

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

My mother negotiated with a militia member to try and save us. We gave him part of our eucalyptus plantation to save my brother, Turgen. We didn't know that they would kill women. Three days later, he came back and said that he no longer wanted the land. He said, "I want your daughter; I want this girl." My mother said no, that the land was enough. Then he came back again with other militiamen. Eventually they took me to the forest, and he told them to gather around. He raped me and said that now I had no choice but to have a permanent relationship with him.

He told the other militiamen to reduce my height because I had always been arrogant; so they got clubs and hit my legs. They didn't cut my leg off, but they hit it until it was all broken. I couldn't move; I was shaking all over. Later, I went to a refugee camp for Tutsis. But little did I know that this man had made me pregnant. I had the problem of the pregnancy and the problem of the leg, which was now beginning to swell. There was a lot of puss in it, but they hadn't cut it off yet.

I knew that nobody would be happy with the child, but I prepared myself. I was excited about it. Today, if you want trouble with me, then show me that you hate my child. I am a mother, yes, but I am not a mother like I ought to have been a mother. Maybe God chose that this is my life. I've accepted it. Although, I think if it wasn't for the genocide, I would have been a better mother.

My family didn't show me that they didn't like my child. In Rwandese, a child is an angel, is innocent. You can't take the sins of the father and blame them on the child. My family accepted this child, but I am talking about my family, not the family of the father. My son is twelve years old, and I think he knows, though we have never sat down and squarely talked about it. Once he came crying and yelling that someone told him, "You're the son of a militiaman. Your father is in prison."

The philosophy I use for my life is to laugh; so I laughed and after laughing told him, “Why should that worry you? Why should that make you cry?” If he has brains, he should know by the way that I laughed. I confirmed to him that he is the son of a militiaman.

Whenever I think about his future, I don't know, and that is my biggest problem.

Sometimes he sits here for a whole school term because I have failed to get pens and books. If there is anything that tortures me, it is the tomorrow of my son.

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