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

Participants:

- Umuraza Nassim
- Isimbi Tresor

Relation: Mother

Relation: Son

Facilitator: Kalisa Benon

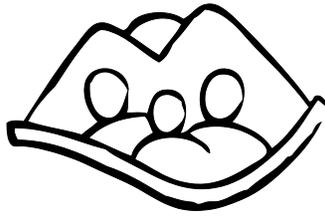
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Story Number: SFH0041

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Umuraza Nassim & Isimbi Tresor

Story Number: SFH0041

Nassim: I want to give you explanations about what you have been always asking me. Last time you asked me: Why don't I go to visit my grandfather during holidays?

Tresor: Yes.

Nassim: Normally I have been trying to tell you that you don't have your grandparents but I have never told you where they are. My father or the father of your father are among people we normally remember in the mourning period. Among the bones you saw us burying, some of them were found there. Not all of them were found there, but I do believe that my father is there and even the mother of your father (short silence while the mother is sobbing). I did not want to tell you that because I thought that you would be bothering me, because even it was not easy to me to receive in my heart what happened. When you see those bones you can't easily understand what happened, it is beyond understanding. I thought that it was not wise to tell you that they were killed because I thought that if I told you that they were killed, you would have asked me: Who killed them? When they were being killed I was not there, so I don't know people who are among those who killed them. My child why are you becoming sorrowful?

Tresor: I am not sorrowful.

Nassim: It means that they were killed in genocide in 1994. We were also trying to hide, and we went through many hardships. When we came back we found that our houses had been destroyed, so we were living a miserable life. We would spend a night in one house of somebody who could accept to accommodate us and the next day we would move to another. I met your father, who was a soldier; he joined me in a Nyabishishi camp of people who were displaced because of war. It was not the first time to see him because I knew him before. He was with my brother, who died, and they took me from the camp. I got married to your father and soon after we begot you but after your father and I split up because I felt I was not a human being like others, I

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had become hopeless and I was thinking that my life would not go on because of different hardships I had gone through. After birthing you I thought I would not be able to bring you up, this is why you could see that it was your aunt who was bringing you up.

Tresor: Yes.

Nassim: In most cases I was falling sick. I couldn't know what I was suffering from, it was beyond my understanding, it was as if I had a mental illness. But today I have decided to tell you my life background because I have received in my heart what happened. Even though those people were my parents and relatives, now I have understood that they died. I don't know all the people who killed them, and those whom I know I have to forgive them because if I make them be killed, their children may have the sorrow like the one I had or the sorrow you may have in case I die. Isn't it?

Tresor: Yes.

Nassim: So I thought it would be better to forgive them so that we keep living together by trying to fight against anything that may again cause genocide in our country. Even though they may not be my close relatives, they can be my friends and neighbors. The only thing I want from you is to help me make use of those ruins, you saw how they look like. We should try to make them productive by using the knowledge we got from schools because, you see, now I am about to complete my studies, so I have knowledge. Isn't it so?

Tresor: Yes.

Nassim: As you know, the government has established some clubs and groups where I can get knowledge.

Tresor: Mother, why do you want to forgive them even though they did not forgive you when they killed our relatives?

Nassim: As you know, we had poor government leadership. The one who was president of this country and those who were helping him govern the country such as ministers and members of parliament knew that the solution was to kill Tutsi. They knew they would find enough space to construct houses and own our properties after killing us. But as you know nobody can die without God's consent.

Tresor: Why was it said that the Rwandese who were outside of the country came back to Rwanda by force? Why were they not allowed to come back through negotiations?

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Nassim: As you know, many wars happened in Rwanda. There is a war that happened in 1959 and Tutsi were killed, and in 1962 again Tutsi were killed. Those people who were outside the country were among those who managed to escape from those who were tracking them in order to kill them. So they would tell the one who was president that they wanted to come back to their native country but he would deny them that right, he would tell them that Rwanda is full and this is why they decided to kill Tutsis who were inside the country. Those who were outside the country were trying by all means to come back to their country, and the Rwandan government of that time was planning to kill those Tutsis who were inside the country so that they may not be found alive in case those Tutsis who were outside would come. And they were thinking that those refugees could not find means that would allow them to come and defeat the former Rwandan army. Those Tutsis who were outside of the country sympathized with those who were inside the country and said "we must take action in order to rescue those people in danger." We were rescued by soldiers who were in the RPF army who were called Inkotanyi.

Tresor: Yes.

