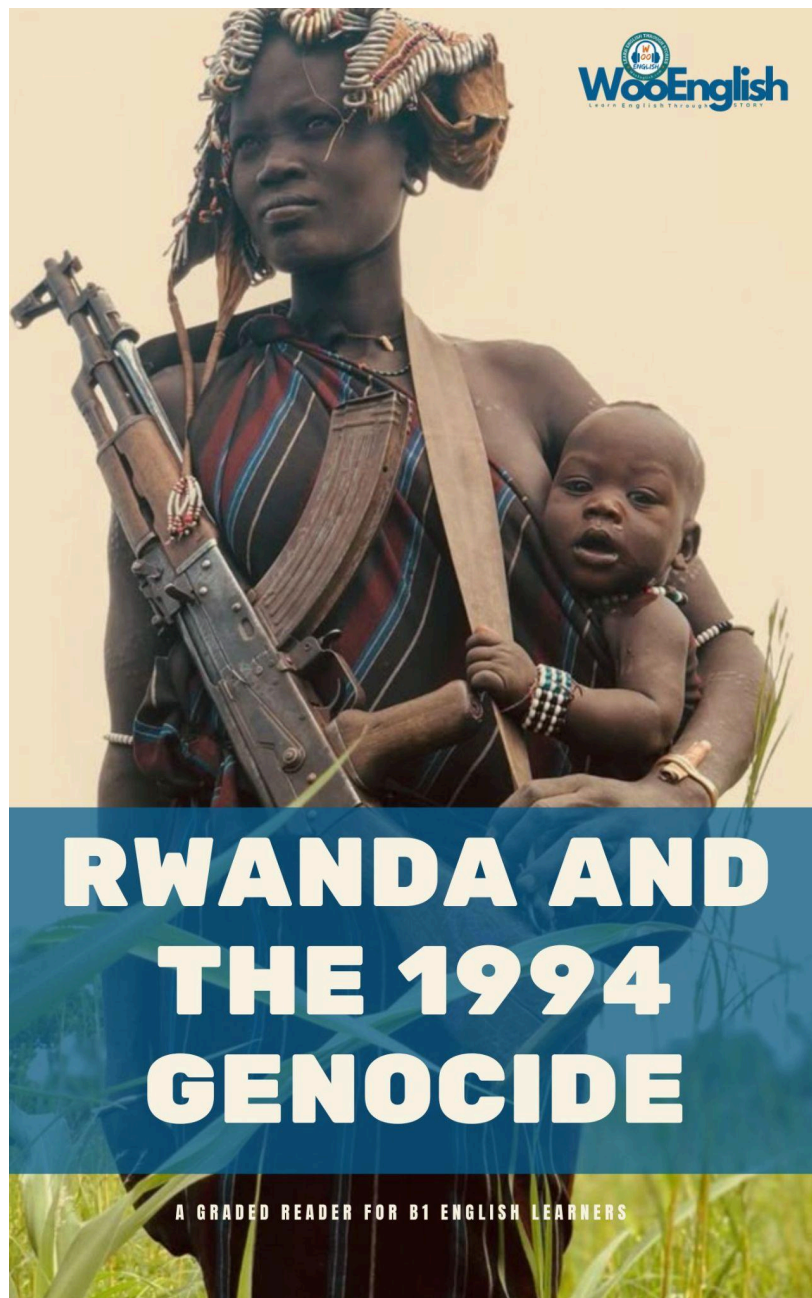


Rwanda and the 1994 genocide

by WooEnglish



The sun shines over the green hills... calm, beautiful, peaceful. But under the surface... danger grows. In 1994, Rwanda became the stage for one of the darkest tragedies of modern times.

How does a nation fall into horror? How do neighbors become enemies? And... how does a country rise again from the ashes?

Join me now... to hear the true story of Rwanda. A story of pain, survival, and hope. Will you listen?

Chapter 1: The Land of a Thousand Hills: Life in Rwanda Before 1994

The sun rises slowly... softly... over Rwanda. The sky glows orange and gold. The green hills roll like gentle waves across the land. They call it *The Land of a Thousand Hills*.

For many people, Rwanda was home, family, and life itself. Farmers walked early to their fields. Children laughed and played under the bright African sky. Women carried baskets of bananas, beans, and sweet potatoes on their heads. Men worked together, cutting tall grass or planting seeds. The land gave food... the land gave life.

