

Bearing Witness to the Rwanda Genocide

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Good evening everyone. My name is Eugenie Mukeshimana. I was born and raised in Rwanda. I left my country in December of 2001, to come to school in America. Rwanda is a very tiny country and I grew up in a very rural area. Coming here to talk to you tonight reminded me of Rwanda. In Rwanda, we have hills—many hills. It was refreshing to be able to see trees and hills like you have here—it reminded me of home.

Allow me to share with you a few things about Rwanda. It is probably the most densely populated nation in Africa. Today, we have the highest number of women in government in the world. The weather in Rwanda is summer all the year round from January to December. So, don't worry if you want to travel to Rwanda. One thing you won't need to change is the weather. As you know, we struggle here in America to put environmental policies in place. You will be surprised to learn that in Rwanda if you go to a shop you will not find any plastic bags. If you travel to Rwanda they will search you at the airport to see if you have any plastic bags. Even a very tiny little thing like a plastic bag—you're not allowed to bring it into the country. It's taken from you at the airport. Part of what is happening in Rwanda today is that we are starting to realize that we have to take care of the land, because we can only survive if the land is good.

And also, I think we cannot overlook the fact that two days ago it was the eighteenth anniversary of the genocide. Having gone through the genocide, we do understand, to some degree, what happens when somebody is crying for help and nobody shows up. I can tell you that Rwanda was the first country to offer peace keeping soldiers to help in the Darfur region of the Sudan. We understand that what is important is that other countries act, come forward, and say "I'm going to stand with you." Our actions in Sudan led to other countries becoming involved. We went because we couldn't just stand by, doing nothing.

Life is not bad, even though the houses are tiny. People grow vegetables, so they don't need to go to the market every day. And then, occasionally, they go to the market to buy the things that they need. There's no electricity in many homes, but most people today have a cell phone. And somebody somewhere not far from your home will have a business. Maybe providing solar panel energy so they can make money providing electricity for cell phones. This is necessary, as Rwanda does not have a whole landline infrastructure, because it would be too expensive for the country. Cell phones are also useful

because you can send money to somebody else without leaving your home. So, in some ways, Rwanda doesn't really fit as the typical poor country. There are a lot of things that are happening in the country that you would never expect.

On a daily basis, you see people walking everywhere going about their business. They farm as their main income, and they grow everything they need for food. But of course, this is only possible because the weather is good for agriculture year round. The government is starting to look into ways to improve farming methods, sometimes advising on crops that people plant so that they can make the most money.

The other thing that we associate with Rwanda is conflict, and now we are going to talk about genocide. A long, long time before the genocide, the cows decided who was Hutu and who was Tutsi. It all came down to the number of cows you had. That's it. We're not ethnic groups. People were seen as Tutsis based on the number of cows they had, and even though the cows would be considered a sign of wealth, it had nothing to do with money. The Tutsis had cows. They were vegetarian. They could only drink the milk and use the butter. The Hutus who grew most of the food crops that we ate had to trade the food with the Tutsis to get the milk and the butter. They also traded for skins to make clothes as we're talking about a time when clothes had not been introduced in the country yet. But owning a cow was very significant beyond trade, because the more cows you had the more beautiful women you could have as wives. To ask for a bride, you needed to pay many cows. If you didn't own them, you could not marry her. So, by accumulating cows you became powerful, you had many wives and children. You know, we're not talking about investment. People lived the same kind of life, and they ate the same kind of food. Those people with more cows had more prestige, but it didn't really make people feel that unequal. So that's why historically, you don't see conflict or fighting between the Hutus and Tutsis. They never really clashed, because there was nothing to fight about. That's the way the system was set up; everyone had a role to play and it worked out pretty fine. After the Belgians came to the country, they dismantled that whole system, left the power in the hands of the Tutsis who had the cows, and that changed the way people dealt with each other.

I think we placed a high value on poetry in the old traditional culture. So, our history was passed down through poetry and oral tradition, which is how Rwandans know our history. To understand the history and culture of Rwanda, it is important to speak the language. I have read some books on the history of Rwanda written by outsiders who did not understand our language—Kinyawanda. I can only imagine the difficulties of trying to write a book about a country for which you don't speak the language.

