

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

At 19 years, my younger sister and I were dragged out of a neighbour's ceiling where we were hiding in Kibuye and taken to a mass grave to be killed. Once there, we were surprised to find ourselves taken back to live with another neighbour under the instruction that he would be our master and us his slaves. We thought the interahamwe had decided to save us, but we soon got to understand the true meaning of this gesture. Two days later, the génocidaires returned.

They said they would kill us if we didn't agree to sleep with them. One man selected me, saying that he wanted me as his wife. An elderly man said he would give my sister as a wife to one of his sons. He took me to his house where he raped me for three days.

On the fourth day, as the pressure to kill all Tutsis heightened, I escaped with the help of the elderly man, but my sister, who stayed behind at his house, was killed. At the end of the genocide, I was four months pregnant as a result of the rape. And when I came home I found that my entire family had been slaughtered.

At the very moment when I needed my family most, upon discovering that I was pregnant from the rape, I found out that my parents and 11 brothers and sisters had been killed. I did track down a paternal uncle in the Democratic Republic Congo and returned with him from the camps to Rwanda, but he died of illness in Gisenyi.

I had lost all hope. So when a widower of the genocide, who was in the same refugee camp in Congo, asked me to live with him, I accepted. I didn't really have any choice given my situation and we married officially in July 1995. I had given birth to a girl in February of that year.

In the beginning, there were no problems between me and my husband. But as the days passed, he changed and wouldn't give me money to buy milk for the child or to take her for treatment. He told me that he didn't want the child of an interahamwe, so I should give her to the interahamwe and let them take care of her.

I now have four children, including the one I had as a result of being raped. My husband helps take care of the children I have had with him, but I need help raising my other daughter.

I left my husband when he became more violent towards me because of the child. But with nowhere else to go, I was forced to come back home. But my husband continues to mistreat my daughter. I do not know her HIV status.



I haven't yet taken the test to determine whether I have HIV either, but at the beginning of our relationship, my husband fell ill with syphilis. The doctor said that I was the one who had infected him, an infection I got from the interahamwe who raped me.

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