The year is before 1994.

In small villages, people lived simply. Houses were made from mud and wood. There was no electricity, no cars, no big machines. But there was community. Neighbors helped each other. If someone's roof broke, others came to fix it. If a cow gave birth, everyone came to see. Life was not always easy... but there was rhythm. There was peace.

Rwanda's capital city, Kigali, was small but busy. Markets filled the streets with colors and smells. Spices, fresh fruit, handmade baskets, clothes... everything was for sale. You could hear music. You could hear the sounds of life.

But not everything was perfect.

Rwanda had a long history of pain. Two main groups lived here: the Hutu and the Tutsi. For many years, they had lived side by side... but also, sometimes, as enemies. Old problems, old fears, old wounds still lived deep in the hearts of people. Most days, people worked together. They married each other. They shared food. But the past was never fully gone.

The land was beautiful. The people were strong. But under the surface... danger was growing.

Did anyone see it coming?

Some say yes. They heard the angry voices on the radio. They saw politicians speak of division. They felt fear growing in the streets. But many wanted to believe... to hope... that nothing bad would happen.

In the calm before the storm, Rwanda stood... quiet... waiting.

The hills stood as silent witnesses. They had seen war before. They had seen peace too. What would they see next?

No one knew.

As we leave this peaceful picture, we ask: How can a place so full of beauty become a place of horror? What went so terribly wrong?



Chapter 2: Hutu and Tutsi — The History of Division

Close your eyes... travel back in time with me... to a different Rwanda. A Rwanda before the horror... but already marked by deep wounds.

For centuries, two main groups lived in this land... the Hutu and the Tutsi. Who were they? What made them different? The truth is simple... and painful.

The Hutu were the majority. Most were farmers. They grew bananas, beans, and potatoes. They worked hard on the land. The Tutsi were fewer in number. Many were cattle herders. In the past, owning cows meant wealth and power.

For many years, these two groups lived together. They spoke the same language... shared the same culture... married each other. But there was always a small line between them... a line that outsiders would later turn into a wall.

In the early 1900s, European colonizers arrived. First the Germans, then the Belgians. They brought new ideas... and dangerous labels. They believed the Tutsi looked “more European”. They gave them better jobs, better schools, more power. The Hutu were left behind... angry, poor, and afraid.

The Belgians even made identity cards. Each person was marked: “Hutu” or “Tutsi”. A simple card... but it became a weapon. Neighbors started to mistrust each other. Friends became strangers.

Was this the moment when peace began to break?

Years passed. The Belgians left Rwanda in 1962. The country became independent. But the deep divisions stayed. The Hutu majority now took control of the government. Some Hutu leaders wanted revenge for years of pain. Violence followed. Many Tutsi were killed... many fled the country. The seeds of hate had been planted... and they were growing fast.

Imagine living in a place where history decides if you are safe... or in danger. Where your neighbors might one day turn against you. The fear was silent... but always present.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, Rwanda tried to move forward. But the line between Hutu and Tutsi never disappeared. The radio spread angry messages. The government trained soldiers and armed groups. Refugees in other countries dreamed of returning home. The air in Rwanda felt heavy... like before a terrible storm.

Could this have been stopped? Could leaders have chosen peace? Could the world have helped before it was too late?

We will never know.

As the sun set on Rwanda in the early 1990s, few people knew what was coming next. A tragedy so big... so cruel... that the world would never forget.

In the next chapter, we will stand at the edge of the storm. We will hear the rising voices of hate... and watch as a nation moves closer to disaster.

Will you come with me... to witness the warning signs... before the nightmare begins?



Chapter 3: A Nation on the Edge — Rising Tensions

The year was 1990... the beginning of a dark road for Rwanda. The sun still rose over the green hills... people still worked in the fields... children still laughed. But something dangerous was growing.

A storm was coming.

Refugees who had fled Rwanda years before were returning. Many were Tutsi, living in exile. They wanted to come home... but the government refused. In October 1990, a rebel group called the Rwandan Patriotic Front, or RPF, crossed the border from Uganda. They came with weapons and soldiers. They said they were fighting for their right to return.

The government called them “enemies”. The war began.

For four long years, fighting continued. Villages were burned. Families ran for safety. Thousands of people were forced to leave their homes. The country grew weaker... poorer... and full of fear.