Now, I told you that the Hutus and Tutsis were not always enemies. They got along pretty well, because identity at the time was really based on social class. Hutus and Tutsis were not so much ethnic groups as they were social classes. You could lose your house because you had done something wrong, really terrible, and you had to pay restitution, so you paid with your house and cows. If you lost your home and cattle you were not a Tutsi anymore; you were a Hutu. And whoever got your cows might, if they already had a few cows of their own, move into the upper class and become Tutsis. So it was possible to switch back and forth, depending on the circumstances. But when the Belgians came, they decided that it was necessary to make those distinctions clear. They imported a racial system from Europe, and they decided to draw those lines between Tutsis and Hutus based on physical features. It came down to your nose and to your height. That's it. If your nose was shaped a little bit narrower and longer, you were Tutsi, regardless of how many cows you had. If your nose was a little broader and you were shorter, too bad. You are Hutu.

The Belgians took this a step farther by introducing an ID card with a picture of the person on it. The first line on the ID card was your ethnic affiliation. During the genocide, if you showed this ID card to anybody, this was a death sentence. There was no discussion or anything. You were dead. Of course, some families, knowing the discrimination would go on for quite some time, tried to switch identities on the ID card, usually through bribing local officials. People would still know who was Hutu and who was Tutsi during the genocide, though. Even those who switched and had a different ID card that said they were Hutus, if in reality they were Tutsis, they were killed because neighbors said, "They're the great-grandkids of so-and-so and so-and-so." It wasn't possible to be protected by changing your ID card. Also during the genocide people did not really look at your ID card. They believed they knew the typical characteristics of Tutsis and Hutus. By the time they found you or you showed up at a roadblock, they would just look at your face and your height, and that would be enough to pull you to the side, and they would kill you.

So, how did the genocide start? The genocide started because the president of Rwanda was killed. A lot of presidents get killed or are victims of coups, but they don't result in genocides. In fact, on the same plane as the president of Rwanda was the president of Burundi, a country that is right next to Rwanda. The two countries have the same exact social make-up. They have Hutus and they have Tutsis, and they have a small minority group of Batwa, yet they did not have genocide. We had the genocide. Why? Simply because we planned genocide in Rwanda, and in Burundi they did not plan genocide. The death of the president was an excuse to start the genocide in Rwanda. We saw it coming. I was twenty-three years old when the genocide happened, and it wasn't a secret. They had been pretty outspoken about all the planning, which had been printed in the papers. There was one propaganda outlet that had been talking about killing the Tutsis for about two years. Of course, how are you going to make me or anybody

believe that your next door neighbors believe in what they were saying in those papers? In Rwanda, when you said “propaganda” it meant that somebody was just talking, but they weren’t actually going to put the talk into action. So, we took the propaganda really for propaganda. We didn’t believe that they could kill people the way they did. And a lot of people have asked, “If you knew that the genocide was coming and it was not a secret, why didn’t you guys leave?” We didn’t see ourselves as potential victims. We didn’t do anything. The politicians, the people who had the money, were usually the ones who would flee. They had the means to flee, but we didn’t really. People who lived in Rwanda didn’t believe that this genocide was going to happen.

Also, Tutsis had a relationship with our neighboring countries, and this is true for most of the Tutsis who lived in Rwanda. The reason being that 1994 was not the first time Tutsis were killed. The killing started back in 1959 when the Tutsis began asking for independence. The Belgian policies had favored the Tutsis and pitted them against the Hutus. In 1959, many Tutsis died. At that time they killed the men, but they did not kill women and they did not kill children. They would come to the house and say, “You have to leave. We don’t want you here. It’s over.” And they escorted them all the way to the borders with Uganda, Congo, and Burundi. So many Tutsis went into exile in 1959.

The families that stayed in the country remained because of the way good Hutus protected them. So, my family and other average Tutsi families that lived in Rwanda always felt that there was that protection. They worked hard to maintain those relationships because it was not always easy in school, or to get into school. I remember when I was growing up my parents made it very clear to me that if anybody became angry toward me I had to walk away. Even if I was not at fault, I was not supposed to say anything bad, just walk away. I was not supposed to show that I was angry or anything. Just walk away and go home. That was almost like a coping strategy that we had. Many children in my particular situation never actually experienced any physical threat, because they grew up in a very progressive area. But a lot of other kids that I met in high school had these stories from the places they grew up. I don’t know how they lived in those places for so long, but the physical aggression toward Tutsis has long been there.

