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### A Walk Down the Street

Never in my sixteen years of living on this earth have I ever feared for my life while walking down the street. Of course, there have been times when I was concerned for my safety, but not once did I have the slightest instinct that I was being hunted with the intention of being killed. Sixteen years is not a very long time. However an immense amount of world altering events can occur within sixteen years. A lot can happen within an even shorter amount of time; ten years, five years, one- even months. Within a few months one person can move to a new city and start a new life, a fresh leader can take over a nation, and within three months, eight hundred thousand men, women, and children can be disintegrated from existence. I have never feared for my life while walking down the street. But the Tutsi people of Rwanda did. We, as fellow human beings, must give justice to those who fell within the jaws of the Hutus and those who escaped with tooth shaped scars on their hearts, through the power of memory.

The Rwanda genocide can be traced back to the two tribes of the Hutu and Tutsi. Around the fifteenth century, the Tutsi established a kingdom that expanded westward and southward by the sixteenth century. This expansion overtook some agricultural area of the Hutu, creating the beginning of the two tribes' tensions. By 1994, the issues between the tribes were devastating; resulting in genocide. According to "Rwanda's Genocide: The Politics of Global Justice" by Kingsley Moghalu, "The Rwanda genocide of 1994 was an indirect result of the expansion of the European-dominated international system of the late nineteenth century," (Moghala). The damage and havoc that followed will haunt thousands for years to come. "Over the next 100 days, an estimated eight hundred thousand Tutsis and moderate Hutus, roughly 10 percent of

Rwanda's population of seven million, were massacred in all regions of Rwanda- the fastest genocide in history...".

Consolee Nishimwe was a happy fourteen year old girl living as a member of the Tutsi community when her life was dramatically altered. In nineteen ninety four, her nightmare began with subtle differences in her community. "Growing up, I could feel the tension growing in my country. Going to school I could feel it. In elementary school they made us stand up if you were a Hutu or Tutsi, separating me from my friends. It made me and the other kids that were Tutsis feel humiliated," she said. The radios that were nationally broadcasted encouraged Hutu civilians to kill Tutsi people. She knew her life had changed forever when she was walking down the street watching homes being burnt, one of them being her grandparents. "Immediately I thought, 'things have changed.' It was very, very terrifying. We heard killers walking around screaming, chanting songs of how they were going to exterminate the Tutsis." Consolee and her family hid in friends' homes, attempting to escape the murders happening right in front of them. Despite their efforts, her father and three brothers were all killed, leaving Consolee, her mother, and her younger sister to survive.

Survival was not easy. While hiding in a family friend's home, a neighbor that Consolee had known all her life kidnapped and raped her during a drunken spell. "I didn't want to live anymore. I was walking down the street looking for someone to kill me," she said. She says her mother taught her how to be forgiving, and together they tried their very best to heal. Consolee now lives in the United States, where she was able to heal through her trauma in therapy. Eventually, she gained enough strength to speak on her experiences, and through this she wrote her book, "Tested to the Limit: A Genocide Survivor's Story of Pain, Resilience, and Hope."

Consolee is a genocide survivor advocate, and she travels the country to talk about her experiences.

Teddy, just like Consolee, had a normal and happy life before the three months of bloodshed cast on Rwanda. Teddy and his family began to run from the killers soon after the president's death. During the day the group of Teddy, his parents, brothers and sisters, and some uncles and their families would run farther from the killers, and at night hideout in different homes of family, friends, neighbors, and sympathizers to the Tutsi. One of Teddy's uncles was blind, having to stay behind with a trusted neighbor. Later, however, Teddy and his family found out that when the killers came, this "trusted" neighbor was the first to attack him. He died.

More Tutsi added to Teddy's group of running survivors. Led by a man who Teddy did not name, Teddy and his people ran as best as they could, but the odds were not in their favor. When faced with killers who were armed with machine guns and machetes, their best form of defense was to throw rocks and run. Teddy accounts what it was like to be hunted by these killers on a daily basis. "We split into two groups and ran for our lives, the killers spraying us with bullets as we scattered. There were roadblocks and they would shoot at us as we tried to pass but we had to push forward because there were killers behind us. Some died and some lived," he said.

Thankfully, Teddy and his brother were saved by French soldiers with the worst damage being done to his brother's jaw, which was shot while him and Teddy slid into a ditch. Teddy, now nineteen, told his brother after the genocide, "that we must work hard, be united and forgive those who did us wrong." Teddy went back to school three years after the genocide, and was able

to build his own home without begging on the streets. "I want people to know our problems," he said. "To remember what happened and to help us so that we may have a better life."

Consolee and Teddy both lived through a terrible time in their country's history. The commonalities between these kids are very similar; each child was unable to walk their neighborhood streets without fearing for their lives. Consolee was humiliated in school. A Tutsi man was killed and hung on a tree in front of Teddy's school as propaganda. Consolee was raped. Teddy watched countless friends, family, and peers' bodies get embedded with bullets and throats slashed. Death, for each of them, could be viewed as paradise compared to the horrors they were witnessing alive. Despite the tragic deaths of friends and family, abuse from their community and neighbors, and the emotional and physical trauma experienced, each survivor continued to fight for hope.

Consolee got hit hard with obstacles most people would not be able to overcome. Even though she hit a point so low that she wanted to get murdered in the street, there was enough perseverance buried within enabling her to listen to her mother's words of faith. Knocked down by murder and violation, Consolee dusted herself off and continued the journey to recovery.

Teddy's physical strength is astounding. Being only five years old when the genocide occurred, he ran and fought against grown armed men with nothing aiding him besides a few pebbles. Teddy became a soldier. He witnessed scenes fit for a battle field; bloodshed, gore, grief, but most importantly, bravery and immaculate strength.

Genocide can be carried out easily when ignorance is taken advantage of. Without the painful memory of survivors, the thought of genocide is a powerful political action. With the

memory of those who had to endure it, genocide can be seen for what is truly is: tragedy.

Prevention is our job, and we can start with never forgetting, and always remembering.

Giving up will effectively achieve nothing. The lessons that Teddy and Consolee's stories teach are filled with themes of courage, power, capability, resilience, and hope, but most importantly, faith. As the sun fell, the streets would get painted red with the blood of the innocent. But the moon is soon replaced with the sun. With each splatter of blood comes a fresh rain. And with each hopeless day, every life taken, and every soul despairing, there is a street in the world where sidewalks are meant for walking, and not killing- and there is faith that one day they will get to walk down that street.

## Works Cited

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