

"For those who have learned of this story only through the famous movie *Hotel Rwanda*, the story of Edouard Kayihura is a privileged opportunity to put reality to the Hollywood dramatization."

—LIEUTENANT-GENERAL ROMÉO DALLAIRE (RETIRED), Force Commander  
for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (1993-1994)

# INSIDE THE HOTEL RWANDA

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THE SURPRISING TRUE STORY . . . AND  
WHY IT MATTERS TODAY

EDOUARD KAYIHURA  
Survivor of the real Hotel Rwanda  
AND KERRY ZUKUS



# FOREWORD

**T**HAT THE 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi of Rwanda was allowed to proceed unhindered, accompanied by near universal indifference, will remain one of the greatest scandals of the twentieth century. The failure to intervene even amid revelations about the speed, scale, and brutality of the killing and the suppression of information about what was actually happening is a shocking indictment of those governments and individuals who could have made a difference and yet chose not to do so.

In April 1994 as the genocide got under way, I was in New York at the United Nations Secretariat, completing a book on the fifty-year history of the organization. My first interviews to investigate the circumstances of the genocide took place then. It soon became obvious that no tragedy was ever heralded to less effect, and my research showed just how many warnings of the danger to the Tutsi there had been. I would discover how the ideologues of Hutu Power had managed to seize the levers of power in order to put in place their plan to exterminate the Tutsi, mobilizing and manipulating the machinery of state for their campaign—even in the presence of a UN peacekeeping mission.

In the course of my research, I was fortunate to have access to a number of important archives. One set of documents comprised hundreds of UN cables sent from the headquarters of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR). These were given to me by a Polish military intelligence officer, Major Stefan Stec, a UN military observer

who had stayed in Rwanda during the genocide from April to July 1994. He had been a member of a tiny garrison of volunteers who, with their force commander Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, had refused to withdraw with the bulk of the peacekeeping mission. The cables revealed how a core group of blue helmets, including Stec, had risked their lives to save as many Rwandans as possible. It was an inspiring story of sacrifice and bravery. Stec told me how UN protection had been provided for sites in the capital city where terrified Rwandan Tutsi had sought sanctuary—including in churches and schools. The site that afforded the most protection was the five-star Hotel des Mille Collines, located in the zone occupied by the deadly Hutu Power forces. It was designated a protected area with military observers providing a permanent UN presence and where the blue UN flag had flown for as long as the genocide lasted.

It was Stec who had stood in the lobby of the Hotel des Mille Collines early on and read the names of those who were to be evacuated to the airport.

“I had a Schindler’s list of the people we were allowed to save,” he said, “only those with the right visas to enter Belgium.” A few blocks away, at the St. Famille Church, 5,000 starving people were trapped. Every night militia came to kill. Stec said, “We did nothing for them because no one there had any visas . . .”

It was with some dismay, therefore, that in 2004 I watched the film *Hotel Rwanda*, released for the tenth commemoration of the Genocide Against the Tutsi. The film was purportedly a true story and yet it did not once recognize the righteous stand and heroism of Stec and his fellow UN officers. It made a hero instead of the hotel’s Rwandan manager, Paul Rusesabagina, who claimed that he alone had been responsible for saving the lives of hundreds of people who had sheltered there.

While being presented as unequivocally true and unenhanced, this dramatization did not tally at all with any of my research. Stec told me that he believed sparing the people sheltering in the hotel

had been expedient for the *génocidaires*. The hotel had been a favorite with expatriates and had been the focus of Western press attention. There were several high-profile people sheltering in the crowded rooms, including prominent opposition politicians—both Hutu and Tutsi—doctors, lawyers, and a senator. Stec told me that exempting the people in the hotel from slaughter had been part of a strategy by the interim government, a way to obscure the fact that genocide was underway. With these people left alive, it was harder to claim that a targeted and determined genocidal campaign was taking place.

It was clear that there had been three components of the protection afforded the hotel refugees: the presence of the UN military observers, the attention of the Western press, and most of all, the discreet action of a senior French government official and a career diplomat in the Elysée Palace, Bruno Delaye, who headed the Palace's Africa Unit. On April 23, 1994, a military siege on the hotel was suddenly lifted within half an hour of making contact with an official in the French foreign ministry. The timely French intervention was later confirmed by French journalist Alain Frilet, quoting an anonymous, guilt-ridden foreign office personnel who had admitted that the rescue was proof, if any were needed, of the French authorities' influence over events in Rwanda.<sup>1</sup> Frilet later described being in Delaye's office during a grenade attack on the hotel and that he had personally witnessed Delaye make a call to Kigali. After the call, Delaye told Frilet the attack had been halted.<sup>2</sup>

Eventually, the advancing Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) forces became the fourth and final component of the safety and eventual freedom of the hotel's refugees.

This, then, is a danger to avoid: the mixing of fact with fiction. The Rusesabagina story has served only to obscure reality. It has usefully diverted attention from what really happened. And that is why

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<sup>1</sup> Alain Frilet, "La France prit au piège de ses accords," *Libération*, May 18, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Morel, "La France au coeur du génocide des Tutsi," *L'Esprit Frappeur*.

this book, *Inside the Hotel Rwanda*, is so important and why I heartily recommend it to all those who seek a better understanding of what happened in Rwanda. Written by someone trapped in the hotel, it is a truthful and heartbreaking memoir. The stories of the targeted refugees' solidarity and courage are awe inspiring. The role of the hotel manager is shockingly exposed.

