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**INTERVIEW WITH MARIE CHANTAL KAGERUKA**

**Archives vivantes des Rwandais exilés au Canada suite au Génocide et aux violences antérieures**

**The living Archives of Rwandan Exiles and Genocide Survivors in Canada**

**Ubuhamya bw’Abanyarwanda bahungiye muri Canada Jenoside n’itotezwa ryayibanjirije**

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**M.M.: Chantal, thank you for granting us this moment, for agreeing to do this interview, to tell us your life story. Before we go any further, I would like to ask you to introduce yourself to those who will have access to your interview. Tell us about yourself and about your family.**

M.C.K.: Thank you. My name is Marie Chantal Kageruka, I was born on February 7, 1971; I’m 39 years old. I’m married and I have three children. I’ve lived here in Montreal for two years with my three children—my husband hasn’t arrived yet. As for my family, I am the eldest in my family and we were five children: four girls and one boy. That’s all.

**M.M.: And you told me that you were born in…**

M.C.K.: I was born in the eastern part of the country, which is now the Eastern Province—it was called Kibungo Province before—in the former Rusumo District, which is now the Kirehe District, I guess. And we lived in Nyarubuye, right next to the church, the Nyarubuye church. We lived nearby. I lived there with my parents and other family members.

**M.M.: Before we continue, I would like to ask you about the people who formed the core of your family. You said that you were five children, and it is you I am meeting here today. Are the other members of your family—parents, brothers and sisters—still there?**

M.C.K.: No, unfortunately, they are not. I lost my whole family in the 1994 genocide of the Tutsis. In the aftermath of the genocide, I found myself the only survivor in my family. No sisters, no brothers, no parents. They were all massacred at the church in Nyarubuye.

**M.M.: We’ll come back to that a little later perhaps, but I understand that now we’re going to talk about the memories you keep.**

M.C.K.: Yes, yes.

**M.M.: I would like to talk about your parents. What did they do for a living during your childhood?**

M.C.K.: My father’s name was Wenceslas Kageruka, he was a teacher. He taught at the elementary school, but he was also a musician, he composed songs, mostly religious songs. There are many songs signed with his name, which are sung even to this day. And I thank him for that. My mother was a housewife, she looked after the housework and the children’s upbringing, and she took care of everything that needs to be done in the household of a family living in the countryside, in a village. We didn’t live in the city, we lived in a village, so she was taking care of farming, the cattle, she was the one who oversaw all these activities. And at the same time she participated in them herself. So she was always at home.

**M.M.: I want to go back to Dad who worked outside of the house. How did he reconcile work and—I imagine he was involved in the upbringing of the children too? When you look back at those years, how did he manage to have time to spend with the children? What was his contribution to his children’s upbringing?**

M.C.K.: As I said in the beginning, my father was a teacher. So school and the education of the children was very important to him. He kept talking to us about school, about furthering our studies. He would tell us sometimes, “My children, because of the system, because of the situation in which we lived, I wasn’t able to go far in my schooling, but I ask that you study, for me.” That was his recurring message. That was his concern for his children, for the future of his children. And he was also someone who was strict about discipline. He tolerated zero errors, he didn’t tolerate any mistakes. I remember he would say to us, “My daughters”—my little sister Stéphanie and I, we were teenagers at the time, we were young teens and he would say to us, “My daughters, if ever you’re not back home by 6 o’clock in the evening, you might as well stay where you are.” So for him the discipline of his children was something very important. That’s it.

**M.M.: Okay. As you said, you were four girls and a boy in the family—when you look at the kind of education you received from him, was it the same for the boys as for the girls? Did both of your parents look after the boys in the same way as the girls or were the responsibilities divided: Mom was looking after the girls and Dad after the boys? I would like to know a little bit about how they managed the upbringing of both boys and girls in the house?**

M.C.K.: In terms of education, my father was—you see, the context in which we grew up, traditionally one gave a lot of—I don’t know if it’s respect—a great deal of importance to the boys. And we were four girls and a boy. And my father had understood very early on what it means for children to be equal. He said—I remember well, I was the first-born, I was the eldest in the family and he called me Kageruka, he gave me his name. I have my father’s name. And he said, “I will give this name to the other children too, so that they all have my name and that none of them believes that they are more important than the others or that they are more loved, to prevent them from thinking there are some who are more favoured than others, to avoid favoritism.” So all five children were named Kageruka. And he said—he only had one son and he was always saying to him, “You are all equal. It’s not because you’re the only boy that you’ll dictate over your sisters, no. You are all equal, you all have my name, so in my eyes you are all equal.” So for him, there really wasn’t favoritism, no particular attention was paid to this or that child, we were all equal, he gave us as much as he could, he would talk to us, and he gave us words of advice, in the same way for everybody. And my mother too was following the same approach. [laughter] She was following my father’s example. So it was always like that. But as girls, we sure had little secrets to share with our mother, but otherwise it was an environment that was good and supportive and instructive to everyone, without particular consideration—according to the child’s seniority, not according to gender.

**M.M.: Looking back still, when we grow up and especially when we remember our family lives, sometimes we say to ourselves, “This is what my parents were like, and now I think that I’ve taken this or that trait from my mother or from my father.” Looking back and thinking about both your parents and yourself, what features do you think you’ve inherited from both sides?**

M.C.K.: That’s going to be difficult to answer—how can I say?

**[00:10:00]**

I think I’ve inherited traits from both sides, I have traits from both sides. My mother was someone who cared about her children, who was affectionate, who wanted to make things available to her children, to always be present in our lives and I think I try to do the same to some extent. So taking care of the children, giving them affection, spending time with them, being present for every need of every child. It’s a difficult task, but I could see she was always trying. There were five of us, living in the countryside, and I could see her efforts. On my father’s side—I don’t know, maybe a little bit of his severity, towards my children, when I demand that they study. But on the other hand, my father influenced me in the sense that I always feel a duty to follow up on what he told me, what he asked of me. Even in terms of taking action, I don’t think I would be able to do everything my father did, because he did a lot, but I bear a burden of all the advice he gave us, of all the wishes he had for his children, I think that I carry this great burden within me; I find myself with a great many things to do, to bring to fruition, thanks to what my father communicated to us.

**M.M.: What are these wishes? What were his wishes?**

M.C.K.: His wishes were to see us grow well, to study, be useful to others, that’s it. These are traditional Rwandan values ​​for a child to grow into a successful woman or man. A successful child in the sense of—in the context of our country. So I always feel confronted with that, with what my father would say—and after the genocide, I didn’t know how to deal with this authority, with this brutal disappearance. But thanks to the advice, to the various and constant interventions of my parents, I was able to live through all that. So it’s something that helps me a lot.

