

## STORIES FOR HOPE

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

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#### **Participants:**

- Nyirahabimana Consolee **Relation:** Friend
- Mukeshimana Godelive **Relation:** Friend

#### **Facilitator:**

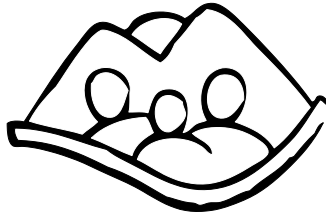
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**Recording Location:** Byumba

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### Nyirahabimana Consolee & Mukeshimana Godelive

SFH0119

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Welcome, this is the place where one gets strength of hope, I want you introduce yourself so that we have a conversation when your names are known, if you wish to start there is no problem, then you can follow.

My name is **Mukeshimana Godelive**, I live in the village of Agatete, in the Cell of Nyamabuye, in Byumba Sector, in the District of Gicumbi, in Northern province.

My name is **Nyirahabimana Consolee**, from the village of Ruhashya, in the cell of Gisuma, in the Sector of Cyumba, in Northern Province.

**Facilitator:** Welcome, Godelive wished to have discussion with you, she has time and it's her chance, she can ask you a question she has and then you will answer her, thanks.

**Godelive:** I wished to have a discussion with you as our family friend, to explain for me about young girls, comparing past and present days, you can tell me.

**Consolee:** About past years as I heard, I am not very old, I was also told by my Aunts. In past years were good if I compare them with the present days because girls in past years were respectful, they had love for one another, they used to socialize, they could meet in a weaving place and they were polite and their parents were close to them and they could advise them. Girls in past years were polite, they were not lousy, and they could listen to their Aunt's advices, respect them and follow their advices. Girls of past years used to be near to their grandmothers, they could tell those stories of long time which they didn't know and they could take examples. But the girls of present, the way I see it; even when I compare the girls of my generation, we were different with the girls of present. In past girls were polite, we could advise each other and know how to handle ourselves towards boys, if one could have bad manners, you could not get married, and people come to look for you as a bride groom, people could destroy it saying; You will not manage that girl, she has bad manner. Presently, I see problems, I don't know whether it is because of development, but you cannot advise the girl of today and she listens to you, but if she listens, it can be of importance for her. As you trusted me to be your advisor from before, as I advised you, I can give you my examples and they become useful for you, but I believe you will

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follow my advices. Presently, how I feel girls should behave; there are some boys who come to you, you should study him well, some come for marriage and others come make you loose your dignity, pregnant you, and leave you and it is not really necessary. But when you behave yourself, and hold yourself well, you get married and give your parents respect, you make them sit on a respective chair. Wearing a wedding gown is a very wonderful thing. So you should be careful with boys of present, they are liars. I think you also see it on girls who give birth from their parent's homes, it is very shameful and it is loosing dignity. So it is good to behave and listen to your parent's and aunt's advices.

**Godelive:** I used to hear that Aunt and parents used to advise their children, and presently it is not there, what causes it?

**Consolee:** It is caused by the children of today as I told you, if you try to advise the girl, she doesn't listen to you, she does things according to how she feels them and sometimes things don't work out, some of them are those who get impact and you see them giving birth.

**Godelive:** Like me, I have reached in the years of getting a husband, for you who were married, you can tell me the good things found In having a family, the good things of having a husband, you can tell me.

**Consolee:** It needs to prepare it in your heart, and you can get good example from good parents, like your neighbors, your mother or on your aunts. You see the one who has a good example and you copy her, but even you, yourself, you can decide and say I want to reach on something, if you were a polite girl, cultural, polite and obey God to select for you the best husband. When you are a believer, you can pray and God answers. So when you have a covenant you have to wait for it and God fulfils it, and he does it well. When God answers you, but I had jumped, let me tell you because you are still young. When a boy comes for marriage, you receive him calmly, you respect him and receive him well, you show him your families and then he does his wish, and if you see he can be you husband, you marry and live together. When you get married, you keep respecting him as you respected him the first day he came to ask for marriage, so you keep that respect, you love him, you give him passionate. A Man is like a baby, you love him, give him compassion. From there you get kids and they get example from you, you keep that love both to you husband and children, you need also to love the family of your husband and respect them and you keep it. So, if they see that you love and respect them, they receive you as their child and you raise your family happily with your husband.