Yet *Inside the Hotel Rwanda* is much more than a sensitive and poignant memoir, for it also seeks to address an important and pressing issue: the exact nature of the relationship between Rusesabagina and those who had carried out the genocide.

Some years ago Rusesabagina came to London to give evidence in court to try to prevent the extradition to Rwanda of four alleged *génocidaires*. During his testimony, he described the chief of staff of the Rwandan army, General Augustin Bizimungu, as "a good man" and he denied there had ever been "a systematic government-driven genocide."<sup>3</sup> The judge later decided that Rusesabagina's testimony in court had gone against all facts and evidence. He determined that Rusesabagina was "strongly allied to the extremist Hutu faction."<sup>4</sup> The judge's damning opinion of Rusesabagina added to serious questions about his links with Hutu Power—a subject this book powerfully addresses.

The revelations it presents are deeply disturbing, and the book provides enough evidence for those who have bestowed Rusesabagina with honors and awards to seriously question their judgement in this matter.

Fictional accounts dressed as fact do not advance our knowledge and understanding of this awful crime. Indeed, they set it back. The Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda is a terrible story, but it

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<sup>3</sup> The Government of the Republic of Rwanda v. Bajinya, Munyaneza, Nteziryayo and Ugirashebuja, (2008), [http://www.trial-ch.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/documents/trialwatch/Rwandan4Decision.pdf](http://www.trial-ch.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/trialwatch/Rwandan4Decision.pdf), para. 388–429.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

is made worse because its true nature continues to be deliberately distorted and confused.

—LINDA MELVERN

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# INTRODUCTION

In a space of just one hundred days, approximately one million Rwandans—one-seventh of my homeland's total population—were murdered by their fellow countrymen, slaughtered at close range with low-tech weaponry: machetes, spears, clubs, handguns, and rifles. The phrase “blood on their hands” was never more true than during those harrowing hundred days, for human blood splattered all over the killers and their clothing as they hacked at the objects of their hatred.

This genocide in the small east-central African nation of Rwanda, perpetrated from April 6 to July 14, 1994, by certain fanatical leaders and members of the Hutu, the largest ethnic group in Rwanda, against the Tutsi, a much smaller ethnic group, was by far the bloodiest chapter in the conflict between the two. The nearly one million who perished represents only the death toll of unarmed innocents.

The killing of civilians finally ended when the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), an army of Rwandans organized primarily in diaspora in Uganda and led by future Rwandan President Paul Kagame, marched into Rwanda's capital city of Kigali and drove out the *génocidaires*.

With a death sentence staring them in the face if they remained in their homes or in public places, Tutsi desperately attempted to hide or flee. I, along with a scant few other Tutsi, was fortunate enough to survive the brutal genocide. I am among an estimated 1,268 Rwandans who sought refuge at the Hotel des Mille Collines, a luxury hotel in Kigali, one of a handful of places where large

numbers of refugees found sanctuary. For years, the name “Hotel des Mille Collines” did not mean anything to anyone other than Rwandans, unless you were a foreigner who had stayed there, a United Nations soldier who had guarded the hotel during the genocide, or an affiliate with the hotel’s Belgian parent company at the time, Sabena. But in September 2004, ten years after this holocaust, Hollywood released the movie *Hotel Rwanda*, purportedly based on what transpired at the Hotel des Mille Collines during the genocide. The film, which received much acclaim from film critics and garnered three Academy Award nominations, claimed to show the lives of those who sought refuge in the hotel as a microcosm of the genocide itself.

By the time this film debuted, I had been living in the United States for four years. Though I had stayed abreast of developments in my native country and had kept in touch with many others who had survived the genocide by staying at the hotel, I knew nothing of the making of this movie, so I was surprised when I learned of its existence. My curiosity was unbridled: Would the film be a documentary? A work of fiction? No Rwandan I talked to had the remotest idea. Neither the film’s director and co-screenwriter, future Academy Award winner Terry George, nor his screenwriting collaborator, Keir Pearson, contacted any of the survivors I had befriended, with the exception of Odette Nyiramilimo (portrayed in the movie by South African actress Lebo Mashile). Yet before I learned about the movie, months before its release, Odette and I had not spoken for quite some time.

Few people are ever placed in a situation like this. *Hotel Rwanda* was not going to depict the entire genocide but only a small fraction of the story, involving a relatively tiny number of real people. It would be limited to the events that occurred in the hotel that had been my personal refuge during the genocide, much like a World War II film that focuses on the experiences of one army battalion, barricaded within the same foxhole for a hundred days.

It had only been ten years. The wounds, which will never go away, were still raw and fresh. The political analysis that historians normally do was still underway. Many questions had not yet been answered, and some remain unanswered today. I wondered how I would feel seeing this movie in a theater in the United States, sitting among Americans, watching something that, for all but me, would be depicting horrors that happened to others, far away, far removed from their comfortable world. Americans, if they so chose, could erase the horrible images once the closing credits ran. For me, though, it would be like watching a home movie of the worst nightmare of my entire life.