**M.M.: So they gave you a solid foundation.**

M.C.K.: Yes, yes, yes. They really gave me a solid foundation. And if I am alive today, if you see me here in front of you, if I had been able to hold on, it’s because of my parents’ efforts from the time when I was with them. And that’s why, every time I see children who have lost their parents during the genocide at a young age, my heart aches because it is these internalized memories that can keep you going. We can hold on to them. I know that many children have been abandoned at one year of age, a month, at different ages, quite young, and my heart goes out to these children, I understand what they’re going through. It’s a miracle if they manage to pull through. I was able to carry on because of the memories I had. I carry them at all times, on every occasion. That’s what keeps me living.

**C.V.: And speaking to someone who’s not of Rwandan origin…—it’s precisely these values that help you carry on. Can you describe them in more specific terms?**

**[00:15:00]**

M.C.K.: Yes, it’s true, it’s a lot to take in for someone who isn’t Rwandan. There is the look in your father’s and your mother’s eyes, the way they spoke to you, the tone, the voice, the expression of the face, it’s the full picture. The words they were pronouncing all the time, their habits, their ways of doing things. And when I talk about my family—and not just my parents, but also our family friends, aunts, grandparents, it’s a mix—all these people, during the time you live with them, as a child, you observe. You see them doing things, you see how they address one situation or another; even if they don’t talk to you, you see how they react in one event or another, one situation or another. All that remains. It has stayed within me and it helps me a lot. It’s hard to describe it with words; we need to do some research [laughter] to be able to better describe it in a more comprehensive way, it’s not an easy thing to do. It’s not something to talk about in an interview and end it at that. It is a complex, mysterious thing that one lives with and internalizes without even making the effort. Ultimately, it is what forms the personality of the individual, in a sense, in the context of our culture.

**M.M.: You mentioned your extended family. I was going to ask if you had the chance to know your grandparents, if you have memories of your grandmother and grandfather on both sides. Did you have the chance to spend time with them? Do you have memories of your grandparents or of your extended family?**

M.C.K.: Both my parents had lost their parents—my grandparents—around 1959. They had lost them all. But there was one person that I can call my grandmother, she was the wife of my father’s uncle. She was the one who had educated my father. My father stayed with her; she took care of him after the disappearance of his parents around 1959—I don’t know the exact year, but it was during the events of 1959. They lived in Gikongoro at the time. It’s in the southwest part of the country, that’s where my father’s family is from originally. And in Gikongoro, it may be—I wasn’t born then yet, but when one reads the history, when one tries to understand what happened—it may be that in 1959 and the years that followed, there may have been an attempt at a genocide. An attempt at a genocide, which means that Gikongoro has experienced a genocide even before the genocide of 1994. So my father and mother were from Gikongoro and had lost a large part of their families, including their parents. But my father was able to stay with his uncle’s wife. She took care of my father and he brought her to Kibungo, so she lived close to our home in Kibungo with her children, whom I call uncles and aunts. They are the children of my father’s uncle’s wife—it’s a long story.

**[00:20:00]**

**M.M.: So the family took care of your father.**

M.C.K.: Yes, on my father’s side, that’s who I saw as family. And on my mother’s side, I knew my mother’s aunts. I knew her aunts, and also her sisters and brothers, I knew them, and, luckily, even today, some of them are still there after the 1994 genocide. I have several uncles on my mother’s side and several aunts, while on my father’s side, it’s as if the genocide of 1994 eradicated everyone who was still there. So on my father’s side I don’t really have any relatives left anymore, not many people. So I live with my relatives from my mother’s family.

**M.M.: But you’re still able to stay in touch?**

M.C.K.: Yes. I manage to stay in touch. I have an uncle who lives in France, two aunts who are in Switzerland and another aunt who also lives in France. And I have many relatives in Rwanda—grandparents, my mother’s aunts. One person has had a great impact on me, her name is Alivera Beninka; she became a sort of a surrogate mother to me. She is my grandmother, but she takes care of me as if I’m her real daughter. And I even see her children as my big sisters or brothers, while they are in fact my aunts. So I’m happy with a life like that. That’s it. They love me very much, they take care of me, they call me on the phone, they have assumed the role of parents and are doing their best to fulfill it.

**M.M.: I am taking the liberty to ask a few more questions about your family. [laughter] Sometimes we try to reach memories that are buried deep within us. I would like to go back to your relationship with your brother and your sisters. These are only memories, but looking back, and with the nostalgia we occasionally feel, what do you remember of the relationship with your sisters and your brother? I don’t know how old you were exactly when you lost them…**

M.C.K.: I lost them in ‘94. I was born in 1971 and my little sister Stéphanie was born two years after me, so she was a teenager too, a teenager…

**M.M.: Ten years old maybe…**

M.C.K.: No, more than ten years, because she was in high school. She was studying at a private school in Kigali, at the APAPE. So she must have been 15, something like that. And the other [sister] was around 12 years old.

**M.M.: She was in 6th grade.**

M.C.K.: Yes, 6th grade in primary school and 3rd grade in primary school. Three of us were in high school and two were still in primary school. So with my sister Stéphanie we played together a lot, we loved each other, we confided in each other, she asked me for advice because I was the oldest. And I felt responsible for my other sisters and my brother. So my behaviour always showed that sense of responsibility I had towards them. And, within certain limits, they accepted my authority. So that’s how it was. But what do I remember? I remember, for example, my little sister’s innocence. We called her the youngest in the house, her name was Claudine. She was the youngest, she was spoiled, she was—in 1994 I would say she was 8 years old, yes, around 8.

**[00:25:00]**

And I remember her smile, she was beautiful—she had big eyes, she was a charming little girl, and very spoiled at home. And I remember that when we wanted to ask my father for something—to go play somewhere or go out of the house or visit friends—we would send little Claudine. She was the one who would ask our father for favours. [laughter] We knew that my father couldn’t refuse her anything. He loved to play with her; everyone loved her. So, if we asked our father if we could go outside of the house, he would surely say no. But by sending our little sister to him, it was a psychological game. By sending our little sister—she had a way to—it’s like she was playing in a comedy. She had a way to stand in front of Dad and present the request and the request was granted. [laughter] So that’s how it was. My brother Jean-Pierre, his name was Jean-Pierre, he was at the Petit séminaire in Zaza, in first or second year. Yes. What memories do I keep of him? It was as though he was following Dad’s path—he loved studying, he was brilliant. How do I remember him? Discipline. He was a disciplined guy and very responsible. He was young still, but I saw him as someone with a strong sense of responsibility. And that’s it. The other one was Assumpta. She was little. She was in 3rd grade in primary school. She liked being close to my mother, she never wanted to let go of my mother, she wanted to feel protected, but she was also adorable. They were all adorable. And I regret having lost them in this way, under such circumstances.

**M.M.: It’s hard to realize that we’re talking about all of this in past tense.**

M.C.K.: Yes, it’s very difficult.

