



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

It was on the weekend of April 9 that an *interahamwe* attack came from Kami Hill. Near that hill there was a military camp. They attacked a neighbor; they did not kill him but took his cows. He came to our home to seek help. My father and brothers went with him. My father carried a spear. He used it and hit one of *interahamwe*. The remaining *interahamwe* came down the valley screaming that the Tutsis were killing them, and they came back with soldiers from the camp.

When they arrived at our home, they found all of us. There was my mother, my sister, my brothers, my father, a nephew, and six or seven other children with a woman that was living with us. They asked us to lie down in the cow's urine; they started to beat us and they stamped on us. One of them wanted to shoot us with his gun but the other *interahamwe* told him it would be a waste of ammunition. They asked my father to lock up the house and follow them with all of us. He told them that he had no padlock. They told him that they were going to kill us. There was a little girl among the children who asked the *interahamwe* why we were going to be killed. A soldier asked her to go and sit in the garden outside the house.

They asked the woman, named Murekatete, to show them her identity card and she replied that she had lost it. They asked her to sit outside as well. We then saw other *interahamwe* bringing a neighbor called Gaetan with his wife. They had been severely beaten. Gaetan was bleeding from his nose and mouth.

One of the soldiers asked my mother to pray the prayer Jesus taught to his apostles three times. She did not say anything. They said that we had no respect and should be killed. They said that we had killed one of their companions. However, they did not kill any of us. They said that we were going to be killed anyway because there was another attack that was going to come at 2 that afternoon.

At 1:30, two soldiers came and asked my father and my elder brother to follow them. They asked my father to bring a hoe to dig a hole in which they were going to be buried. They went to a forest. Right after they left, the attack came. Among the attackers were neighbors of ours. I even saw a boy who was my father's godson amongst the soldiers. They ordered us out of the house. We went out and we saw a man called Jean Marie Vianney, his wife and his brother-in-law, all who had been macheted and were bleeding. They were sitting down.



The killers asked my mother where the man was that killed their companion. She told them that he had already been taken by other *interahamwe*. He asked the other killers to beat us with their machetes. They started with my brother and my mother. At that time there were eleven of us. I was beaten after the others. We were all badly hurt. My father and brother had not been killed; they came back and found us on the ground. They brought us into the house. After some days, a few had died because we did not have any treatment. My brother buried those who had died in our fields near our house. Their bodies are there even now. My father decided to escape and join the Rwandan Patriotic Front soldiers, to help the war effort.

Then a man came, telling my brother and I to follow him. When we arrived at his house, we found that he was giving refuge to about twenty Tutsis in his home. But the *interahamwe* eventually found out that he was hiding Tutsis. They said that all male Tutsis had to die. He came and hid me with other men in a cabbage field. When the *interahamwe* came, they did not find us. We returned to the house after they had left and decided we had to flee the following day. As we traveled to Ndera, we were stopped at a roadblock. They arrested us and we were ordered to sit down. After a few minutes, an *interahamwe* came and asked us to stand up and go. God was on our side.

We finally arrived at Sainte Famille cathedral. But that was not safe. A man asked me to follow him to be treated because I had many wounds. The man treated me, but also demanded that I sleep with him for saving my life. I had no choice. I thought he would kill me if I refused. I was rescued eventually, but only a few of us survived.

My brother and I returned home. I didn't tell my brother about the rape. My father returned and things became a little better when we were reunited with a sister who we had long thought had died.

We have tried to rebuild our lives, but our experiences have left us scarred forever. We don't talk about what happened to us. It is too painful to deal with.

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