**Godelive:** So, if you are unfortunate and marry a husband and fail to collaborate with your mother-in-law and your sister-in-laws, I hear there is a saying which says that; "The worst co-wife is your sister-in-law and mother-in-law", what can you do, how will you go about it?

**Consolee:** What you do, you love them, they can be difficult to you, but you keep showing them love. You try not to show them that you are also against them, whatever your mother-in-law does for you, even if she abuses you or do any other thing; you keep respecting her, and know that she is the mother of your husband. Finally, she becomes tired and asks herself why she is against you, and she returns back to you as her child, your sister-in-laws can try you, but it is short time, they also get married, then you win the war. Then you keep together your family, it needs patience, most especially when there is a

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family problem, it is going to war and you pray, because if you don't pray, you can fail and start fighting by yourself. Sometimes you divorce and leave your children, or the husband marries another woman or goes in prostitution and you find you destroy your own family. That's what I was telling you my child, if you don't care about what your mother-in-law does for you, you become patient with her and show her that even if it is your mother, and she can mistake for you. So if you are patient with your mother-in-law and your father-in-law, and you manage to stand the problems in your family, you will manage to build your family. But if you try to fight for yourself, you fail and sometimes leave your family to be destroyed.

**Godelive:** So, if you become unlucky and your husband also listens to advises of his mother and even his sisters, and when he comes home he starts harassing you, what can you do? Will you go back to your family, will you keep at your husband's, how will you go about it?

**Consolee:** Your husband marries you out of love, so you try to converse with him and tell him how he loved you and came to marry me, I didn't bring myself, you tell him; I don't tell you to hate your family, but you tell him; those advises they are giving you are going to destroy our family, ask him; do you think we are developing or we are drawing back? Ask him; You as a man in the family, what is your decision? You tell him; you don't tell him to hate his parents, but also to make his own study. You show him that you don't hate his family; finally, he comes to his senses and starts to observe whether they are the ones who causes trouble and may be sometimes make you disobey them. Then when he makes his study and come back to his reasoning, he comes back to you and start telling you what you can do to build your family, and tell you to patient with his parents, however much they disturb you. Then you advise each other and you build your family, but going back to your family is not a solution, that's what I was telling you before. Rwandese they say; "The one who's breaking down his home, you lend him a machete", that way you will be lending them a machete, the most thing is to be patient.

**Godelive:** Then, Long ago, I used to hear that there was a weaving place for girls; do you know those things?

**Consolee:** My aunt told me about it, in those years I was not yet born, but my aunt told me they had a weaving place in backyard. They could go to collect grass and sweeping blooms. They were polite girls, girls of the past used to wake up very early at nine or ten in the morning, and nobody could see her sweeping in the compound, not like today, when a girl sweeps at three or four o'clock in the morning. My aunt is the one who told me about that weaving place. Girls of long ago used to do their mother's work, like cleanliness, she could clean milk pots and their beds and she was the one who used to give her brothers milk pots for milking cows, when they came back from grazing cows. Girls of long ago; I feel bad because I was not of that generation, I feel things of long ago were good.

**Godelive:** Then, long ago, you could find a family has eight, ten, eleven, twelve or fifteen children and more, how come nowadays, you find a family of a husband and wife, you find two or three children and they no longer have eight or ten children, why is it like that?

**Consolee:** I also see it like that, but they say the land became small, what to feed them and less capacity, less capacity of paying for them school fees, to give a child all the necessities, dressing, medical

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care, they bring together all that and see that they don't have capacity, then , they decided to produce few.

**Godelive:** When I am walking on the road, I can see some women, even not beautiful, if I compare to present situation, you find girls of that time they have husbands but the girls of today, who beautiful and even clean are not yet married, she goes up to thirty or thirty-five years without getting married, can you tell me it's reason?

**Consolee:** [Laughter], that is what I told you, if a girl does not handle herself well, faces consequences, and fails to get married. I told you if a girl does not behave herself well, if a man goes to ask for marriage, people discourage him by telling him; the girl is impossible, he will not manage her and you find the other one whom you said, who has no beauty, but was behaving .You could find even like an old man is moving around and even has no plan of looking for a bride groom, but could recommend a girl according to how he saw her. He can say that of so and so loves people, she is respectful and without considering other things, you find she is blessed with a husband, but the other one who is beautiful and has no manners, fails to get a husband. It is not because they have no parents, but you find she could not listen to her parent's advises. You find their aunts were advising her to respect her father, her brothers but the girl could almost remove her mother's eye without considering that she is her parent. When they try to advice, she tells them that were long time ago, that culture is not current, and then finally, you find she fails to get a husband. Then she reaches at that age without a husband.

