

This is the testimony of Phillipe, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide

We were a large family at home; my extended family. When the genocide started, I was only six years old. The killers came and first killed my parents and an uncle. Another uncle of mine threw me over the hedge into the neighbour's yard and that is how I survived the first encounter with the killers. I heard my parents scream as they were hacked down with machetes and *udufuni* (small hoes).

I escaped and hid for some time with neighbouring kids, but the *interahamwe* chased us out of hiding. Together we requested to pray before they killed us. In the middle of the prayer I ran for my life and the killers took off after me. Since I had a clear lead on them, I fell into a deep ditch that had been dug specifically to throw the bodies of the slain Tutsis - I was out of their sight. They did not know where I was so they decided to leave. One of my younger uncles had seen me falling into the pit and he came to my rescue; his entire family had been killed. He told me he had nowhere to take me since he was on the run himself.

I hid until the RPF invaded. One of the liberating soldiers looked after me. His family had been killed alongside mine. My maternal grandmother learnt I had survived and then looked after me. But in 1998 she died too. We had been living together just the two of us. She had no other family as they had all been killed in the genocide. I was the only surviving relative and upon her death, another distant uncle who had survived took me in. We are still living together now.

When I returned to school, we always had difficulty paying for books and my uniform, which affected my marks. But when I was brought together with other survivors, it helped me open up and to talk about my past. I came home happier and more positive about things.

I know the people who killed my family; my parents, three brothers and a sister. I would forgive them because there is nothing I can do now to bring them back; but it also depends on the way they ask for this forgiveness.

We now live more at peace. Many of my friends who survived still have trauma problems; but together we help each other out when we can.

I would like to be a construction engineer but I do not have the money yet to go to university. My ultimate plan is to study hard and develop myself. I would also like to see a more stable Rwanda that is no threat to children; a Rwanda where there will be no more genocide.

Today's testimony reading marks the 17th Anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, in support of survivors like Phillipe.