

APPOLINAIRE KAGERUKA

Appolinaire was born in 1967, into a family of eight children and was 27 years old when the Genocide in Rwanda started. Appolinaire was a teacher who hid from his killers and witnessed the aftermath of thousands of people's murder in a church. His mother, father, brothers and sisters were all killed in the Genocide. Before the Genocide, Appolinaire helped to pay for the school fees of one of his Hutu students. It was this student's family who hid Appolinaire during the Genocide, allowing him to survive.



I stayed in Rwanda after the genocide, we tried to go back to work, to find others and make friends, to find out if you have some family members left. Then we tried to build the country again, to build a family again, to build ourselves again.

Even before the Genocide, Hutus and Tutsis were separated and treated differently. When Appolinaire was at primary school, at the beginning of every year the teacher came into the classroom to find out how many Tutsis and Hutus were in the classroom, in order to send a report to the Ministry of Education. In secondary school, the school boys didn't have a problem with each other, but the professors separated the students and treated them differently.

When he finished secondary school, Appolinaire found it very hard to go to university and difficult to get a job. However he became a teacher.

In 100 days in 1994 approximately one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were murdered in the Genocide in Rwanda. It began when President Habyarimana's plane crashed and the Tutsis were blamed for his death.

Appolinaire found out that President Habyarimana had died when his uncle woke him up early in the morning during the Easter holidays. Very soon after that, Appolinaire heard that Tutsis were being killed in Kigali, the capital city, and road blocks were popping up in his area. Appolinaire decided to find somewhere to hide.

Our parents had [the] mentality that if they can go to the church they can survive. I say no, I can't go to the church, because I knew that they're going to find us in the church. I say, 'oh my God. Where can I go?

Appolinaire asked a Hutu neighbour, Pascal, to help – the parent of one of his students. The student was clever, but his family was poor and a few years previously Appolinaire had paid for the boy's schooling. Pascal agreed and hid him for several weeks; the militia searched Appolinaire's house barely two hours after he had left.

Can you imagine you bring another person in that small house, without a bed, without [a] blanket? Think! Just sleeping on the floor. You don't have any food; you want some water. You can't go to find the water. You can't go to find the food. Think.... imagine.

Because Pascal was a Hutu, he was able to see the changing situation and update Appolinaire on what was happening in his area. Appolinaire also found out that his parents had not survived; they had been killed by the militia in the Church.

After I think one month and a half, I start to hear some noise of the gun... Then Pascal come. 'Quick,' he say, 'Appolinaire, please move. I don't know where you are going, but you have to leave this place because they know that you are here.' I leave the place; I went to hide in the bush. After two days the RPF comes.

After the RPF came to his area, the first thing Appolinaire tried to do was find out if any of his family members had survived. His parents had been killed and he found out that his brother had been killed too. But he also learned that his brother's wife had managed to survive, she had crossed the border into Tanzania with her two children.

When the Hutu started to go to Tanzania I went to the church where my parents were and I found bodies in the church, like three or four thousand bodies which is shocking...

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I went to a different job because I had bad memories. It was a very bad life. You don't have water, electricity, food, medicine, you don't have everything and you are shocked and psychologically traumatised – it was a very, very hard life. You know in life it is very hard to understand if you lose one member of your family, can you imagine if you lose four, five, seven in your family or sometimes altogether?

I decided to move to the UK because even with the RPF's efforts there were some problems. So I said 'let me go away just to calm my mind'.

Appolinaire moved to the UK and now lives in Coventry. He has rebuilt his family and now has a son who he has named after his father, Bernard.

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