**M.M.: Since we’re talking about your childhood, I would like to take you back to the eastern part of the country where you grew up, this time taking a look back at your neighbourhood. We talked a lot about your family, but families influence the neighbourhoods where they live or are influenced by their neighbourhood. Sometimes we think, “I miss this part of my childhood or I don’t miss that other part at all.” How do you see yourself in the place where you grew up? How do you see your family in this corner of your childhood?**

M.C.K.: How do I see myself? We were a middle-class family, because we had fields, cows, so in terms of everyday life we didn’t have problems finding, say, food, milk, we were relatively well-to-do, not too much, but still, we had a certain standard of living in relation to all that. It wasn’t difficult to find food or drink. Also, my father was educated, he was teaching at the primary school, which meant that we had a relatively good life, compared to the villagers, if I can say so, to the people who—compared to many, many of the people who lived around us.

**[00:30:00]**

We lived very close to the church in the parish. We were always in contact with the priests, and there was also a community of nuns, the sisters of Benebikira. This was the same parish responsible for the primary school in Nyarubuye where we all went to school. So in the morning, we had to go to Mass, I remember, yes, every day. [laughter] Obeying my father’s discipline, we had to go to Mass. We had to read the Gospel at Mass. My task was—[laughter]—since we were living in the countryside, in the morning I had to go and fetch water, draw water. It was far: up the rocky mountains, carrying a jerrycan on my head, I had to drop off the water at home, around 7 o’clock… We would wake up very early. So if I didn’t go to draw water, I would clean the house and the yard, and everywhere before going to Mass. Mass began at 7 o’clock. So at 7 o’clock I was at Mass and school started at 8. And how do I see myself? We grew up in this environment where the church dominated. So we had to participate in these activities, because it was as if—it was also related to education, to school, the priest was the head of the primary school and the parish managed the school, so we were kind of stuck there. I grew up in these circumstances. We didn’t have many opportunities to play with the children in the neighbourhood because we didn’t feel at ease in the cultural context of Rwanda’s ethnic groups. So the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups had a big impact; there were a lot of Hutus living in the surrounding area. So we weren’t very—how should I say?—very free. There were limits… I grew up in this context.

**M.M.: And when you, once again, look back, you’re probably thinking that as kids you were not likely to go and play, to go meet with other kids because of the concerns you had about the ethnic groups. But how did the parents—how did you know that other kids were from the other ethnic group? How does a child of your age who is growing up realize that she’s different?**

M.C.K.: I don’t remember which year it was or how old I was when I realized that, but when I think about my childhood, I always see myself as stuck in this Hutu-Tutsi context. I don’t know when, I don’t know how old I was, but there wasn’t a moment when I wasn’t aware of it. Perhaps when I reached the age of reason, when I became aware of things, this context already existed, and that’s how I understood it at the time. And as we started primary school at the age of seven—so from that age, from the first year of primary school, we had to fill in these cards, each student had a card. And each student’s ethnicity was written on these cards. We were always asked what our ethnicity was and if you didn’t know it, you had to ask your parents. And your parents told you that you were either Hutu or Tutsi. Then, back at school, you had to say, “I’m Hutu” or “I’m Tutsi.”

**[00:35:00]**

So, from an early age, at the age of seven, I knew that I was Tutsi because I had to tell that to my teacher. And I remember that there weren’t many Tutsis in my class. It was, like, two or three girls in the class and the others looked down on us, they were looking at us… There were very few of us, the majority of the class were Hutu, we were even ashamed to say that we were Tutsi. I was ashamed to say it. Because others looked at us as if we weren’t normal people or normal individuals. They were always looking down on us and every year we were asked that same question—in first year, in second, third, until the end of primary school. At the start of every new year in primary school, we were asked the same question. And each time, we were very embarrassed. We were embarrassed because of the look in other people’s eyes. And during recess they were pointing at us: he is Tutsi, she is Tutsi. So it was a difficult situation to come to grips with when you’re a child. It’s also true that sometimes we don’t even realize these things, we quickly forgot about it and we continued to play together, but when I remember this now I can see the extent to which we weren’t free, the extent to which we couldn’t enjoy our childhood.

**M.M.: And the teachers in all this? Once they knew who was Hutu and who was Tutsi, do you think they still treated you the same way? Or was there a difference in how they treated you once they knew who you were?**

M.C.K.: I didn’t notice anything particular on the part of the teachers until the end of primary school. They filled in the cards, they couldn’t do anything. And sometimes it was even the Tutsi teachers who did that, who were asking us that. They had no choice, they knew what the consequences were, but it was the norm, so they couldn’t do otherwise. No, I don’t see a form of violence, I don’t see anything particular on the part of the teachers regarding myself or the others, not to my knowledge.

**M.M.: What are your memories of your teachers? Were there some who had an impact on you more than others, who motivated you more than others?**

M.C.K.: Yes…

**M.M.: Such as…**

M.C.K.: I remember one teacher who taught me in primary school, 4th or 5th grade, his name was Antoine Mpangaje. He was brilliant, he liked French, mathematics and I liked the same subjects and I did very well in those classes. I remember the way he taught, how enthusiastic he was, how he succeeded in piquing our interest. And we anticipated French or math classes with great enthusiasm. That’s why I remember him. He taught us well. I liked those classes because of him. It was a pleasure to have these classes with him. And I have another memory of my father. It was in 1st or 2nd grade, we were learning to write. I was falling behind in reading and writing. I don’t know why, but I would write the letters backwards, A, B, C, I would write them backwards and for a long time my father, since he was a teacher, was helping me, teaching me to read and write properly. When he would come home he would bring me books to read; it was a hard time for me.

**[00:40:00]**

I hated those moments I spent with him in the morning, very early, [laughter] when he was teaching me to read and write. I couldn’t do it, he insisted, he wanted me to learn no matter what. No, it was hard. [laughter]

**M.M.: And it produced results.**

M.C.K.: Yes, later, it was successful, but at what cost? [laughter] It wasn’t enjoyable.

**M.M.: My next questions are about your studies. How did the transition go from primary to secondary school?**

M.C.K.: It was hard, very hard with the quota system. The quota system was—there was a certain number, they had to—so it was the Ministry of Education that was in charge of all that. Tutsis didn’t have the right to continue their studies after primary school, it was hard for them to find a high school where they could study. And I think this was predetermined, there were mechanisms in place, every effort had been made to put barriers before the Tutsis. Even if you were brilliant, even if you had 90% [on the exams?], if you were Tutsi—because it was marked on the card and it was the ministry that kept those cards, so they controlled everything. It was very difficult. In order to go to high school, I repeated a year. The first time [I took the exam], I wasn’t successful, but since my father knew that I was capable, he made me repeat 6th grade. And the second time around it worked. I succeeded. Since he worked in the education system, he had expressed his concern. He had gone to see the inspector and had told him, “What happened? I want to see my daughter’s results. I don’t understand why she didn’t get accepted, she is smart. I don’t agree with the fact that she couldn’t pass.” So he fought for me and I repeated the year and the second time around I was able to pass. I was accepted to high school. I went to a high school in Zaza, at the Zaza École normale. It was ‘86 or ‘87.