But the war was only part of the danger.

Inside Rwanda, powerful people spread lies. They used the radio to speak angry words. “The Tutsi want to take everything!” they shouted. “Be ready to defend yourselves!”

Militias began to form. One of the most feared was the Interahamwe. They trained in secret. They collected weapons... knives, guns, clubs. They waited for the order to strike.

The air in Rwanda became heavy with hate.

Imagine living in such a place... walking to school, going to the market, knowing that any day, violence could explode. People whispered, “Something terrible is coming...”

In 1993, the government and the RPF signed a peace agreement. It was called the Arusha Accords. For a short time, there was hope. Maybe the war would end. Maybe peace would win.

But not everyone wanted peace. Some leaders believed war would give them more power. They planned... and waited.

The world watched. United Nations soldiers came to Rwanda to help keep the peace. They wore blue helmets and smiled at children. But they were too few... too weak... and had no permission to stop what was coming.

The danger signs were everywhere. Trucks filled with weapons moved at night. Hate messages played again and again on the radio. People disappeared. Some were never seen again.

Could anyone have stopped it?

In April 1994, the country stood like a glass ready to break. All it needed was one final hit... one terrible event to shatter everything.

As the night fell over Rwanda, the people held their breath... waiting.

What would happen next?

In the next chapter, we will stand on the night of April 6, 1994... a night when one explosion changed a nation forever. Will you listen... as history takes its darkest turn?



Chapter 4: April 6, 1994 — The Plane Crash That Changed Everything

It was a quiet night in Kigali... the capital of Rwanda. The stars shone over the hills. People were in their homes. Children were sleeping. No one knew... that history was about to change forever.

Suddenly... a loud explosion filled the air! A ball of fire lit up the night sky. People ran outside, looking up in fear. The plane carrying Rwanda's President, Juvénal Habyarimana, had crashed... shot down just before landing. Everyone on board was dead.

The news spread like wildfire. Radios buzzed with the terrible message. "The president is dead!"

Panic followed. Who did this? Was it the rebels? Was it someone inside the government? No one knew. Or maybe... some people knew, but stayed silent.

The president's death was the final spark. The glass finally broke.

Within hours, roadblocks appeared all over Kigali. Soldiers and armed men stopped cars and people. Lists of names were ready... names of people to kill. Many were Tutsi. Some were Hutu who believed in peace.

The Interahamwe militia, who had trained for months, now began their bloody work. They carried guns, machetes, clubs. They moved through the streets... hunting.

The sound of gunfire mixed with screams. The smell of smoke filled the air. Neighbors turned on neighbors. Friends became enemies. Families were destroyed in seconds.

Can you imagine? One moment you are safe in your home. The next moment, you are running for your life... hiding under bushes... begging strangers to protect you.

The United Nations peacekeepers, wearing their blue helmets, watched in shock. They were not allowed to fight. They could only stand and hope the violence would stop. But it did not stop. It grew worse by the hour.

Phone calls were made. Messages were sent around the world. Rwanda is burning!
Rwanda is dying!

But no help came.

The streets of Kigali became rivers of blood. In the countryside, the killing spread fast. The genocide had begun.

Was the plane crash an accident... or a plan? Many people believe it was a plan by those who wanted the genocide to begin. But even today, no one knows for sure. The truth remains in the shadows.

As the smoke from the burning plane disappeared into the night sky, Rwanda disappeared into darkness... into horror.

The sun rose the next morning over a country that was no longer the same.

How could this happen? How could the world watch and do nothing?

In the next chapter, we will step into the nightmare itself... into the 100 days of horror that followed. Are you ready... to hear what happened next?



Chapter 5: The Genocide Begins — 100 Days of Horror

The killing began quickly... and spread like a fire out of control.

It started on the night of April 6, 1994. In Kigali, and soon across Rwanda, the streets filled with armed men. They carried guns... machetes... sticks. They had one mission: to kill.

The targets were mostly Tutsi... men, women, children, even babies. But also Hutu who wanted peace, who protected their neighbors, or who spoke against the hate.

Imagine the fear... the terror. You hear the sound of boots coming closer. You hear voices shouting names. You hide under the bed... in a hole in the ground... in the forest... anywhere. Will they find you?