Discrimination remained rampant. It wasn’t enough to get dressed and go to high school. I had to score high enough to get past the cap, because there was a set number of Tutsis allowed into high school. You filled out the application to go to high school, and you had to claim your ethnic group so the government could select who to choose and who to toss to the side. It was hard to go to high school, but it was extra hard if you were a Tutsi. You had to do exceptionally well to be able to get a seat in high school. When I was growing up, less than five percent of all elementary school graduates could go on to high school. It was very, very tough, but that’s what you had to do, so we did it. Our parents invested in all kinds of relationships so that we could live a normal life. So when the genocide happened, we felt that

we had invested so much in the communities that we would not be harmed. It's hard to believe that somebody could do what they did during the genocide.

We were reassured because there was the UN peace-keeping mission in the country. When the peace-keeping mission came, we felt that we had more protection. We had the oversight of the international community. Those Belgian soldiers who came into the country ended up coming to my high school, and we saw them every day. We felt really protected. I had a close friend in high school whose parents, at some point, had taken them all out of the country early. They were gone for three months, but maybe three weeks before the genocide started, they came back because everybody was saying that the peace-keeping troops are here, the peace accord is being signed, and then there will be peace in Rwanda.

So we were caught by surprise on April 7, 1994. Rwandans realized that it was bad when it was too late for us to escape. I remember on April 6, at night when I was home, we lost electricity. I was married. I was actually eight months pregnant, and we lived in a neighborhood that was not fancy. We weren't rich by any stretch of the imagination, but it was fine except that, because we didn't have any very rich person living in our neighborhood, we kept losing electricity. There wasn't enough electricity for the whole city, so they would have to decide which neighborhood would lose electricity for the night. It was our turn on April 6. We didn't know that the president had been shot down. We didn't hear any broadcasting on the radio, nothing. The next morning when we woke up—we live in a very busy section—there were no cars on the street. It wasn't the first time, so we thought maybe there was some negotiation or demonstration going on downtown, because we were very close to downtown. We thought, in two hours, everything will be clear, and we'll go to work. We waited for two hours. It didn't happen. Three hours. Then it happened, and you started seeing a few cars on the street, but they were military cars or even civilian cars with military people inside. I told my husband that I thought something wrong was going on, and he said, "No, no, no. There's probably, you know, all those violent demonstrations." We knew there was a group of people that were not happy that the president was ready to sign a peace accord. They had already published that he had sold-out the country. He was going to stay the president, but some of his ministers and some of the military officers would lose their jobs.

We started considering the idea that it was a military coup. But the thought of a military coup still didn't concern me. We were not on the street. I was not a politician, so I should have been safe. It wasn't until midday that we found out that the president had been killed, and that the national radio had announced that everyone had to stay at home. That's why there was nobody on the street. But the propaganda radio station, RTLM, started broadcasting messages saying that the president was killed by Tutsis and, therefore, all Tutsis had to die. Their message was clear: "Go after them. You know who they are. We don't need to name names; you know them. Grab your tools. Go to war." Look at the language: "tools," "go to war." People understood what was supposed to happen, and they understood which tools

they were supposed to take. It was an easy job in Kigali because they had distributed arms. There had been distribution of machetes. We don't need a machete in Kigali. It's a city, and a machete is a tool used for agriculture, for cutting trees. All of a sudden they had these new machetes, imported tools for agriculture. But the people who got them had purchased the machetes for killing people.

A neighbor ran into our house and said, "The president has been killed. They're telling people to go after neighbors who are Tutsis." We said, "Now what do we do?" We started going down a list of names of people we could go to, but we realized that we couldn't really go far because there was no transportation. We were stuck, and true enough, at about two in the afternoon, a group came to our house. These are people who were our neighbors. I saw those guys almost every morning because we took the bus from the same stop. I talked to them. They talked to me. I knew them. I didn't know their names, but I knew their faces. So, they showed up at my house with guns, machetes, hand grenades, you name it.

And when we opened the gate, they said, "Do you know what we're here for?"

"No."

"Well, you are Tutsis. We're here to kill you."

"Why?"

"Because you guys have killed our Hutu president."

"We didn't do it."

"Of course—we know. We saw you last night coming home. You can't do it. You're nobody. But you are Tutsis."