**M.M.: So you had to pass an exam and then…**

M.C.K.: Yes. There was an exam—I don’t remember what it was called, but in 6th grade—

**M.M.: An entrance examination.**

M.C.K.: An entrance examination. All students met at one of the selected elementary schools—my school was always selected in the region and all the other students from primary schools in the surrounding area came to take the exams with us. There was—we were seated inside the school, we had to use numbers to pretend that the exam was going to be “impartial,” quote-unquote—

**M.M.: So that you couldn’t be identified.**

M.C.K.: Yes, but “identified” in quotation marks—so, yeah.

**M.M.: When you were choosing a high school, did you already know which career you were destined for? Did you already know what you wanted to do in life, or was it later that you—**

M.C.K.: Yes, there were choices. We could specify our choice on the card. We did this beforehand. The date of the test was also indicated, but at the beginning of 6th grade we filled out these cards—I don’t know, maybe it was something like registering for the test, something similar to a registration procedure, to be able to write the test—that’s when we were asked to make three choices, we had the right to make three choices. And I had chosen the École normaleprimaire.

**M.M.: Which specialized in teachers’ training?**

M.C.K.: It was for teaching; second, economics—and what was my third choice? Something like nursing, I think.

**[00:45:00]**

Depending on your results from the exam, you could be admitted into either your first, second or third choice of school. And I was lucky: my first choice, the École normale primaire, was granted, and I continued on to high school. The École normale primaire was like—they trained future teachers there. So we learned the methodology, how to teach, psychology—we learned everything about providing structure and care for the children from early age to primary school. So the people in my school were the future primary school teachers.

**M.M.: So, if I understand correctly, in high school you specialized in pedagogy. Did you finish high school, and did you teach after that?**

M.C.K.: I started in ‘87—no, in ‘86—we spent six years in high school, so this means that I graduated in ‘93 and I taught for about six months. I finished high school in July ‘93 and I taught during the period from July ‘93 to April ‘94. I taught at the Nyarubuye High School, it was a parents’ school called APENYA. It was a kind of a parents’ association.

**M.M.: A private school?**

M.C.K.: Yes, it was private. So I was able to teach there for a few months, just before the genocide.

**M.M.: If I understand the process well, you didn’t have to go to university?**

M.C.K.: No, to teach in the private high school—well, I don’t know, they accepted me.

**M.M.: You had sufficient training.**

M.C.K.: Yes, let’s say it was sufficient. [laughter]

**M.M.: Before we move on from talking about your high school, your adolescence, I’d like to ask you to look back again, to when you were a 16–17 year-old girl who is growing up. I don’t know—you can come home every day after school or you can live there. Here we call those “boarding schools.” There it’s a “residential school”; I don’t know in which system you—**

M.C.K.: I went to a boarding school. I lived at the boarding school and it was good; the school was supervised by the nuns. The director was a nun and moreover she was a Tutsi. So we were spoiled. This was in Zaza, and right next to our school was Zaza’s Petit séminaire, where there were also Tutsis and where the Catholic church was training future priests. It was a good environment. But on the other side from us was the Zaza Groupe scolaire with Hutu students. [laughter] The students from our school were friends with the students from the Petit séminaire. So it was good, the director was good. And she—when something would happen—I noticed that she advised us as young Tutsi girls who shouldn’t have fun, who shouldn’t—how can I say?—she—when you made a mistake, no different than any teenage girl, she would say, “You too? How dare you?” You know what I mean?

**M.M.: Yes.**

M.C.K.: So she was someone who held—who had a different attitude towards us.

**M.M.: I do understand. But I don’t know if Carole understood. Someone who is Tutsi like yourself, who sees you messing up and who says, “You messed up too? How dare you do that?” What did she mean by that?**

M.C.K.: She wanted to tell us: “You are in a situation that’s not—don’t let them get you. You’ve had the chance to find this school, don’t waste your luck, because there are many other girls who weren’t as lucky as you.” Because not all Tutsis were eligible to go to high school. And if you made mistakes, if you were not disciplined, if you disobeyed the rules of the school, you could be expelled. That’s why, her being a Tutsi, she would say, “How dare you do that? If ever you make a mistake—” She knew how to communicate with us in a special way because of this connection.

**[00:50:42]**

**M.M.: So she established a connection with you, the students?**

M.C.K.: Yes, a connection.

**M.M.: She was strict in order to make you understand that you have to work hard, that your position is not a given.**

M.C.K.: Exactly.

**M.M.: And the students who were there with you in high school—the bonds of friendship?**

M.C.K.: Yes it was going very well. We had good friendships, we made friends, we were at that age when you make friends. And even now, I keep a few of the friendships from that time.

**M.M.: Hutu as well as Tutsi?**

M.C.K.: Not Hutu. [laughter] Unfortunately not. They are there, but with the genocide—in school it was as if we had forgotten everything, but the genocide of ‘94 revived all memories. Even if they’re there, I don’t have to talk to them. I have nothing to hide from them. Everything is clear. Yes. At the university, I met two girls I had gone to high school with—I didn’t pay any attention to them. I didn’t approach them and they too were afraid to come near me. I ignored them and they ignored me too. Because, you see, at the end of high school—I did well in high school, I finished third in my class, but I couldn’t—at the end of high school we had to pass yet another test to be admitted to university. I did the test, I was confident that I would pass. I don’t know, maybe I’m wrong, but when the list with names came out, I wasn’t on the list of those who were going to continue to university. And these girls had lower grades than me, and they had passed the test. It’s because they are Hutu—that’s what I said to myself. Maybe I am—maybe it’s true or maybe it’s not, but that’s the idea, that’s all I could understand. And after the genocide, they went back to university. Me too, I registered again at the university, and we met there. And there was a kind of mutual ignorance. We couldn’t communicate—everything was still fresh, everything was clear. There was no need pretending to be diplomatic.

**M.M.: I’m going to ask: Did you see the events of ‘94 coming? How did you foresee the genocide?**

M.C.K.: Oh my god, what a question! [laughter] In fact, ‘94 didn’t just fall from the sky, it was prepared in advance. I remember, even when I was in high school in Zaza, so in the 1990s, when the *inkotanyi* attacked for the first time on October 1, 1990, it rattled all segments of the population, including students, teachers—everyone was aware of this attack and there were reactions all over the country. And I also remember the death of General Fred Rwigema. He was the commander of the RPF forces and when he died there were celebrations in Rwanda. And when they were celebrating, it was like they were proving that we, every Tutsi in Rwanda, were failing.