*Hotel Rwanda* was promoted as a story about “the quiet heroism of one man, Paul Rusesabagina, during the Rwandan Genocide.”<sup>5</sup> I knew Paul Rusesabagina. All the people who survived inside the Hotel des Mille Collines during the genocide knew Paul Rusesabagina. No one among us has ever thought of him as altruistic, let alone heroic. On the contrary, of all the people who were within the hotel during the genocide, he would quite possibly be considered the *furthest* from a hero any of us could imagine. Rusesabagina had been a war profiteer, a friend to the architects of the genocide, a man willing to starve those without money while hoarding piles of food, drink, and riches for himself and his friends.

Given this, I couldn’t help but wonder: How in the world did someone manage to put this film together and make this man a hero? Truth would not be served. I say this not because I believe myself to be a hero of this episode in time. I am merely a survivor. Perhaps all survivors of horrific circumstances could be considered heroes, but I tend to believe heroism requires much more than that. Heroism is the selfless pursuit of justice and right, the willingness to lay down one’s life for the lives of others. Many people consider themselves to have this quality without ever having their resolve tested. Inside the

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<sup>5</sup> “Center for Diversity,” Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, accessed <http://www.rose-hulman.edu/diversity/events07-08.htm>.

real “Hotel Rwanda,” some were placed in just that position: to see if we would act heroically when an opportunity was before us. I was not tested in that way, and for that I make no excuse or apology. But it is my honor to describe the actions of those who did find themselves at the crossroads of true heroism.

Shortly after *Hotel Rwanda* opened in theaters, I managed to find someone who sold DVDs of movies and purchased a copy. The film had not yet been released for purchase, and I did not realize at the time he had sold me a bootleg copy. I was a civil servant for the Rwandan government prior to coming to the United States and I would not have purchased something I knew to be illegal. Yet at that moment, excited, tentative, and unaware of the legalities, I took the film home to watch. I was with my wife as well as two young Rwandan friends—students who were only about twelve years old during the genocide. Just as I feared, the drama hit far too close to home for us. It was too much too soon. The students could not finish it because they remembered what had happened during the genocide, how many people close to them they had lost. At the end, I was watching the film alone, the only one able to stay bolted to my chair, refusing to give in to emotion and turn away from the horror.

As the film ended, I was filled with several strong, conflicting emotions. On the one hand, I was glad the movie had been made. It was educational, although inaccurate. So many people, particularly here in America, knew nothing of this genocide. They knew of the slaughter of white people at the hands of the Nazis during the Holocaust. They knew of the slavery of American black people before and during the Civil War. But *Hotel Rwanda* was about black people in Africa. Nothing could be more foreign to most Americans. Thus I was glad the movie introduced Americans to this tragic part of Rwanda’s recent history.

On the other hand, the movie presented a story filled with falsehoods. I called many genocide survivors, both in the United States as well as back in Rwanda: Alexandre Nzizera, Isidore Munyakazi,

Jean Marie Vianney Rudasingwa, Egide Karuranga, Augustin Karera, Tatien Ndolimana, and Eugene Kitatire—all of whom had found refuge in the Hotel des Mille Collines. I told them about the movie, and every one of them wanted to watch it. Once they did, their reaction was the same as mine: Although it was good to see the movie raise awareness of the Genocide Against the Tutsi, as we have come to refer to it, the specific story about the hotel and Rusesabagina was wildly inaccurate.

After watching the film, we all felt the need to correct the record, to let the world know where the film had gone wrong. But who would listen?

Besides wanting to clearly present our vision of what really happened, we were, and are, concerned about the effects of the movie in regard to Rusesabagina. The “hero” of the Hollywood story, Paul Rusesabagina, in real life became an international sensation as a result of the film, a living saint on par with Oskar Schindler. Only unlike Schindler, Rusesabagina’s cinematic tale was released while he was still alive, so he was able to reap the financial benefits by selling his life rights to the movie’s director, Terry George; writing his memoir, *An Ordinary Man*; and public speaking, as the movie launched him as a person important enough for his opinions on politics and world affairs to be considered worth hearing. In fact, Rusesabagina has become a very popular speaker on college campuses and at major houses of worship across America and the world, speaking to audiences who saw his movie and are now anxious to hear his spin on African current events. For these talks he fetches upward of \$15,000 per speech, plus first-class airfare and expenses, according to the American Program Bureau, his Massachusetts-based speakers’ agency.

He has risen in prominence throughout the United States. The University of Michigan bestowed upon him the Wallenberg Medal, awarded to outstanding humanitarians whose actions on behalf of the defenseless and oppressed reflect the heroic commitment and sacrifice of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who rescued

tens of thousands of Jews in Budapest during the closing months of World War II. President George W. Bush gave him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian award, presented for meritorious achievement in public service. He was even interviewed and glowingly praised by media icon Oprah Winfrey.

