

FRIENDS OF TUBEHO
933 High Street
Bath, Maine 04530
USA



Berthe

Thanks to the association “Tubeho,” I belong, I exist, I have found a new identity after the genocide. My brothers, sisters and I do not feel alone because of this association. It allows us to meet and share. In writing my thesis about this association, I bandaged some wounds but also gave voice to my neighbors. Briefly, “Tubeho” is my new family.



I hold an MS in education from the university of Québec at Trois-Rivières. I was able to complete my masters thanks to a merit scholarship granted by the Canadian Agency for International development (ACDI). I also hold a bachelor’s degree in psycho pedagogy from the Adventist University of Central Africa in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. My bachelor’s degree was financed by the Fund to Assist Genocide Survivors (FARG). Upon finishing my masters, I began teaching French as a second language. I first taught in the French department at Trent University. This spring, I taught a French language immersion program at the University of Sainte-Anne. I had these opportunities as a result of my education.

Before the genocide, I spent the first nine years of my life with my maternal grandmother. She died when I was nine. At that time, I returned to my immediate family. We were happy. I was very attached to my father and I admired my mother’s courage and strength of character. She was beautiful and intelligent. They both cared for us. They were worried about our future and did their best to ensure it would be better. There were ten children in our family. We grew up in succession.

Starting on April 7, 1994, everything changed for us. Our parents died April 12, 1994. My father was killed by machetes and my mother beaten to death with clubs. My two older sisters who were twins were also killed during the genocide. I know neither where nor how. My uncles, aunts, and cousins who were in Rwanda in 1994 were all killed. I know neither where nor how they lived their last moments. The genocide robbed me of many other loved ones: colleagues, classmates from my second year in high school, childhood friends, neighbors. The landscape I knew before the genocide was destroyed. I had to start from nothing, in a great emptiness and in the impossibility of mourning. The places where I lived the first nine years of my life no longer existed. All became brush as if no one had ever lived there.

After a long road of intense suffering for my brothers, sisters and myself, we found ourselves at an orphanage in the Congo. We entered this orphanage and spent four years there, from 1994 to 1998. The orphanage was located to the north of Rwanda and during the period of instability this region experienced in 1998, we left the orphanage. We were taken in by a generous woman in Kigali. When I finished high school, we started to live in our own household. Life became hard. We lived this way while continuing our studies. Later, we lived in several different families and often, my brothers, sisters and I were separated. In certain families, two of my brothers were abused. In 2002, we found a house in the village of Tubebo. We had a place to call our own. We were happy to be together again and to live with others who shared our wounds.

Q: In your eyes, what does the opportunity to study represent for an orphan of the genocide?

For an orphan, the opportunity to study is of capital importance. Many orphans are unable to attain this goal due to the trauma they experienced during the genocide, most of all the brutal disappearance of their relatives, friends, and neighbors. Briefly stated, being uprooted from the lives they knew before the genocide produces an emptiness which many find difficult to confront. Some orphans were unable to because they lacked the psychological or material means following the genocide. Especially for those who became parents of their brothers and sisters, the pursuit of an education is not easy and even when the opportunity is offered, the responsibilities of the household prevent some from continuing their studies.

After a genocide, education allows orphans to reconstruct themselves, to integrate into the new society, to repair the humiliation experienced during the genocide, to project themselves into the future, to base themselves in scholarly encounters. An education allows them to feel they will not be forgotten a second time, to equip themselves to confront life and its many difficulties. Furthermore, an education allows orphans to grow, to bloom and to develop on personal, social and professional levels. The opportunity to study allows orphans to become autonomous on many levels.

Q: How will the creation of a library and mini computer room change the opportunity to study and integrate into professional life for the members of Tubebo?

The creation of a library and computer room will bring about a great change for the village of Tubebo's orphans. For one thing, a library will provide work for some youth. It is an opportunity for those who are studying to learn even more through reading. Reading can become a source of creativity for them. Now, creativity is a useful way to express our sorrow which remains vivid. Additionally, a computer room will give the youth of Tubebo a window on the world. Several technology-related activities could become a source of income for our association and will make us feel less isolated, less like outsiders. Because our neighbors will be able to use this room the contact between youth from the village and other youth from the neighborhood will increase. These interactions are important for the orphans of the village in the context of the larger dynamic of social integration in the larger Rwandan community.