

# Noel's Story

**The Memories of a Child Who Survived  
the Rwandan Genocide against  
the Tutsi.**

**by Sibomana Noel**



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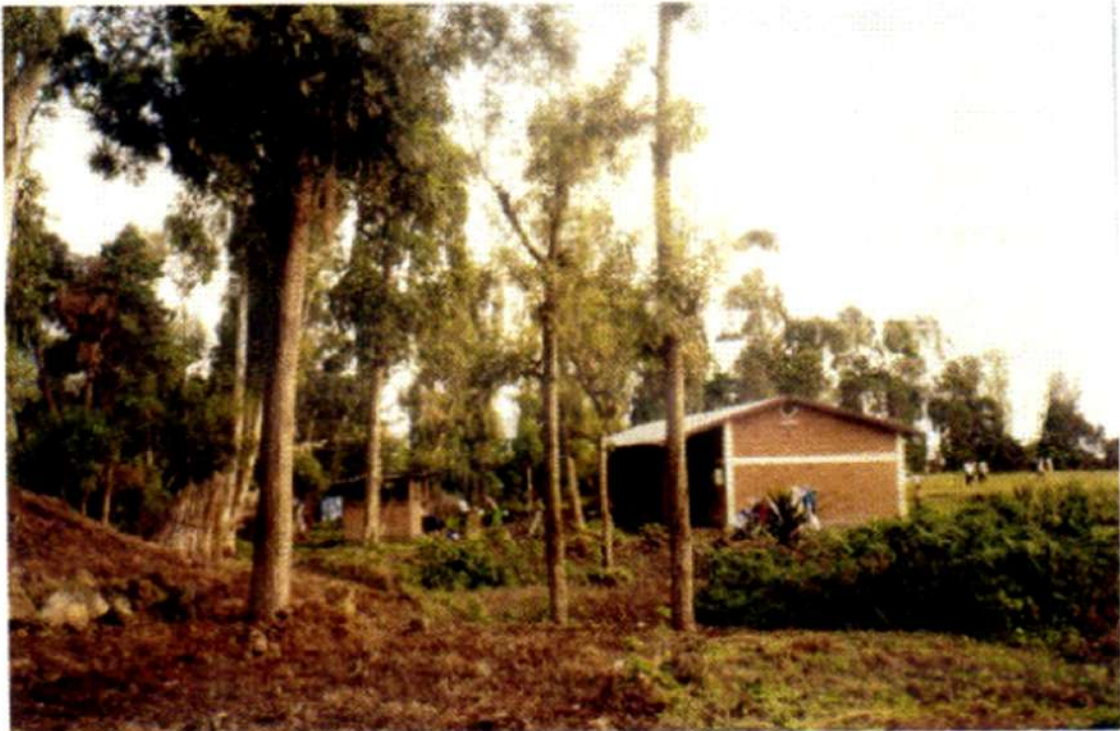
My name is Sibomana Noel. I am now fourteen years old. I was born on December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1988 at 11:30 P.M. That is why my parents named me Noel. In Kinyarwanda, Noel is Noheli. Sibomana in Kinyarwanda means, "People are Not God". When I was a little boy, I would ask many questions. I asked my mother why she named me Sibomana. She told me that when she was pregnant, the people of our village told her that her child was not ordinary and might not be born. I defied the odds and was born in the village of Nyundo in the District of Kanama in Gisenyi Province.

### **A FRIGHTENING MEMORY**

In April of 1994 when I was six years old the genocide started. It was particularly fierce in my village. My family fled into the Democratic Republic of Congo (the former Zaire).

When we arrived, we had many cows with us. We needed to sell some of these cows so the family could survive. My father loved me very much and always took me with him so I would not be left alone. On the way to the market, there were many, many people. I got lost in the crowd. My father spent all night looking for me, but he could not find

me. My family's camp was near a hill called Kibumba. I spent two weeks wandering slowly from camp to camp trying to find my family. At night I would see where people were cooking outside and I would sit there with these strangers and they would give me food and a place to sleep. Some days I would find no one to feed me and I would sleep between camps. I remember those two weeks as one of the hardest times of my life.