He has also been given a place in world history. Today *Hotel Rwanda* appears on school curriculums alongside such American and Eurocentric educational perennials as *A Raisin in the Sun*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *All the President's Men*, and *Of Mice and Men*. In educators' efforts to expand multicultural studies in the United States, *Hotel Rwanda* is now the African film to which high school and college students are exposed. It is one of only four films recommended by Amnesty International USA for human rights education, for which the organization has even created a curriculum guide.

In discussions with those who know nothing of the genocide except what they saw in the movie, some survivors are asked, "Are you jealous of his fame?" or "Are you angry the film has made him rich?" In truth, no; however, we wonder how someone could become rich and famous for something he did not do. In that sense, the movie could have been made about any one of us, with the same bounty as the end result. While this leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of many survivors, such feelings can in time be overcome by prayer and meditation. What is less easy to swallow is Rusesabagina's denial of the Genocide Against the Tutsi, which made him famous, as well as his threat to the peace and stability of our mother country, and it is because of this we cannot remain silent.

We should be concerned that, because of this error-filled movie, Rusesabagina has become a wealthy icon and has used that status to become a dangerous, divisive political figure, spewing false truths not only about himself, but about the past, present, and future of Rwanda. In public forums as well as in his memoir, Rusesabagina continually refers to himself as nonpolitical. Rwandans know this assertion is starkly untrue. Rusesabagina has always been political,

not just since the events of the genocide, but also before and during it. While the film portrays him as a *bon vivant* hotelier, which gives him access to and relationships with the evil men who planned and executed the genocide, the truth is he was always active in the same political parties and movements as they were, present at meetings and conventions where their hate philosophy was discussed openly.

In speech after speech before audiences around the world, Rusesabagina has used his influence to champion “Hutu Power” politics (an ethnic hate-mongering against the Tutsi), raising money for causes that have less to do with peace than with revenge against current Rwandan President Paul Kagame. Most flagrant of the words Rusesabagina speaks are his attempts to paint the murderous actions of the Hutu Power extremists during what we came to call the Hundred Days as a natural byproduct of civil war and *not* genocide. Rusesabagina even testifies at trials on behalf of those who took up machetes against the unarmed, all the while blaming the victims and claiming they were the true murderers. As one of the most famous men in Rwanda today, Rusesabagina is the smiling public face of the murderous opposition groups who were driven out of Rwanda to end the genocide.

Shortly after the genocide, Rusesabagina left Rwanda and settled in Belgium, a nation that was the final colonialist ruler of Rwanda and that has been accused of exacerbating much of the hatred between the Hutu and Tutsi that led to the extreme violence of the latter half of the twentieth century. After the release of *Hotel Rwanda*, he also established homes in the United States. Rusesabagina has recently been charged by Rwandan authorities with using his nonprofit, American-based Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation to raise money for his personal political ambitions, which include assisting in the creation of and having leadership roles in at least two political parties, and arming the terrorist army known as the FDLR—the *Forces démocratiques de la libération du Rwanda* or the “Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda.” The FDLR is the primary

anti-Rwanda, anti-Tutsi rebel group, composed almost entirely of ethnic Hutu opposed to Tutsi political representation and influence in the African Great Lakes region (Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo [DRC], Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania). The group counts among its number the original members of the *Interahamwe*, one of the armed civilian militias that carried out the Genocide Against the Tutsi, and is regarded by the United Nations as a terrorist organization. It is composed of child soldiers and uses rape as one its main tools of oppression and terror. In June 2011, Rusesabagina was arrested by Belgian authorities and questioned on these charges as part of the process of repatriating him to Rwanda for trial.

With this book, I want to shine a light on what really happened at Hotel des Mille Collines: who and what got us there, who and what sustained us, and who and what really saved us and how. It is a story with no singular hero, for while there were heroes without whom all of us would certainly be dead, it is really about us as a group sharing horrific days in the same metaphorical foxhole, wondering how and when we would die. As for Paul Rusesabagina, each time we survivors hear him speak today it takes us back to our most primal fears, the recollection of a divided society where murderers faced no consequence and the protection of law excluded many. Everyone is entitled to his or her political opinion and philosophy. But fortune and fame give some people a louder voice. It is one thing when that fortune and fame are honestly earned. But Paul Rusesabagina is a fraud. He did not “single-handedly prevent the slaughter of more than 1,200 refugees at the Mille Collines Hotel for one hundred days during the Tutsi genocide from April to July 1994,” as he advertises when he makes personal appearances.

His voice has been heard. Now is the time for the voices of the other survivors.



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## TO PROFIT FROM THE WALKING DEAD

**A**S TIME WENT by, almost all the cash any of the refugees had brought with them was given over to the hotel's manager. This left him with no other easy options for profiteering, until he came up with the idea of bringing a Bank of Kigali (BK) manager into the hotel in order to run an actual banking operation there. A trustworthy and respected Bank of Kigali (BK) employee, Louis Rugerinyange, had bank receipts for those who had accounts with BK. Those of us inside the Mille Collines signed the receipts, then Rugerinyange went to the bank in Gitarama, forty-five kilometers from Kigali, to withdraw the money and bring it back to the hotel. (All banks and government agencies had followed the interim government to Gitarama.)

