

Rwandan Courage & Survival

My name is Daphrose Mukangarambe. I was born in 1963 in the Gasabo District in Rwanda. My father's name was Buhunyuhunyu and my mother's name was Gashonga Marciana. At the time of the genocide I was 31, living with my husband Kayigi and our five children. Today, of all my immediate family, only my nephew survives.



Daphrose Mukangarambe

In Gasabo there were no politics of division. People seemed to get on very well. I was not educated, I had only managed primary education up to year five. I left school when my mother died, and I was then looked after by my grandmother, who also died. My father and mother had separated, so I was left at school because there was no one to take care of me.

Before the genocide life was good to my family and I. We were farmers and had cows and banana plantations. We managed to get enough food for the family and sold the rest. We lived like everyone else around us; many people depended upon cattle for milk and small-scale farming.

I had five children. The eldest, Rudahusha, was born in 1982, he was in year five at the time of the Genocide. Then Rumanzi was born in 1984, he was in year three; the third, Uwamungu, was born in 1986 and he was in year two. Only three were at school. The fourth child, a girl named Muhimpundu, was born in 1988 and the youngest, Gatambara, was only one year and seven months old when the Genocide began. My husband and I had a good relationship and when there were problems our in-laws always helped to sort them out. More than anything else, we had great hopes for our children and we looked forward to a better future once our children had finished school.

During the Genocide

The genocide found me in Gasabo district living on a hill called Ruhango. On the 7th April we heard that Habyarimana's plane had been brought down. People were coming to Ruhango from Nyagasambu, Kabuga, Gasozi and all over because they knew that Ruhango had many Tutsis and no one would dare attack us. The *Interahamwe* did not start attacking Tutsis immediately on April 7th but when the killing did start we hid in a local sorghum plantation, later moving to a school in Ruhango. The school and a nearby church were filled with Tutsis seeking refuge. The

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men tried to protect the women and children inside from attacks by the militia and Presidential Guards, but to no avail. They burnt the buildings down.

We then saw a group of other people carrying clubs and machetes. We gathered together and men and boys made a barricade to protect women and children. They hailed stones at the Interahamwe to stop them advancing. They managed to hold them off until the 15th April when killings started. Soldiers came and started firing at the crowds. We ran in different directions, many people fell and then came the *Interahamwe* in large numbers like so many like ants. They started killing and hitting anyone in their way. There were people everywhere, in the school, in the church, in the parish grounds.

There were no less than 16,000 corpses found at the scene. They killed all day and all night, you could hear children crying, mothers yelling and many people in agony, it was scene out of this world. Cows were mixing with people and mooing in confusion. The situation was beyond imagination. I try not to remember what happened. When I think about the Genocide I feel mentally ill and sometimes call out to God to take the thoughts away. The whole experience was very frightening, no words can explain. I was with my husband and children. I don't know how my husband died but I think it must have been during the first shootings. He had joined the barricade to protect us and I was told that when the shooting began everyone ran, but some were shot. Maybe he fell somewhere nearby but there were so many corpses, heaped up like rubbish, that it was impossible to identify anyone.

We stayed hiding in the classroom; I hid with my children in some water pots. Then shooting began all around us; when it ceased, the children ran to hide outside the classroom, but I remained in the school. Grenades were being thrown into classrooms and bodies were bouncing around me and exploding into pieces. Later there was calm when the shooting stopped. The children returned to the classroom, but my first-born did not return; I knew he was dead, but I do not know where or how he died.

That evening, when the killers left, I told my children that we should go but I didn't know where to. I thought of hiding in the bushes, but they didn't seem large enough to hide us all. We spent a night in a bush, but the next day we had nowhere to go, so we went back to the corpses at the school. They had killed more people during the night; some were half dead, others were crying in agony, or wandering aimlessly in the compound. Then the Interahamwe returned again. Among those killed was my younger sister, and the baby she was carrying on her back was alive, crying in deep distress. I wondered how I would carry her with my own baby. I was searching for a spare cloth to carry her, but cows were walking among the corpses and one of them stepped on my sister's baby. She died. Meanwhile men with machetes were scanning bodies, killing anyone who still had any breath left. I was lying among the corpses with my children. Before they reached us, there were skirmishes outside - people were looting bags of rice, sugar and other goods from a shop nearby. The killers went out to see what was happening, leaving my children and me. I think we were the only ones who had escaped injury so far. When the killers left I ran out with the baby I

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was carrying on my back and the second last-born. I didn't see my other two children again. We managed to escape in the confusion and sought shelter in the home of an old man who lived nearby. He could shelter us for only one night because his home was full of many other Tutsis in hiding.

I went to hide in a banana plantation and then in the bush, but after a time our thirst forced us to go to a nearby home to seek water. That is where we met our fate. I remembered a family that had died but their children had survived. I went to hide there, but there was no one there, the house had been burnt down. We hid in the kitchen, we were hungry and tired and the killers were scanning the area. My daughter was shivering, she asked me to take her to sit in the sun. I did, and the killers saw us. I think I was deaf or confused, I didn't see or hear them coming. I had heard a group of killers passing by screaming and running. I heard them say, "is there no-one in this house?" Then a voice shouted, "what do you mean there is no-one here, isn't that a person?" He told me to come to the front of the house. I told him I couldn't. He came and kicked me, I fell and he kicked me again. I kept falling, but managed to pick up my baby, he kept kicking me and dragged me to a nearby house. I think I wasn't moving fast enough for them, so he grabbed my youngest child and cut him in two, throwing him away. The person who killed my baby is called Sebuyinja; I heard that he died but I don't know how. He was our neighbour.

