

Excerpt: *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*

By Philip Gourevitch

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Chapter 2

If you could walk due west from the massacre memorial at Nyarubuye, straight across from Rwanda from one end to the other, over the hills and through the marshes, lakes, and rivers to the province of Kibuye, then, just before you fell into the great inland sea of Lake Kivu, you would come to another hilltop village. This hill is called Mugonero, and it, too, is crowned by a big church. While Rwanda is overwhelmingly Catholic, Protestants evangelized much of Kibuye, and Mugonero is the headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist mission. The place resembles the brick campus of an American community college more than an African village; tidy tree-lined footpaths connect the big church with a smaller chapel, a nursing school, an infirmary, and a hospital complex that enjoyed a reputation for giving excellent medical care. It was in the hospital that Samuel Ndagijimana sought refuge during the killings, and although one of the first things he said to me was "I forget bit by bit," it quickly became clear that he hadn't forgotten as much as he might have liked.

Samuel worked as a medical orderly in the hospital. He had landed the job in 1991, when he was twenty-five. I asked him about his life in that time that Rwandans call "Before." He said, "We were simple Christians." That was all. I might have been asking about someone else, whom he had met only in passing, and who didn't interest him. It was as if his first real memory was of the early days in April of 1994 when he saw Hutu militiamen conducting public exercises outside the government offices in Mugonero. "We watched young people going out every night, and people spoke of it on the radio," Samuel said. "It was only members of Hutu Power parties who went out, and those who weren't participants were called 'enemies.'"

On April 6, a few nights after this activity began, Rwanda's long-standing Hutu dictator, President Habyarimana, was assassinated in Kigali, and a clique of Hutu Power leaders from the military high command seized power. "The radio announced that people shouldn't move," Samuel said. "We began to see groups of people gathering that same night, and when we went to work in the morning, we saw these groups with the local leaders of Hutu Power organizing the population. You didn't know exactly what was happening, just that there was something coming."

At work, Samuel observed "a change of climate." He said that "one didn't talk to anyone anymore," and many of his co-workers spent all their time in meetings with a certain Dr. Gerard, who made no secret of his support for Hutu Power. Samuel found this shocking, because Dr. Gerard had been trained in the United States, and he was the son of the president of the Adventist church in Kibuye, so he was seen as a figure of great authority, a community leader—one who sets the example.

After a few days, when Samuel looked south across the valley from Mugonero, he saw houses burning in

villages across the lakefront. He decided to stay in the church hospital until the troubles were over, and Tutsi families from Mugonero and surrounding areas soon began arriving with the same idea. This was a tradition in Rwanda. "When there were problems, people always went to the church," Samuel said. "The pastors were Christians. One trusted that nothing would happen at their place." In fact, many people at Mugonero told me that Dr. Gerard's father, the church president, Pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, was personally instructing Tutsis to gather at the Adventist complex.

Wounded Tutsis converged on Mugonero from up and down the lake. They came through the bush, trying to avoid the countless militia checkpoints along the road, and they brought stories. Some told how a few miles to the north, in Gishyita, the mayor had been so frantic in his impatience to kill Tutsis that thousands had been slaughtered even as he herded them to the church, where the remainder were massacred. Others told how a few miles to the south, in Rwamatamu, more than ten thousand Tutsis had taken refuge in the town hall, and the mayor had brought in truckloads of policemen and soldiers and militia with guns and grenades to surround the place; behind them he had arranged villagers with machetes in case anyone escaped when the shooting began—and, in fact, there had been very few escapees from Rwamatamu. An Adventist pastor and his son were said to have worked closely with the mayor in organizing the slaughter at Rwamatamu. But perhaps Samuel did not hear about that from the wounded he met, who came "having been shot at, and had grenades thrown, missing an arm, or a leg." He still imagined that Mugonero could be spared.

By April 12, the hospital was packed with as many as two thousand refugees, and the water lines were cut. Nobody could leave; militiamen and members of the Presidential Guard had cordoned off the complex. But when Dr. Gerard learned that several dozen Hutus were among the refugees, he arranged for them to be evacuated. He also locked up the pharmacy, refusing treatment to the wounded and sick—"because they were Tutsi," Samuel said. Peering out from their confines, the refugees at the hospital watched Dr. Gerard and his father, Pastor Ntakirutimana, driving around with militiamen and members of the Presidential Guard. The refugees wondered whether these men had forgotten their God.

Among the Tutsis at the Mugonero church and hospital complex were seven Adventist pastors who quickly assumed their accustomed roles as leaders of the flock. When two policemen turned up at the hospital, and announced that their job was to protect the refu-

gees, the Tutsi pastors took up a collection, and raised almost four hundred dollars for the policemen. For several days, all was calm. Then, toward evening on April 15, the policemen said they had to leave because the hospital was to be attacked the next morning. They drove away in a car with Dr. Gerard, and the seven pastors in the hospital advised their fellow refugees to expect the end. Then the pastors sat down together and wrote letters to the mayor and to their boss, Pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, Dr. Gerard's father, asking them in the name of the Lord to intercede on their behalf.

"And the response came," Samuel said. "It was Dr. Gerard who announced it: 'Saturday, the sixteenth, at exactly nine o'clock in the morning, you will be attacked.'" But it was Pastor Ntakirutimana's response that crushed Samuel's spirit, and he repeated the church president's words twice over, slowly: "Your problem has already found a solution. You must die." One of Samuel's colleagues, Manase Bimenyimana, remembered Ntakirutimana's response slightly differently. He told me that the pastor's words were "You must be eliminated. God no longer wants you."

