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

Participants:

- Ingabire Janviere
- Umurerwa Divine

Relation: Sister

Relation: Sister

Facilitator: Kalisa Benon

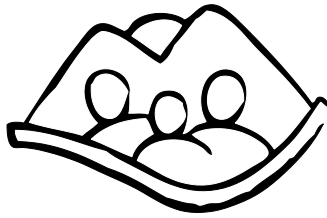
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Story Number: SFH30054

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Ingabire Janviere & Umurerwa Divine

Story Number: SFH30054

Janviere: My name is Ingabire Janviere, and this child is called Umurerwa Divine. I think it would be best to tell the story of my life background. In war I saw how my brothers were killed and I became sorrowful. I was starving, and I would spend days and nights without eating. I was living a very bad life. I was trying to hide, but it wasn't easy. I can't say what exactly happened in the war because I was still young. What made me extremely sorrowful is the kind of life I was living after the war. I think it would be better to tell it to Divine; my life after war became too bad. That is when I understood what sorrowfulness is. I realized what my parents would have done to me if they were alive. The more you grow, the more you think about the meaning of life. Soon after war, I strived to go back to school even though it was not easy. Sometimes I would miss some school materials, and I would fall sick without having anyone who would take care of me. I would miss having somewhere to go to spend the holidays; sometimes I would stay at school during holidays. There came a time when I seriously fell sick and they gave me a medical leave. When I was given a medical leave I had to leave the school but I did not have a family to go to. I met a girl who told me to go with her to her home because she had told me: "I have my brother who takes care of me, there is no problem, and our brother will help us." In this regard, I went there for a medical leave but I was not lucky to be there because her brother made me his wife. Before he had accepted to be my parent, but after he changed and made me his wife. What made me sorrowful is that he did not carry on being either a parent or a husband, but instead he abandoned me after bearing him two children. Imagine being an orphan without siblings or parents. There were nine children in our family. I went to school but I failed to study. I had no person who could advise me or help me get anything. I got married thinking that my problems would be solved, but instead the situation changed from bad to worse after he abandoned me with his two children. It was a terrible situation. This means that I have been living as an orphan. I could not study and get a degree in order to earn my living. I got married to a man who abandoned me with his two children. I can briefly say that I became isolated. This is a summary of my life background, and it was a tug of war to manage to live in those terrible conditions. I was starving together with my children, and I was living only by God's grace. You as a

A conversation between Ingabire Janviere and Umurerwa Divine

child, I would advise you to consult me or any other person of your choice in order to get advice and recommendations from him or her. Make studying a priority, for even now when I think that I have never been able to study I become sorrowful. If you study you will have a bright future. I have been facing serious challenges without even having a mother who could support me as I was bringing up my children. I did not have even any other person who could assist me. I was alone, just like the way you see me now. I don't know how I can explain this in order for you to understand. Sometimes someone may try to give explanations to another person, but it is difficult to make you understand that. I would advise you to study because a school contains your future. If you are eager to know any other thing from me, if there is something I haven't explained well or I have hidden from you, you may ask me some questions.

Divine: I would like to know something that made you extremely sorrowful in your life.

Janviere: Among the things that made me extremely sorrowful include the life I lived without my mother and getting married thinking that a husband would be a solution to my problems. Instead of becoming a solution to my problems, he worsened my situation. Even now I am still extremely sorrowful.

Divine: I have received your piece of advice and I will keep it in my heart. I have another question: is there something among your achievements that has made you happy?

Janviere: There came a time when I missed clothes to put on, when I would hide when I met students who knew me, but today I am happy because I can smarten myself, especially on Sunday. When I go to church, I put on my best clothes and use my lotions and become very smart. I pass by somewhere and people say: "You are so smart." When you tell me such words I become very happy, you can't believe. I become very happy when I compare this situation to the situation I was in when I had 39 kilos. Imagine the way I looked like when I was 39 kilos, but today I put on nice clothes, I put on nice shoes, and I take my handbag with my artificial hair, and then when I meet somebody they say: "You are so smart." This makes me so happy, you can't believe. Even if you come surprisingly and say: "Janviere, could you please tell me something that is currently making you happy," I can tell you that I am made happy by the way I look like, my weight, my good complexion, the way I put on nice clothes. I can't tell you anything more, nothing less, nothing more.