**[00:55:06]**

I remember an event in Zaza, in my high school, they organized something they called “the funeral of Fred Rwigema.” I think I was in 4th grade, 3rd or 4th grade of high school, and they organized the funeral: all teachers, all faculty members, everyone who worked at the school and the students as well. They organized a march in which we participated. We went to the neighbouring hill, called Karembo, I don’t know if you know Karembo… So we went up Karembo, they had brought mats, *imisambi*. Traditionally in our culture, in the countryside, we bury people, the dead, we bury them wrapped in mats. And so they had these mats, they folded them and gave them to us, we had to carry them over our heads, pretending that we were going to bury Rwigema. And they gave the Tutsis—I carried a mat above my head, my friends as well, I remember, Judith, Angelique, everyone. We carried mats over our heads, they wanted to humiliate us by way of this event: “Fred, Mr. Fred is dead; and you, you are his sympathizers, you are related to him”—while we didn’t even know him. We had heard people talk about it, we didn’t know Rwigema, but they thought that—it’s like we were working—like we were his relatives. So to humiliate us, we had to carry those mats and we went to bury them in the mountain on Karembo. I remember that event. So, what I mean to say is that the genocide was prepared in advance and the uneasiness settled in very early. So from 1990 to 1994, those four years were a nightmare for every Tutsi living in Rwanda. And I lived this ordeal in high school—because I was still in high school. I also remember…—traveling to school or back home was hard. We had to take the bus and to get on the bus sometimes we had to show an ID. There were soldiers who were checking. There were roadblocks all over the country. Since 1990, there were roadblocks all over the country and to get on board, you had to show an ID. Sometimes, when they thought you were Tutsi, they would make you stand aside. If that happened, it was over, you could be imprisoned, you could be killed, anything could happen. And what did we do? My parents had warned us to hide our IDs: “Never show your ID!” So before each trip, we had to make sure that our ID was well-hidden, and place our student cards up front. When we were asked for the ID, we would say: “Oh, I forgot it at school.” Or if I was going home from school, I’d say: “Oh, I forgot it at school.” Or: “One of my girlfriends took it. I don’t have it, but I have my student card”—and I would show my student card. The ethnicity wasn’t written on the student card, while the Tutsi ethnicity was indicated on the ID card. That’s how we manoeuvred sometimes. And sometimes they would let you go, sometimes they asked you to stand aside, and you tried to get on board another bus, so we made up these games of hide and seek with them in order to get on the bus.

**[01:00:00]**

These were very difficult times. Going home from school or going to school from home was difficult, and our parents were very worried—everyone was very worried. So those four years were quite a nightmare.

**M.M.: And so finally [inaudible]. Everything that happened in ‘94—somehow, we survived. So here we are, in ‘94, how did things unfold in your family?**

M.C.K.: Oh my god, what can I say? 1994—so I was teaching, I had finished high school in 1993, in June or July, I was at home. My little sisters and my brother were still students. Since I hadn’t passed the university admission test, I had looked for a job and I was teaching at that school, at APENYA. And in 1994, in April, it was school break, even the high school kids in Kigali or Zaza were back home. It was vacation time. So it started on April 7, or the night of April 6, the plane crashed and the country was declared in a state of high alert. So they made announcements that nobody had the right to move—we had to stay put, wherever we were. And they installed military checkpoints everywhere across the country. On every corner, on every street, on every road, there were roadblocks to control the movements of people. We were at home. When we heard the news…—for four years, we had been expecting to die, since 1990, for every Tutsi death was imminent. Death was everywhere, because there were massacres everywhere—in the Bigogwe, and everything that had happened in Bugesera, everything that had happened everywhere else, so death was imminent. And when the plane fell, we said, “It’s over. It’s going to be… It’s over!” It was clear. The message was clear: we were going to die. And in Nyarubuye, where we were, the events started a bit later, on the 15th or the 16th. People had gathered in the church. As I told you, we lived very close to the church in Nyarubuye, so we took refuge there believing that we would be saved. We prayed, we stayed there, we prayed. From time to time, they came and threw stones, but the day when they killed people was the 15th. The soldiers arrived accompanied by the *interahamwe*. They came with the purpose to kill, they used machetes, they used spears, they used guns, and there were a lot of people [gathered in the church]. Some were from the Nyarubuye area, but also from the surrounding areas, like Mushikiri—there is an area called Mushikiri—Kankobwa, Bwiyorere—so everybody had come to the parish, to the big church in the area to seek refuge. So on the 15th, they attacked with the support of the militia, but the *interahamwe* were also armed with spears, clubs, all kinds of objects they used to kill.

**[01:05:00]**

And I remember they even used—how do you say *urusenda*?

**M.M.: Pepper.**

M.C.K.: Pepper, spices, pepper, trying to see who was still alive. They would spread it—so that when you smelled the pepper you—

**M.M.: —you sneezed.**

M.C.K.: You sneezed and in this way it showed who was still hiding, who was dying. It was terrible, what happened on the 15th and the 16th. And the survivors of this massacre were hiding all around, in the bush—the church was surrounded by eucalyptus forests—we were hiding all over that area, waiting for the help of the RPF forces because the RPF wasn’t far away. They were advancing fast because they knew people were being killed. So, it was only after the RPF’s rescue that we finally said, “Whew, we’re survivors! Now we can—” We didn’t know what had happened. At that moment, we didn’t know that we had lost our whole families; we were alone in the situation, and when we—it’s after, it’s only afterwards that we discovered that we had lost this or that person… For years and years, you would sometimes say to yourself that maybe someone else from your family has survived. I remember I spent many, many years believing that I would find others from my family alive. After the genocide, there were camps all over the country. Refugee camps inside the country, but there were also camps outside—in Tanzania, Burundi, Congo, there were camps. And in those camps, sometimes there were Tutsis—it’s true, most of the people who had taken refuge in these camps were Hutus, but sometimes Tutsis were also arriving in those camps too, they had managed to sneak in. And I always thought—for a long time I didn’t accept my situation because I was thinking that maybe in the camp in Tanzania—because we lived near the Tanzanian border—I thought maybe one of my sisters or my brother had been able to sneak in. For years and years I lived with that uncertainty. And when the camps were closed, when the refugee camps everywhere closed, that’s when I realized I didn’t have anyone left. So it took me many, many years to accept this sad reality. It took me years. I felt confused, I thought, “I’ll surely run into one of them.” I remember mostly in ‘95, ‘96, ‘97, when I would walk down the streets in Kigali, I would keep my eyes wide open, looking all around me to maybe recognize someone from my family. I believed in a miracle. So every time I listened to the radio, or when I was reading—especially when they were communicating information—to see if someone in my family had been asking for…—things like that. So I spent many years of confusion, but unfortunately, after a while I said to myself, “Oh my dear…—that’s it, you have to accept it.”

