

# **Rwandan Eyes**

a monologue play

by  
Tom Flannery

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*For the Fallen,  
and the Risen in Rwanda  
and for Lorne, who sat me down and made me listen*

*please visit  
[www.rwandasongs.com](http://www.rwandasongs.com)*

## INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of April of 1994 Rwanda was a country of 8 million people. One hundred days later 1 million of those people were murdered by their own government. Rwandans cried out for help. Nobody came.

On September 11 th , 2001 the United States, a nation of 293 million people, lost some 3000 in a savage terrorist attack. The event stunned the world. It has since become the defining moment of the new millennium. The US called for help. Everybody came.

Rwanda suffered the equivalent of nearly 3 World Trade Center bombings every *day* for 100 days. Playing the percentages, the US would have to lose over 20 million people over 3.5 months to equal the devastation doled out in Rwanda.

Just about everybody in the world remembers where they were when they heard the news on September 11th. But where were you when you heard about Rwanda? Or have you still not heard about Rwanda?

I was at home reading a book given to me by a friend. He demanded that I read it. I'd never heard of the tiny African country it dealt with. I had to ask him how to pronounce it, and it took me at least 10 minutes to locate it on the map. It was so small the name of the country had to be written outside it's borders. Like Rhode Island on a US map.

When was this? The year 2001.....7 full years after the genocide. I'd somehow managed to miss it completely.

As Americans, our self importance can reach staggering proportions.....as can our self absorption. I claim no special exemptions, and therefore am frequently guilty of both. After all, when you miss a genocide, it's hard to convince those from the outside that you're not living with blinders on.

But for me at least...something changed in 2001.

As a voracious reader of history books....I've probably spent more time studying the events in Rwanda during 1994 than any other event of the 20 th century. Books line my shelves and my floors on World Wars...the Holocaust....Pol Pot's Cambodia. But over the last 3 years it's this tiny mid African country that keeps tugging at me...drawing me back again and again. I must have read millions of words....initiated hundreds of discussions....got countless blank stares....banged my head off of numerous walls...written dozens of songs.....always searching for the answers to the 2 basic questions. Why did it happen?...and....Why did we let it happen? I have no answers. In truth, I probably don't want them.

This simple play uses the voices of the people caught in the vortex. I try not to interfere in any way. Maybe if we listen hard enough to them, "Never Again" will not invite a snicker.

Tom Flannery  
4/20/2004  
Peckville, PA

*Exactly how the play is to be presented onstage is at the discretion of an imaginative director. I am neither imaginative nor a director....so won't give much advice here. Stage direction is nearly non-existent in the script. Do what you feel is right to compliment the words, and allow the actors to breathe.*

*I do think that lighting is very important though...so perhaps the transitions between the monologues can be helped along by creative use of lighting.*

*Let good actors take over. Rwanda has suffered through so much "analysis" from Westerners (like me for instance) that I'm not sure any more is needed in the theatrical sense. Simple is best nearly all the time in theater. No exception here.*

- I. Us**
- II. Survivor**
- III. Killer**
- IV. Reluctant Soldier**
- V. The Red Cross**
- VI. Journalist**
- VII. UN Peace Keeper**
- VIII. US Government**
- IX. Dead at Nyarubuye**
- X. A Child**
- XI. Us again**

*Stage is empty. Black curtain behind. Lights go down...and while in darkness the theater hears the song "Isn't That a Shame" by Lorne Clarke.*

*(song is available for download here..  
<http://www.songaweek.com/rwanda/songs/isntthatashame.html>  
Very important that it be used here.)*

*Song ends. Still dark. You hear the voice of a child calling for his mother. "Mama? Mama? Are you awake?"*

*Lights come up. Sitting on the stage, staring into space.... is a young Rwandan woman. A man is standing close by... speaking of her. She never looks at him.*

## **I. Us**

*(young white American male. Between 30 and 40. He is intently studying the woman sitting on the stage.)*

I was busy....damn you! Busy. Things move too fast. Work, the wife. The kids. Money is getting tight. All the worries. Look at me. I feel like I'm 80 years old. Lines in my face feel like they've been carved there.

"What happens if this....what happens if that?"

They say worry is wasted thought but without what the hell would we think about? It's like spending your entire life tip toeing through a mine field.

"Gee, I wonder what will happen if I step here?"

And the news. I saw a US soldier being dragged down the street. Dead. Who were these people? What the hell are we even doing there?

Then change the channel. With the flick of a thumb I'm back in never never land.

And then I saw you.

*(gets closer....studying her intently)*

At first I saw nothing *but* the eyes. There is plenty of life there. They are not cold. There is surely fear, because deep inside there has never been anything but fear...but I can see a flicker of hope as well....if I have the time to gaze into them long enough.

Just what *have* your eyes seen? Have they seen murder? Have they seen rape? Do they now inhabit a world in which all family is gone...replaced by....what? How do you replace family? If you (*meaning the audience*) could speak with her....what would you

say? What would seem appropriate? Maybe it's not necessary. Maybe a smile is all she needs? After all, how often are you close enough to deliver a smile that really matters? (*addressing the woman again*) To move from your hiding place would risk....what? Are the killers still out there? Do you know them by sight? Do they know *you* by sight? And with eyes like yours, do they dare let you live? To step from darkness into the light of day could mean for you...what?

(*he comes closer to her now...*)

You are beautiful. Do you know that? Does it matter anymore.....to you?  
Do you dream? What happens when the eyes close?

What images in your mind would come back when you sleep? Can the horror you've seen be conjured up again?...or is it buried so deep that even subconscious excavation is fruitless? If that's true, isn't that some sort of sign that God does indeed exist? If proof were given to you of a God, would that make any difference? Would you say....."what were you doing when my family was being hacked to death?"

If you were white would it have mattered? Maybe. Maybe it's more than race. Maybe it's deeper in the soul than that. Or maybe color is all it is. Maybe there are no shades of gray....maybe everything is black.....and white....as they say.

If you had been the first item on the front page, instead of being buried on the bottom of page 26...would it have mattered? If you had been the leading story on the news instead of the one day story that came between weather and sports, would it have mattered? If we had not been struck dumb by the sight of a Ford Bronco....would we have had time then to look into your eyes? We seem to have found time to do it now. What has changed between the killing and recriminations?

(*getting in her face....and screaming*) What have you done to me?

