

Christie: Reversing the harm of genocide one step at a time

As Canadians recently marked the 100 years that have passed since the start of the First World War, it is ironic that we must also consider another significant war anniversary. The First World War was to be the war to end all wars, and yet in 1994, a horrific genocide took place in Rwanda. It's been 20 years since the world stood by and allowed up to one million Tutsis be slaughtered in a genocide in Rwanda. Thousands more were left permanently maimed, widowed or orphaned.



Young Rwandan Gilbert Sibomana is one of these orphans. He was just two in 1994 when the genocide took place. His dad and seven siblings were all murdered. When Gilbert and his mom were fleeing from the horrific slaughter, Gilbert got separated from her and he was left wandering trying to fend for himself. Luckily, little Gilbert was taken in by some liberation soldiers who looked after him for several years. Among those soldiers, Joseph, a caring man, became a dear friend and mentor to young Gilbert.



Joseph spent every spare minute writing stories about the genocide and the Rwandans who had been lost in the slaughter. He told Gilbert, "I must share these stories so people across the world know what happened here." Subsequently, Joseph was severely wounded in an armed confrontation. Before he died, he asked young Gilbert to promise to continue to tell the stories of what happened in Rwanda. "I decided that day that I would keep my promise to Joseph to write the stories. But even more, I decided to tell the stories through making films, so our message could truly reach the world," vowed Gilbert.

My husband Roy and I met Gilbert when our group of 12 volunteers visited Rwanda a few months ago with Calgary charity [INSPIRE!africa](#). He is now a mature and focused 22-year-old. After finishing high school, Gilbert furthered his education by attending the Rwandan Multi-

Learning Centre (RMLC) which was supported by INSPIRE!africa. “I arrived at RMLC feeling worthless and world weary,” admitted Gilbert.

“Along with other students who were orphans of the genocide, I participated in classes to master English, computer skills and business skills. However, the greater gain was making friends with other survivors as we helped one another to heal our wounded hearts.” After completing those classes, and with his dream firmly in mind, Gilbert accessed every possible resource online to teach himself to write scripts and produce and edit videos. He told us: “Now I help friends in directing and editing their videos and that’s how I make a very little money to scratch a living as I live by myself.”

However, it has been a long road. Gilbert and other young survivors fight a constant battle with loneliness, depression, and even hunger. When our group visited Rwanda with INSPIRE!africa, we came to share our skills by working with talented young people like Gilbert. We joined their teachers in sharing our knowledge of English, computers and photography. In return, these enthusiastic young orphans gave us a greater gift by sharing their hopes and dreams and trusting us with their stories. We came back determined to help more Rwandans to get ahead.

Gilbert so inspired us that Roy and I have committed to sponsoring Gilbert via INSPIRE!africa to attend university and work towards his goal of becoming a professional filmmaker and uphold the vow he made to Joseph. INSPIRE!africa supports a number of innovative programs such as a youth helpline and entrepreneur program, as well as a livestock program. For just a few dollars, Canadians can buy a gift of cows or pigs to help genocide widows to support themselves and build an independent business.

But there are still so many other Rwandans who need a help to get ahead. Twenty years ago, during the Rwandan genocide, the world stood by and left Rwandans to their own resources. We collectively forgot the lessons from as far back as the First World War, where the world vowed not to let such atrocities happen again. Although we may not have helped to do more to prevent the slaughter 20 years ago, each of us can do our part to give the gift of hope to our Rwandan friends who are rebuilding their lives.

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