**Godelive:** Currently, I see many girls giving birth at their parent's homes was it there at your generation, or it is only nowadays?

**Consolee:** It is too much nowadays, my aunt told me, if the girl could get pregnant in past, she couldn't give birth from her home. When people knew that the girl was pregnant, they started shouting and they could say it is a curse. My aunt told me that they used to be carried in carriers by pigs and go to throw them in the river. So girls of that time used to behave in order not to face those problems and they could listen to the advices. Presently, I think the sauce of pregnancies, is because of the boys and girls today's closeness. You find them together the whole day. The girls of the past used to stay inside, they could go in weaving place or go to collect sweeping blooms when they were girls only, even I hear they used to be naked, so girls were prohibited meet a boys in order not to see them naked. I don't know if it is because of today's development and girls are dressed, they are not ashamed of moving around with boys because they will not see her nakedness, and they are not shameful. So find they move around with boys which finally cause them pregnancies. But again, girls of my generation, like me; I grew up feeling that I should wear a wedding gown and give my parents respect, I felt it was a pride, but I thank God because I achieved it. So, the girls of my generation were vigilant, if a boy could come to visit her, she could take care and know what he wants, but presently, if a boy goes to visit a girl, I think even the girl is the one who tells the boy that she loves him. In the past, a boy could take even two months before telling you what he wants; getting a groom was too difficult. Presently, the relationship is too quick, maybe, it's because of development, but about the girls who give birth at their parent's homes, it is too much.

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**Facilitator:** That question you were answering her was good, but in order to be clearer, you can tell her some reasons that cause girls to produce while they are still at their parent's homes. Is it intentional, is it an accident or there are some reasons, so that she may understand and learn how to protect herself.

**Consolee:** To me, I think it is because of them, because where ever goes, she doesn't go with her parent so that we may say, the parent tricked her. The parent tries to advise her, but she doesn't follow them. Why I condemn girls of today, they are not vigilant as I had told you, they don't know how to understand a boy who loves them, because someone who loves you cannot tell you to do such a thing which will led you to have pregnancy, instead, he respects you. Why I condemn girls of today, is the way they behave, sometimes a girl goes to visit a boy without his invitation, and when she finds parents are not at home, a boy also takes a chance, so that's why I say a girl has a hand in having that pregnancy.

**Facilitator:** Generally, those advises you are giving her, she might take it as truth, but in the real truth, is it general, all girls are like that?, so she takes that as truth? As a parent, I feel you could have told her both sides so that she may understand, because all girls are not the same, so you can help her and explain to her as she had asked you that question, and other many factors, as we move around, we hear people talk about children who live alone and the poor, how they are tempted, so it would not be fair if we take them in general as girls of today. You can explain for her more.

**Consolee:** They are not all the same, there are some who have manners, one decide to take an example of her mother, again why I can't say they are all the same, poverty can cause girl's pregnancies. Like as I had told you parents who produce few children because of capacity, a parent who produced many children, and a girl fails to get lotion, clothes or a nice shoe which she saw with her fellow, she can fall into that trap of getting pregnant, if a boy temps her with money. Again, what I can talk about is about orphans, but I became an orphan, my mother died when I was in primary six, I was fourteen years if they were many, I stayed with my young sisters and brothers, I raised them, I felt like I was like a mother to them, so they all got married and my brothers also married and finally, I also got married. I used to advise my sisters to have my example and should not produce because our father had married another woman who will never raise their children, so they listened to my advices like a mother and they all got married, so why didn't I get pregnant, I can't confirm that all the poor can take a wrong way which will cause her more pain because of poverty. So even the poor can keep their dignities in their poverty and finally get their own families.

**Facilitator:** Really, what you are telling her is good, actually, you were very brave to raise your sisters and brothers up to the time of marriage, what secret did you use, how did you manage?

**Consolee:** For me I was a saved girl, even, I met problems, it was difficult to raise children while I was also a child, so a got a simple job because I was not educated. I felt that I will raise my young sisters do for them everything as their mother, I visit them if they produce, but finally, I also got married, but the secret was that job which also protected me from boys and pregnancies.