(*lights. when they come back up the same woman is now standing alone...center stage*)

## ***II. Survivor***

(*Rwandan Tutsi woman. About 40*)

We're simply here. Born to our mothers. I don't take life for granted, but we all take the fact that we were uniquely born as a matter of course. I exist. I am part of the vastness of earth. I never stop and wonder how it could be that another soul could be looking out of my eye sockets.

I am what they call a Genocide survivor. A Tutsi woman in Rwanda. But there are no real genocide survivors. The body may survive but the soul is dead....and one is not much use without the other. And I can finally imagine myself how God must see me...looking down at all this space among the green and blueness of the earth. We must look like bugs

from heaven. How could he see us all?

They say that Rwanda is where God comes when he needs to sleep. Maybe that explains what happened here. Maybe God slept through it all.

I will only speak in generalities. I think they may be more forceful sometimes. If I say that for 100 days 6 people were murdered every minute...that may mean more in your consciousness than any of the details of such crimes. Sometimes large numbers demand to be processed in the mind. Broken down it somehow becomes small...and perhaps disposable.

I tell you I never question why I was born, but now over and over I think about why I did not die. My husband and children were killed in front of me. Hacked with machetes as if they were cows. My baby was ripped from my arms and taken by his feet, where he was then swung around in a circle before they smashed his head into the ground. I tell you in this way because there is no other way to tell. I ask you for nothing but reflection.

And they raped me until they were satisfied, and it was only when I begged them to kill me with a bullet instead of a machete that they looked at me like I was a human being.

For a moment they had eyes, and then they were gone again. Slits. They would waste no bullets on me, they said. But instead of being hacked, they threw me in a grave and forced me to drink a bottle of disinfectant...which was easier for them and much more entertaining. They thought I was dead...and left. I was not dead. I vomited for hours, and the poison left me. And that's how you become a genocide survivor.

I knew the men who raped me...the men who killed my family. One of them lived across the street from us...and once when my child was sick he brought milk.

Though the act of killing can be quick, it is a slow process that leads up to it. Hatred must be allowed to fester like a machete wound, and if there was no hatred there, then that hatred must be invented. And there is no better way to suppress natural intelligence than to bring hatred into the mix. History has taught us that, or at least I thought it had. Hatred is like the water behind a dam...and when unleashed, it sweeps away everything in its path. It takes away reason, and finally it takes away human empathy. Even God gets drowned. God has risen from the dead already. Does he really have the strength to do it again?

You always look around you...for exceptions...for people who can swim. Madness is contagious true, but some are equipped with a gene that is resistant. I lived amongst these people during the killing, and we collectively wondered if the screams were loud enough for anybody else to hear. Was help going to come from the outside? Inside all was death. Life could only come from outside.

They never came. The screams went up towards the sky, where there is only silence...and the UN (*she laughs bitterly*).

Go on, you can laugh....as I still can. There are no rules against laughter here. The UN sent some troops, perhaps to get a front row seat to how these things go for future reference "Never again" and all that....you know. They watched intently enough from behind their wire and walls, but when asked for help said that they could do nothing without permission from New York.

Strange. They looked like grown men to me, but a bureaucracy can make the mind childlike. And so the powder blue berets bobbed up and down from behind fences and walls, and then went off in search of a working fax machine.

And so 800,000 died in 100 days. That is the number the west came up with, so that is the number you know. It's more than that. Much more. Well over a million. But no matter. What is 2....300,000 Africans? They just make the line on the chart move ever so slightly upward. If the machetes don't get us surely AIDS will.

The west started a tribunal to prosecute war crimes, which is a bit like offering me an umbrella after it rains. I suppose there is collective guilt there...for not doing anything to stop the killings....and a westerner in a robe with a gavel feels useful and un-guilty. We should all feel that way. The judges all have one thing in common. None of them has even set foot in Rwanda.

The men who killed my family....they still live here. I see them almost everyday, although they never look or speak to me. There is no remorse. They just say they did as they were told. If they were told to do it again, they would do it again.

My husband....and my children. They are still dead. There is no plan for anybody to bring them back.

As for me? Does anybody still want to hear about me? I have AIDS from the rapes. And everyday I die a little more. I tell you that dying comes easier than living sometimes. You don't have to work to die. Living is hard....and I am so tired.

Soon I'll be gone, and when God comes for me I do hope He and my family will recognize me. I used to look....well.....better. My children deserve to see their Mother. I hope for at least that. I am not ashamed to ask for it. I've asked for nothing else.

*(lights)*

### ***III. Killer***

*(Rwandan Hutu man. Young. Twenties.)*

I remember the beer. Banana beer. They would bring it to us in crates at the end of the day if they thought we had killed enough Tutsis. It was very good. Nice on the back of the throat. It is hot here. You think you already know that but you can't really understand it unless you are here.

And it is hard work to kill a man. It takes more than one blow to keep him down. Sometimes 5...10 even. The same as a cow. Strange. A man is smaller so you figure it would take less....but no. And still sometimes they still want to live longer. That is how Tutsi are. They are not like us. They are arrogant.

And some nights we would not get our beer...and there would be cursing. And someone would say...."never again will that happen....tomorrow we will get our beer."

What can I say? They told us to kill. That it was the right thing to do. That it was for the best. That the Tutsis were going to kill us if we did not kill them. I had no job...so I had the time to do as they said. They were in charge, not me. And now Tutsis are in charge and they say it was not OK to kill...so I feel bad about it now. Of course I do. But I can't raise the dead. Only God can do that. But the Tutsi are still dead. He did not raise them....so maybe he agreed with us. You have to look at all sides....at all possibilities.

The radio would say....."there is a Tutsi living at such and such an address....and he is trying to sneak out his back window. Are you going to let the cockroach get away?" So you see it was easy to find them. There are only so many places to hide. Even if they went to hide in the fields we could always set the fields on fire.

And I knew the Tutsi. We all knew them. They lived next to us. They don't all live in a separate place. They are all over Rwanda.

They say we must kill the women because they are seducers. Our women are afraid they will tempt us. So we must kill them. Our wives kill too. We all had to do it. If we did not, we would be killed ourselves....so what are we to do? I can be no good to anyone if I am dead.