Divine: But I think that you have no problems.

Janviere: Normally you cannot say that there is a person without any problems. There is a great difference between this time and that time when I couldn't do something special for me, when I couldn't even buy lotions of 500 Rwandan francs for me. Now I can do something and get money. For example, I can wash clothes for people who can

A conversation between Ingabire Janvier and Umurerwa Divine

pay me 2000 RWF. I can do that and get lotions and even Irish potatoes for food. I am not currently worried because of being an orphan or because I did not complete my studies, but instead I am worried about those children I had with that husband who abandoned me. It is not easy to get married to another man even though there are some men who try to court me. I am worried about my two boys because they don't study as they should, they are not well fed, and this is the way it is. One may see that I have not been able to study and then ask how it is that my children are not able to study. How will they earn their living?

Facilitator: Janvier, thank you very much for this story you've told Divine. I think that it is helpful even to me. I am a boy but I think this story may help me. You see, now I am a boy and I haven't yet gotten married but I am mature enough. I haven't yet gotten enough money and I am still studying. I hope to complete my studies next year. But I have a question to ask you: How did you manage to get the heroism to overcome all those hardships? You were still young, you came from school, and the one who was your friend is the one who took you to a dishonest person. You bore him two children and then after that he abandoned you. Instead of thinking that it was the end of your life, you continued to strive to overcome your trials. I would like to know where you got that heroism from. What kind of lesson can Divine get from what you've told her?

Janvier: It was only God who brought comfort. There is a woman who came and comforted me. She was working in the TROGAZ and was paid 150.000 Rwandan francs. She was a wife of my uncle and she was also abandoned by her husband, and they split up when they were abroad. She loved me very much, she would come and tell me that I am a good person who is humble and wise. She would also tell me that the troubles I was going through will have an end. She would come and say: "Take heart." She provided me with great help. For example, my child would lack porridge and the wife would come and say: "Take heart, if you get a job do it in order to bring up your child." She would buy me milk and sugar and sometimes when the landlord had evicted me, she would come and pay the three months rent for me and she would say: "In case you get a problem, tell me." I was overcoming problems like that. I had endurance; endurance comes from having a good heart. Those women would come and say: "Take heart, this may happen to each and every person, it will have an end."

Facilitator: Thank you for saying that the secret of overcoming different life hardships is to take heart and be humble. I think Divine has learned from you. Please, what name can you give your story?

Janvier: Sorry?

Facilitator: I mean a name that can be given to this story. This is a sad story. If you had been sitting here, you would have heard other sad news that would have made you think that you are better off than many people.

A conversation between Ingabire Janvier and Umurerwa Divine

Janvire: There is an idea that has crossed my mind. I wish I could write a bibliography, a book about my life story. The name I can give to this story is: "Ibanga ry'umutima," which means: "The secret of the heart."

Facilitator: Is there something else you want to ask her or a request you want to address to her?

Divine: I would like to request her to keep having the kind of heart she has and I would also pray to God for her so that God keeps on helping her and adding things onto what she has.

Facilitator: Janvier, what last words do you have for her? Whatever you are saying will help Divine in case she takes it seriously.

Janvire: I would like to tell Divine that there is a proverb that goes: "If you want to know a person you should know the kind of people he associates with, because a human being tends to associate with people who have a behavior that is similar to his." You should know the kind of group to associate with, for if you associate with a good group you will also become a good person, but if you associate with a bad group you will also become bad. Please, you are still young and you are a student; you should bear in mind these pieces of advice I am giving you. Before associating with any group you should first of all know if it is good or bad. If it's bad avoid it, and if it is good join it.

Facilitator: Thank you very much. May God bless you.