The Interahamwe militias worked with the government army. They set up roadblocks everywhere. Cars were stopped. People were forced to show their identity cards. If the card said “Tutsi”... the person was taken away... or killed on the spot.

Churches, schools, hospitals—places that should be safe—became places of death. People ran to churches hoping to hide. Instead, many were trapped.

One survivor remembers... “We hid in the church for days. We heard the killers outside... shouting... laughing... breaking down the doors. There was nowhere to run.”

For 100 days... the nightmare continued.

The killing was personal. Often, it was neighbor against neighbor. Sometimes even family against family. Could you imagine your own friend... your own neighbor... becoming your killer?

The sound of gunfire. The cries of children. The smell of smoke from burning houses. This was Rwanda in those terrible days.

And what did the world do?

The world watched... and stayed silent.

The United Nations reduced their peacekeepers. The big countries said, “It is not our problem.” The people of Rwanda were left alone.

In that time, about 800,000 people were killed. Almost a million lives... gone.

But in the middle of this darkness... there were heroes.

Some people risked everything to help others. A hotel manager named Paul Rusesabagina protected over 1,000 people in the Hôtel des Mille Collines in Kigali. Others hid their neighbors in their homes... dug holes for them to hide... or gave them food and water.

These acts of courage remind us: even in the worst moments, some people choose good.

Finally, in July 1994, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) took control of the country. The genocide stopped... but the pain remained.

Families were destroyed. Villages were empty. The rivers carried bodies. The land of a thousand hills had become a land of death.

Could anyone have stopped it?

Many people believe yes... the world had the power to stop the genocide early... but it did not act.

Today, the question still haunts us: how could this happen after the world said, “Never again”?

In the next chapter, we will explore the world’s failure to act. Why did so many leaders turn away? Why did help never arrive? Will you join me... to seek these difficult answers?



Chapter 6: The World Watches... and Fails to Act

The cries for help echoed across Rwanda... but the world stayed silent.

The killing had started. Neighbors, friends, even family were turning against each other. Rivers ran red. Smoke rose from burning villages. The sounds of screams, gunfire, and fear filled the air.

And the world... did nothing.

The United Nations had a small group of soldiers in Rwanda. They were peacekeepers... wearing blue helmets. They were there before the genocide began, to help keep peace between the government and the rebels. Their leader was a Canadian general named Roméo Dallaire.

General Dallaire saw the danger. He sent messages... warnings. "A storm is coming!" he said. "We must stop it before it starts!"

But his cries were ignored.

Why? Why did no one listen?

The answer is sad... and complicated.

Some world leaders did not believe the killing was real. Others said, "This is not our problem." Some countries had bad memories of past mistakes in Africa and were afraid to act. Some simply did not care enough.

The United Nations had rules. Peacekeepers were not allowed to fight. They could not attack the killers. They could only stand and watch.

General Dallaire begged for more soldiers... more power to stop the murder. His request was denied. Instead, most of the UN troops were pulled out. Only a few brave peacekeepers stayed behind to protect small groups of people.

The media was slow to report the truth. For weeks, newspapers and TV channels around the world called it a “civil war”. They did not say the word “genocide”. That word would have forced leaders to take action.

The world’s most powerful countries stayed quiet. The United States, France, Britain... all refused to send soldiers. They held meetings. They shared words. But they did not stop the killing.

Can you imagine?

A whole nation was crying for help... and no one came.

One survivor later said, “We thought the world would come. We believed they would save us. But the world closed its eyes.”

In just 100 days, around 800,000 people were murdered. The world failed Rwanda.

Some countries even helped the killers. It was reported that France gave support to the Rwandan government before the genocide. Later, France sent troops in Operation Turquoise. They said it was to protect civilians... but many believe it allowed some of the killers to escape.

How could this happen?

How could so many people die while the world watched?

Today, this question still makes people angry... and sad. Many believe that if the world had acted early... if leaders had listened to General Dallaire... thousands of lives could have been saved.

After the genocide, the world finally spoke. The United Nations, world leaders, and human rights groups all said, “Never again.”

But those words came too late for Rwanda.

Could it happen again? Could another country face the same horror while the world waits and watches?

These are the hard questions we must ask. These are the lessons we must learn.

In the next chapter, we will hear the voices of survivors. The people who lived through the nightmare. The people who lost everything... yet somehow found the strength to survive.