We are told to kill the babies too. The boy's will grow up to be soldiers someday....and try to kill us. So, we kill them. Sometimes with a rock. Smashing the head. Sometimes it is easier to throw them down a well. They cry but stop crying when they hit the bottom. The baby girls will grow up to be seducers too like their mother's...so they have to die too. We were told this. Pregnant women.....of course. Some made them drink drain cleaner instead of using the machete because they had a weak stomach....so there was some weakness and mercy too. But you never hear this. And if you could not kill a woman you could mutilate her so she could not reproduce more Tutsis.

I do not know how many I killed personally because I was not counting. It is easy to lose track anyway, especially in a crowded place. The churches were a gathering place for Tutsis so we went there. They thought the priests would protect them but the priests were Hutu like us and of course did what they were told. Sometimes they passed out gasoline so we could burn the churches....and one priest was a farmer too so he had a bulldozer that we used to knock the building over and crush them inside. I am not a priest so I do not know what they went through in their own hearts about this. They knew God was watching so that told us that God said it was OK for us to kill Tutsis. If God had not

thought so our leaders would not have been telling us it was OK to kill. We are Catholics mostly here so we want to be right with God.

Sometimes we make mistakes because Hutus who are tall get mistaken for Tutsis and killed. That comes from being drunk and tired I think too. Some nights we can kill no more so we just cut the Achilles tendons of those around us so they could not escape while we slept. We woke up with groggy heads and sometimes it's hard to remember where you are or what you are supposed to do. But the moaning makes it hard to sleep so we have to make it stop because that is what we are ordered to do unless we want to be killed ourselves. Nobody wishes to die. You do what you have to do to stay alive. It's natural. On these nights sometimes I have dreams. I miss my kids. They are home wondering why I am not there. I dream about them and it makes me feel better.

I went to prison for 9 years and then I was released and told to go home and make peace with the families of those I killed. Mostly I could not do this because I did not know who I killed, but in some cases I killed neighbors and knew them well. Sometimes a child was all that was left, and they would tremble when I appeared on the street and run away. So it was hard for me to approach them. I was worried too that some might try to kill me for what I've done. But you cannot live your life filled with worry, so now I try the best I can to be a good man.

What would you have done if you were in my place? If I did not kill I would be killed. That is a hard fact. So I defended my tribe against the Tutsi.

You ask me if I feel guilt. Yes, I feel guilt for what I have done. I think about it everyday. Nobody looks the same to me anymore. Nothing looks the same to me anymore. I am a stranger here I think. In my own country.

I do not wish that on anyone.

*(lights)*

#### ***IV. Reluctant Soldier***

*(Male Tutsi. Around 30)*

I never wanted to be a soldier. I'm a farmer. That's what I was born to be. Just like my father and his father. I look at soldiers and I see clowns. Just kids a lot of them. Playing dress up....waving their guns in the air and drinking beer and belching. First time away from home. They are only afraid of their mothers. Not smart enough to be afraid of anyone else. Being a soldier was like the government giving you a pass to be a bandit. No, not for me. I kept me head down. Tended to my cattle....my family. There's only so much time in the day. No time for nonsense.

Nobody knew it would start so quickly. Things were uneasy between Hutu and Tutsi, but things were always uneasy. But in the fields you have to keep your head down. Your

world becomes much smaller. You need control....all men need control....so you tend to the earth. Your earth. The stars can take care of themselves.

I knew when we heard the plane went down that something might happen. There might be some random violence....but it would pass. I told my wife and kids to stay inside for a few days. But I had to tend to my fields. So I was away for maybe 2 hours that day. And when I came back....my family was dead. They were in the yard. Or pieces of them were. I searched for all the parts....but was never able to put my wife completely back together. I found the parts to my son. His head and limbs were in the tall grass. His eyes were still open in his head. My wife's eyes I could not find. They had been gouged out. I buried them in the yard....placed my son on the breast of my wife....and covered them with dirt that had been in our family for generations. I tell you this in a quiet way because there is no other way to pass along such news. If out of my mouth came what is in my heart...you would all be poisoned. I tell you that my family was killed like hogs. I shall not tell you how to feel....nor lead your feelings one way or another. That is not my way.

Everywhere was fear....but rage takes fear away.....so in a way I felt perfectly safe walking to the next hill....where the closest Hutu farm was. I knew the family. He was a loudmouth...the kind that shuts up when you are around but gets louder as you get further away. But he had children....and sometimes they met my son in the fields..and they would do like all children do. They knew nothing of Hutu and Tutsi. They only enjoyed being children. So they'd play....like kids do.

I carried my panga...and when his wife saw me she tried to scream but nothing came out. Her husband saw and tried to get away....but he had a big Hutu belly that slowed him down and that allowed me to catch him easy. He begged like a girl, and I saw that he had soiled himself. If you are brave enough to chop up women and children, you should not go shitting in your pants.

He died quickly....with gurgling noises coming out of his mouth. For some reason I hated the sound, and got a rag from the shelf and stuffed it down his throat. Then he as finally silent. The blood on his shirt wasn't his blood when I got there, but it was when I left. His children saw....and his wife. They thought I would go for them next. But no. I sat down at their table....and pulled out pictures of my wife and child that I carry in my back pocket. I said..."do you want to see them?"

They didn't....so I left.

I can't remember how long I walked. One day....maybe three. I drank when the rains came. I did not eat. There was too much hate in the belly. I would retch after drinking the rain.

There were roadblocks everywhere....but I kept to the fields. I am sure that some saw me....but chose not to interfere. My mind was totally clear. Observant people could see that. And this country is filled with observant people.

I finally reached a part of the country under control of the rebels. I went to the first group of soldiers I saw and told them I wanted to join up. If I wasn't six and a half feet tall covered in dried Hutu blood and carrying a panga like a rifle...I am sure they would have laughed at me. But they didn't....and showed me to their commanding officer. He told me what was expected of a soldier....and I laughed, because I knew what was expected now. He asked me about my family. I told him, and he said nothing. He only said that revenge was like a dog chasing his own tail.....and I simply stared at him and we let the comment pass. They gave me a gun and showed me how to shoot. So there. I was a soldier now.

And my story seemed normal when I met the others. All seemed to have lost family. Mothers, Fathers, sisters, wives...children. I was not going to get straight sympathy here. I don't think I wanted it or even needed it, but it's good to know where people stand anyway. Soldiers will let you know because they never really know how much longer they're going to live...and it's best to not have gray area between comrades.

