

Healing: Rwanda 20 Years Later
Genocide survivor devotes life to healing, reconciliation
Man lost parents, 4 siblings in 1994 Rwanda massacre

Local classifieds including 'Rural health' article, 'Tomorrow's visions of downtown', and various service ads like 'Aftondness for winter' and 'Batteries, Tires, Wiper Blades'.

Continuation of the 'Genocide: Survivor says he could forgive the people who killed family' article, including 'Check it out' section and 'Obituaries'.

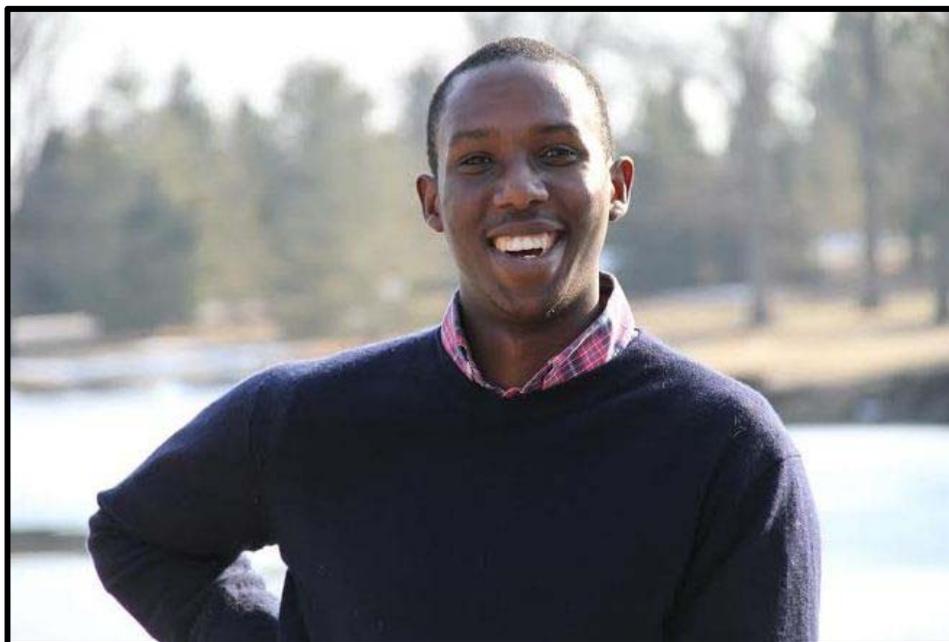
News

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massacre

**Sue Loughlin**  
The Tribune-Star



## Tribune Star Article

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TERRE HAUTE — Twenty-nine-year-old Emmanuel Habimana is a genocide survivor

He lost his parents and four siblings during the 1994 Tutsi genocide in Rwanda, when more than one million Rwandans perished over the course of 100 days.

He was 9 at the time and carries painful memories of that dark period. Habimana had several harrowing experiences in which he narrowly avoided being killed.

His dad was killed by a soldier on April 7, 1994, and the rest of his family on April 11; his mother and siblings were found hiding in a school with many others, and they died in a mass killing at the hands of extremist Hutus.

He survived by hiding, and at one point, he pretended to be a Hutu.

Habimana misses his parents and siblings: sister, Beninka, younger brother, Muyumbu, little sister, Cyoga, and big brother, Humure.

He mourns their loss, and sometimes, he feels anger as well.

“I still wish to have my family,” he said in a telephone interview. He wishes he could have watched his younger siblings grow up.

He has two brothers and two sisters currently living in Rwanda. “I was fortunate to have siblings who survived,” he said.

Despite his experiences, he is able to forgive those who killed his family members and shattered his childhood.

While Habimana hasn’t met those who killed his family members, “If they came to me and asked forgiveness, I would forgive them,” he said.

Today, Habimana is a filmmaker, public speaker and activist from Kigali, Rwanda.

His work began as a youth activist in Kigali, where he collaborated with peers to assist other orphans of the genocide.

On Tuesday, he will speak at the CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center and his topic will be “Healing: Rwanda 20 years Later.”

His presentation will begin at 6 p.m. Admission is free and open to the public.

April marks the 20th anniversary of the beginning of the Tutsi genocide.

Habimana is speaking at CANDLES “to help us learn more about the genocide as well as Rwanda’s story of reconciliation, nation building, and post-conflict possibilities for peace,” according to a program flyer.

In 2010, he began co-directing “Komora: To Heal,” a documentary about the orphan survivors of the genocide as well as the healing that is taking place in his country.

Despite the atrocities that occurred in his country, Habimana’s message is one of hope. Even after the darkest of times, even after genocide and the needless killings of family members and friends, “Life can continue,” he said.

People around the world, despite their differences, have far more in common, he said.

He wants to raise awareness that genocide has happened and continues to happen. He will encourage his audience to work to stop genocide as well as any kind of human rights violation.

Despite what he’s experienced, he’s an optimist. “Every morning when I wake up, I tell myself to try to see the positive, even in extreme, very bad situations,” he said.

Those who know him say Habimana “gives people the benefit of a doubt; he looks for the good in people.”

Habimana had several brushes with death during the genocide and also as a refugee in the Congo, yet he survived. He believes there is a reason and a purpose for his survival, although he may not know exactly what it is.

“I could have been easily identified and killed, but by a miracle (I’m not ashamed to say that it was my God’s miracle), I survived,” he said.

He has studied law in Rwanda and intends to return to those studies someday, although presently, he’s involved in other activities.

In Rwanda, there is a group of other genocide survivors who meet and remind themselves, “We have a responsibility to move forward and to lead a better life,” he said.

In many cases, survivors — who frequently live in the same communities as those who killed family members — have learned to forgive those killers. And those who have perpetrated the killings “are willing to approach survivors to say, ‘This is what I did and I’m sorry.’”

The Rwandan government has encouraged a reconciliation program hailed by many as “revolutionary in the way it has

brought people back together,” said Kiel Majewski, CANDLES museum executive director.

After the genocide, Rwandan refugees didn’t have the luxury of going to another country to live; they went home, often putting killers and survivors in the same community and in some cases, next door to each other.

And Habimana, too, has learned to forgive — although it’s not been easy or overnight.

“I think that by forgiving, you help yourself in the process of healing and overcoming emotional difficulties,” he said.

Twenty years after the genocide, his country is moving forward in a positive direction, he said.

But forgiving does not mean forgetting — and that’s also part of his message. Genocide hasn’t stopped happening.

“It repeats itself over and over in different countries for different reasons,” he said.

He wants others to join him in working to ensure it doesn’t happen again, anywhere.

He also wants to continue to tell the story of genocide in Rwanda to honor the memory of those who died — including his mother, father and four siblings — for no good reason.

One million people died in Rwanda “because of their ethnicity,” he said.

Some don’t understand what happened and deny it happened.

“Once their [genocide victims’] story is heard and taken seriously, it’s a dignity we are giving back to those killed,” he said.

He hopes his story “can be heard by as many people as possible.”