So, we negotiated. We gave them money. Finally, they left and said they would be back.

Sure enough, a few hours later, we got a second group. A few guys from the first group were in the second group and they said, "You know what the deal is." We gave them money. We didn't have to negotiate peace; on receiving money they left, but said they would be back. Around six in the evening we got a third group. We gave them money, whatever money we had left. And the same amount wasn't enough because some guys from that third group had been on the first and the second groups, and they knew how much money we had given out. They said, "Well, it's not enough." So, we ended up opening the house and saying, "Take it...you can come in and take some of the belongings to make up for the difference," which they were happy to do, and they entered the house in front of our eyes. This is the very first day of the genocide on April 7, 1994.

After they left, we started this debate over whether to stay at the house. We didn't have any more money. We didn't have any valuables that they would take if they came back, because they said they would be back. So, we decided to leave the house at night. We went to a neighboring Hutu family who were very close friends. When we got to the house, the wife was very willing to help. The husband was not, but he wasn't at home. He came home later after we had eaten dinner. We were just sitting, talking,

and waiting for him to come home. When he came home, the very first thing he said was, “What are you doing here?” We thought he was joking. We started going through the whole narrative of what happened during the day, and he said again, “What are you doing here?” So, we now had to explain that we were really seeking protection and that we could not stay at our house. We left with the clothes we had on, because we thought it was maybe for a night, and he said, “No. It doesn’t matter.” Well, we had been good friends, but we were Tutsis, so it was awkward. He said, “We can’t be friends anymore, and I can’t do anything for you. In fact, you have to leave my house now or I’m going to call my friends to do the job.” We got up, left the house, and went to a nearby high school.

We spent the night in the high school. The next morning, people came to the high school. Actually, they were not looking for Tutsis because they didn’t expect people to hide in the school, but they were after some computers that were there. The computers were right next to our room, but they didn’t check our room; they just took the computers and left. But during the day, we started hearing screams and some houses were being torched. We could hear more and more movement on the street with sporadic gun fire. We started thinking, “If this is not a military coup or if it goes on for two more days, what are we going to do? We don’t have water in this high school. We don’t have any food. We’re not sure if we can go back to that friend of ours. We don’t know anybody else in the neighborhood we can trust and go to their house.” We didn’t know what to do, so we sat in this school for the whole day. By the evening—I had never been hungry—I was hungry. We decided to go back to the same family that had said, “Well, we can’t help you.” The thinking was that maybe they had talked about it. We could not really believe that they actually meant that they couldn’t help us.

We went back, and for the first time we really talked about what was going on. We got the confirmation that all the things that we had thought were just propaganda were true. He basically said, “Get this straight. You’ve been so naïve. You know that we know the list of Tutsis in the neighborhood. You know that they told you that they would kill you, and this time, no one will survive. In 1959, they failed to kill all the Tutsis. All the women and children, they left, and they were escorted to the borders. Look what happened. They went to Uganda. After forty years, they come back fighting, you know? They had more kids. This time make no mistake: kill everybody. It’s just a matter of time.”

So, we negotiated with him. We said, “Look, you’re saying that you can’t help us because your name is next to our name. Give us the name of a friend who might hide us. Find another family whose name is not next to our name, and we can worry about what is going to happen afterward.” He agreed, actually, and I ended up with a family, and my husband went to another family. And so we got separated on the second day of the genocide.

The family that ended up hiding me I hadn’t known, but it was a very simple family. They only had a very tiny house. There wasn’t any money involved or anything. We got in, and they instructed me

to hide in a place where they showed me. It happened to be underneath the children's bed. The space was very small, because beds are just not made to leave that amount of space underneath. I had to squeeze and get underneath that bed and they hid me with additional stuff. I don't know what, but they had to make sure that the kids didn't see me, because they might tell the neighbors. It was very common during the genocide that people would spy on the neighbors' kids to find out whether they were hiding anybody. The reason for hiding me in that room was that, based on the propaganda radio station, it said that anybody caught hiding a Tutsi could suffer the same fate as the Tutsi family they were hiding. There were people who were killed because they were protecting other people. They ran a real risk and they hid me. They fed me when they could. It would take about ten minutes. They would have to get the kids out of the bedroom, out of the house, lock the gate, and that cooperation would take about five to seven minutes. So, it's get out, eat very quickly, drink water, use the bathroom, go back in, and all that happened between five to seven minutes. If we don't have enough time, the kids come back, banging on the door, saying that the neighbors don't want to play with them, and then I don't eat that day. Things like taking a shower, washing your clothes—not going to happen for three months.