After a while none of us spoke of our families at all. It was as if we were all orphans. And I remember what I thought about soldiers and soldiering...so I tried to be different. My shirt always had a crease. And my boots would shine so that I could view myself in them while marching. But no matter how I looked on the outside inside all I wanted to do was kill. And at the end of the day we'd sit and drink beer and talk about the war....and the killing, and it would make us feel righteous. And there is nothing more dangerous than half drunk armed soldiers who feel righteous....especially when most of them still have the dirt they buried their families with on their hands.

And I'm sure that made me no better than those clowns I'd see shooting their guns in the air. But nothing was the same anymore. It would never be the same.

My thoughts were simple. You wanted death? Now you're going to get it. You killed my family? Now I am going to kill you. You can judge me all you want. What does judgment mean anyway? Who judged my wife and child when they were being chopped up like sugarcane? I feel nothing anymore. Revenge is all that I have to hold onto. It's all that I have that makes me feel alive.

Judgement is the Lord's.....that's what they say. That's only half true. He'll get his chance in the next world. But in this one, judgement belongs to me.

*(lights)*

## ***V. Red Cross***

*(White European Red Cross aid worker. Mid forties.)*

Working for the Red Cross....you get addicted to the action sometimes. I'd spent years in Latin America....and now it was getting stale. I thought Africa would prove more exciting. And then I was told about Rwanda....and the peace process they were trying to

hammer out there. Never heard of the place really....had to search to even find it on the map. But I was told they had great lakes there....and the fishing was marvelous. So, I lobbied for it and got it. I was sent here. And I wonder if I hadn't exhibited a bit of racism myself....you know? "Come to Africa...after all, that's where the black people are....that's where all the killing is." To white Europeans....it's still like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It's like the other side of the tracks when you were a kid. And who didn't slip out at night wanting to see what was going on there....to see how the other half lived? Racism is insidious, it really is. I have no qualms about telling you the truth. You watch a million people get killed and bullshit becomes difficult to spew.

I got here in 1993....and I can remember the Rwanda government being forced to sign this peace agreement by the international community. The "International community". What does that even mean really? These people had never even heard of this country. It was like playing some board game to them. They were more interested in the pool back at the hotel. I remember one guy saying..."oh, you've got a pool at the hotel?"...and a Rwandan saying.....with a great big smile...."yes, we can swim too."

(laughs)

It was like they were watching *Roots* on the plane to prepare. They were dealing with forces that they couldn't begin to understand. I remember asking a Rwandan government official about the peace agreement, and he told me that "in Africa....we use peace agreements to wipe our ass."

And I remember thinking.....um.....this is not going to go very well. Because you'd sit around the table with all the white guys in suits...sweating like they'd never experienced heat before, and the Rwandan government officials would be charming....you know.....bending over backwards to please them all. And then they'd laugh when they left and then get on the phone and order more machetes. It was what I call "3 piece suit" evil. Evil from the top down.

It was surreal....but I'd seen so much that nothing I could imagine at the time could possibly be worse than anything I'd already experienced. That was the thought process at the time. Like sleepwalking almost. And then a friend of mine....a local Red Cross worker here, a Tutsi....he came to see me one day and said...."if something happens, can you protect me and my family?" And it was like right then I woke up. He didn't really explain what he meant....and I couldn't really answer his question. I don't think I wanted to. It just kinda drifted off into the breeze. I immediately knew...right there....that this was going to be different than anything I'd ever seen. And the cocky side of me says..."alright, I'm ready....bring it on."

You know.....the big liberal European saying....."I will save the blacks from themselves"

And then of course the killing started. You have to remember something here. It was like hitting a trip wire. It didn't start slow and build. No. It came like the summer rains. The sky simply opened up and it rained blood. And it was mind numbing from the get go.

Other aid agencies...smaller ones...they pulled out immediately. And I remember getting a call from my boss saying that they were working on a plan to get us all out of there, and I said...."ok...good idea"...you know. And then they called back and said.."about that plan? well, we could never implement it. it's just too hard logistically to get everyone out....so you'll have to stay." And I appreciated the honesty about that. I really did. Honestly in the middle of a Genocide is refreshing.

And so we went to work. Both the national and local chapters went out to gather the wounded. Since the killers could not conceive of any Tutsis living...they didn't even refer to them as wounded. They called them "not quite finished off". And one of our local Vans was stopped. There were 6 people inside....with machete wounds. And screwdriver wounds. They used screwdrivers too. And a group of about 6 drunken youths stopped the Van...and killed everybody in the back. Then they sat at the side of the road and smoked cigarettes.

How does one take news such as this? I called Geneva and said we had to make this public. The Red Cross had never taken a stand before. There have been 4 confirmed genocides in the 20th century alone. The Armenians, the Holocaust, the Killing Fields of Cambodia...and now Rwanda. We had not taken sides. But something snapped now. And so a press release was sent out...and even the killers were embarrassed by the bad press. Nobody wants their name in the paper...you know? Especially killers. So from then on we were able to travel somewhat freely. And it was like a 4 line press release. That was all it took. And I wonder....what else could we have done? Why does it take so much to get people to speak?

And so we were able to save...what?.....maybe 70,000 people. Out of a million dead. It seems insignificant. Like walking around a colony of ants instead of on it. And to do this we had to talk to the killers. Gain some trust with them. It leaves a bad taste....but how else can I say this? The best way to save people is to talk with the people who are wanting to kill them. I can spin this around my head all I want now. But when I have a dying woman in the back of my truck, and I can get her to a hospital by giving the guy that hacked her head with a machete a pack of smokes....well...then I give the guy a pack of smokes. And he smiles and puts out his hand for me to shake. And I shake it.

Would you?

You are scared....but can't show it. Killers are cowards who prey on fear. It's like air to them. If they know you don't fear them, they act like little children. They'll pout. How many roadblocks did I pass by simply looking them dead in the eye? And I tell you....after a while....when the dead on the side of the road become part of the scenery....your fear leaves you entirely. You don't care if you live or die. If you no longer feel....then fear leaves you as well. You just do the job.

I have one job. To make sure people live. When they are dead, I can do nothing more. You can say that I've grown cold. I pay that type of thing no mind. If the bodies pile up, I have to move them to make room for the living. As long as people live, I have no time for

the dead. Does that make sense to you?