Nassim: Tell me other questions you want to ask me. I have decided to talk to you thoroughly today.

Tresor: People say that Habyarimana died, so I would like to know those who killed him.

Nassim: I was 21 years old, and if you think properly you come up with knowing that he was killed by some people who were working together with him. Habyarimana was called by leaders from foreign countries many times to explain why some people were outside of the country and even to explain different things that were happening in Rwanda. Eventually there came a time when he signed the Arusha agreement in order to allow Tutsis to come back to their native country. But those who were leading the country together with him were not happy about the decision he had made, so they decided to shoot him down as he was in his plane because they knew the time at which the plane had to come. By thinking properly one may say that he was shot by those who were working together with him. His plane was shot down at Kanombe near where we are currently residing. He was shot by those people who were protecting him, I think they are the ones who shot him dead. There are people who tell lies that he was killed by RPF Inkotanyi, which is not true because RPF Inkotanyi were not able to do that, they had not reached that place. He was shot down at Kanombe near where we are currently residing.

Tresor: Were there many RPF Inkotanyi to fight and defeat the former army?

Nassim: They defeated the former army because they had valid reasons that made them fight and even God could see that they were fighting in order to rescue those who

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were oppressed. You are used to seeing many bones that are discovered in the ground, for example those ones found in April. You also know that I sometimes take you to Gisozi to visit the memorial site, you know even that we sometimes go together in rural areas to bury people. Many people died, so this means that the army of Habyarimana could not get enough time to go to the battle but instead they would go kill local people. This is why they were defeated by Inkotanyi, they could not go to the battle to fight but instead they would go to kill innocent local people.

Tresor: Are there some people who were among Inkotanyi who died?

Nassim: It is understandable that people who are in the battle have to lose some of their people.

Facilitator: There is something I want to ask you: What is the quality you have that makes you not forget what you went through and that makes you not become sorrowful to the extent of weeping when you think about your hardships? What is the quality that helped you get resilience so that it may help your child when he will attain the age you had at that time?

Nassim: He can even have that quality before attaining that age because he seems to have more endurance than me. If I had listened to what I am saying before I attained his age I wouldn't have been able to endure that, but when I see his vision and hear the questions he is raising, the piece of advice that I can give him is that in order to get resilience you must associate yourself with people who have a positive thinking that prepares the bright future of our country. Soon after war I was like a mad person, I had trauma for about three years. For the first time I was being comforted by the group of genocide widows, I had different talks with them and was counseled by some counselors and got a recovery. Soon after they advised me to go to school, so I went to some technical schools and met other people who had serious problems in war. We could share views and we ended up deciding that it would be better to form groups of people to share views. For example I am in a group called Never Again in Kicukiro District, that group has brought me comfort. I have spent almost three years in that group, and this is why I am even able to share these ideas with my child by telling him the truth and also advising him to be part of groups that have a positive thinking because that is where comfort and hope are found.

Facilitator: Is there any importance in sharing views with your child?

Nassim: I think that it is important to him because as he sometimes asks: Why can't I go to visit my uncle, my grandfather, and my aunt? He knows that a person can only manage to live because he has close relatives. But in case you don't have a family, if God has not provided you with a family, you can join other groups that can bring you comfort to the extent of thinking that it is as if you have recovered your family. These are the people who are close to you all the time, they give you some pieces of advice

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like the ones you may get from your family and in case you get a problem they become sympathetic to your suffering. I would advise him to grow up being in groups where he feels free, where he is considered like a family member.

Facilitator: What kind of name can you attribute to this story? What kind of proverb can you give to your child? I mean the proverb related to this story. Please tell us the proverb if you have it.

Nassim: I can tell him that there is a Rwandese proverb that goes: Utaganiriye na se ntamenya icyo sekuru yasize avuze. The direct translation is: One who has never talked with his or her father will never know what was said by his or her grandfather. When my father was still alive he used to tell us: Please know how to be on good terms with all people and do good things to people. In this regard I am telling him this as his parent, because as you know the child's mother is equal to the child's father. I hope that he knows that what I can tell him is similar to what his father can tell him.

Facilitator: I think this what you can briefly tell you child Tresor.

Nassim: As far as the questions that were raised are concerned, this is all I can say. But as a parent I have already decided to tell him whatever he may ask me because he is a child who is used to asking so many questions. I will be telling him different things because I think that the fact that he has tried to raise these questions shows that he is a child who has a high level of thinking.

Facilitator: Thank you very much.

Nassim: Thank you also.