

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

Before the genocide, life was good. My parents looked after me, and all I had to concentrate on was study. We lived in harmony with neighbours and friends.

When I played at school with friends, they sometimes demanded to know whether I was a Tutsi. That prevented me from being free. It was a sign of things to come.

When the genocide started, I was 13. All the family was forced to flee from our home in Gikongoro. From Kansi, to Kibinza, from Sahera to Tumba, we were constantly on the move. Death followed us. Travelling with a group of refugees like ourselves, we made it to Rango, when our real troubles began. A bus full of soldiers caught up with us. They asked to see our identity cards and concluded “They are snakes from Gikongoro.” They forced us to lie down. We did as we were told without delay. It was then that the attack began, as we were hit with axes, machetes, pick-axes, clubs. They cracked open the head of one of my little brother’s. I didn’t see what they did to my other brother, because he died without receiving any wound. My father’s head was hit with blows from machetes and clubs. I was hit on the head but couldn’t work out what weapon was used. All I knew was that I was in insufferable pain.

With my little sister, Delphine, only two then, I was left for dead. But I managed to escape, carrying her on my back, and we spent five days hiding in a ditch. We lived on whatever we could find. We finally were picked up by RPF soldiers, who took us to an orphanage in Butare. Whenever anyone asked me a question, I could only reply with tears. A teacher there amazingly knew our parents, and helped care for us. She made soup for me because I couldn’t chew other food properly with my teeth. Gradually I got used to it and I was able to speak and eat like the others. I told them everything that had happened to me in the genocide.



The orphanage helped to place us in a foster home, of a doctor called Vincent, a remarkable man who though was from the same areas as my family, did not know my parents. He helped to get me back into primary school, and when Delphine was old enough, she started nursery school. I couldn't speak and that was traumatic for me. I took tranquillisers to help me sleep.

Eventually my uncle was traced, and we were returned to him. Life then became harder, as he did not care for my sister and I – but we had no choice in the matter. With my sister, I ran away and that is how we found Uyisenga N'Manzi. The organisation of orphaned survivors has saved my life. They gave me a house at Kicukiro. I am staying there with my little sister who is now at primary school and my two little brothers who are at secondary school who survived the genocide in Burundi. And so there are four of us. At the time of writing I am also a pupil. I don't know how to thank this association which has done such a lot to rehabilitate me. For all that I thank the Good Lord for Uyisengani N'Manzi and everything it has done.

We don't have anything to give them in turn, but the main thing is that we pray for its members. God is with them and may that always be so.

I wasn't able to find out who killed my parents. But when they died we at least were together. I couldn't bury them because it was impossible to locate them. Our homes were demolished and our cattle slaughtered. But that was then. This is now. I am thankful to have survived, to be living with my sister and two brothers, and to have at least a roof over our heads.

Today's Reading of the Testimonies marks the 15th Anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, in support of survivors like Donatha.