

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

I am the only survivor of my family. I was only 19 years old when the genocide took place. My parents, three sisters and two brothers were killed in Gitarama on the 14th April.

When the killing began, my family escaped in many different directions. My two brothers and younger sister, then aged 14, escaped to Butare. Along the way my other sister and I separated from my brothers, managing to hide in a trench.

On 16th April we were discovered by some local villagers, who had joined with the *interahamwe*. We pleaded with them to leave us alone. We were extremely lucky, because they did just that. At around 2.00pm, still on the 16th, we naively believed that the situation must have improved. We came out of the trenches.

The killers mocked us saying: “Aha, it is the girls. Let’s go and ‘liberate’ them. We must give them something to celebrate.” They took us and another girl who was carrying a baby, to a nearby hill. We passed a roadblock where we saw that people were being killed. Right in front of us people were forced to squat on the floor and were then macheted or killed with a masu. A big truck was on standby where the bodies were piled on and taken away.

When they were tired of killing, the men came to us and ordered us to take off our clothes. They each in turn raped us. One man pleaded with the others to leave my 14 years old sister alone, saying she was only a kid. The other men laughed and said, that we were all going to be killed anyway. That we would have to chose between rape or a cruel death. They raped my 14-year-old sister. I stopped feeling my pain. I wanted to protect her, but I couldn’t. After raping us they gave us food to eat by the roadside.

Many people were being captured by villagers and brought to the roadblock. Soon there were so many women kept aside for rape. This went on two weeks. My sister and I met many women, some were raped and killed, others were macheted and lay in agony for days before eventually dying. Others were piled on lorries with the dead, even though they were still breathing.

A man called Marcel, who was our neighbour and had a reputation as a killer, came to the roadblock and recognised me. I begged him to save my sister and I. He told the *interahamwe* who were keeping us that I was his spoil and they let him take me. But I had to leave my sister behind. I was distraught.

Marcel accused me of forcing myself on him. Saying that I was a whore that deserved what I got. He took me to his home and raped me every day. His mother was left to guard me whenever he went out so that I would not escape. She was a nice woman. I asked whether she had any daughters of her own. She felt sorry for me. She would clean me up, and treat my injuries. She said that if I become a good wife to her son, she would make sure he never hurts me again. I told her I was sad because I had left my younger sister at a roadblock, and feared I had betrayed her.

When my captor finally returned home after two weeks away, he told that he had a surprise for me. I thought he was going to kill me. Instead he had brought my sister with him. His mother had pleaded with him to save my sister. I couldn't believe he could be that kind. I was eternally grateful to him for saving my sister. But Marcel had a plan. He got one of his relatives to take my sister as his wife.

By mid-Jun, there were few Tutsis left to massacre, and the killers got more and more agitated. They went from village to village to hunt any surviving snakes. Word got around that Marcel was keeping Tutsi spoils. The local leader ordered a search. I managed to sneak out of the house in time with the help of my mother-in-law, but my sister wasn't so lucky. She was killed. I was so distraught by the news of my sister's death, that I handed myself over to *interahamwe* to be killed.

Instead of killing me, another *interahamwe* took me to a disused house and raped me. He showed me his grenades and bullets and asked me to choose which death I would prefer. I picked up a grenade and threw it on the ground hoping it would blow me up, but it didn't explode. He then called in his friends to punish me. They gang raped me. This went on for five days. I was left torn and bleeding. I don't know how I sustained the abuse. After a time I finally passed out. When I awoke, the place was silent.

I ventured out of the house, hoping someone would kill me, or even rape me until I would die. I was filthy, covered in blood, smelling. I looked like a walking dead. I kept walking calling for the killers to come and get me. By that time, I didn't realise the Rwandan Patriotic Army had liberated the area. Soldiers dressed in uniform came towards me. I was throwing insults at them, demanding that they kill me. Instead they calmed me down and took me to a make shift clinic for treatment.

I have since found out that I am HIV positive. But I don't want to talk about it.



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