Chapter 7: Surviving the Impossible — Voices of the Survivors

The killing had stopped... but the pain remained.

The land of Rwanda was quiet again. The sounds of screams, gunfire, and running feet were gone. But the silence was heavy. The air was full of sadness... and loss.

How do you survive something like this?

How do you live after watching your family, friends, and neighbors disappear forever?

In this chapter, we listen to the people who lived through the impossible. The survivors.

One woman, named Odette, tells her story...

“I was 23 years old. My husband and two brothers were taken away. I never saw them again. I ran into the forest with my baby. We stayed hidden under trees... in holes in the ground... for weeks. We ate leaves, drank rainwater, and prayed to live one more day. I told my baby, ‘Be quiet... be strong.’ And somehow... we survived.”

Many people like Odette hid in swamps or forests. The water was cold. The nights were dark and full of fear. The killers searched everywhere. Some people stayed hiding for over two months.

A boy named Jean remembers...

“I was 14. My parents were killed. I escaped and walked for days... barefoot, hungry, afraid. I slept under the stars. I heard wild animals. But I kept going. I wanted to live... I wanted to tell my story one day.”

Some survivors were saved by strangers... even by people from the “other side.” Brave neighbors risked their lives to hide children, women, and men in their homes, under floors, or behind walls.

A farmer named Emmanuel says...

“I hid 12 people in my house. I told the killers I had no Tutsi inside. If they had found out, they would have killed me too. But I could not just watch people die.”

In Kigali, one of the most famous stories is the Hôtel des Mille Collines. A hotel manager named Paul Rusesabagina protected over 1,200 people inside the hotel. He used his words, his courage, and even bribes to keep the killers away.

One survivor from the hotel said...

“Each day we thought we would die. But Paul gave us hope. He stood at the door and refused to let the killers in.”

After the genocide, survivors walked out of hiding. The country they found was not the same. Families were gone. Homes were destroyed. Schools and churches were empty.

Many survivors felt lost... alone... and broken.

But even in this dark time... something strong began to grow. The survivors started to rebuild their lives. They told their stories. They gave testimony to the world. They wanted the truth to be known.

One young woman named Aline says...

“My whole family was killed. I had nothing. But I went back to school. I studied. I became a teacher. I tell my students, ‘You must learn what happened... so it never happens again.’”

The voices of the survivors are powerful. They remind us that even after the worst suffering... the human spirit can survive.

They speak for those who cannot speak. They carry the memory of those lost. They fight for a future of peace.

As we leave this chapter, we must ask ourselves...

What would we do in the face of such horror? Could we show the same strength, courage, and hope as the survivors of Rwanda?

In the next chapter, we will see how Rwanda began to heal. How a country of broken people started the long, painful journey of justice and forgiveness.



Chapter 8: Justice, Healing, and Rebuilding Rwanda

The killing had stopped. The guns were silent. But the pain... the pain remained.

Rwanda was a land of ghosts. Empty houses. Silent schools. Broken families. Nearly a million people were gone. The survivors stood alone in a country they barely recognized.

How do you rebuild after such horror?

How do you live beside people who tried to kill you?

Rwanda faced these questions... and began a journey like no other.

First came the search for justice.

The United Nations created a special court: the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. It was based in Tanzania. The court was made to punish the leaders of the genocide. Presidents, military officers, government officials, and media leaders were arrested and put on trial.

The trials were long and difficult. Some people received life sentences. Some were sent to prison for many years. The world watched and said, "Justice has begun."

But this was only part of the story.

There were thousands and thousands of killers. The prisons in Rwanda were full. How could a small country bring justice to so many?

Rwanda chose something new... something brave. It turned to an old tradition called **Gacaca** (pronounced "Ga-cha-cha").

Gacaca means "justice on the grass." In the past, village elders would sit outside under a tree and solve problems between neighbors. After the genocide, Rwanda brought this idea back.

Across the country, people gathered in local courts. The killers sat in front of the survivors. They were asked to tell the truth. They had to confess what they had done.

Imagine this...

A woman stands and faces the man who killed her husband. She listens as he tells what he did. Then, she must decide... will she forgive? Will she accept him back into the village?

Not everyone could forgive. Some people were too hurt. Some still felt anger.

But many chose a difficult and powerful path: forgiveness.

One survivor said...