I don't blame the bank employee—looking back, it is quite possible that through his actions he may have helped refugees live longer. Frankly, in this time of our circumstance-imposed imprisonment inside the hotel, our only real need for money was to ward off Paul Rusesabagina, who by now was threatening to evict us from the hotel unless we paid for our lodgings.

On May 18, 1994, the refugee committee sneaked into the hotel manager's office while he was unaware and faxed an SOS letter addressed to international organizations as well as Sabena,

the corporate manager of the Hotel des Mille Collines, asking for protection and specifically pleading with the hotel management to stop Rusesabagina from harassing us. In short order, a fax came in response from a Michel Houtart at Sabena headquarters in Brussels. Translated from the original French, it made three blunt and salient points:

- *Do not charge money for food received for free;*
- *Do not pressure anyone who cannot defend themselves; and finally,*
- *Make sure everyone is in rooms or dormitories.*

That the hotel's corporate headquarters felt the need to send such a missive to Paul Rusesabagina speaks volumes about what our lives were truly like within the real-life "Hotel Rwanda," and who had made them so. Unfortunately, getting him to heed their warning was another matter altogether.

Those who could not pay for their lodging were forced from their rooms by Rusesabagina himself, literally as well as figuratively. He would send invoices to the rooms. If you did not pay, he called you to his office and asked you to pay or get out of the room. People strongly contested that decision, but some who had money paid, while others signed receipts for the amount owed.

Instead of taking one of the regular Mille Collines employees and making that person second-in-command, Rusesabagina hired himself an assistant, Asuman Ngagi, who had been working at the Hotel Méridien. The Méridien was also under UN protection, in the zone controlled by the RPF, as were the Hotel Amahoro and the King Faisal Hospital. Asuman was even more openly hostile toward us Tutsi than Rusesabagina, threatening us at every opportunity. Visions of him haunted my dreams. Now, armed with a strong and loyal assistant, Rusesabagina became even more aggressive in moving people from their rooms because of nonpayment.

Once displaced, many of us milled around the hotel and slept wherever we could, mostly in the hallways.

I was personally called into Rusesabagina's office with my roommate, Rubayiza. He asked us to pay or to get out of our room. I had no money on me other than the blank check I had found in my coat. I agreed to sign the check over to Rusesabagina, and Rubayiza paid him some cash from approximately 300,000 Rwandan francs he had gotten from Mukaniwa Deo, a businessman from Cyangugu, his home prefecture, who was also seeking refuge within the hotel.

All of us did whatever we could to help one another out, sharing everything we had so that no one would die. Occasionally, after reaching the hotel, someone tried to bring inside a loved one who was still outside, hiding in some other location. We pooled whatever money we had managed to hide away from Rusesabagina to pay off *gendarmes* or militiamen to search for and rescue our family members.

The refugees who managed to bring some money to the hotel could have used that to procure anything from those of us who came in empty-handed—but they didn't. During this time of terrible murders in the streets, we all wanted only one thing: *to live*. Despite vast financial disparity among us, no refugee profited from any other refugee.

On the other hand, there were a few refugees who were not forced to pay because Rusesabagina knew them. I suppose that could be construed as an act of magnanimous charity, but if one were really a humanitarian, why extend such hospitality to only a few personal friends? Most refugees were total strangers to one another when we arrived and yet we shared everything, *every single thing we had*, regardless of our ethnicity. That sort of communal peace and love is what truly sustained our spirits during the dark days.

A typical example was when Major Cyiza, a Hutu military man and the president of the military court, came into the hotel. Sometime in May, he took room 109, which was occupied by Augustin Karera, a businessman, and Wellars Gasamagera, one of our refugee leaders.

They were forced by Rusesabagina to give up their accommodations. The major behaved as if he were a man on holiday, going to work and coming back to the hotel each evening safe and, unlike the rest of us, in no fear of any harm because of his ethnicity and position in the government. Cyiza could have treated us like the “cockroaches” we supposedly were—but he didn’t. Instead, and for this I give him credit, the major actually helped some of the refugees by going outside the hotel and buying us provisions with money we gave him.

As for Gasamagera and Karera, they found another room in the hotel, only to be moved again by Rusesabagina. This time they had to resort to sleeping in the corridor until they could find someone willing to share space with them. When they were forced out of their new room, Gasamagera and Karera went out with only a set of sheets and their small cache of personal belongings. When we saw them we were scared, thinking they were leaving the room and taking everything with them because someone inside had died or been killed, or perhaps Gasamagera or Karera themselves were being turned over to the *génocidaires*. That is a sight none of us will ever forget.

I asked Gasamagera a few days later how he was getting on. “A friend of mine named Charles Harelimana took me in. There are about twenty of us in one room and some people sleep in the bathtub. We have a child with us who is mute. We send him around the hotel to beg for food for all of us. That’s how we are living.” This was rather commonplace. Not everyone had access to food, and if you did not tell someone you were starving and ask if they would share with you, you starved. I asked Karera the same question, how was he getting by. “Victor Munyarugerero came and told us not to worry; that he had found me and my family another room. We are now living with Bernard Makuza.”