Sometimes the families that were not actively participating in the killing would be targets for systematic searches, because it was suspected that some people who were not yet killed were probably hiding in the neighborhood. You could not leave your neighborhood because there were road blocks everywhere. So, if they see your name on the list, and they haven't crossed off your name, it means that you're still alive, and you are in the neighborhood. They have to find you, and so they started targeting those families who were not taking part in the killing. True enough, the family that was hiding me did not go out to kill. I heard the guys who came to the house say, "We know you're hiding people. If the person we want is not the one you are hiding, we're not going harm the ones that you have." The family had no choice but to call all of us into the living room.

By the time I got to the living room there were four other women there. I don't know where they had been hiding because the family only had two tiny bedrooms. We all found ourselves in the living room and this policeman who was leading a group of militiamen asked for money. I didn't have any money, not even one penny, but he looked at me and said, "You know, you are pregnant, so you're going to pay for two people." He was asking for something like \$500 and I didn't have that money, so he said, "Yeah, well, if that's the case, then you're going to have to face the machete." The family that was hiding us said that I was a relative of theirs, that I didn't have an ID card, and that I was a little bit Tutsi, but since my dad was Hutu, this made me a Hutu and not a Tutsi. Even though I look like a Tutsi, I was not really a Tutsi. They bargained, but the policeman said no. The only reason I survived that encounter is because a group of people came running past saying that people were breaking into a very expensive store and taking good stuff away. They needed the policeman's help to lead them to the store so that they could

get the goodies before they were all gone. So, the policeman turns around and says: "Well, you wait here. I'm going to take care of that business and I'll be back."

I didn't have any place to go. The four other women, unfortunately, were from the neighborhood. So now, all the people from the neighborhood came to the house because they wanted to see if they knew the victims. They wanted to know who was hiding in the house. They recognized the women and asked them what they wanted to do. The women said, "Well, we prefer to go back home, and you can kill us in our house." So, they went back to their house, and of course, they were killed there.

The family that was hiding me told the people that they should take me to the local official, because they cannot confirm that I'm not Hutu. So, they allowed the family to take me to that official woman's house. They knew the neighbors would just follow me to that house, which happened to be a few feet away. The neighbors waited outside the official's house because I think that was the routine: bring someone to that local official woman, and then wait outside until the person is sent back out to the killing site.

Meanwhile, they took me to the back of the house. They called the woman out and she greeted me and the guy who brought me. They had a very brief conversation, and then the official went into her house and said, "Well, I know this woman," and she should live here and be protected. Her mother said, "Fine, but make sure you keep her away from your brothers." She had teenage boys who were going out to kill, like everybody else. In the evening, the funny thing in this house was that when they came home from a killing expedition, they would have dinner just like any family, eating and discussing what happened during the day. The boys would go through the stories of people they killed, a very graphic description of what they specifically did. They told how they chained the victims before they killed them. Sometimes, the mother could not remember the names, so they had to go through the description of who the victims were. The boys would say, "Remember, they were in so-and-so's second grade class or they were here for so-and-so's confirmation." It was very intimate. They went after specific people, and sometimes they came home very angry that somebody else got to kill the person they wanted to kill before they got there.

From those conversations at the dinner table, I picked up the names of places where the killers couldn't go because people there were protected. If you have seen *Hotel Rwanda*, that was one place where killers couldn't go in. It was one of the places they kept complaining about. There was also a church called St. Famille; they were complaining that there were some people who escaped to that church and they couldn't get inside because there were two UN peace-keeping soldiers who were always sitting outside. So I learned that the church was safe, and the hotel was safe, but I couldn't figure out how to get there. I hid under the bed, of course, and the only way to keep the boys out of the house was to bribe them with alcohol brought to their mother by the people who had lost their ID cards. It was a bribe, so she

could give them temporary passes. The alcohol kept the boys out of the house, at the neighbors, and they would get drunk, stay there overnight, come back in the morning sometimes to get their machetes, or change into new clothes, and go out to kill.