When people die, they are in God's hands...not mine. And if you think I am cold...what do you think of Him?

*(lights)*

## **VI. Journalist**

*(White Female Western Journalist. Grizzled veteran. Between 40 and 50 years old.)*

Interesting to hear the US and France and Belgium saying...."oh, we had no idea what was going on..."

Funny....but for folks who didn't know what was happening.....they sure got their people out in a hurry. A few days after the genocide started the Western powers launched what I like to call "operation save the white people".

The same people who later took 3 months to send cold war era ATV's to the UN force had large and well equipped military forces on the ground in a matter of hours. And lest anybody miss the show....they invited journalists like me to come along.

I went with French paratroopers to a hospital in Kigali where some French nationals worked. We were driving in this convoy....and I can remember everything being so quiet. And then all of a sudden it seemed like people were materializing like ghosts from the trees. Just kids mostly. Militia. They were carrying machetes...and they lined the side of the road...like some sort of bizarre honor guard. Nobody said a word. The French didn't seem particularly worried. Some of them even waved. And there were roadblocks set up everywhere....but we were waved right through all of them. My cameraman pointed his camera at the militia....and they'd turn away. Camera shy. Kids. My son's age maybe. Fifteen....sixteen. All with eyes like a children's doll. Killing to them is like waving your hand in front of a blind man. Nothing.

And we pulled up at the gates of this hospital.....and Rwandan's swarmed at us. They came pouring out of every door. Tutsis. They thought we were here to save them. They told us the militia were just waiting for the French to leave before they killed them. We were stunned. None of us had ever been in Rwanda before....and couldn't really grasp what they were telling us. They were going to be killed? By the kids we saw on the way in? Why? They weren't soldiers. They were hospital workers. Nurses, doctors. We were told this was a civil war? Where were the armies?

And the French paratroopers formed a kind of wedge....and some went inside to get the French people out....and the rest kept the Tutsis away. And I can remember this one French guy. A beautiful Tutsi woman was pleading with him to take them all away....and he wouldn't even look at her. And it didn't look like shame on his face....it looked more like indifference to me. He was bored. And it dawned on all of the Tutsis that while this

was indeed a rescue mission....it wasn't for them.

And then the most pathetic part. They turned to us....the journalists. They said.."please, in the name of God, don't leave us here to die." There must have been 100 of them. And we were facing each other. And the cameras were clicking away....and they all thrust their hands out towards us....but it was like they were aware of some invisible barrier. I felt dirty. Unclean. Just to be standing there....watching people beg for their lives...knowing that warm sheets and a heated pool and your suitcase with pictures of your kids inside it were waiting for you back at the hotel.

They didn't move towards us. They just pleaded from about 10 feet away. It sounded like they were all singing us a song. And we stood there and took their pictures....like you would an animal at a zoo. And the same Tutsi woman who spoke to the soldier....she looked right at me...and she says..."Madame, you must have children. I don't want my children to die today." And she said it so quietly....with so much dignity. I couldn't find words to say. How could I counter dignity like that? And my cameraman leans over to me....he had been filming the whole time....and he says...."by the time the rest of the world sees this video all of these people will be dead."

And then the crowd parts and 2 French paratroopers are leading this fat French woman wearing tight shorts and flip flops....they are leading her to one of the trucks. And she's crying hysterically....but she never looks at her Tutsi co-workers at all. She doesn't even acknowledge them. And I'm thinking...."what is she crying for?...being pulled away from lunch?...she's going to the airport and these people are all gonna fucking die!" And the soldiers are trying to console her. It takes 3 of them to get her into the back of the truck. The fatass. It was sickening to watch.

And all the while the militia are outside the gates. Waiting. Not moving. Buzzing. Like bees. And the paratroopers said it was time to go. They had gotten all the white people out of the building. Their "mission" was over.

And it was like everything was going in slow motion. We all peeled away and got back on the trucks....and you could hear the birds. You could feel the breeze. But it still felt like the world had stopped somehow. Just stopped spinning....or maybe just tumbled out of the sky. And I looked back....and that Tutsi woman was looking at me still. And I heard her call out....just loud enough for me alone to hear...."Madame, I wish you peace."

*(nearly breaks down at this)*

And the convoy started to move....and as we moved away....the militia moved in. Like a swarm of locusts. And before we were 50 yards off I heard gunfire. Then screams. I tried to turn away but I couldn't. I searched for that woman....but all I could see were flailing arms. It looked like farmers working in a field.

Since that day I can take 3 showers a day and still not feel clean. I feel like there's some

sort of gritty film all over my body. And I look at myself in the mirror and all I can see is my whiteness. It's pale....with no color at all really. Like a.....corpse.

And my son....he tries to understand...but maybe we expect too much. He has no reference point. So on those nights that I cry for that Tutsi woman....and my own lack of moral courage....I know he hears me....but he leaves me be.

*(lights)*

## ***VII. UN Peace Keeper***

*(White UN Peace Keeper. About 50 years old.)*

As a soldier you're taught to obey orders. And so that's what I did. My superiors were back in New York at the UN, and they told me....essentially....to stand down. And so instead of stopping the genocide, I became a witness to it. Front row seats.

And you know....I've thought this over in my head for 10 years now. Nobody ever really tried to hold me accountable. Even Rwandans now don't. My excuse that I was "just following orders" is enough for them. They may blame the UN....my superiors, but they don't blame me at all. I can go back....and they'll welcome me with open arms.

And now they gather the killers together....and they ask..."why did you do it?". And they'll say....."because I was just following orders." The Nuremberg defense apparently works for both of us.

I was a soldier...and I wanted to go to Rwanda. I wasn't sure where it was....but I still wanted to go. I've been a soldier my whole adult life. But the cold war ended...and now it was like being a doctor where nobody gets sick. You never really knew what kind of soldier you were. You needed combat. I actually craved it. It was like Rwanda was put there for me....as a test. And there was probably a point there...where I was getting ready to go....where if somebody said...."stand down, the situation is stabilized...you don't have to go now"....I would have been pissed off. I wanted it to be messy....because I wanted to clean it up.