Rusesabagina continued to harass us despite the fax from Sabena headquarters that clearly ordered him not to. On May 21, 1994, the refugees composed another letter, this time to the CICR, the *Comité international de la Croix-Rouge* (the International Committee of the

Red Cross), asking them to intervene in the matter. Though the Red Cross likewise scolded Rusesabagina for his actions, he did not discontinue them. The conflict escalated to the point where Tatien Ndolimana, acting on behalf of the rest of the refugees, took a letter protesting our treatment to Colonel Moigny, who was in charge of the UN peacekeeping brigade inside the hotel. By their reaction, we could not help but notice in what low esteem the peacekeepers and the Red Cross held Rusesabagina.

Ndolimana, a fine man, was particularly disgusted with the hotel manager. "You understand, not only was he not here in the hotel when the genocide first began, but for almost a month he was going back home every night. Throughout April he worked here from 7 A.M. to 5 P.M. and even then he spent many hours outside the hotel. He only started sleeping here with his family since May second because he thought he and his family could be evacuated to Europe from here."

One day the bloodthirsty militias targeted the hotel despite the UN presence there. An artillery shell was propelled in our direction, but instead it missed its intended target and accidentally hit a nearby bank. Instantly, we all fled to the hotel basement, using it as a sort of bomb shelter. When we got to the basement we saw this little metallic door. It was open. Inside, we found a stock of soft drinks, bottled water, and some cookies. Unbelievable! We had long suspected the hotel manager had been greedily squirreling away provisions in secret. Knowing how hungry and thirsty we were, Christophe Shamukiga began distributing the soft drinks to the rest of us. When the bombing stopped and things began to settle, we made our way out of the basement, only to find Rusesabagina standing in front of the *entrée*, threatening to throw us out into the streets unless we put back the drinks.

A couple minutes later people knocked on Christophe's door. When he answered, they asked if he was Christophe Shamukiga and he said, "Yes." They told him the director, Paul, wanted to see him.

He went up to Paul's room. After what seemed like an interminably long time, Christophe came back out, looking more ragged, scared, and upset than he had ever been seen before.

"I asked why he wanted to see me. He told me it was about the incident in the basement. He said if I didn't pay him five hundred thousand francs he would kick me out of the hotel. I begged him and said we were all hungry and it wasn't our fault. He said he didn't care; either I pay him or he kicks me out. As a matter of fact, he even said, 'I'm going to kick you out anyway. It doesn't matter if you pay me or not.'"

To be kicked out of the hotel at this point in time was akin to being put before a firing squad without trial. It was a death sentence.

"I climbed out the window of his room and stood on the third-floor balcony," said Christophe. "I told him I would rather jump off the balcony than be kicked out of the hotel, especially if I was going to die anyway. He said he didn't care. I told him to at least let me talk to my father's friends, people such as Bertin Makuza, a well-known businessman. They might help me to come up with the money. He said I should sign somewhere that I was going to pay him."

Like those before him who had paid *génocidaires* to shoot them rather than die slowly and painfully by machete, Christophe threatened to commit suicide by jumping from a top-floor balcony to the pavement far below rather than yield to the hotel manager.

We did not know how to properly comfort Christophe, as neither he nor we knew how much longer he would be able to stay in the hotel after having crossed Rusesabagina. Christophe possessed tremendous civility, humanity, and tolerance for people regardless of their ethnicity or politics. With great humility he had used his significant political connections and influence to help save us refugees and keep us alive inside the hotel. In a way, he was our very own Robin Hood, in that he robbed from the rich (distributing freely the biscuits and soft drinks Paul Rusesabagina had stashed away in the basement so he could later sell them for a profit) and gave to

the poor (his fellow refugees, many of whom were suffering from dehydration and starvation). It was a daring action that nearly cost Christophe his life.

Later on, fortunately, someone managed to negotiate with Rusesabagina, and Christophe was given a stay of execution and allowed to remain inside. But after the basement incident, Christophe never again felt he had any personal security within the hotel, even more so than the rest of us.

Alexis told me that occasionally he'd hear that some people were trying to escape or run away from the hotel. As soon as they'd leave, before they'd get very far away, they would all be killed. "Why would someone want to get himself killed?" He asked. We knew the hotel was the safest place anyone could be, especially because we were already there. We were supposed to stick together, no matter what. That had been our credo, the thing that helped us combat the insanity of the genocide.

Throughout these tumultuous days, our lives were in the hands of God. Bishop Nicodème, another refugee at the hotel, gathered us daily in the conference room, where we would pray. Victor Munyarugerero, a very religious man, would knock on our door to let us to know it was time for our daily vespers. After we had evening prayers, those who had no food could get some from a shared stockpile to which everyone who had food would willingly contribute.

Victor was a Hutu in his forties. During our time together, cloistered inside the hotel, he showed us how people are different; how all Hutu were not killers or exploiters. Some people collected money and gave it to Victor in order to smuggle their families and friends into the hotel. When Bernard Makuza, one of the refugee committee members, first arrived at the hotel, he had been beaten up by the thugs in the street and was in pretty bad shape. It was Victor Munyarugerero who took him in, along with Bishop Nicodème. We had a doctor inside the hotel, Josue Kayijaho, who was also a refugee, and they would ask Dr. Kayijaho to check on him.