The mother reported to the local officials in the evenings on how many people she thought they had killed. How much more ammunition do you need? If there is a house they couldn't get in because it was too strong, they would ask for military reinforcement; a tank would fire at the building and get the people who were hiding there. At no point had they considered any "what ifs" such as, "What if this genocide doesn't end the way we planned it? What if somebody else comes and stops it?" There were quiet rumors floating around that the American army was in Uganda, and they would come in to stop the killing.

The organizers of the genocide had methods for keeping up the pace of killing. One method they actually used to encourage the killing was to call in to the radio station, the propaganda radio station, and say: "So-and-so has killed fifty people today, and therefore, he's a hero today, and he's getting a house. He's getting a car." This aimed at making a competition of killing and get across the idea: are you going to be the hero tomorrow? Some guys would get up the next morning and work really hard to become the hero. But of course, there was no such thing as a car or house. It was just a lie to encourage whoever thought or felt that they should do more and kill faster.

If you looked at the places where they killed people, you can't miss the fact that people were killed in sacred places. Mainly the church, because back in 1959, the people who went to the churches were not harmed. So this time people went back to the churches, and of course once they got there, it was different. This time they were not protected, and so that's why, among the genocide memorials sites in Rwanda today, the biggest ones are in churches because that's where most people were killed. Most others were killed in schools because the government, at some point, relayed a message that said, "We have stopped killing, so all the people who are still alive, you are encouraged to go to nearby public places. We can only protect you if you are all together, because we can't protect you if you are in different places." People went to these areas and after they lived safely for a day or two, then they got their kids from where they had been hiding. Of course the organizers of the genocide just wanted to make sure that everyone was in that location, and then they proceed with the killing.

It was happening during the day, and I hid in those places. Some people would hide me, but at the same time go out to kill. This woman who hid me also sentenced people to die every day, calling for more arms and for killing people. That's what she did, and her daughter lived in the house, and I was stuck with her. On a couple of days, she actually asked me to do her hair. She would ask me if the way she was dressed looked appropriate, and she was only dressed to kill. That is what she did on a daily basis, but asking me—a potential victim—how she looked, why would I care how she looked? Honestly! But those

people didn't think that way. I hid in her house until she decided to get rid of me, because the daughter was bored and she really couldn't keep me there. So she kicked me out of the house. She sent me to a room nearby, and she said, "Well, I will make sure you get food." Of course, it was nice of her to tell me to leave the house. I did ask about the hotel. She said, "No, you can't go to the hotel. You don't have money, and we have to go get a military officer, a high-ranking military officer, to come to escort you from here, because the roadblocks leading to the hotel are pretty tough. Regular soldiers can't do it, and you have to have money to pay the officer. When you get to the hotel, you can't live there for free. You have to pay as well." That is what most people did. So, the hotel option was off the table. I asked about the church, and she said: "Well, I would have to drive you to that church, but you look too Tutsi. If your nose was a little bit different . . ." People are very tall in Rwanda, so my height wasn't the problem; it was my nose. So she said, "I can't take you there. I will be setting a bad example."

Instead she took me to that little house. I spent the whole day there. There was no space to lie down. They used to use this as a toilet until they got plumbing. But then people walked through the houses and started putting all the junk in that area. So, I spent a whole day pushing stuff to the side so I could find a place to stand, but I was very tired and I couldn't really stand for too long. Still, I made it comfortable enough so I could sit down. That evening, actually, I went into labor and I had my baby.

Oh, yeah, that's war.

You know, that is what is different between a woman and a man in war time. Things like that do happen, and the baby was not going to wait just because the conditions were not right. It was my first time, and I never thought that I could find myself in that situation, but she came. Don't worry . . . she's alive. She survived. She's a junior in high school now, and whatever I did worked to keep her alive.

I never would have taken her to a place I knew was a killing site. I didn't have money to pay bribes. They made me an offer. One of those guys with the hero designation in the neighborhood showed up at the killing site—it was amazing to see how leadership emerged amongst the killing groups. The one who killed the most became the boss regardless of any other skills. That was the only basis they had to judge. He said the Hutu military was not doing well on the battlefield against the Rwandan Patriotic Front. If I had information that I could give to him about the fighting, he would shoot me and my daughter. We would not have to face machetes. I would have done anything not to face the machete. I was the only person who was brought into that area that morning. They said I looked so terrible that it would have been bad luck if they killed me first. So, they made us sit and wait for a better-looking victim, basically. That was what they said.

