

## STORIES FOR HOPE

<http://www.storiesforhope.org> • ph: 734.678.5512 (US) / 0788260317 (RW) • email: [ppasick@gmail.com](mailto:ppasick@gmail.com)

### Transcript of an Audio-Recorded Conversation in Post-Conflict Rwanda

---

#### **Participants:**

- Mukandagijimava Epimanie
- Muhongwanseck Scholastique

**Relation:** Mother

**Relation:** Daughter

**Facilitator:** Mukangiruwonsanga Agnes

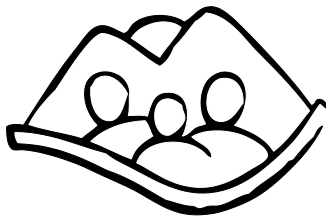
**Date:** 31/8/2009

**Recording Location:** Byumba

**Story Number:** SFH0095

#### **NOTICE:**

- This transcript contains personal reflections and remembrances of Rwanda's culture and history and is exclusively provided with the participants' permission.
- Alteration or manipulation of content (which includes the creation of derivative works) is expressly forbidden.
- Individuals may copy this transcript solely for personal, noncommercial use and must provide full attribution to Stories For Hope and include Stories For Hope's contact information with any reproduction.
- Parties interested in other uses of this material please contact Stories For Hope.



## STORIES FOR HOPE

<http://www.storiesforhope.org> • ph: 734.678.5512 (US) / 0788260317 (RW) • email: [ppasick@gmail.com](mailto:ppasick@gmail.com)

### Mukandagijimava Epiphanie & Muhongwanseck Scholastique

Story Number: SFH0095

**Scholastique:** Maman

**Epiphanie:** Yes

**Scholastique:** I want to ask you a question. You have spent 25 years with father and I have never seen you fight. I can see many women come here to seek your advice and counsel and I am aware that there are many (marital) problems. What do you do to make sure you avoid marriage problems? How come you don't go to seek counsel yet I see you do have some personal problems.

**Epiphanie:** Let tell you: In order for me to give you a full answer, I will need to go back to my background and childhood. I was raised in a family of which shared advice by Christian parents. They offered me advice after every action and I learnt from their example. In my youth I was very energetic and I felt that I would build my home (based on these values) of harmony and love.

**Scholastique:** But sometimes we ask father for some needs and he asks us to come to you yet we know he is bothering you, why don't you also let other people know about this?

A conversation between Mukandagijimava Epiphanie and Muhongwanseck Scholastique

**Epiphanie:** Love is love. Telling other people about this is not a remedy. We instead sit down and talk about it and he corrects himself.

**Scholastique:** Do you mean you two talk from places where we cannot hear you?  
*(implying she has never overheard such a conversation)*

**Epiphanie:** Do you really think you need to know everything?

**Scholastique:** Long time when I stayed at grandmother's, your mother, we were forced to go to mass and she forced us to pray and yet I find that at our paternal grandfather's they are not Christian. I also learnt that papa is the only one who got baptized. Why did you get us baptized and why do you force us to pray? What do you do to make papa love God? Is this the way you found him or did you teach him Christianity?

**Epiphanie:** We got married in a Christian way and after we got married we agreed to raise our family in as Christian. These are the objectives that he follows to this day and we discuss this regularly in order for us to raise our children nicely.

**Scholastique:** Would you have to apologize when you took us to get baptized?

**Epiphanie:** No, I didn't have to apologize, in fact he never stopped me he encouraged me because it is in him.

**Scholastique:** But you told me it is 'love' but friends at school also tell us that their spouses say their marriages are based on love then after a short while their homes break. How do you manage your home?

A conversation between Mukandagijimava Epiphanie and Muhongwanseck Scholastique

**Epiphanie:** In our love nothing is done without consulting each other, we discuss everything and when we meet any traps we eliminate them ourselves.

**Scholastique:** But mother, how come you were able to raise five of us and send us to school and yet every time we ask papa for our needs he tells us to 'ask our mother', how are you able to provide for us when you don't have a job, where do you get the money to pay for us?

**Epiphanie:** This is the love I have been telling you about. When he (papa) gets paid, he gives me the money and tells me, this is what you can start with when paying the school fees. I also do some farming and I take my produce to the market which I use to raise money for finance your school fees. This is how I am able to raise your tuition with his help.

**Scholastique:** So you mean that when he tells us to come to you is he trying to confuse us so that we always bring our problems to you?

**Epiphanie:** This is because he can't tell you every secret that goes on in the home.

**Facilitator:** So who is the custodian of your family secrets in order for your child to learn about them?

**Epiphanie:** She should learn from how we live with each other in harmony, it is not necessary for us to put everything to light because he knows what he provided for his children to me as a custodian. I keep (what he has provided well) at home and when the time comes, I use it (appropriately).

