

Name: Françoise (not real name)

I was only thirteen years old when the genocide started.

My father died before the genocide, and my mother took care of all of us 6 children. Before he died, my father used to tell me to not trust everyone, because many people hated us just for being Tutsi. At the time, I didn't understand why he always told me this, but I came to understand during the genocide.

On the morning of the 7th of April 1994, every Tutsi in my area was trembling with fear because they heard that Tutsis were being killed in other parts of the country and that our president Habyarimana had died in a plane crash. We left our house and went to our nearest neighbor who was a man, because we thought that his house would be much safer than ours.

The next day, when my brothers were farming, they saw houses on a nearby hill being set on fire and the inhabitants fleeing. My brothers returned home quickly and we fled that man's place and went to the nearby Roman Catholic Church where many Tutsi families had gathered.

A few days later, a group of *Interahamwe* militia¹ attacked the parish. Young men who were with us fought the *Interahamwe* and we managed to run to another nearby parish. A group of *Interahamwe* militias attacked this place as well. They started to kill people and I lay on top of my younger sister as if I was dead, trying to protect her. But when one of the militia beat me with a club, I screamed and he realized that I was still alive. The other militias were very tired so they told him to take me with him. I sat on the ground and I asked him why he wanted to kill me. He ordered me to follow him and I took my sister by the hand and we followed him.

¹ *Interahamwe*: Kinyarwanda (the local language of Rwanda) for "those who attack together." Refers to a Hutu militia group composed of mainly Hutu youth that was active during the genocide.

On the way, we saw a young girl that I knew, but thirty minutes later, she was killed by a grenade right in front of my eyes. Many Tutsis had gathered at the place we went to, waiting for the “final solution”.

At around eleven that night, a group of *Interahamwe* militias came and picked among us people to kill and young women to rape. They picked me out of the group to rape me: three of the other girls who were also taken were killed after being raped. Even then, I believed, deep inside, that no one would rape me. I was still young for that! But I realized I was wrong when an *Interahamwe* ordered me to take off my clothes. Before I could realize what was happening to me, he ripped my clothes off himself, pushed me on the ground and raped me.

After he finished raping me, two other *Interahamwe* militias raped me. After they were done, one of the militia abducted another girl who he had raped, and forced us to walk with him to his house. On our way to his house, he saw three goats and could not resist taking them. While he was following the goats, I moved quietly and jumped into a small gap near the road and hid there. On the third night, a Tutsi man who was also fleeing joined me in that gap.

The next morning, the man told me that we should go to Burundi where his family was. So we left the gap and moved slowly towards Burundi because I was very weak and thirsty. We finally arrived in a refugee camp in Burundi.

At the refugee camp, I met a woman who took me to her house.

I thought that maybe if I cried for a very long time, I would die, so I used to lock myself in my bedroom and cry for hours and hours.

I did not have the chance to continue my studies because I couldn't afford to.

After the genocide, I met a man who loved me. We had a baby before we married, but he found out that I was HIV-positive² when I got tested and left me.

I tried hard to survive by being a housemaid but I was overwhelmed with having to take care of my child and being HIV-positive so I quit my job.

None of my neighbors knows my real history and I think that it is better for me because if they knew, they would not help me if I have a problem.

I have not yet accepted what happened to me. I think it was too much for the young girl that I was, and I am still suffering from that experience today, at the age of 28. I need to constantly seek medical care for my anti-retroviral medication.³ I feel that my future is really dark.

I do not think that I will ever forgive the people who killed my five brothers and those who raped me. *Gacaca* courts⁴ are a difficult experience that I do not want to have, and so I will never participate. People are being released and they are killing the survivors. Some people say justice means compensation. Maybe. But how can justice compensate broken dreams? How can justice restore broken hearts and bring back the love and care of the loved ones who were killed during the genocide?

We have faced killers. We have known genocide. And we have endured humiliation. I do not think that there is anyone else on earth that deserves what we have gone through. I beg the international community to do whatever they can to prevent this from ever happening again.

² HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV is a virus that attacks the body's immune system and can lead to AIDS. Someone who is diagnosed as being infected with HIV is said to be HIV-positive.

³ Antiretroviral treatment or ARV treatment. Treatment for people living with HIV that works by inhibiting the ability of HIV to reproduce in the body.

⁴ *Gacaca*: Kinyarwanda for "on the grass," referring to the traditional courts of Rwanda. Their mandate evolved after 1994 to adjudicate crimes committed during the genocide.