It was people like Victor who risked their lives by leaving the relative safety of the hotel to find militia or *gendarmes* who would accept bribes to let people inside the hotel, or to buy food for the rest of us. Victor did this many times without any complaint, and certainly without any thought of retaining a profit for himself. Many refugees sang his praises. He was so nice, but he didn't want to take any credit for his generous and noble deeds. Bernard Makuzza, in particular, felt Victor was owed a special debt of gratitude. "He cares about what people are eating, how they were living, if they have any problems. There is also this man named Cassien Nzaryana; he works in the kitchen. When I was hurt and couldn't move, sometimes he would bring me a drink, but he would have to do it without being seen by anyone. He never brought me any food, though. I guess it was too risky for him, with the hotel manager watching over everything."

I would run into Alexis from time to time and ask him how the hotel employees were doing in light of no longer getting paid. "I don't think the employees really care about their salaries anymore," he said. "All we care about is staying alive and making sure our families are safe. At this point, we are all refugees."

Life in the hotel during the days of May 1994 was strange indeed. We were under siege, and yet those whom we feared most strolled in and out of the hotel as if nothing was the matter. The hotel was an odd and tenuous sort of neutral zone, yet we had no reason to trust that this would last. Every day and every moment, we feared the next time a Hutu Power soldier or militiaman entered, he would be leading a pack of armed jackals, ready to slaughter us. The screams, explosions, and gunshots we continually heard outside on the streets made us tense and wary. Many had trouble sleeping, wondering if they would be roused by a machete held to their neck.

There were basically four groups of people who were in the hotel: Tutsi who sought refuge in order to avoid death, Hutu who did not share the same ideology as the killers and were also threatened with death, Hutu who came into the hotel simply to avoid the war

zone for a little stay while they made plans to leave town, and UN peacekeepers and other visiting internationals. All in all, it resembled the classic American World War II-era film, *Casablanca*, in which Nazis, Vichy French, French freedom fighters, locals, and various expats all shared space—a place where cautious civility and a respite from actual armed conflict existed, although its component parts made for a potential powder keg of blood and death if political and military situations suddenly changed.

Managing the peace, of course, was the fourth group: the ever-present UN soldiers and other internationals. While they had nothing to do with the daily running of the hotel, which was a private business, it was they who provided the on-premises security in this highly unique situation. The peacekeepers had their own office in one of the hotel rooms and someone was there at all times, 24/7. One of the rules they enforced for visitors to the hotel was to leave their weapons at the reception desk. The hotel was a kind of de facto protected site for all kinds of international visitors, for nowhere else in the nation seemed as perfectly located and secured.

Kalisa was an example of a Hutu who did not support the *génocidaires*. While at the hotel, he risked his life by helping us. Kalisa had kept his friend Emmanuel Musonera, a Tutsi, safe in his house in Secteur Gikondo by hiding him inside his roof, much as Pascal had hidden me. After managing to sneak Emmanuel into the hotel, Kalisa took the money we raised communally and purchased things we needed. Food and water, of course, were our largest concerns, but basic sanitation, cleanliness, clothing, and medical supplies were also difficult to come by. We may have been refugees, but we sought to retain our human dignity and pride. We did whatever was required of us to stay alive, but we would also not allow our spirits to be broken.

Despite the kindness he showed us, Kalisa was a man who scared many refugees, especially his Tutsi roommate, Alexandre, because of his familial connections. One of Kalisa's sisters was married to

Anatole Nsengiyumva, a lieutenant colonel who was known to be one of the planners of the genocide, while another was married to Colonel Karangwa, who was in charge of G2, the Rwandan military intelligence. In fact, Karangwa came to the hotel many times to see Kalisa, as well as to see his friend Paul Rusesabagina. Whenever he arrived, there was likewise a distinct scent of fear in the air.

Kalisa and Alexandre lived in room 305, just across the hall from my room. Alexandre had just barely managed to get into the hotel and he had foreign money in his pocket. Because he was scared of Kalisa (or perhaps more accurately, Kalisa's in-laws), he slept very little at night, succumbing only after exhaustion had overtaken him. Though he would catch some rest during the day, he also prayed that the daylight, not to mention the stirring of those of us who were awake, would alert him if we were being invaded or if he alone were in personal danger.

Alexandre and I used to go into the basement at night to find places to hide in the event of another bombing—though in truth we were certain it was a matter of “when,” not “if.” On the day when Christophe Shamukiga distributed the drinks and cookies to us he had found stashed away in the basement, Alexandre and I took a package of cookies and hid it in another part of the basement so we would have something to eat during a future attack—or at least that was our thinking at first. As time went on, though, we made a pact: no matter how hungry we were, no matter how desperate things came to be, we would never open that package of cookies. It was sacrosanct, a visual reminder of hope that we would somehow get through this alive—and though we never said it in so many words, to tear open that package and eat those cookies would have been as if we had given up that hope. Even if the hotel were stormed and taken, we would have left that package intact. Hope was all we had, and hope was what had gotten us to the hotel in the first place.