**Scholastique:** Is this why papa asks you before he does anything (or makes any decision)?

**Epiphanie:** We must come to an understanding.

**Youth:** But mother, I was born at my maternal grandfather and mother, how come during the war my aunties who loved me died and the day they died we were together? How did this affect you? Every time I think of them I feel really sad and yet it seems like you are not affected by it all? Can you tell me how you managed to handle it?

**Epiphanie:** Well, after all when this occurred, it did not affect only me, many Rwandese had the predicament of losing their relatives and so I noticed that dwelling on this would not help me to carry on with life. When I talk to others and what they went through, I feel strengthened by love because there is a time for all of us in this world to take a next step.

**Facilitator:** Did it not affect you at all? Were you not hurt by the loss of your relatives?

**Epiphanie:** It broke my heart but I cannot pass on the pain it caused to my hurt to my children.

**Youth:** On the day of their death I was with them: as your first born if I had died, would you have been in as much pain as these aunts I loved who passed on.

**Epiphanie:** It would break me just like those other things that happened.

**Youth:** But mother among those aunts that died, there is one who really loved me, she wanted to be a nun, if I felt the desire to serve God, and shared it with you, would you disagree? Or would you prefer is I brought you a son in law and grandchildren?

A conversation between Mukandagijimava Epiphanie and Muhongwanseck Scholastique

**Epiphanie:** You know if you thought about now and felt that you really want to work for and serve God instead of going to play there, I would grant you this. I would speak about it with the master (papa) and we would grant you your wish.

**Youth:** What if papa refused this and said he wanted bride price, what would you do about this?

**Epiphanie:** He would have his own opinions on it but we would talk about it.

**Facilitator:** What if he refuses when you see that the child desires this, what would you do? Would this bring about disagreements in the family.

**Epiphanie:** There would be no disagreements because whenever we talk we discuss issues concerning the children and we you see that (there is a desire to reach an agreement). It is only bad when the child decides to take actions without discussing them at home.

**Youth:** But mother, you gave birth to two girls and three boys and I am the first born. Has father ever asked, since our daughter is grown now, has she discussed anything (regarding marriage) with you? When he does ask you, what will you answer?

**Epiphanie:** Whenever we discuss issues concerning children, he is most concerned with the children obtaining an education, marriage is not an issue.

**Youth:** Mother, you told me that you do everything out of love, and you have been married for 25 years before you call on people to mediate your disagreements. How come out here most homes out here get problems right after they get married, even among my friends at school? While you were still a girl, could you tell me three things that you went by to select papa? I know that at the time, after a while girls were forced

A conversation between Mukandagijimava Epiphanie and Muhongwanseck Scholastique

to get married and I remember you once told me that you got married at 22. These days, that is really young, so how and why did you choose papa?

**Epiphanie:** (Laughs) You have really made me laugh! Me? I had many male suitors. But I looked and realized that out of all of them, I needed to choose one that I love who lived in the countryside and one whose parents also lived in the countryside so that we would be able to have land to plough. I knew that I could not handle people from the city.

**Youth:** Do you mean that you only loved papa just because he had plenty of land to plough?

**Epiphanie:** I fell in love with him because of the romantic words of love he used to say to me.

**Youth:** That means that even if he was telling you lies, you would have believed him

**Epiphanie:** Not just today, even in the past we had people who would approach us and tell us about themselves and where they come from. We would not just pick up a lad off the streets and take them.

**Youth:** Well, nowadays we called it 'fiance', how long did father court you?

**Epiphanie:** He asked me for 2 years.

**Youth:** 2 years!! How come these days you spend 5 days with a guy and he starts telling you to show him how much you love him by sleeping with him. Did two years go by without him asking to sleep with you?

A conversation between Mukandagijimava Epiphane and Muhongwanseck Scholastique

**Epiphane:** Our love manifested itself very early, he never told me any of that, in fact all he told me was about how the kind of home we would raise would be like.

**Youth:** Well, in your time, you never used to write, how would he tell you (express himself) all this.

**Epiphane:** We went to mass, and would meet at church but we would talk in private making sure his parents did not notice what we were talking about.

**Youth:** How did you announce this (your relationship) to grandma?

**Epiphane:** My mother? He visited us, but he found himself in a pickle when he got there to find it was only my mother at home and he told her it is me he had come to visit. When I got home from digging, they asked me what had brought him over and I told them that he wanted us to build home together.

**Youth:** These days people go out on 'dates' Did he do any of that or you would just meet in church? He never even bought you brochette (barbeque meat)?