I'd never been to Africa before.....so naturally I had the place all drawn up in my head. You know....it's going to look like this....and the people are going to act like this. That sort of thing. That's what humans do. And I remember flying over trying to learn about Rwandans. Nobody at the UN had given anybody any real information about the country, so I was reading an Encyclopedia that I'd taken out of my local library. I took the "A" and the "R"....and I'd read everything there was before the plane had even taken off. It was like eating your popcorn before the movie starts. I was like a little kid.

And I remember that first breath of African air. Nothing prepares you for it. I mean....you weren't in Kansas anymore....understand? Africa is not like anyplace else. If you blindfolded me now, and flew me there without telling me where I was going....I'd

know we were in Africa. And once Africa enters you...it never leaves.

And once we got there it was like nobody knew we were coming. I was calling New York saying things like...."where are we supposed to sit down? there are no desks"...and "the flashlights you've sent were great....but do you think you can send the batteries and bulbs for them too?" And the guy at the other end of the phone in the peace keeping office is using a milk crate for his desk....so he's not too moved by my problems. He's saying.."well, if you wanted bulbs and batteries you have to ask for them....all you asked for were the flashlights." Welcome to the UN. These guys could complicate a cup of coffee.

In retrospect....the arrogance is incredible. We come in there....not knowing a thing about the country....the people....the culture...and we just expect everybody to shake hands and play nice. It's like..."the white people are here....so it's time for all you children to behave." I hate to say it like that but it's true. There's always a bit of racism involved when the west comes to Africa. We watch CNN, and all we ever see are African's either starving....or killing one another. That's it. And when they starve...we feel bad and send food. When they kill each other we shrug and say..."there they go again."

Somalia changed everything. You know....this was supposed to be a photo-op. It's like confession for the West. "We could use a bit of cheering up....so lets go feed some Africans and unload some of this guilt. Make sure the camera's are running."

But Africans killing each other is one thing. When they start killing US Marines....well, that's something else entirely. And I'm convinced that the day those black hawks went down in Somalia was the day that doomed Rwanda. Because the US said "never again". And they weren't talking about preventing another holocaust either.

Remember that movie *Gorillas in the Midst*? It was about Dian Fossey....who came to Rwanda to study the mountain gorillas. Beautiful, mysterious creatures. And I can say with no doubt whatsoever that if a group of insurgents went into the Rwandan mountains to murder all the gorillas there.....there would be a bigger outcry in the world than there was when 800,000 people were slaughtered. Not gorillas. These were people. And as a matter of fact the infrastructure of Rwanda would make it much more difficult to kill gorillas than people. The Gorillas are afforded much more protection .There's much more light on them. You don't see Hollywood making a movie about Rwandan people. But the gorillas? Well...that's entertainment.

The whole world is a shade of gray. There's good and bad everywhere. And I guess it depends on the kind of person you are whether you feel like you have to peel one away to get to the other. You know....is the glass half filled with evil or is it half empty? But the world *has* changed. Want to know the difference? Ok, here it is. When the Nazi's killed the Jews, they did everything they could to cover it up. When Rwandan's killed Rwandan's, they not only killed 5 times faster than the Nazis, but they did it in front of the world media. Everybody with cable TV could watch. Now that's progress eh?

*(long pause)*

I'll tell you one thing that Rwanda did to me. It made me scared of the light. Most people are afraid of the dark. But I welcome the night....because while you can hear things, nothing you can imagine could be worse than what these things will look like when the sun comes.

When I got home I was driving with my wife....down this stretch of highway. And there was a clean-up effort going on in the area....and on the sides of the road were bags and bags of debris...waiting to be picked up. And my wife saw my eyes go....and asked me what was wrong. I told her that for a minute it looked like the bodies on the side of the road in Rwanda.

*(lights)*

### **VIII. US Government**

*(Washington official. Forties.)*

This is turning into 100 ways to say we're sorry. I could say it again but I won't, because sorry gives the impression that somehow we'd do something different next time, and I think we both know that's not true. It rings hollow quite frankly. A government acts against its will only when its people demand it. And you tell me what the political price was for ignoring Rwanda. Nobody was pushing Clinton to do anything. The average American never heard of the place. All they needed to hear was the magic word..."Africa". It's like the boogey man. That was enough. Just a bunch of blacks killing each other again. Ho hum. Get me another beer will ya?

Somalia was another place in Africa that nobody ever heard of. And then one night we turn on the TV and see dead US soldiers being dragged through the street by teenage boys with Russian machine guns. And guys were walking around the White House mumbling to themselves....you know...."heads are gonna roll on this one....fucking CNN....the Republicans are gonna tear us a new asshole..." And everybody starts asking Clinton...."what the hell are you sending American boys there for?" and Clinton mumbles something about people starving to death and Congress is going..."well, they looked pretty godamn healthy dragging our boys through the streets, so I guess the food is getting through eh?....well done". And Clinton got the message.

And so when Rwanda exploded it was like somebody's dog leaving a big piece of shit on your Mother's carpet. Your only thought was to get it out of the room before she got home. And it wasn't like there weren't other things happening at the same time. South African Elections. Bosnia. Lots to keep us busy...lots to take our mind off things. So we were all acting like kids do....thinking that when they close their eyes it makes them invisible. And pretty soon the TV is showing pictures of bodies flowing into Lake Victoria....into Uganda. I mean, Rwanda was so full of dead bodies that they were

overflowing into other fucking *countries*. And we're saying, "well, the situation is still very unclear." (*laughs*). And I remember a meeting where some guys were talking about how us intervening might affect the mid-term congressional elections...and that maybe we could save a little face by donating some rubber rafts and boat hooks to get the bodies out of the river. And guys are screaming...."who's gonna pay for the boats?"

It was fucking surreal.

There was a state run hate radio station broadcasting over there...inciting the population to kill....real Joseph Goebbels stuff....and at the very least we could have jammed the frequency. And some guy suggested it and one of the State Department lawyers argued that that would be censorship. And instead of everybody in the room picking up their chairs and throwing it at his head, they all kinda nodded like wind up dolls and said..."well, yea, you don't want to get involved with that...". An airforce guy says...."besides, it'd cost \$8000 an hour for a flight over there to do that. Who's gonna reimburse us?" And then they broke for lunch....(*laughs heartily at this*)

Found out later that an average of 333 people were killed every hour over those 100 days....almost 6 people a minute. While we were arguing over the cost of rubber rafts, maybe 100 people were killed with machetes. And on Friday afternoon's guys would knock off early and go..."we'll pick this up again on Monday morning" and by then there'd be 16,000 more dead people. One guys says...."they are good at this aren't they?"

