

Freddy Mutanguha

I want to see us build our nation

Before the genocide

My name is Freddy and I was 18 years old at the time of the genocide. I lived with my parents and four sisters in Kibuye. We were all very happy together.



My Mum was the person I loved most in the whole world. I still remember everything she used to do – perhaps because I was by her side all the time. She was a very kind and generous parent, very sociable, with lots of friends. She used to tell me, “Life is about making friends and learning to live with people. When you know how to live with people, you’ll never fail to do anything.” And she would say, “It’s not good to be selfish, you should always share with others.” She didn’t have a lot, but she gave a lot to those she lived with. And now I can see the fruits of her actions. All the people helping me now do it in my Mum’s name. They tell me, “You’ll never lack anything as long as we’re here.”

My father was a very quiet man; he wasn’t very talkative. From what other people have told me about his childhood and education in the seminary school, he showed tolerance with all types of problems. He used to console others by assuring them that, “The first thing is to have faith.” He was reserved and patient. He was never discouraged when he faced difficulties. Those are the things I remember about him.

I had four sisters who were all killed during the genocide – killed in a terrible way, some of them dumped alive in the latrine. Of all my sisters, I remember Angélique best. Sometimes there’s a special bond between two siblings. I was much older than Angélique but we really loved each other. In fact, she would have missed school if I hadn’t taken her myself. I used to run along, carrying her in my arms and she’d tell me she was having lots of fun. I finished primary school when she was just starting. She used to tell me that when other kids at school wanted to fight with her, she felt very safe just knowing I was around. I was everything to her. She trusted me completely and at home she used to tell me all her little secrets.

I remember that I was very boisterous as a child. My Mum would tell other parents that her son was so lively that he was always breaking things in the house! Nothing made me happier than playing football. I joined a senior team when I was still in primary school. Playing football is one of my best memories.

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I have other special memories of the times when my parents got paid. My Mum was a primary school teacher. Whenever she got her pay, she used to ask me to meet her in a place called Rubengera at around 1 p.m. Then she used to buy me milk and cake – I was still a child at the time. When I was at secondary school, she once bought me a bottle of beer, but she didn't let me finish it. She wanted me to know that there are many stages in life, that I had moved to a time when she no longer considered me a child. She could confide in me. She told me lots of things that day.

She talked about the treatment of Tutsis in Rwanda. She told me how she had passed her Ordinary Level Examinations at school, but no Tutsi ever passed those exams again until six years later when she was a teacher at the same school. She said, "I'm the only one who is educated in my whole family. My brothers are intelligent, but their fate is to become cultivators. Hutu children got into schools, but they were no cleverer than my brothers. But Freddy, you'll complete your studies, I can assure you of that. And I'm asking you to take care of your family just as I'm doing." She was supporting her brother Edward at secondary school in Zaire at the time. It was very hard for her to look after our family and his schooling, but she was doing it. She wanted me to know all this, to learn how to behave in such situations.

She went on to say, "I want you to behave like your father. He's one of the people I most appreciate for their patience. I sometimes give him a hard time and I always realise it when it's too late, but he always responds perfectly to the situation. I know you like football," she continued, "but don't let it stop you doing school work." I hadn't done very well in class that year; I'd got 65% whereas normally I got a distinction, 75-85%. She thought it was because of football. "Please, I beg you, nothing must take your attention away from school. You have to complete your studies so you can make something of yourself in the future."

The genocide

My strongest memory of the genocide, the one that hurts me most, is the night of 13 April 1994. That was the day they came to kill my family. I was away from the house, in hiding, but Mum came to find me. She knew I was very hungry because by then nobody could cook any food. There was practically nothing left in the house. By then people had been bribing the hungry *Interahamwe* [Hutu militia] with food – to let them live a few days longer. At home the only thing we had left was beans. Mum knew I didn't like beans and so she brought me some vegetables and passion fruit. She told me, "I couldn't find anything for you to eat... The people I told you about – the ones who don't like us – took everything away from me. I don't even have anything to give my child." Then she added, "Try and eat this, it will be OK. Be strong." Today, passion fruit still reminds me of that last meal my Mum gave me.

I also remember that before she was killed, Mum told me I had to be strong. She said that if my sister and I survived, I had to be a man. Those are the two things still on my heart to this day.

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I was there when the perpetrators came to kill my family. They came saying, "We're tired, we'll take these two fat kids [Freddy and his sister] later." So they took the younger ones; my sister Rosette and I were left behind. We saw them being taken with our own eyes and they were killed not far away. We couldn't see it happening, but we could hear them screaming... They took Mum far away to kill her. Later at night, I went with another boy to find her body. We rushed there and buried her. We simply covered her with soil. So I saw my Mum's body, but not the rest of the family. I just heard my sisters being killed. I didn't see my father killed – people told me about it later.