Meanwhile, throughout my days at the hotel, my stomach continued to hurt from drinking pool water. I had by chance met up

with a woman I knew named Jeannette, whose husband happened to work at the hotel. Though Jeannette was Tutsi, her husband was a zealous member of President Habyarimana's MRND Party. He supplied her and her children with everything they needed, such as juice and food. On April 6, when the president's plane had crashed, Jeannette had been blocked at Gitega, my town, and could not go back home that evening. She stayed hidden in Gitega with a family friend, close to where I had lived, secreted away until she was finally able to get to the Hotel des Mille Collines. She knew how hard the militias had searched for me and had heard that they had killed me when I was trying to leave town. You can imagine her surprise when she stumbled onto me one day and saw I was still alive.

"Edouard," she said with tears in her eyes. "I cannot believe it is you! Are you all right? Do you need anything?" She could tell I had been wearing the same clothes since I fled Gitega on the morning of April 7, over a month before. "Do you need money for underwear?"

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Instead of feverishly guzzling it, we just smelled the aroma of the juice because we had drank so much of the heavily chlorinated water from the swimming pool. It smelled so good. It smelled like civilization.

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"I don't worry about underwear, Jeannette," I said. "But I do have a stomachache."

She went and brought me a cup of juice and 20,000 Rwandan francs. To say "thank you" is easy. I think God himself knows what she did for me. And

yet I could not drink this cup of juice without sharing it with my friends Jean Marie Vianney Rudasingwa, Rubayiza, and Emmanuel Musonera. Instead of feverishly guzzling it, we just smelled the aroma of the juice because we had drank so much of the heavily chlorinated water from the swimming pool. It smelled so good. It smelled like civilization. And then, as we looked at each other as if for permission to finally quench our thirst, we slowly and equally shared it.

The water in the swimming pool would frequently run out and we would have to wait until the UN peacekeepers could bring back more with their tank truck to refill the pool. When the pool had water in it, we would go outside each morning with a large trash basket, fill it with water, and then bring it inside the hotel. At night we would go back again and do the same. One good thing was that as time went on and the UN refilled the pool, it was no longer treated with the harsh chemicals that made it safer for swimming but made us sick.

Rubayiza, my roommate, had no idea about his wife and children—whether they were dead or alive, or where they or their bodies were. Emmanuel had no idea about his wife, either, while Jean Marie Vianney Rudasingwa had come to the hotel after they had killed his wife and children.

When Rusesabagina forced people out of their rooms, some people paid for other people or signed checks for them so they could stay and not have to sleep in the hall. I split the 20,000 francs I'd received from Jeannette with Emmanuel Musonera. Even though Emmanuel was a businessman, he had no money in his pockets. When you are running for your life, you are living moment to moment. It does not occur to you to bring all the cash you can lay your hands on, and at a time when mayhem ruled the streets, it was not as if you could easily go to a bank, make a withdrawal, and assume you'd come back alive.

Emmanuel's father-in-law, Vedaste Rubangura, was also among us. Vedaste was one of the wealthiest men in the country and the first Tutsi to get into the Hotel des Mille Collines. He had a large family and helped buy food for everyone. Many refugees ate because of this man.

Then there were the families of Mister, Damascene, and Assiel, whom I will never forget. Somehow they were able to bring a grill inside the hotel, which they used to cook food they had managed to buy early on during our time together. Once we were allowed to use the hotel kitchen, they cooked beans and corn given to us

by the Red Cross and shared them with many people. Meanwhile, the UN peacekeepers who were in the hotel also helped some refugees, particularly those who had children, by giving them food and potable water.

I remember sometimes we would gather together, apportioning our suffering with others: Jean Marie Vianney Rudasingwa, Emmanuel Musonera, Eugene Kitatire, André Musoni, Jean Pierre, Alexandre, Rubayiza, and me. There were so many people who took care of other refugees—businessmen like Bertin Makuza, Egide Karuranga, Vedaste Rubangura, Augustin Karera, Victor Munyarugerero, and Mutualikanwa. Some kindly Hutu who were not staying in the hotel brought in food from the outside to family and friends who were refugees. Among these were Sadala Abdalahaman, Libanje, Maniraguha, and a priest named Kaberamanzi, who made his way through the roadblocks every morning and every evening to bring food to his colleague, Bishop Nicodème.

The chapter markers that normally highlight our lives continued inside the hotel, much as they do anywhere during any circumstance, but hastened, as we feared if we did not partake in important sacraments, we would die before we got the chance. Bishop Nicodème baptized one child of Tatien Ndolimana. The daughter of Victor Munyarugerero married her boyfriend, and the bishop celebrated the mass and gave the marriage sacrament.

These names mean nothing to anyone outside of our band of survivors. But to us, these were real heroes. These noble men and women sacrificed everything they had so that each of us could live. None of us will ever forget the love we all demonstrated for our fellow man.

We shared everything we could, and though we did our best to keep our spirits up, deep down we all feared we would never leave the hotel alive. It was as close to purgatory as one can imagine. All we were doing was buying time, each of us making his or her own negotiation with God for one more hour, one more day. The magnanimity

within our ranks was our way of making our peace with God, our hope of settling our karmic accounts before death.

Each one of us inside the hotel had our own personal, special story. We talked; we listened; we allowed one another to cry when the time came to cry. But more than anything else, we waited... waited for death to take us.



Thanks for checking out

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