So, this guy showed up and said that even though I looked like a Tutsi, I also looked like someone who might have had a good life before—I don't know how he came up with that—therefore, I might have the information. I said, "Yes, I do." I had no information, but you know, being pregnant

during the genocide was one thing, because I was thinking that the baby was dead, and I don't have to go through who's going first. But after I had the baby, it was harder because you have to think about those things, and that was why, when he said, "Do you have information?" I said, "Yes." I didn't know what kind of information he was looking for, but he said, "Okay." He took me to a nearby house, and what was in the house were the computers they took from the school in the neighborhood, the first big school they attacked on the first day of the genocide. He didn't know what those computers were. He thought he had stolen some for the mission, and I told him they were computers. My husband was a computer guy, and I had worked with him on these computers, so I connected one and he immediately, somehow, realized that he was rich.

We started going through other stuff that he had in the house. Some he had stolen from families he had killed, of course, and in the end he said, "Well, I want to live well and eat well. Where did you use to shop?" Rarely did one of them go grocery shopping. They didn't cook. They didn't know how. So I told him where I used to shop and made a shopping list, because he wanted to eat well. Then I would cook for him. He brought the food, I cooked, and I had enough milk for the baby. You know, I got safety, and I had food. The deal was that, in the end, he was going to kill me. Two bullets: one for me, one for the baby. But as the war progressed in Kigali, he started taking those valuables outside of the city, and one of those days, he made a trip and never came back, because they lost the city. That's the only reason I'm alive today. If he had been around, he would have killed me.

Then the genocide was over because the Rwandan Patriotic Front entered the city and all the people who were involved in the killing started leaving. But I was still stuck inside the building because there was a padlock on the door. He wasn't afraid that I was going to escape. He was afraid that someone would break in and take his valuables in the house. After maybe a day or two, I didn't know what was happening. People had disappeared, and I knew that they'd been running, but I didn't know who was in charge or who was around. I couldn't see anything. The soldiers who took over the city started checking every house. They found me, and they told me I was free. I didn't know what to do with my freedom. They said, "Why don't we take you?" They put me in their car. We went back to the house that I used to live in. Everything was gone. Anything people couldn't take, they had piled it up in the yard, and set it all on fire. So, I couldn't stay there. I had a sister who lived in another part of the city. I said, "Well, we can go and check if my sister survived." We went to my sister's and ran into a neighbor woman. She gave me the word that said it all. She said, "If I were you, I would just turn away. Because the people who have killed your sister still live around here, and they think you're dead. You can't live here." So, I turned around.

The question was where do I live now? You had to backtrack through everywhere you had lived to see if you knew any neighbor who might have survived. We started going back to every place I had

lived, and where I was likely to run into a family who had survived. If we used to be neighbors, you just moved in with them. Whenever they had food, you ate. For the very first time, I slept on a mattress, because I'd been sleeping on the floor, and I had no sensation inside of my body. It was just like sleeping on a piece of stone, pretty much. The first time I slept on a mattress, the second day, I got very sick. Really, really sick. There wasn't a hospital to go to. The only place to go to was a military barracks. They didn't have any medication. My body was burning. It was like a fresh wound. Anything that touched me was almost like touching a fresh, open wound. I was really, really cold. I could dip my hand in hot, boiling water and not feel the heat. They took me to the barracks, but they couldn't figure out what was wrong with me. I couldn't sit, lie down, anything. Then two days later it disappeared. I don't know what happened, but I regained sensation in my body.

I found out that my husband had been killed. My dad had been killed, and my aunt and uncles. Basically everybody was gone except for my mom. My mom survived because everyone thought all her family had been killed and they thought she would go crazy and they needed a crazy woman in the street. They had taken over her house. She would have to work for them to be allowed to sleep. After she found out that I was alive, and one of my brothers was alive, and two of my sisters were alive because they were out of the country at the time, she calmed down. She died in 2006 of cancer, but she never really recovered from it all.

By the end, the genocide took about a million people—killed by neighbors, and I was surprised when I came to this country ten years ago that my teachers and my classmates didn't know about it. So, I started pushing and talking about it, because I was angry, and here I am today. I go to schools and talk, and I started an organization to help genocide survivors. And that's pretty much the story. Thank you.