**M.M.: It’s hard, and I feel uncomfortable, but I’ll ask you this question anyway. I am, in my mind, trying to recreate the scene at the church in Nyarubuye. You have left, with your family, your three sisters, your brother, your mother and your father, I imagine you were all in the same place. What was your reflex when the church was attacked, when you saw the militia coming?**

**[01:10:00]**

**If I am seeing you here today and if I am talking to you now, that’s because you had the reflex to do something and you realized later that the others didn’t do the same thing perhaps—and you learned from this experience. What was your reflex? What did you do, where did you go? Where did you end up after? And what did you learn afterwards?**

M.C.K.: What did I do? In fact we didn’t do anything. What was my reaction? When they attacked, you were entirely overcome by fear, you were trembling, you were thinking about death, you were thinking about how you were going to die; there was even a moment when I couldn’t think anymore. You are completely overcome by fear, it’s as if you’ve had an electric shock. I remember when, to open the doors behind which people were hiding, they were using machetes, but also axes, *amashoka*—

**M.M.: Axes, yes.**

M.C.K.: They used axes to cut down the doors, they were using whatever they could. I remember when the door was about to come down. For a long time we could hear them hacking at it, trying to remove that door that protected us, to finally get to where we were. In that moment, you’re scared stiff, you’re not thinking anymore, you’re not crying, you have no tears left in you, you’re there, you’re awaiting death. We could hear the sounds of guns outside, shots, people screaming, grown-ups, children, everyone screaming. And you are there, waiting for the door that is protecting you to open so that you can finally be killed. It’s a difficult moment. What did I do? I didn’t do anything. They opened the door, they finally—the door fell on us and we got out. And before even killing people, they first selected those who—there were some who were well-known and those were the ones they were looking for. I was lucky, because where I was—in the same way as when two days before the genocide, I had gone to visit friends and I wasn’t home when it happened. So since I wasn’t—I was in an environment where not many people knew me. When they broke into the house, they were looking for so and so’s daughter, they were looking for a specific person. They were seeking out specific individuals, and I wasn’t among them. That’s what saved me, in the end. Because I was in a place where not many people knew me. Nobody was interested in me and so I was able to sneak out. I was able to sneak out, otherwise—so I sneaked out, I got out, I went to hide in the bush. I stayed in the bush for a long time. And I remember I was wearing pants, but I had to look for some pagnes to wear because in this region pants are a sign that you are an educated person. I had to disguise myself as an old woman. And by “old woman” I mean, say, 70 or a 100 years old. So I was walking [shows curved posture]—my body was bent and I was wearing a pagne. I did what I could to disguise myself, to not show my face. So I was wearing—like a Muslim woman [makes a gesture to show covering her head], and at the same time I had to do all I could to appear like an old lady, like someone who has no life, someone of no interest to you. So that’s how I went on disguised. I didn’t eat, I wanted to drink, but I couldn’t find anything to drink. And I remember one day I was really, really thirsty. What did I do? There were—I was in the bush, you know—how do you say *urume*?

**M.M.: Morning dew.**

M.C.K.: Dew, yes, so I was scooping dewdrops with my hands and I was licking it. That’s what I—yes, I was licking it. I licked dewdrops to quench my thirst.

**[01:15:00]**

**C.V.: Were you alone in the bush?**

M.C.K.: Yes I was alone. And the good thing in all this was that we could hear the *inkotanyi* advancing, we could hear their gunshots. We could hear them moving forward. At one point, I felt surrounded by silence, no one was moving. You had to hide at all times, because people were passing by, the *interahamwe* were everywhere. And one day, I was surrounded by a peculiar silence, which meant that the *interahamwe* were gone. Two days later, I thought, “Oh my god, what—I’m the only one left in this world, how is that possible?” I couldn’t hear anything, not a thing. And I got scared. I got scared of being all alone in this world—what would I do? I thought, “My god, I have to get out of this situation.” I came out of my hiding place, I tried to get a sense of orientation, to see if I could find anyone walking, crying, a sign of human presence. So, I—while trying to get out I saw corpses everywhere, corpses everywhere I went. That’s when I saw that the *inkotanyi* had taken over the area. So the *inkotanyi* had taken over the area two or three days before, and I wasn’t aware of that, because I was hiding. The *interahamwe* were gone and I was there. I found—I reached the *inkotanyi* forces, because we recognized their uniforms, and when I saw their camp, I saw the soldiers, but I had to make sure it was them, I had to make sure that they were indeed *inkotanyi* soldiers and that it wasn’t the camp of the former Rwandan Armed Forces. So you had to make sure to be—

**M.M.: Vigilant.**

M.C.K.: Vigilant, yes. And we recognized the *inkotanyi* by their uniforms. And the hats they wore were different from those of the Rwandan Armed Forces. And when I saw the hat of one of the *inkotanyi* soldiers, oh, I thought, “Am I dreaming? Is this true? Is it the *inkotanyi*? What is happening to me?” I felt—what I was feeling was particular. I don’t know if I can say that I felt good, but I felt a little different. I walked towards that man and he looked at me. And while I was walking forward, I yelled to all sides, “I’m not an *interahamwe*, I’m not an *interahamwe*.” Then he saw me. He wasn’t enthusiastic, he just looked at me like that and I was looking at him, I came closer, I was still wearing my disguise—

**M.M.: Of an old woman…**

M.C.K.: Yes, no one could recognize me. Then I was able to stand up straight. At first, perhaps, he didn’t know that I was a person, because I was walking like that [shows bent position], sneaking my way forward. Then I saw him and yelled, “I’m not an *interahamwe*, I’m not an *interahamwe*.” And he saw this old lady, wearing a pagne, dressed like that from head to toe, he looked at me with a bit of a dismissive eye, and me too, I was afraid of him, because I wasn’t sure that he was an *inkotanyi* soldier. But he looked at me, I moved closer, and then he asked me to raise my hands [raises her hands] so that he could check that I wasn’t wearing—

**M.M.: That you have nothing—**

M.C.K.: —nothing on my body. And when he saw that I had nothing, he looked at me like I was—I was ugly for sure, many days had passed without washing, without eating, without doing anything, I was ugly, ugly.

**[01:20:00]**

Then he brought me to a centre where there were other people, other survivors. He gave me water to wash up, he gave me clothes to get dressed in and then he gave me something to drink. Many drinks—a whole day went by before I was able to eat. Even drinking, I only took very, very small sips. For a week I was feeling sick. And after a week, it was like I woke up. I was taking medication, because I was coughing a lot, I had headaches, I was taking many pills. And then I felt alive again, I started getting used to the life at the centre where we were. There were many of us there. We were trained, a brief training to administer drugs to people who were in a very, very bad state compared to the rest of us, so I became an on-the-spot nurse. Yes, we took care of others who had just arrived. In my case too, there were people who had taken care of me and when I was back in good shape, I began taking care of people who were in a bad state, who were very sick, who were very hungry. So we helped each other. Then what happened? Later, I said to myself, “Is there anyone left from my family?” That’s when the questioning started: “Has anyone from my family survived?” I searched everywhere, everywhere, and I didn’t find anything. I found some relatives, more or less distant relatives, and that’s all. My life began anew, thanks to the people around me, thanks to my relatives that I was able to find, including the famous grandmother Alivera who really devoted herself to me. But my life began anew, I made new friends, I went to university, even though I wasn’t sure if I really needed to go or not. But I went anyways… The period after the war was a hard one for me to deal with. It was like I’ve lost all effort to live. It was like nothing could reassure me, I saw no reason to live, I didn’t see a single reason to live, and at the same time I wasn’t ready to commit suicide—so I lived between these two states. And little by little, by meeting people, talking to people, and with the support of the relatives I still had, I was able to rebuild my life.