The militia took us to our place of death and there I was hit and beaten until there was no life left in me. Then my last child was hit with a club on the head and she died. I don't know who hit her. There were about 40 people. All my children were now dead. I thought, I am short and I have a big nose, maybe I can tell them they are mistaken I am Hutu. I called out, telling them that I was Hutu and that they had made a mistake. They told me to look up and when I lifted my head, I was hit with a machete on my forehead. I fell on a sharp object which cut my throat. I felt as though they had poured water on me, slowly I lost consciousness; I don't know what they did with me after that.

I don't know how long I was unconscious for. All I know is that I awoke to hear birds singing. I heard my child crying, they had not killed her when she was hit with a club. I heard her say, 'please mum give me some water to drink please'. I couldn't understand what was happening, I imagined her sleeping in her normal bed, I tried to speak to her but my tongue was not moving. I couldn't recall the events and when I tried to remember I got confused. Meanwhile I could hear my daughter crying in agony. Eventually I remembered that I was hit with a machete. I couldn't recall my daughter being hit, but I guessed she might be hurt. I told her to try and gather her energy and go to the neighbour's house where we had left a basin full of water but neither of us could stand. I kept sliding back and falling. It had rained and we were covered with mud mixed with blood. We crawled and managed to get to the neighbour's house and drink the water. While there, our neighbour's children found us at their house, they mocked me saying 'this thing is supposed to have died, they looked for it to bury it and couldn't find it'. They were three young boys about fourteen to sixteen years, they tried to kill me although one of them was against it but I left.

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I went to a woman friend to find refuge. When she saw me she shouted out, “didn’t you say she was dead, now she is here still walking and dragging her child?” There were only women in the neighbourhood, the men were away on a killing spree. The woman sent her son to torment me. I passed her house and went and sat in a trench nearby, the boy pulled thorny trees and hit me with them straight in my wound. He was laughing saying “you are rotten you stink of maggots”. I don’t know where I got the energy from but I got up and walked on with my child, I didn’t know I had lost my eye. I ran into the militia again but this time they were throwing things at me and one of them went deep down the cut that was on my neck. They dug a hole to bury me but were tired and opted to leave me alone since they did not imagine that I would survive. I managed to get back to my home where there was rainwater that had collected. By this time my child was dying. She drank some water and immediately died. Dogs started coming near, I feared they would eat me alive. The dogs came and dragged her body away and I got out of that place because the dogs had started dragging my legs too. I moved away, and watched as they ate and crushed every bone in my child’s body. Pigs came too; they kept passing my child’s skull around while I watched. I went back to drink water and decided to stay and wished that somebody would come and finish me off. I shouted all day till I fell asleep.

Some young girls who were hiding in a nearby bush uprooted cassava tubes and brought them for me to eat. They managed to get to the place where the RPF soldiers were and they told me my relatives to come to my rescue but when they got to me, I told them I was alive. They put me in a wheelbarrow but they were threatened and so they left me there. Thankfully, local Twas took me in, washed all the maggots off me, gave me clothes to wear and fed me till the RPF soldiers took me away.

After the Genocide

I was taken to Nyagasambu Health Centre but due to lack of equipment I was moved to Rwamagana Hospital. I weighed just 29kgs at the time, so thin that I looked no older than a nine year old. Soon though I started to learn to walk again. I spent a number of months going to the Ndera Mental Hospital. Fellow survivors saw to it that I received food. My nephew stayed with me in hospital, and he gave me shelter in his partially built house. I still relied on big sticks to move around, but I managed to gain some weight. I still could not chew hard food, until I had an operation on my jaw.

One of my eyes is still damaged and I cannot see at all with it. I do not have teeth on my lower jaw, but I am slowly beginning to hear again.

I live now on the AVEGA estate in Nyagasambu. Joining AVEGA has helped me a great deal because I now realise that I am not alone in enduring the effects of Genocide. I must live with the damage, and by accepting my new circumstances I will live longer.

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Recently released *gacaca* prisoners who confessed to killing in my hometown told me where they buried my two older children. We found many bodies, which we recently buried. I can't get over the grief and sorrow of losing my children. I am disabled, and instead of having my husband or children here to help me, I am all alone. I fetch my water, firewood, I go to the market alone. I try not to think about my life because it hurts so much. I only have to look at myself in the mirror and see a legacy of the Genocide. The scars on my face and neck and the scars in my heart remind me every day of what happened.

AVEGA and Solace Ministries try to help me but I often wonder how long it will be before I die? I can't keep begging and I have now found out I am diabetic. Despite all my problems, without AVEGA I would not have survived. Giving me a house was the best gift. Whether I am sad, hungry, sick or grieving I have a safe space where I can put my head down and cry. Sometimes I ask God to take me and end my pain.

There is no need to give me money as now I get confused adding up sums. I think I have a mental problem. I can't trade, I can't cultivate land, I don't know how I will survive. I promised God I will not beg but I don't have energy to keep going.

There is relative security in the village where I have a house. I am sad to see a home that had more than 10 people, now with two children with no adult or mothers. I know am not alone and I thank God that I have made it this far.