I know some of the killers very well. One of them wanted to rape my sister, but he didn't succeed. I know the people who took them away. They were our neighbours, among them a man called Benoit who had been our neighbour for years and owned a shop nearby. He was Mum's friend and he even used to lend her money for me to go to school. They got on very well. He was one of the leaders of the group that took them. And there was another young man called Kanani – Mum had been his teacher in primary school. Some people inside the compound tried to fight off the killers, but it was Kanani who held on to Mum when they took her out of the house. Later, he let go of Mum's hand and she ran away. But they found her again and she was beaten to death with clubs.

Those memories usually come back to me in April. That's when I have nightmares and I see people killing other people... I see *Interahamwe* killing people. But otherwise I'm lucky, I rarely have nightmares. Another thing I keep remembering is how they used to chase people from their hiding places in the bushes and run after them with dogs. Once they caught them, you could hear the screams that meant they had been killed. The killers ran after people as if they were animals. Tutsis were no longer considered human beings then. The killers were like animals as well. They acted as if they were killing something else, not human beings.

It's hard to describe how I felt during the genocide. I was so afraid. I used to imagine a machete cutting my neck all the time – or my neck on the ground. All the time I was hiding in the roof of someone's house, my heart was full of fear. They sometimes used to let me sit near the fire because I was freezing in the cold. I used to hide behind a big sieve (used for sorghum) so that whoever was making the fire couldn't see me. I was so afraid and lost all hope of survival. But then I reached a point where I wasn't scared any more. I was no longer afraid of death. Death or life, it meant nothing any more.

Sometimes my sister and I would walk along the road. We walked a lot but we weren't afraid of passing the roadblocks. There was only once we were frightened. That was in a place called Mwendo in Kibuye. They took us up to the roadblock and asked us if we were Tutsis. We told them we weren't, but they looked at us and said we must be Tutsis because of our soft hair. They told us to stop lying to them. They asked me to dig my own grave and I refused. They said the burgomaster would judge our case and took us to the commune. We ended up spending a night in a cell because the burgomaster was drunk. But I wasn't afraid. I had lost my fear after

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my parents were murdered and after all the terrible things I had experienced. Only my sister Rosette and I survived.

After the genocide

I personally believe that surviving was partly a matter of luck – but it's also a great responsibility because many survivors are very poor and don't even have life's basic necessities. That's why those who have something to share need to feel responsible for those who have nothing. I also think surviving is a privilege because when I consider what happened in Rwanda, all the determination of the killers and their accomplices, it's a miracle that some people managed to survive.

It's hard for other people to understand our experiences. Obviously not everyone can understand what I went through. Some people didn't even want me to live – they still don't want me to be alive today – and they're not happy to see me prosper. Those who went through similar things do understand, especially those who share our lives daily.

In the future, I want to carry on working to help survivors. I'll need to invest a lot more effort into it because I know survivors have many problems. So I'm ready to work for them my whole life. I was lucky; I'm not handicapped, so I want to make use of my luck to help others.

It's difficult to forgive and I don't even know where to start. Who should I forgive anyway? The former Government? Individuals? I look around and I don't even know where to start because so many people were involved in the genocide. Personally, I'm not ready to begin that journey of forgiveness.

Forgiving is difficult, but it's not impossible because the few genocide survivors can't develop Rwanda by themselves. We all need to combine our energy to develop the country. But I think it's better for those who committed the crimes to start asking for forgiveness. They should come to us to talk about it. Let's say if it's a Hutu who killed, he should come and say, "I killed people and I am really sorry." They should show us that they are truly sorry. Then things could proceed.

And the countries involved should also use their power to help survivors in need. I'm not among them because I'm not handicapped; I'm able to work for myself. But what about the orphans, the kids who look after themselves and have other responsibilities as well, how do they survive? The countries involved should do something to show they care about them.

I personally would like to thank those who founded AERG, the Association of Student Survivors of the Genocide [*Association des Etudiants et Elèves Rescapés du Génocide*]. I think it's a very worthwhile association and has achieved a lot. It helps people believe that although they have lost their parents, friends and fellow students are there to help. As long as that association operates, I hope that orphans will stop considering themselves as orphans, that they'll find that AERG is there for them –

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and that they'll find peace. I know this from experience; I lived there for a long time and found peace.

What can we learn from the genocide?

I think we can learn from the genocide. A lot of people had to grow up very quickly. They had to take on responsibilities while they were still young. Their experiences made them forget they were still young. It wasn't a good experience but it taught us important lessons – about knowing who you are, how to behave and consider others.

There are also lessons for the international community – that it's very important to keep one's word, that they did very little to save people who were dying in our country. They also need to know about the survivors, that they need to live a good life. The international community needs to know that the genocide actually happened. It should show respect to the victims and acknowledge that those victims were innocent people.

The future

I dream of having a family one day and I'm sure I'll achieve it. I'll teach my family the morals my parents taught me when I was young. The first thing they need to know is that a parent's word is of great value. They need to keep that in their hearts.

I want to help other survivors as we join together to fight against the consequences of the genocide. I dream of a developed Rwanda and I'm determined to fight all genocidal ideologies. I want to see us build our nation. We can only do that if we consider the younger generations and work to remove all bad ideologies from their minds.