Imbabazi Orphanage, Gisenyi town 1999

### GOOD MEMORY

On the sixth day of the second week, at 12:00 noon, I found my parent's camp. They asked me how I managed while I was lost. When I told them, they all cooked lots of food, and we had a little party. It was a very happy time for my family and me.





Noel & Twagira 1998, at Mrs. Carr's, Gisenyi town

### A BRIEF BUT HAPPY MEMORY

We came back home to Rwanda in October of 1996 escorted by soldiers of the Rwandan Defense Force (RDF). In September, I started second grade. I was always a good student. I finished first in my class and as a gift I was taken to Kigali, Rwanda's capital, and allowed to walk all over, wherever I wanted.

### MY WORST MEMORIES

When we returned in October of 1996, we could not go back to our house. Another family was living in it. We built a tent in our field and lived there from October until July. My father's name was Ezechiel. He was a farmer and owned many cows.

My mother was a shop assistant. Her name was Esther.

On the night of July 21, 1997 Interahamwe, soldiers who had committed the genocide in 1994 and fled into the Congo, came back into Rwanda to try and free prisoners and also to steal food and medicine at the University of Mudende. During that night there were many loud gunshots.

Early the next morning, the people of our village started to go into the forest called Gishwati to hide. My family was tired of running and decided to stay. My mother went to look for something to eat. She always cooked the best food. That afternoon, people in the village noticed the smoke from our fire and smelled the food cooking. They came to our tent and asked us why we did not leave. My parents said they were tired of running. My mother put the food on the plates, but we did not enjoy it.

It was early afternoon on July 22, 1997 when a large group of Interahamwe, carrying big sticks sticks which had nails in them came. The ends of with the nails in them were all bloody. They had been using them to kill people. When they came to our area, our shepherd was sitting nearby. One of them yelled "Look!" They all went immediately to the shepherd and started beating him. They beat him for thirty minutes. Then one said "He is still alive because his heart is down." They turned him over onto his back and beat him some more until he died.

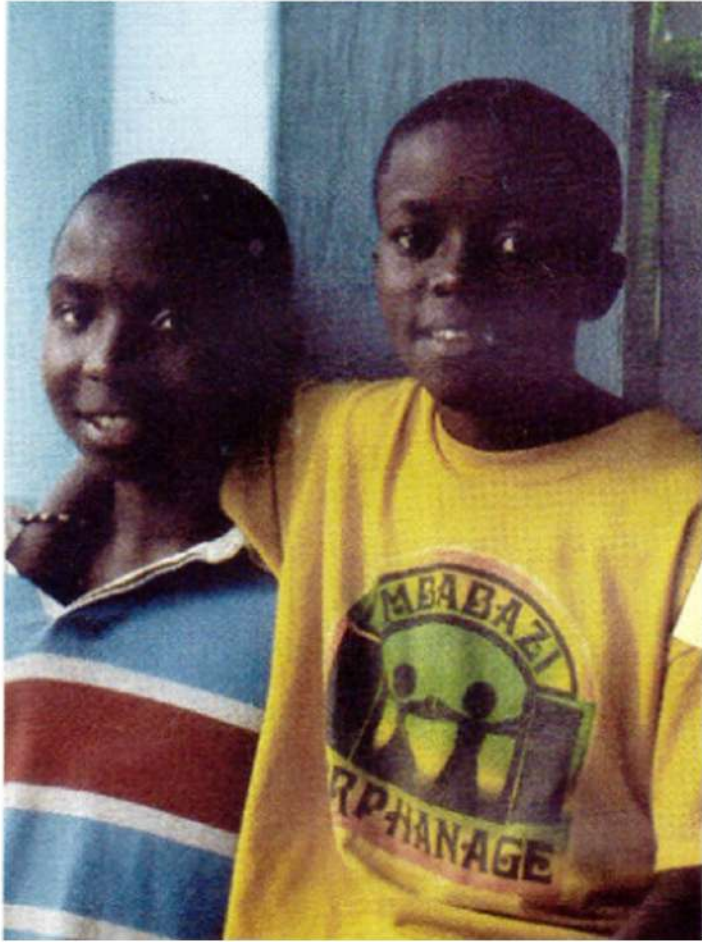


When they finished, they looked at our tent and said there were more inside. They quickly entered. They looked everywhere so that they would miss no one. They picked up the hoe which my father had used for a long time. They used it to kill my father. He did not hide from them. I was there and I saw them cut my father's head off with his hoe. He died immediately.