We were told...."look, whatever you do don't use the G word....you can't say "genocide" or else we'll be legally obligated to do *something*" So we'd all do this bureaucratic 2 step and patting each other on the back, you know..."good work, they never laid a glove on you" (*laughs*)

But eventually a state department spokesman slipped and admitted that yes....*acts of genocide* had been committed but when some smartass asked her what the difference was between *acts of genocide* and *actual genocide* she looked like she was gonna give birth at the podium.

Oh...forgot this one. Towards the end of the genocide we did agree to supply the UN with some old cold war era APC's. 50 of 'em. Told 'em they'd have 'em in two weeks. Two months later the genocide was over and the tanks finally get there....one of the delays was that somebody thought they were the wrong color and had them re-painted....they get to Rwanda but they don't have guns or radios in 'em. Might as well have sent them a pack of Volkswagon's. Some guy at the Pentagon gets called on the carpet and says...." ...they're lucky they have fucking wheels".

So that was that really. We really didn't give a shit what happened to you. And since it looked bad for us, we strong armed everybody else to not give a shit what happened to you either. It's best to look bad with others. If you take a class picture and you're the only

one with the nose growing out of your forehead, everybody will notice. But if the entire class looks the same, everybody blends in. No matter how deformed your policies are.

What have you got that we need? What's in it for us? Saving lives is nice, but it doesn't pay the fucking political bills. That's reality. As real as the dead in Lake Victoria.

Today....I'll bow my head and say all the right things. I'll look repentant as hell. But I don't really think about you all that much. I mean....it's fashionable to blame the US for what happened there, but I never picked up a machete and chopped somebody up. Clinton never did. Albright never did. I can't be all things to all people. Can I?

But Clinton....he came to Kigali in 1998....the famous apology. But you go back and listen to his remarks...go ahead....and you tell me where he said the words "I'm sorry." He never did. I swear he only went to get out of the house. He was getting his balls busted about Monica Lewinsky and even Rwanda was looking good to him about then. So he flew in, shook some hands, got some flowers, gave his little pep talk..."never again" and all that bullshit. He claimed he had no idea what was happening at the time even though it was on fucking TV in his office. He stood there for all to see....with his nose in the middle of his forehead, and instead of repulsing everyone....they cheered him. Go figure.

He never left the airport. Air Force One never even shut it's engines down.

*(lights)*

## ***IX. Dead at Nyarubuye***

*(Tutsi woman. Around 40)*

I was killed here in Nyarubuye. In the Catholic Church. We all thought we'd be safe here. But there is no safe place really.

It's not over for us. We're dead....but it's not over. We're still here in this church. We see everything. We hear everything. We also smell everything...which is not so good. But one can get used to anything in time. I still say we're better off than you are.

If there is a heaven we haven't been there yet. Maybe this is purgatory.

Our bodies remain here for all to see. The government figured that if us being killed could be ignored...maybe just leaving the bodies strewn about where we were killed might get noticed some. I mean....it's hard to ignore a dead body laying on the ground.

Unless you're Rwandan of course.

Burial is only important for those still alive. For those of us dead....who cares really? I'd just as soon lie be here than in some dirt in the ground. Here I have company. My family

is here. And my friends. It is good not to die alone.

There is no more physical fear....and there is no more physical pain. That is a blessing. My friend is named Joseph. He started to pray when the killers came. So they cut off his feet. Then they cut off his hands too....so he could not place them together in prayer. And with no feet...and no hands...he crawled while they watched and laughed. He crawled towards the altar in the church. And so they cut off his head and placed it on the altar where the cross was. They impaled it on the cross. And he died in agony...the way a butchered cow does. And all his life he prayed here....and in the end that was his answer. But now he is whole again. And we are still friends. And he has never lost faith. He still prays. He will never give up. He is stronger than any thousand killers.

And there were that many. First the military came. And people were screaming....and they said they would waste no bullets on us because the militia were outside with Machetes....and you didn't need bullets for a machete. But they offered to shoot anybody who would give them money....and a lucky few had money to give and were killed with a bullet to the head. That was mercy for the Tutsi.

And the militia stormed in...and the problem was that there were more of them than there was of us. And they wanted to kill so badly. But the math does not add up. So I myself was hacked to death by 3 men. This was a blessing of sorts because it takes less time.

One man with a machete...it might take 15 blows to kill. But 3...it can be done quickly. Maybe this was mercy for the Tutsi as well.

One of my killers I knew. I went to school with him. When I screamed out his name....he noticed me for the first time....but knowing me seemed to make him even more savage. All I could hope for was that my family would die quickly.

My parents....I remember them that morning before we made our way to the church. They were in bed sipping tea. I was screaming at them to move...that we would all be killed. And they kept saying that it was done already. We were already dead...so they saw no reason why they could not at least enjoy their tea. And when the killers came, they did not move. They sat in a church pew holding hands. I asked them later....I said, "How were you killed"...and my father said...."it doesn't matter. I don't want to think on that. But that tea....that is what I remember. It was exquisite."

Their hearts were not poisoned...perhaps because they are dead. I've heard those still alive say that if you licked their hearts....you would die from the poison. Perhaps we are the lucky ones. And even years later....the children here. They don't understand. They keep asking...."why did those people come and kill us...what did we do?" What can we say? Can I tell my children that they day there were born to a Tutsi mother...their fate was sealed? Would they blame me for bringing them into the world if I said that? To not die here for Tutsi is to not be born.

But now, here in Nyarubuye....the visitors come. Not as much now as in the

beginning....all the well dressed people from the West came....as a sort of public relations penance. They bring the newsmen too....so they can be sure later that they were here I suppose.

And there's always somebody here who knows who they are. Madeline Albright. I never heard of her but somebody with me knew her...said she was from the US and worked at the UN or something. She was so short she must be half Twa (laughs). She came in a helicopter and tried not to slip in her high heels and black skirt on all the broken bones. Somebody picked up a skull with a machete crack in it and showed it to her and she made a face like somebody drinking sour milk. We all enjoy these visits. It gives us something to talk about.

