

Rwanda

Marie Rose and Jean Louis speak out about their experiences in Rwanda

Marie Rose and Jean Louis are two people whose lives were changed forever in 1994 by horrible events. They are not connected in any way other than by those events and by their bravery today.

Marie Rose and Jean Louis are both victims of the Rwandan genocide; they both saw family and friends killed and were lucky to escape with their own lives. Although less than 20 years have passed since those events they both speak up about what they saw. Between April and July 1994 over one million people were killed just



Jean-Louis Mazimpaka today. Copyright HMDT

because they belonged to a different ethnic group or were sympathetic to that group. Hutu Rwandans killed Tutsi Rwandans even though the two groups had lived side by side for generations, many had married each other and had families containing both Hutus and Tutsis. One of the most shocking elements of this genocide was that so many people knew the people who attacked them.

Marie Rose is a young woman who lost half of her family.

'It had a serious impact on my life, what I personally experienced at that time; no words can really describe it. It was an awful experience, seeing people killed, having to run for your life. You felt guilty, that you couldn't do something. What could I do to have saved them, I had no power. But I still have that sense of guilt.'

She feels that the International Community should have spoken up and done something to stop the killings.

‘What could have been done to stop the killing, a lot could have been done, because international organisations like the United Nations were all watching. The UN was present in the country but their mandate did not allow them to intervene. Before we knew what was happening they were withdrawn from the country for their own safety. So they abandoned the Tutsis to be butchered’.

The very organisation that was created to speak up for all the nations and all the peoples of the world failed to do its job even though it was there.

Jean Louis talks about the build-up to the genocide. Even though he was only a child when the genocide took place he was able to recall talk about the preparations leading to the killings.

‘In a separate part of the country, some people were saying they (the Hutus) were sending young men to military camps for training. So some people were killed so that they could see the reaction of the victims and find the efficient weapons. But we didn’t know that they were going to kill everyone.’

Once the violence started he remembers how unarmed civilians would try to stand up against armed authority figures – who should have been there to protect the people.

‘There were so many of my family and friends, so we put the women, the old people and the young ones inside the church, and the young boys and girls and the men stayed outside trying to protect them (from attack) using just stones. That lasted maybe ten days, but then the Mayor came with soldiers and pretended to protect us. And then the soldiers started firing at us, throwing grenades and we started to lose people.... I lost all of my friends and the killers were our neighbours.’

Jean Louis survived by swimming across a lake and getting to a neighbouring country, The Democratic Republic of Congo. It was a gruelling journey and many of those who attempted it did not survive. Having lost so many people and witnessed such terrible scenes, it would be understandable if Jean Louis never wanted to talk about what happened. Instead, like Marie Rose he is prepared to **Speak Up, Speak Out** and talk to young people about those experiences. He explains why: ‘Education is very important, remembering and memories are the voices of loved ones who were not so fortunate to survive, so I have to do it.’

The genocide in Rwanda happened fewer than 20 years ago. Some survivors now live in the UK or other European countries, many more still live in Rwanda in the towns and the villages with the people who committed the genocide and those that did not speak up to stop it.