**M.M.: Going back to the camp...**

M.C.K.: Yes…

**M.M.: I understand that you met Alivera, your aunt—**

M.C.K.: Yes, my mother’s aunt.

**M.M.: Your mother’s aunt—effectively, your grandmother. I’m thinking…, I’m thinking to myself—so, you are at the camp—**

M.C.K.: Yes.

**M.M.: —was Alivera also at the camp?**

M.C.K.: No.

**M.M.: Did you find her elsewhere? When the announcement was made that they were closing the camp and you hadn’t found anyone [from your family] there, did you think, “I’ll leave with so and so—”? Where did you go?**

M.C.K.: Curiously, in the camp, there was—they were trying to group people by age. And we were still young at the time. There were also the refugees from Burundi, the Tutsis who were in Burundi, who were coming back, or those who were in Tanzania, dispersed everywhere, who were returning. And among the people who were coming back, I found my relatives, those who were living outside the country before the war.

**M.M.: Who had left many years before.**

M.C.K.: Who had left. So I found one of my cousins, Germaine, whom I knew from before. She was—one day, we were doing—we were taking care of the people who had just arrived, giving them medication, filling in the patient registry—there was a girl from Burundi, and it was Germaine.

**[01:25:00]**

One day we were talking and talking, I talked about the people from my family, on my mother’s side, on the side of—we were having a conversation. The people coming back—they had just returned, they wanted—they were looking for their relatives. And those of us who had stayed in Rwanda, the survivors, we were also looking for members of our families. And we talked about that all the time. We would find any opportunity to talk about it. And she told me, “I come from Burundi, my father’s name is Rusanganwa and I had—we lived in Congo, then we went to Burundi, but I know we had a big family in Rwanda. We had a big family, I had aunts, such as Alivera, I had—” So she told me about them. And I asked her, “Which family are you from?” And she said, “I am from Rusanganwa’s family.” And I knew that Rusanganwa was the name of my mother’s uncle who lived in Burundi. I said, “Don’t tell me you’re Rusanganwa’s daughter, because I know I have an uncle, Rusanganwa, who lives in Burundi—” She said, “Oh yes? I’m his daughter!” And then we continued talking and she asked me, “Are you Théo’s niece?” And I thought, “Théo who?” She said, “Are you the niece of Théo who lives in France?” I said, “Yes, that’s my uncle.” That’s how we found each other. And then Germaine told me that aunt Alivera is alive and that she is in Kigali. While we were at the camp, we could travel with the military cars. When we were looking for—when we knew that a military car was available, going on a mission to Kigali or to Kibungo or somewhere, we would try to get a lift. We would ask them: “I need to go to Kigali to find someone—or for whatever reason,” and they gave us a ride for free because we didn’t have any money. So Germaine and I went to look for Alivera and we found Alivera. It was an emotional moment because Alivera didn’t know I was still alive, she had learned that everyone in Kageruka’s family, everyone had died. So what she knew was that no one had survived from my family. And when she saw me, she said, “Oh my god!” In Kinyarwanda she said, “*Mwana wanjye, uriho! Ndamubwira*: Yes, *Ndiho*.”

**M.M.: “My child, you’re still here.”**

M.C.K.: Yes, “My child, you’re still here.” And I said, “I’m still here.” So that’s it. I stayed at her place. She protected me, she gave me a lot of love because I represented all the people she had lost. And with my uncles returning from Burundi, from Uganda, I could enjoy the feeling of being loved, despite everything. I benefited from the support of all those people who understood my situation, who showed me compassion. They supported me, I didn’t really have any difficulties—no lack of affection, no financial difficulties, they were there for me. That’s it. After that I went to university; then I got married and had children, and now I’m here in Canada. That’s it. [laughter]

**M.M.: You won’t be happy with me, but I’ll rewind your story again. So you went to Kigali, you found Alivera, and you began your life again.**

M.C.K.: Yes.

**M.M.: But there were people you couldn’t find. I imagine you tried searching—what did you do? What did you learn [about them]?**

M.C.K: I tried to look for them. I learned quite quickly that everyone from my immediate family was dead. I learned that quite quickly, but I didn’t want to accept it. So it took me a long time before I started looking for them again, because I didn’t want to accept that sad reality.

**[01:30:00]**

I told you earlier that when I was walking in the city—because I stayed with my aunt, my grandmother Alivera who was in Kigali, so I lived in Kigali after the genocide. I never went back to live at home, in Nyarubuye, because there was no one there. And when I was walking in Kigali, I was thinking, I kept my eyes wide open to see if I would find one of my sisters, one of my uncles. I was always looking for them. I spent several years in this situation. But, about three years later, I found the remains of some of my relatives. I found my father’s remains. I learned that the remains of my relatives were in the church itself, that their bones were there. There was nothing I could do. I could bury my father’s bones because he wasn’t in the church. I found him a little further away. He was killed while trying to seek refuge in Tanzania.

**M.M.: He had left the church—**

M.C.K.: He had been able to escape whatever was going on in the church. He was trying to flee the country, to go to Tanzania, but before he could cross to the other side, he was killed midway. So how did I learn about these events? Through the people who are imprisoned. They told me where he was. I went to see these people in prison, I talked to them and they told me that they had killed him on his way to Tanzania. The place is called Rushonga, I don’t know if you know it. So they killed him there and the prisoner himself came to show us the place. We exhumed my father’s bones and brought him home to my house. And the others, they are all at the Nyarubuye church cemetery. They are there.

**C.V.: Was your mom—**

M.C.K.: Yes, she is there. My mom, my three sisters and my brother are all there. They are all there. I was told a story for each one of them; one of those stories hurts me always. I was informed that my mother had wounds on her face. They were throwing grenades; they said that among the people who attacked the Nyarubuye church there were also soldiers who had grenades, guns, they had all kinds of ammunition that they used. And my mother was wounded all over her body, she had wounds everywhere and I was told that she didn’t die right away, she spent several days like that, with these wounds. And finally she was—she died… just like my three sisters and my brother. They are all buried in the Nyarubuye cemetery. Only my father is buried at home, because he was apart. The others are mixed together with the rest of the people who were there, I can’t know who among them is my mother, who is my sister, who is my brother—no, it’s impossible. They are all intermingled there.

**M.M.: I remember, if I’m not mistaken, they did—it’s a common grave for everyone who was there, in the church.**

M.C.K.: Yes.

**M.M.: And then they were buried—**

M.C.K.: —in front of the church, slightly below the church. They are all there.

**[01:35:00]**

**M.M.: So, at a certain moment, you accepted that no one was left.**

M.C.K.: Yes.

