

Crimes of Hate, Crimes of Opportunity

**By Kaitlin Wakeman, Burke High School
9-10th Grade Category, First Place**

“For us, genocide was the gas chamber –what happened in Germany. We were not able to realize that with the machete you can create a genocide” (Boutros). These words from Boutros Boutros-Ghali remind us that genocide does not occur because of means—what weaponry we have or how we kill—but because of opportunity. When Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana’s plane was shot down on April 6, 1994, it gave Hutu extremists the opportunity they needed to kill over 800,000 fellow Rwandans.

The Rwandan genocide was one that had been building over many years. The history of prejudice dates back to the times of Belgian colonized-Rwanda. Because of their tall stature and small features, the Belgians regarded the Tutsi as a higher class than the Hutu, thus causing resentment. When the president’s plane was shot down, it was blamed on the Tutsi (Rwanda) and chaos was in its wake.

Hutu extremists began systematic massacres of other Rwandans. This was targeted mostly toward the Tutsi, but it also led to the murders of those Hutu who tried to protect Tutsis. One man in Rwanda stood up through the brutal attacks and threats on his life as well as those of his family and showed moral courage.

As an assistant manager of the Milles Collines, a hotel, Paul Rusesabagina helped many of those in need. He opened up the hotel, and many of those fleeing found a safe haven. In the end no one who entered his hotel died. With so many people taking shelter in the small hotel, food shortages were inevitable. The people inside the makeshift refugee camp ended up having to drink from the pool (Leave).

Paul Rusesabagina bartered with Hutu troops to keep them at bay. He traded alcohol and other items. Bribing them, he kept them away one day at a time.

A couple of times there were close calls. Once while trying to escape to a refugee camp, they were ambushed and beaten. But Paul did not give up. Eventually, all the people in the hotel made it across Tutsi rebel lines to a refugee camp, where many escaped into Tanzania (Hotel Rwanda).

Moral courage is a quality that few understand in its entirety. People that have moral courage stands up for the little guy, the one who is being pursued, be it teasing or genocide. They break all of the “rules” to do what is right according to their beliefs. Paul himself was in greater danger of being killed. Being a Hutu was one thing, but his wife

was a Tutsi. Protecting his family made him more of a target. Paul Rusesabagina displayed qualities of character, perseverance, and overall morality that make up a person with moral courage.

This story is truly inspiring to me. It showed me that I *can* make a difference in some aspect of my life. I *can* befriend the person that no one will talk to or even call someone out when they have hurt others with words or violence. We have the choice to make changes now, rather than trying to catch up with our problems later.

My sister is close to a year and a half younger than me. We are close, but when we were younger, I almost sacrificed that to be “cool” with my cousins. Anytime she would come around, we would say; “Oh you’re too young,” or “You’re too stupid to play with us.” I noticed that these words hurt my sister, but I was too careless to stop. When my little sister stopped trusting me, I was angry. But then I realized, that she was not the problem, / was.

This lesson was a hard one to learn. At some point in our lives, we all truly regret something we have done in the past. We wish that we could go back and re-do the event. But I also realize that if we had somehow fared better in that event, we would never be able to learn from our initial mistake.

Knowledge is power, and it all depends on how we put that knowledge into action. The genocide in Rwanda may be far from the public view nowadays, but there is still much genocide in the world today. We need to educate ourselves, and know what is going on in our world. Without knowledge, we can never expect to be able to help others.

Acts of hate towards each other can often be described as crimes of opportunity. We tear each other down, destroying self esteem, because we can. We can’t fully realize all the harm that we are doing. We can change the way people relate and think about each other, just by setting a good example. Like Rusesabagina, we should realize that something needs to be done. We need to take a look at ourselves, and make the decision to change the world, starting with ourselves, one person at a time.

Works Cited

Boutros-Ghali, Boutros. "Boutros Boutros-Ghali Quotes." [BrainyQuote](#).

2007. BrainyMedia. 12 Feb 2007 <<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/b/boutrosbou319860.html>>.

[Hotel Rwanda](#). Dir. Terry George. Perf. Don Cheadle. 2004. DVD.

"Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda." Human Rights Watch Publications. Mar 1999. Human Rights Watch.

06 Feb 2007 <<http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/>>.

"Rwanda: How the Genocide Happened." BBC News 01 Apr 2001

06 Feb 2007 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1288230.stm>>.