**Epiphane:** All that is in the present – us we used to meet in the church.

**Facilitator:** So what would happen if a young man took your daughter out on a date?

**Epiphane:** Well, if she told me she needs to go somewhere, I will not go with her. But primarily, a child should have a program and share it with her parents.

**Facilitator:** What if she is not following this program what advice would offer her? What strength going by the example of your life would you offer to ensure that she is able to achieve her full potential and live well with others?



**Epiphane:** In that case if she wants to go somewhere with her date, I would tell her the first thing she needs to practice is self respect.

**Youth:** But mother, you just told me I need to respect myself, what if I let down my guard for a moment, and got pregnant, I know that telling papa would be difficult for me, how would you help me to help me get accepted by papa?

**Epiphane:** If you got such a problem, you are a child at home so we would not abandon you but in this case you would have abandoned the right path. You would return home and I would speak to the man about it to make him understand that it was a problem. We would advise you that even though you met such a problem today, you should not continue such bad behavior. I have one more question.

**Facilitator:** From the advice you have received don't you have any other question? Tell her! Ask her what she had to do to make sure she did not get pregnant even though she was in love.

**Youth:** You tell me that you used to meet father in church, didn't you ever visit him?

**Epiphane:** No, I did not visit him after church, but after we took our fingerprints at the Commune\* I did. Before that I could not get permission. What would I say I was going to do?

**Youth:** What would I do if I went to there (to see a male suitor) and got raped? Lately girls go there (visit their boyfriends) and get raped.

**Epiphane:** If you got raped I would encourage you to come back talk about it, speak to me, so we can understand the problem and then discuss it with your father.

A conversation between Mukandagijimava Epiphane and Muhongwanseck Scholastique

**Youth:** Do you mean to tell me that before you got married to father you had never set foot in that house we live in?

**Epiphane:** No, I had never visited him before.

**Youth:** Could you please tell me at least two things from what he told you that made you believe he was telling the truth?

**Epiphane:** The first thing I asked him was whether he had a house we could go home to and he told me he did. Then my parents asked him for dowry and he paid without any problem.

**Youth:** At grandma's house, I saw a iron sheet roof house, what if you had found that he lived in a grass thatched house how would you react to this?

**Epiphane:** Because I loved him, I would have found a way to live with him.

**Facilitator:** Now is this the advice you are offering to your child, if she finds a man she loves should she do the same as you and not find out where he lives to the point where he would take her to a place he lives in the 'sky' (nowhere)

**Epiphane:** Back then... (gets interrupted)

**Facilitator:** What advice would you give her on how she should conduct herself? These are the two questions she would like to have answered so that she knows how she will conduct herself.

A conversation between Mukandagijimava Epiphanie and Muhongwanseck Scholastique

**Epiphanie:** You see today you investigate. Investigate the words that he has told and listen to make sure he will say the same thing the following day to make sure it is the truth.

**Youth:** How long should one spend doing this investigation?

**Epiphanie:** As soon as you get to know each other, once you know he is interested in you, you need to find out what he really likes you or has other intentions.

**Youth:** You told me he courted you for two years, are you also suggesting that I should spend two years thinking about him?

**Epiphanie:** It will depend on how he is doing and how you see things

**Youth:** You tell me that father courted you for two years and then you lived together after those two years. I have a question that I am very curious to have answered. Today it is very difficult to meet a girl who is a virgin, could you tell me whether you slept with father for the first time on your wedding day?

**Epiphanie:** Yes that was the day. After I had been married, I had every right and did not need to seek my parents' permission.

**Facilitator:** Now is this what you would like your daughter to do as well or do you think the times have changed?

**Epiphanie:** Today! People are always on the move so (it is possible) to meet a young man who will confuse you and then after that he will leave you saying he is not the first and there have been others (who have had sex with you). So the advice I would

A conversation between Mukandagijimava Epiphanie and Muhongwanseck Scholastique

give you is do not expose yourself or give yourself to him completely because he loves you.

**Youth:** So I should also try to spend two years finding out if he loves me.

**Epiphanie:** Yes, I feel that you deserve that, you should research and observe sufficiently for yourself.

**Youth:** Thank you for giving me this advice.

**Epiphanie:** Yes my child, continue to observe and follow the right path...

**Facilitator:** Don't you feel that you have any other questions? Are you satisfied with the discussions you have had? Do you have no other discussions you want to have with your mother?

**Youth:** But mother, as your first born currently attending university, once am done with school, what would you like me reward you with in appreciation?

**Epiphanie:** When you are done, I will appreciate your love and your ability to welcome those who come to you and share advice with them, both those at home and the neighbors.

**Youth:** Thank you for you advice, I will try not to shame you.

**Epiphanie:** Thank you also.

\*"Taking fingerprints at the Commune" means getting married.