

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

I am twenty-nine years old. I was just a school girl aged 15 years when I was raped.

When the Interahamwe attacked our school, we had to run for our lives as they were beating and hacking children to death. I was caught, and my arms and legs were tied to a pole, and I was raped repeatedly. The pain was so bad, but after a while, I could not feel anything. I was numb. The killers didn't mind whether I was covered in blood. I lost consciousness. When I awoke, I was still tied up, naked and bleeding heavily. The place was silent.

I gathered my strength and untied myself. There were many people lying dead on the ground, including my class teacher Evelyn. Despite the injuries, I attempted to crawl and eventually found refuge at a house that belonged to one of my teachers. The family were Hutu, but they helped me to clean up and gave me some clothes. They then asked me to leave before I was found in their house, saying they didn't want to witness my execution.

I wandered along the road, with many people, just following the crowd. I was raped many times during the escape. At one roadblock, I was made to eat broken bottles. It was here that many girls were killed and I was taken out from under dead bodies. A Hutu man said he was doing me a favour to marry me. Though I wanted to die like everyone else, I kept surviving. The pain I went through was too much, I thought being his wife would be a bit less painful. He kept me, treated me and raped me every night, he took me to Congo, I managed to escape back to Rwanda during the refugees influx in 1996.

After the genocide, I found all my family had been killed. The perpetrators of the genocide even killed the lone survivor in 1996. I bear scars all over my body which reminds me of my experience, and each day I suffer from chronic headaches.

I now have two children, a boy and a girl. For a long time I hated these children because they reminded me of my sins. But I realise they are the only blood relations I have, so I have tried to love them. I know it is not their fault, but still they remind me of what I have become. I have tested HIV positive and worry about my life, and the life of my children when I die.

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