Somebody here said Albright's parents were nearly killed during the holocaust...which is why she came to the US. Strange that somebody with that lesson behind them could not do more to help us. I'll never understand the West....but the truth is I'll never understand Rwanda either. If you spend your life trying to get into the heads of others, there would be no time to climb into your own.

Outside the church...there is a large statue of Christ over the entrance. He has His arms outstretched...calling us inside. He died for us...perhaps he wanted us to die for him. Underneath him...on the steps into the church....is a single dead body. Tall...with legs spread apart...one on the bottom step and one on the top. Head in the middle somewhere. Crushed. And that person is here with us now too. And I asked her..."what were you doing out on those steps?" And she says..."I was asking God for help...to sweep me up into His arms...above it all. His arms were outstretched, but there was nothing in them. There was room for me there. But the militia got to me before He did."

*(lights)*

## ***X. A Child***

*(Young Tutsi child. Perhaps 10 years old)*

I'm not really alone but I feel like it because my family is gone. There are lots of people around me now but it's not the same. There were less people around before but I was never lonely when my family was around. I wonder how you can be less lonely with less people? We've all learned to take care of ourselves mostly...but if we need to know things we can ask each other. All of us are here for the same reason....and sometimes some are smarter than others and you can get answers from them. I never asked anybody why my family was taken away though. I don't think even the smart ones could answer that.....because if they knew maybe they wouldn't still be here.

My mother told me...."Camille, make like you are dead. Don't move. Don't even breath.

It's like a game, OK?" That's what she said....and I said OK. So the men came and hit her until she was dead. She was lying on top of me and I just kept my eyes closed and

tried not to move....even when the blood from my mother's head slid down and got into my mouth. I didn't make like I tasted it or anything....and when the man kicked my mother and she didn't move, I heard him say that she was dead and that they could go home now. So when I finally moved I saw that my brothers and sisters and my father all looked the same as my mother. Dead. And I had nowhere to go....so at night I'd crawl underneath my mother and try to sleep....and I did that for many nights. That's where they found me, and they brought me here. I asked them if they could bring my family too but they said no.

I'm a little older now. We hear about what happened....but nobody really understands it still. And after a while, you stop talking about things that don't make sense. But sometimes even though I'm not talking about it, it gets in my head and makes me wake up at night sweating with bad dreams. But still, nobody says anything anymore. Well...they do sometimes. Mostly when the white people come by and start asking questions. White people want to know everything about my Mom, so I tell them all I can remember. Sometimes, they pat me on the head and give me sweets. We all like to see them coming...not so much for the questions, but because they always have sweets in their pockets. There are lots of kids here and sometimes the white people can't ask everybody questions....so you get left out. But mostly we'll break the sweets into pieces and share what we have. It's not really fair that some get them while others don't.

We go to school now. I'm learning to write and to read. My father never knew how to read. I don't know if my mother did or not because I never asked her. I wish I could ask her questions like that now. You always think of the good questions to ask when it's too late. My teacher says that a lot more people read stories than write them...so that I should learn to write and tell everybody what happened here....but if I tell everyone by writing that might mean that the white people will stop coming to ask me and give me sweets, so I'm not sure what the right thing to do is. I wish my mother was here so I could ask her.

Sometimes in the middle of learning my mind will go back to when my mother told me to pretend I was dead. Some people say that thoughts only come back at night when you're dreaming but for me they can come in the daytime too when I'm awake. I'm not sure if I like the night or the day better. Both are the same I guess.

I remember that the radio told everybody it was OK to kill my mother and father and brothers and sisters. I heard it myself. We used to listen to the radio to hear the music, and sometimes my mother would teach me to dance. She was a good dancer and used to laugh when I tried to move my hips like her. But now I don't listen anymore. I don't like the radio. It scares me....and I'm tired of being afraid....so if I don't turn it on it can't scare me anymore.

They tell me I'm a Tutsi because my mother was a Tutsi and my father too. Even though they are both dead I still get to be a Tutsi. There are also Hutus here...and they are Hutus because their Mother and Father were Hutus. Sometimes somebody will ask..."are you a Tutsi or a Hutu" and I'll say "I'm a Tutsi" and they'll say "I'm a Hutu can't you tell?" and I'll say I can even though I can't really. And then we'll go off and play marbles and

sometimes a Tutsi wins and sometimes a Hutu wins....and sometimes we just play and nobody wins because nobody is keeping track....just playing.

I still miss my Mother. I miss the way she smelled...and the way she smelled me. I miss the way she wet my head when I was warm and sang to me in a whisper so she wouldn't wake up everybody else. She sang just for me. I miss holding her hand the most.

Wherever we went I always held her hand and my brothers would get jealous because I always got to her first. But when she got hit in the head and died and they brought me here all I wanted to do was hold someone's hand....so anybody who came near me I'd reach out for and they'd let me hold their hand until they had to go and do something. But after a while you don't need to hold hands with anybody....and it feels good to be grown up but not so good too.. It's hard to explain so I won't even try.

*(The "Survivor" actress comes onstage, and holds out her hand. The boy hesitates....then takes it, and they both turn and face the audience. Lights go down. theater remains dark and the song "Requiem for Butare" by Lorne Clarke is played. The song can be downloaded from here... <http://www.songaweek.com/rwanda/songs/butare.html>)*

## ***XI. Us Again***

*(Lights come up when the song ends. Same man who began the play. the boy and woman are onstage as well)*

So that's it. Dinner is on the table. Work tomorrow.

Getting cold outside too. Maybe one last time to cut the grass.

Gotta get the kids in the tub. Get them to bed earlier. They stay up too late. Always crabby in the morning.

Gotta say our prayers though. Now I lay me down to sleep....

*(turns to the little boy)*

Do you say that prayer?

*(he kneels down, and guides the boy in doing the same....so they both kneel as the woman watches)*

"Now I lay me down to sleep  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep  
if I should die before I wake  
I pray the Lord my soul to take"

*(the woman takes the little boy by the hand, and they move slightly away)*

You seen the paper? See what's going on now? It's happening again you know.  
Everyday.

But I'm so tired.

We have the ocean to keep this stuff away. It's always been there. It always will be. Did you ever try to hear anything from across the sea? If the almighty himself was calling you couldn't hear him.

I don't know them (*meaning the woman and child*)...do you? I should but I still don't. I don't have nearly the mind for it. But they know me. They know me.

Maybe that's the part that keeps me up at night.

*(lights. end of play)*