

My Life was Full of Pain but Now I'm Healing

By Cecile Nyiramana

My name is Cecile Nyiramana and I was born in 1969. I'm married to Emmanuel Rudatinya. Together, God has blessed us with two children: Mary Justine Uwase, 10 years old, and Justin Cedrick Bikarimana, 8 years old.

In my family, there were many struggles. My father was polygamous, with three wives, and my mother was his second wife. So I'm the second child, with two brothers and one sister.

I was born in Kigali town, the capital of Rwanda. My family wasn't poor - they could get enough food for the children. We were six, because my father was separated from his first wife who had two girls. My father was a worker for PTT (Poste Telegramme Telephone). He was a drinker and not kind to my mother. She was beaten every day.

I will never forget one day, when I saw my mother with a great bag full of her clothes on her head. She took my little brother and sister by the hands, and got out of the house. She took a yellow truck and went back to her parents, leaving me and my brother with my father. One week later, my father got married to his third wife. He called my mother to show her his new wife. When I saw my mother, I believed she would stay with us. I didn't know that she could leave us alone again. My father asked her to leave the children with us and to let him be free. I was five years old.

Before leaving the house, my mother told me, "Be careful with my kids. You become their mother and protect them. And when you meet a great danger of problem, never cry or tell anyone. Keep silent, because you will never meet somebody who will be able to understand you."

I was very traumatized by the situation. I couldn't believe it. I started to be serious, to try to protect my sister who was very young - only two years old. And in that matter, I grew up differently than other children. My oldest brother was very angry about the situation. He was nervous and got into trouble about everything. So he was beaten every night when my father came home from work. My father told us that our mother was not kind to the children, and that is why he asked her to go back home.

In 1976, I started primary school. In 1984 I entered secondary school. My

objective was to become a worker like my father so that I could find out where my mother was and help her. One day, after I had finished my secondary education, I met her. It had been sixteen years since I had seen her. She was married to another man, and had another little girl. She was not happy. My brother and I planned to build a house for her, but we couldn't because we had too little means.

In 1992, I reached University in Gisenyi, which is near the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, and there I met my husband. In the second year, the war started, so I didn't have the chance to finish university or to get my degree. This is another grief for me, and until now, I haven't been able to find the means to finish my studies. In 1994, just before the genocide, we got married. We planned to help my mother and then the horrible genocide came and my mother died with her pain and grief. This was a terrible period for me.

In marriage, I thought I would find happiness once in my life. My husband loved me so much. It was the first time I had met someone different, kind, who could keep my confidences. With him, life was different. He was the first person who understood me, sharing my grief and pain, and who knew how to make me happy. But during the genocide we were persecuted together. Just after the genocide we fled the country and when we came back, he was imprisoned in 1999.

His imprisonment was another event that shook me up a lot. When we were together, we encouraged one another. I was with him only because I stayed without my father, mother or brother. Now, I was alone, with our kids. I had fallen in the same situation as when my mother left us. But here, it was terrible to see him in prison, suffering. It was not easy for me. I started again to live in loneliness. I lost hope and confidence. But God assisted me and tried to give me joy and hope.

I grew up in the Catholic Church, and my father attended the Adventist Church. But in December 1998, together with my husband, I became a member of the Friends Church. The Friends started to help me. They invited me to their seminars about conflict management and AVP in 2001. Just after attending an AVP workshop, I felt many changes in my heart and my mind also, and overcame my pain and grief. Since then, I decided to go to other and to recognize the good things which are in others. And since, I know how violence is not a good thing, and so I try to help other women with husbands in prison, to see together how to break that dividing wall in Rwanda. I decided to bring these women together with women who are genocide survivors. It was not easy to do that, but as a Quaker, I had to do something for peace and to call others to live in peace after asking for or giving forgiveness.

I know I was violently treated because God wanted me to help those who know violence and be for them an advocacy instrument. I thank my Yearly Meeting for intervening in my situation and helping me and letting me get out my trauma and encourage me in my initiative, Women in Dialogue. Now in my church, I am president of the Peace Committee in Kigali Quarterly Meeting and an AVP facilitator. I also help in the church's Women's Department.

Now, I have three groups for women who meet to talk about healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. Now, even though my husband is staying in prison awaiting the Gacaca process, I believe that he will be released and I already have gotten hope from God, whose child I am and whom I serve.

I thank the good God because he gives me happiness and joy, and calls me to work in peace ministry and peace building. I'm sure that one day I will see Rwandese living together and in the future we will have sustainable peace.