

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

I was sixteen and studying for my O level exams when the trouble began. A day after the President died, my father had gathered us all together at breakfast and told us that the hour of death had come. He told us to be careful and to stay at home, or tell our mother if we wanted to go out anywhere. For nearly three weeks there was no killing in my village. We continued school, but we would hear stories that in the capital, Kigali, Tutsis were being killed. My parents told me not to leave the house again, as things were getting worse.

I was very stubborn and daring, worried about my exams. I decided to return to school to get all the books I needed, so that I could revise at home. I knew my mother was worried and would not let me out of her sight. So I slipped out without being noticed, and headed for school.

On the way to school, which was only a twenty minute walk, three delinquents came towards me. They were discussing how they were going to kill me. One of them recognised me and said that I was a daughter of a rich man. They said that I should give them money since my father was supposedly so well off. I told them I didn't have money. They then started discussing how to punish me.

One of them suggested that they rape me instead of killing me. The three raped me in turn by the roadside. After each finished, they walked away. As the last one finished, a new group of killers arrived. They ordered the last man to rape me again, and he did. After that they gave this man a machete and ordered him to kill me. He hit me on the head several times and I passed out.



I later learnt that someone called for my father who had taken me home. That night attacks on Tutsi homes began. Still unconscious, my father carried me when the family took refuge at a friend's house. The killers came looking for us. My father and one brother escaped, but two of my other brothers were captured and killed.

My mother covered me in a blanket to stop them seeing me breathe, and pretended I was already dead. The killers then took my mother with them.

After the genocide, I found that my father had been wounded but had survived. One brother had been macheted, left for dead but survived also. However, my mother died. We don't know how though. We don't even know where her body was buried. Hopefully when the *Gacaca* testimonies begin, we hope that the killers will be kind enough to let us know where our mother lies. We know that she was killed in our home village but have no other news than that. We cannot have closure on this terrible situation until we find her. We live in hope, but that may never happen.

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