Noel & Musa at the picnic 2002

When my mother saw what they had done, she said, "Don't let me live because you have already killed my husband and I am not able to live alone in such a terrible world." I was watching those horrible things while sitting on a big rock. When my



Noel & Gadi Imbabazi Orphanage, Sodevi 2002

mother said those words I thought she sounded like a crazy woman. They told her to put down her baby which was on her back because they said they could not kill a mother and baby. They were afraid of that sweet baby. They took the baby and walked into the deep grasses. Then they took my mother, who had carried me in her belly, and they cut off her head using the same hoe. The baby was only seven months old.

When I saw that both of my parents were dead I ran as fast as I could and hid myself in the corn near



our tent. I stayed there one night and then went to hide near Mt. Karisimbi, the largest volcano in Rwanda. I was found by my aunt and lived with her for two weeks and then returned to my village.

I was told when I arrived that they had already finished the burial of my parents. There were many deaths in our village that day. I thank God for saving me.



Noel & Uwera at Imbabazi Orphanage, Gisenyi town, 2000

### MEMORIES OF MY SISTER AND BROTHER

The baby that was taken from my mother was left in the grasses. Someone heard her cries and went to investigate. This woman found my little sister and took her home. Eventually the family made the choice to bring her to an orphanage. They had gone to the district office and filed the proper papers that this child was an orphan. They brought my sister to

the Imbabazi Orphanage, but this orphanage does not take babies. Two days later they took her to another orphanage. Noel De Nyundo, which is very near where I was born. This orphanage was founded in the 1960's before the genocide. After two weeks at the Noel Orphanage, my sweet little sister died. They buried her and life went on as usual.



Richard, Noel & Uwera in Mogongo 2006

My sister Uwera was found hiding in the corn and she and I were brought to the Imbabazi Orphanage. My brother Richard Mwiseneza was also brought there. The woman who founded the orphanage is Mrs. Rosamond Carr. When she saw us she was very happy to have three new children.





Uwera In the Imbabazi's garden in Sodevi 2003

During the afternoon of that first day Mrs. Carr brought us clothes, shoes and even toys. We were very happy and we started to forget what had happened to us. We arrived at the Imbabazi on September 1, 1997. After one week, I started school in the third grade.



Richard in the Imbabazi garden, Sodevi 2003

### MEMORIES OF THE STORY MY MOTHER USED TO TELL US

Before taking supper our little family would meet in the dining room and mother liked to tell us a story of a little boy named John. A long time ago there was a little family that lived in a little village called Ndorwa. There were three children in the family and the youngest was named John. The



father had a good job but his wife had not any job. She stayed at home with her children doing home's work. The father always looked after the family. When he returned home he brought sweets, cookies and chocolate for his little family.

As in our family, when they waited for supper the father told them stories in the room including this. There is another father and another mother. The father is very big and very good, simple hearted and intelligent in whatever he does. He is wealthier than all the people in the world because he has everything he needs in his daily life.

Have you seen the things I brought for you? The sweets, the clothes and all the things special that I brought for you are given by Him. If you have a real friend, with Him He can give you whatever you need. Now I am His best friend and His name is Jesus. The children listened very attentively.

When John was six years old he lost his father who had given him whatever he needed and the life of the family started to change. In the storehouse there was nothing, and John didn't get satisfied as when his father was alive.

After missing his father, friends of the family visited them, but always John wanted to see their best friend, Mr. Jesus, but he didn't see Him.