**Godelive:** If I see old men and old women who were married long time ago, you find they still loving each other at their old age, but if you observe current marriages, a man marries a woman, they produce

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the first born, the second born and the third born, then they divorce, why is it that marriages in past lasted longer but current marriages, they don't live happily as a husband and a wife as it could have been. What do you think causes that?

**Consolee:** Long ago, people had love, that's what I see with the difference of today. In past, if a man loved a woman, that meant that they will live together, have children and work to develop their family. These things of marrying young girls were not there, and if a man could love another woman, he could marry her and bring her home. He could marry two or three and he could love them equally, he could dress them equally, by then, co-wives were like twins. But nowadays, I don't know whether it is development, love of today is very little. If a boy wants to marry, he focuses on wealthy, if the girl is educated, if she has a paying job which will be contributing money at home. So if I compare the past and present love, the love of today is based on wealthy. I can't say it's general, there are some who have true love, who build their family together and grow old together, but I mean those who marry and in a few days you find them with problems, they are those who consider the wealthy of girls family, what the girl has and what she earns. That's how I see the difference.

**Godelive:** If I go back, from what you have told me, you talked about the word to be saved, what is to be saved?

**Consolee:** To be saved, I can term it as being devoted to God. It is submitting to God, to be a Christian and pray. To be Godly and sin not. Girls of today devote themselves to God; it can protect them from adultery which causes pregnancies. It helps people. If the youth of today devote themselves to God, he can protect them, if they pray, present their wish to God, God finds them too and can get him a nice wife who will grow old together. When you are not saved, that's when you love with desire, and your family does not stay long because it was not God's will. In God's wish, you can choose a husband who's not handsome, example you can be a beautiful girl, and if you don't marry a handsome man, people start asking themselves why you married him, but it was God's will, your family grows a Christian family, your children grow up good Christians, your family becomes strong and you grow up old together as Christians.

**Godelive:** Then, you know, my parents told me you were not their friend and you were not born here in Byumba, how did you reach in Byumba?

**Consolee:** I reached in Byumba, after I became an orphan. My father married another wife and we were not on good terms, up to when she said, there can't be two women in the same house, I was not schooling, my father had got me out of school to raise my siblings, so when she told me that word, it touched my heart and I was sad, that's when I started to think about the life out of my home, that's when I got the other job I was telling you. My siblings lived with our step mother in hardship, but they knew they were orphans; they lived politely until they got married. But the main point was on how I reached in Byumba, it was because of my step mother, I had started the bad life while I was still young, and that's when I decided to look for a job. That's how I reached in Byumba.

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**Facilitator:** To help this girl you came with, apart from job, you were also married here, so did you meet your husband here or you come together? Apart from job that assisted you, what other powers did you use in your youth time that could help her life?

**Consolee:** Let me start with the last one, the powers that helped me ; is how my mother used to tell me how girls handle themselves, I listened to it, she died while I was still a young girl, but I took it in an account. So I held myself as an old girl, I even compared myself to my mother's age. Not every boy could get used to me. I also used to respect myself and I was not lousy. That thing helped me, up to the time I got my own family, and I think we will grow old together and I think I am different with the present marriages. Another thing'

**Facilitator:** Whether you found your husband here or?

**Consolee:** My husband came to work from here too, I had completed four years here, I had liked this place, I didn't know him, but there is a way he saw me, he came and asked me how he can visit me, we met on the way and he asked me how he can visit me, I told him, he is welcome. Then after sometime, I don't know how he traced me, I saw him coming. We then had a conversation and he left. Nobody knew he had visited me, they thought he visits people in that area. The problem with present youth, they tell about their relationships at early age. She tells her friend, her friend tells the other and there are some jealous girls who can destroy your relationship. Finally, I married my husband, he was from Butare and I was from Kibuye. Yea, that's it,

**Godelive:** You are all foreigners.

**Consolee:** It is all God's plan, I had a covenant, I used to pray to God, to give me a husband, then God gave him to me, when I didn't know where he came from.

**Facilitator:** Is there anything else you want to ask your friend before we separate?

**Godelive:** Instead, I thank her for everything she has told me. She has told me things of the past that she knows because she is older than me, she even said other things she was told by her aunts, for me I don't have them so that they can tell me. So, I thank her for everything she has told me and the advised me and I will follow all her advices

**Consolee:** Just be my child, I will be your parent too.

**Facilitator:** May you go well.

**Consolee:** Thank you.



