

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

I have endured years of torment since 1994, fear and social pressure trapped me into an abusive relationship, pregnancies and HIV infection.

I was first raped while staying in a refugee camp in June 1994.

The man insisted I become his wife and even after the genocide, I stayed with him against my wishes, because I was ashamed of what everybody who knew me would say. Subsequently, my new “husband” was repeatedly unfaithful, and in April 2002 he died of an unknown illness. I was four months pregnant at the time. I came to realise I could be infected with HIV soon after the birth.

I continued to feel uncomfortable and was constantly ill. When I was full term, I gave birth to a beautiful big baby. Yet, as he got older he became thinner and thinner. He is very ill nowadays. This was my fourth child. We had three others. The oldest is seven years old; they are all still very young. As I watched my fourth child, and noted that my illnesses weren't going away, I decided to take the HIV test.

Once I'd learned that I was HIV positive, I relived my terrible past and felt traumatised. My family comforted me a great deal. I told myself that I shouldn't put the blame upon my shoulders and make my life even more miserable as I wasn't responsible for the situation. Even today, when I think about it too deeply, I tell myself that it's not just me who's been a victim, and that there are others in a worse state than me. This calms me down.

My father has been an invalid since the genocide and the burden of caring for me and the children falls mainly upon my mother, who grows food in our fields.

We live from day to day, thanks to the grace of God. We eat when we can, but sometimes we go all day without food.

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