“I forgave because I wanted to live. Hate is a heavy weight. I wanted to put it down.”

Gacaca helped thousands of people tell the truth, accept responsibility, and begin to rebuild. It was not perfect. Some people lied. Some victims felt the process was too fast. But for Rwanda, it was a way forward.

At the same time, the country focused on healing and rebuilding.

New schools were built. Roads were repaired. Farmers planted again. Children who had lost parents were taken into new families.

The government worked hard to unite the people. They said: “We are all Rwandans. We are not Hutu or Tutsi anymore. We are one nation.”

New laws were made to stop hate speech and division. Memorials were built across the country. They are places to remember those who died... and to teach new generations.

Today, many people visit these memorials. They walk quietly past the pictures, the clothes, the names. They remember. They promise: Never again.

But even as Rwanda moves forward... the scars remain.

A young woman named Claudine says...

“Some days I smile. I go to work. I live my life. But inside, I still carry my pain. I lost my family. I lost my home. I will never forget.”

Rwanda teaches us something powerful.

Even after the darkest nights... the sun can rise again.

But healing takes time. Justice takes courage. Forgiveness takes strength.

Could any of us forgive after such horror? Could any country rebuild with such hope?

As we move to the final chapter, we will look at Rwanda today. How has this small nation continued to grow and teach the world about peace?

Will you join me... for the last part of this incredible journey?



Chapter 9: The Future — Remembering the Past, Building Peace

The sun rises once again over the green, rolling hills of Rwanda... *The Land of a Thousand Hills*.

But today, it is not just a land of beauty. It is a land of memory... and a land of hope.

Rwanda has changed. The roads are smooth. The cities are clean. The markets are busy with smiling faces. The people walk proudly through the streets of Kigali, wearing bright clothes, carrying baskets of fruit, laughing... and living.

But everywhere... the past is still present.

Across Rwanda, there are memorials. Places of silence. Places of remembrance.

At the Kigali Genocide Memorial, visitors walk slowly past pictures of men, women, and children who were killed. They see clothes, shoes, personal belongings. They read names... thousands of names.

Outside, the gardens are peaceful. Roses and trees grow next to the graves of over 250,000 victims.

Many people cry. Some pray. Some stand in silence.

The memorial teaches a hard but important lesson: **“Remember. Learn. Never forget.”**

Schools across Rwanda teach young people about the genocide. They tell the truth. They explain how hate grew... and how it destroyed so many lives. They teach children to respect all people, to say no to hate, and to choose peace.

The government has passed strong laws. Hate speech is not allowed. Division between groups is not allowed. The people of Rwanda are no longer “Hutu” or “Tutsi”... they are Rwandans. One nation. One people.

But is it easy? No.

Some survivors still live next to the people who tried to harm them. Trust takes time. Forgiveness is a journey... sometimes slow, sometimes painful.

Yet Rwanda shows the world what is possible.

The country now has one of the fastest growing economies in Africa. Women have taken strong leadership roles. In fact, Rwanda has more women in parliament than any other country in the world!

The streets are safe. The parks are clean. The lakes and forests are protected. Tourists come to see the famous mountain gorillas... and to learn the story of Rwanda's recovery.

One young Rwandan student says...

"I was born after the genocide. I did not see it. But I know the stories. I know the pain. My generation must protect peace. We must build a better future."

And this is the dream of Rwanda today...

To remember the past, but not live in the past.

To teach the world that division and hate can lead to disaster... but also, that healing and hope are possible.

The world looks at Rwanda and asks...

How did they do it? How did they survive the impossible and build something strong and beautiful?

The answer may be this: the people of Rwanda refused to let hate win.

They stood up. They rebuilt. They chose peace.

But the story does not end here.

Rwanda's journey continues. There are still problems... poverty, trauma, and the long shadows of the past. The work is not finished. The promise of "Never again" must be renewed every day.

As we close this story, we must ask ourselves...

Has the world really learned? Will other countries act faster if such horror happens again? Will we choose to build bridges, not walls?

The voices of Rwanda whisper to us... "Do not forget. Do not look away. Remember us... and choose peace."

The green hills of Rwanda stand tall once more. They are strong. They are silent witnesses to pain... and to hope.

Will you, listener, carry this story with you? Will you share it? Will you help make sure the words "*Never again*" finally mean something for every person, in every land?

The choice... is ours.