One day there was a guest who had given the little child a coin. Immediately he went under the bed. Always he asked his mother a lot of questions such as "When will my father return home? Why have you put a lot of soil on him?" but his mother told

him to sit down and explained to him that his father wasn't alive and that is why they put him under the ground. All of this broke the heart of Mr. John.

When John was satisfied with the answer of his mother he would ask her again this question: "Mother, why hasn't the best friend of my father visited us yet? Didn't you tell him what happened to us?" With this question his mother didn't give him an answer. It broke his heart because he thought that maybe Jesus lived in the USA or in Europe and that he was far away from them.

One day he took his little money and brought an envelope and stamp and when he arrived home he wrote the following letter.

December 15, 1947

John  
Ndorwa Village  
Gisenyi Province  
In the house near the  
Big house of the village

Dear the best friend of my father, Mr. Jesus

Hi!! How are you there? Didn't you know what happened to us? Now we miss our father who has given us whatever we needed. When he was alive he always told us about you. That you are intelligent which means you know more things in the world than everybody, but don't forget that the best friend



is someone who saves others during hard moments like this.

Now my mother doesn't have clothes to wear. My big brother is like a madman always crying enclosed in his bedroom. My second brother is very sick, and we haven't money to bring him to the hospital, and I am very hungry.

Thank you very much. We are waiting for your best answer as soon as possible. Use this address;

John  
Ndorwa Village  
Gisenyi Province  
In the house near the  
Big house of the village

God bless your brilliancy.

Your son and best friend John

After he wrote this letter he bended the paper and he put it in the envelope and he put on it "Mr. Jesus, Far From Here."

He put the stamps on it and he put it in the mailbox. When the people who work at the post office saw that letter they asked themselves to whom and where they will send that letter. One of them said to take it to the airport and give it to someone who will travel.

They agreed with that advice and they took it to the airport and they told the pilot that when he got

up into the sky to throw the letter out of the plane and say: Mr. Jesus, take your letter.”

When they were in the sky, above a town, they threw the letter from the plane. Below there was a rich man who was celebrating his birthday in the garden with his family. They saw the envelope drop on the table where they were sitting. The rich man read the envelope: Mr. Jesus, Far from here.”

He said to himself that Jesus had written him a letter. He said I am in front of You and whatever I find in this letter I will practice immediately.” When he opened the envelope he found the letter of John. He read it very well, and when he finished he said: I must help this family as soon as possible with what I have got from my friend Jesus.”

The following day the rich man took the best of his cars and went to Ndorwa village to see that family of John. With the address given by John he arrived at the home and he saw the mother of John. He asked her this question: “Do you know where John’s family lives?” She answered that she was John’s mother. He told her to look for John who was playing soccer at the playground. When he saw the rich man he asked his mother, “Mother, is this Mr. Jesus?” When the rich man understood these words it broke his heart.

The rich man told the family that they will become one family, and he told them how he got the letter. After explaining he took John to the bank and showed him the family account, and life became again like it was when his father was alive.



When my mother finished telling us that story I would pass all the night thinking about it, but I didn't know why my mother needed to tell us that story.

#### SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PRESENT

When I remember all the terrible things that have happened to me and my family, I could be very angry. I could have lost my mind as some people did. But I am not crazy and I am no longer angry. I work hard and study well. I do all the normal things other people do. This is because I pray to God-always!

When those horrible things happened to me, I was a young child. It was all very confusing to me. The story of John reminds me of how much of a Christian my mother was. She taught me to follow Jesus well. After telling the story of John, she would tell us how good Jesus was to his friends. Now when I long for my parents, I ask Jesus to come to me and help me in the terrible world. Since I have asked Jesus to come into my life, I have always had something to eat and clothes to wear and a home at the Imbabazi Orphanage.

I do not have problems, because as an orphan, I have learned to overcome problems. I play with the other children at the orphanage, I listen to music and swim in Lake Kivu. I don't think of the bad times because that would interfere with my studies. Because I am a good student and receive good grades I can look forward to a successful life.



Noel with the Imbabazi kids





Mrs. Carr and the children