In his capacity as a hospital orderly, Manase served as the household domestic for one of the doctors, and he had remained at the doctor's house after installing his wife and children—for safety—among the refugees at the hospital. Around nine o'clock on the morning of Saturday, April 16, he was feeding the doctor's dogs. He saw Dr. Gerard drive toward the hospital with a carload of armed men. Then he heard shooting and grenades exploding. "When the dogs heard the cries of the people," he told me, "they too began to howl."

Manase managed to make his way to the hospital—foolishly, perhaps, but he felt exposed and wanted to be with his family. He found the Tutsi pastors instructing the refugees to prepare for death. "I was very disappointed," Manase said. "I expected to die, and we started looking for anything to defend ourselves with—stones, broken bricks, sticks. But they were useless. The people were weak. They had nothing to eat. The shooting started, and people were falling down and dying."

There were many attackers, Samuel recalled, and they came from all sides—"from the church, from behind, from the north and south. We heard shots and cries and they chanted the slogan 'Eliminate the Tutsis.' They began shooting at us, and we threw stones at them because we had nothing else, not even a machete. We were hungry, tired, we hadn't had water for more than a day. There were people who had their arms cut off. There were dead. They killed the people at the chapel

and the school and then the hospital. I saw Dr. Gerard, and I saw his father's car pass the hospital and stop near his office. Around noon, we went into a basement. I was with some family members. Others had been killed already. The attackers began to break down the doors and to kill, shooting and throwing grenades. The two policemen who had been our protectors were now attackers. The local citizenry also helped. Those who had no guns had machetes or *masus*. In the evening, around eight or nine o'clock, they began firing tear gas. People who were still alive cried. That way the attackers knew where people were, and they could kill them directly."

On the national average, Tutsis made up a bit less than fifteen percent of Rwanda's population, but in the province of Kibuye the balance between Hutus and Tutsis was close to fifty-fifty. On April 6, 1994, about a quarter million Tutsis lived in Kibuye and a month later more than two hundred thousand of them had been killed. In many of Kibuye's villages, no Tutsis survived.

Manase told me that he was surprised when he heard that "only a million people" were killed in Rwanda. "Look at how many died just here, and how many were eaten by birds," he said. It was true that the dead of the genocide had been a great boon to Rwanda's birds, but the birds had also been helpful to the living. Just as birds of prey and carrion will form a front in the air before the advancing wall of a forest fire to feast on the parade of animals fleeing the inferno, so in Rwanda during the months of extermination the kettles of buzzards, kites and crows that boiled over massacre sites marked a national map against the sky, flagging the "no-go" zones for people like Samuel and Manase, who took to the bush to survive.

Sometime before midnight on April 16, the killers at the Mugonero Adventist complex, unable to discover anybody left there to kill, went off to loot the homes of the dead, and Samuel in his basement, and Manase hiding with his murdered wife and children, found themselves unaccountably alive. Manase left immediately. He made his way to the nearby village of Murambi, where he joined up with a small band of survivors from other massacres who had once more taken shelter in an Adventist church. For nearly twenty-four hours, he said, they had peace. Then Dr. Gerard came with a convoy of militia. Again there was shooting, and Manase escaped. This time, he fled high up into the mountains, to a place called Bisesero, where the rock is steep and craggy, full of caves and often swaddled in cloud. Bisesero was the only place in Rwanda where

thousands of Tutsi civilians mounted a defense against the Hutus who were trying to kill them. "Looking at how many people there were in Bisesero, we were convinced we could not die," Manase told me. And at first, he said, "only women and children were killed, because the men were fighting." But in time tens of thousands of men fell there, too.

Down in the corpse-crowded villages of Kibuye, live Tutsis had become extremely hard to find. But the killers never gave up. The hunt was in Bisesero, and the hunters came by truck and bus. "When they saw how strong the resistance was, they called militias from far away," Manase said. "And they did not kill simply. When we were weak, they saved bullets and killed us with bamboo spears. They cut Achilles tendons and necks, but not completely, and then they left the victims to spend a long time crying until they died. Cats and dogs were there, just eating people."

Samuel, too, had found his way to Bisesero. He had lingered in the Mugonero hospital, "full of dead," until one in the morning. Then he crept out of the basement and, carrying "one who had lost his feet," he proceeded slowly into the mountains. Samuel's account of his ordeal following the slaughter at his workplace was as telegraphic as his description of life in Mugonero before the genocide. Unlike Manase, he found little comfort at Bisesero, where the defenders' only advantage was the terrain. He had concluded that to be a Tutsi in Rwanda meant death. "After a month," he said, "I went to Zaire." To get there he had to descend through settled areas to Lake Kivu, and to cross the water at night in a pirogue—an outrageously risky journey, but Samuel didn't mention it.

Manase remained in Bisesero. During the fighting, he told me, "we got so used to running that when one wasn't running one didn't feel right." Fighting and running gave Manase spirit, a sense of belonging to a purpose greater than his own existence. Then he got shot in the thigh, and life once again became about little more than staying alive. He found a cavern, "a rock where a stream went underground, and came out below," and made it his home. "By day, I was alone," he said. "There were only dead people. The bodies fell down in the stream, and I used those bodies as a bridge to cross the water and join the other people in the evenings." In this way, Manase survived.