stayed with my godmother's family, but apparently maggots were eating away into my neck. I wasn't aware of what was happening to me; I was retold this story when I regained consciousness.

Around the 20th July I started getting my senses back. I could recognise things around me and hear people speaking, but I didn't know who I was, what had happened and how I ended up where I was. The family I was staying with were getting ready to escape to Congo, they told me they were taking me with them because the cockroaches were killing people and that they had arrived in Cyangugu and would kill me if they found me. I didn't understand a thing they were saying; I thought I had died. I could not make sense of anything around me yet. The wounds were beginning to heal and I had less pain in my neck.

I left with my godmother's family and trekked with many other people to Congo. That night we went through a forest called Ntemabiti, and there we found *Interahamwe* still killing people. There was a road block; if you were tall they cut you in two, or if they suspected you were Tutsi they killed you. But because I was with a leader of the *Interahamwe*, they let us pass. The killings had no effect on me by then. I had seen my father being killed. In my mind I could see a state of chaos, the noises and cries seemed to be happening in another world. We eventually reached Rusizi border with Congo.

At the border, the killings intensified. I saw many people struck and thrown in Lake Kivu. Men wearing civilian clothes were seizing any cars, killing the owners and driving away. There were so many people waiting to cross the border. It was like a murder movie, I couldn't make sense of who was killing whom. We had no problems crossing and no-one asked any questions. My godmother's son was known and feared

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by everyone. Many people were crossing into Congo carrying looted property from Rwanda, soon it was almost like a Rwandan village.

At a refugee camp nearby, a mobile clinic was treating people for free. I asked permission to go and get treated but I was told I would be killed if I went there. My body was slowly rotting, maggots were flowing from my neck and face wounds. One day I couldn't take the pain anymore and I left secretly. There were Rwandan women working there. They asked me what happened to me, and I told them I was hit with a machete. They asked me by whom, I told them I didn't know who. One of them said that this was the work of cockroaches. Until this time I didn't know who the cockroaches were. They called white people to dress my wounds. I was told there was a lot of dirt in my wounds, which had to be removed before the wound on the neck and face could be closed.

I returned home and told my godmother. This time she was cross with me and said that I should not return to the clinic because if they found out who I was they would kill me. She bought some chemicals and cleaned the wounds at home. The family decided to move further into Congo to Bukavu camp in zone 12. By this time, I was beginning to speak and string sentences together. I had last spoken before my neck and face were cut. I was not allowed outside, but after some time they started to relax and I would go and get food portions from the United Nations. Sometimes I got farming jobs with Congolese and they would either give me food to take home or money.

Close by there was another camp called Inera, where Sindikubwabo (the transitional president) was staying. I heard people say he lived there but I didn't know who he was. The camp used to hold meetings and sometimes I would attend. One day in a meeting someone said there are Tutsis hiding among us. An order was put out to kill any Tutsi they found. A search for Tutsis began. One night a group of men came to our plastic sheeting shelter, but my godmother's son was a known Interahamwe and he told them he would kill any Tutsis himself and they left without checking.

My godmother's son turned against me too, he gave me an ultimatum, to save me and get married to his brother or to hand me over to Interahamwe. I had no choice, but was saved when his brother was taken to a forest where they were training to go back and kill more Tutsis and recapture Rwanda. I prayed that he wouldn't return soon. But after a few months he returned and told us about his training, and how white people had brought them arms. I was now an official wife and the family was behind me.

One day I was getting on with my usual work, and I met a man who seemed familiar; he too was looking at me curiously. This man went back to the camp and said he thinks he saw Etienne's daughter, whom he believed was dead. He said he had seen me a number of times going to work at the Congolese farms. The boy who heard this came and told my family. I asked them to help me go back to Rwanda, but I was told that where they die is where I will also die. They would never give me up

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to the killers. The man confirmed to the camp leader that he had seen Mukayitesi, a daughter of Etienne. After that, I wasn't allowed to venture out of the house. The camps were so big, and the man didn't know which house I lived in, but he was determined to find me.

There was a Hutu girl living with us who worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross. She was nice to me and secretly took me to register with the ICRC. When I went home I told my godmother to plead for me and let me register with the ICRC and return to Rwanda. She didn't know I had already done so. The family refused me permission to register, so the next day I took my work tools as though I was heading to the farm and when I arrived there was an ICRC vehicle which was to return me to Rwanda. There was a driver, a white man dressed in civilian clothes and another white man dressed as a soldier. I was the only one in the vehicle. As soon as the door closed I heard people screaming, calling out that people were returning to Rwanda. They were blocking the vehicle and throwing stones at it. I think the white men asked for reinforcements, because many UNAMIR soldiers who were looking after the camps appeared. They helped us through the angry crowd. They brought me to Rusizi, a camp on Rwandan side of the border. This was in August 1996. The man who was registering returnees said that one of my relatives had left a request to let them know if I returned. It was my father's sister. I stayed with her for some time. Then another aunt who had children my age and was married to a Hutu asked me to stay with her so that I could stay with my peers. Their father looked like the man who cut my throat, whenever I saw him I ran away and hid or screamed in fear. I went back to stay with my father's sister.

I began getting severe headaches. I was losing my senses and in the end I was admitted to Ndera Mental Hospital where I spent 5 months. When I came out I tried to go to school, but I could not cope. I decided to do a catering course, which I have now completed. When I came out of hospital, a widow who had lost her children gave me a place to stay. Meanwhile I found out that my three siblings had survived. My younger brother Muhirwa Jean Baptiste is in his second year and my sister Murebwayire Marie Grace in her third year of secondary school. They are paid for by the Government Fund for Survivors (FARG). My elder brother has turned to drinking.

I am looking for a job that will enable me to unite my siblings. I have no house here in Kigali and no money to go and visit them in Cyangugu. It hurts me because I can't look after them.

I am disabled; sometimes I can't think straight, I get dizzy and the headaches continue to bother me. I feel numb on the left side of my face, the eye moves around in the socket, I get blackouts all the time. On many occasions I have been admitted in hospital and have had no one come to check on me. I live on leftovers from patients or sometimes Christians bring me some food. A while ago my face swelled; I went to Kigali Central Hospital where I was treated, but I was told it is my veins and Rwanda has no means to cure me.

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As the days pass my health is getting worse. I am anxious about getting a job to enable me to get a house and bring my siblings to live with me. Before the genocide life was good for my family and me. I always told my mother everything. She was there for me. Now I am on my own, I can't even look after my siblings. Life is very hard and unpredictable and I worry about the future.

Most of the people who killed my family crossed to Congo, but the man who killed my father, known as Concorde, is still living in the community. He confessed in *Gacaca* courts to killing my father. He still has a life and a family. What justice is there for my family? They continue to live with the legacy of the genocide. I heard about the Solace Ministries and went to see them. They have tried to help me cope with my daily ordeal. Recently when I was feeling unwell, I was tested and found that I was HIV positive. The only way this could have happened is through rape because I didn't even know what the rapists were doing to me. I was a child, only 11 years old when the killers struck. To sum it up I am now 23 years old, I am still suffering because of the cuts on my face and neck and I am HIV positive. What hope or future do I have?