**M.M.: And you learned to live without…**

M.C.K.: Yes, after six years you can’t continue hoping to find anyone. Finally I—I don’t know if I accepted it consciously or—I’m still living with that. I don’t know how to explain it. I’m still living with it, but without hope that I would find anyone, because I learned how each one of them died. Now I know how. I only saw my father’s remains and I’m sure that it’s him because I saw the sweater he was wearing. It was a yellow sweater, I recognized it. Of the people I knew, he’s the only one I’ve seen, so his death is, to me, a concrete fact. I know that the others are there and, in a mysterious way, I accept their death. I haven’t seen them, I haven’t touched their bodies, I haven’t seen their clothes—I have nothing to go by, I haven’t seen anything, but I accept.

**M.M.: Sometimes, precisely, when we are searching, we think, “I’ll go to the hill, I’ll talk to such and such person, maybe they’ll tell me exactly what happened. I want to know…, or I don’t want to know…” And we also know about the *gacaca* where survivors and those who were there at the time of the killings can confront each other and learn exactly what happened, find out who played what role in all this. Did you have the courage to go to the hill?**

M.C.K.: Yes, many times. While I was still living in Rwanda, I often went to the region where I’m from and talked to people. At every opportunity, every time the people from Nyarubuye were meeting, I participated as well. I even spoke with the neighbours, our next-door neighbours, but they weren’t telling me the truth. I could see that they were skewing the real truth, the one they are supposed to tell me. I could see they were biased, but I couldn’t force them, I couldn’t do anything, I let them be. But I learned from them—these are people who were there, after all—they talk to you, they tell you how it happened. You can’t deny, you accept, you accept the facts as they happened. That’s it. I go there often, I even keep precious photographs of the different events. And I look at them often. I am inhabited by this reality, I try to understand it; it’s difficult but I must do it.

**M.M.: Did anyone admit: “Yes, I took part in what happened to your father?” Or to the other members of your family? Or was it in a more general way…?**

M.C.K.: No, they deny it. Even when we directly accuse them, they don’t admit to it. They said, “I saw such and such—I saw people who came over from the neighbouring locality and they killed him.” But they can never say, “I killed him.” Or they say, “I saw him, he was hiding here or he was hiding there.” They can never—not one person I’ve seen takes that responsibility. They all try to shrink from responsibility, they try to present themselves as witnesses: “Yes, I saw it, but it wasn’t me who did that.” Yes. I haven’t found one person who would tell me [that they’re responsible], even if they’ve been accused of it, but they don’t admit to it. They don’t admit.

**[01:40:00]**

**M.M.: So the sad reality of finally accepting… You went back to Kigali, somehow you tried to start living your life again, as you say…**

M.C.K.: Yes, we try to wrap our minds around it, to act as if nothing has happened, but we keep it all deep inside. You keep that in, you live with it. But you have no choice, you have to get to work. You have to face life’s different challenges. That’s what I’ve been trying to do so far.

**M.M.: [inaudible] [thinking] I am hesitant to ask this, but what did you find most difficult at that time?**

M.C.K.: At the moment of accepting?

**M.M.: I don’t know if it’s about acceptance, but there you are, life goes on and you do your best to continue living: “I have to do this, I have to do that…” What comes to mind first, what did you do? What was most difficult every time you tried to move forward?**

M.C.K.: Oh, many things. Many things because you are uprooted. It is true that I carry within me the memories of my family as a kind of a baggage, which helps me live. It gives me strength. But what was most difficult? I will tell you a little anecdote. One day I went back to my region, at home, I was with my husband. It was after we got married. When we were there, in our house, adjacent to the big house is a place where we used to play as kids. My little sisters, my brother and I, we played a lot when we were young. Every evening, after we have done our work, all the chores we had to do around the house, we gathered at that corner to play. My father liked to read in the evenings so we couldn’t play near him. We had to find a place where we can be free, do whatever we wanted without disturbing anyone. So when I went back to my region, to my home, with my husband, we could see the state of the place: brushes sprouting, grass growing wild, trees overgrowing the site. And then I found myself in that same corner of the house, and memories started coming back to me rapidly, and I was asking my husband, “Oh, do you remember, do you remember…” I was telling him stories, spontaneously like that, and he was silent. And I was waiting for a reaction from him because I thought I was recounting this memory to someone who had been there, who shared this memory with me. I looked at him with—I was surprised that he wasn’t reacting, that he wasn’t saying anything. And I turned to him and I realized that he was my husband, that he had nothing to do with all that. And I thought, “Oh my god!” And after I told him that, he said, “Oh, I understand, I’m sorry!” So I mean to tell you how difficult it is. It’s difficult. It’s like your life has been cut off somewhere. The most difficult thing is not to have a sister or a brother with whom you’ve made this journey together and with whom you can reminisce, you can talk to—that’s even worse. So I keep many, many memories, I have no one to share them with. That’s even worse. At least if I had a sister, if I had a brother, at least one, I could tell them: “Do you remember what my father used to say, what my mother used to say, what my sister used to do…?” Things like that. But you have no one. So you keep—you’re forced to keep it all inside. It’s hard.

**[01:45:00]**

**M.M.: Or you’re talking to someone who doesn’t have the same memories…**

M.C.K.: The same memories, the same sense of gravity of the situation, the same consideration, all that. Yes, you tell your story, you tell your story or you leave it unspoken, it’s as you wish. Another difficult thing is when you’re trying to rebuild your life and when you have children. When you have to explain [to them]. When you have to explain what happened—again, that’s most difficult. It’s true, I have a family, but my children—when I was still in Rwanda, we often went to visit the grandparents, the grandparents on their dad’s side. So they played with them, they knew them, they socialized with them. And then I realized that when he got to a certain age, my son thought I was their father’s sister. Because he never—he visited my family, at aunt Alivera’s house, but he knew that aunt Alivera is not my mother. So, I thought, maybe he’s wondering: “Who is my mother’s mother?” He was seeing their father’s biological mother and he thought that I’m their father’s sister. So I had to explain that. When you’re living these kind of realities that are difficult for you to accept, it’s even worse having to pass them on to your children. But that’s how it is. We try—all we can do is to try to explain, to talk to them, gently. That’s it.

**C.V.: How old are your children?**

M.C.K.: The eldest is 11 years old, the middle one is 8 and the little one is 5. They like to ask me a lot of questions about my family, the genocide, everything that happened. They are very interested in that. And it’s up to me to decide which events to recount and which to hold back on, depending on their age.

**M.M.: Since we are talking about this, I will ask you: What do you tell them?**

M.C.K.: To my children? I don’t hide the fact that I lost all the members of my family. I tell them they are dead. Fortunately, they don’t ask me about the details. But they know that I lost my mother and my father and my brother and my sisters.

**M.M. That they were killed…**

M.C.K.: Yes, they know about the genocide. They know that there was genocide in Rwanda, but when it comes to the Hutu-Tutsi realities, they don’t know anything about that. When we were in Rwanda, we were watching a film about the genocide and I usually wouldn’t let them watch such films, but I don’t know how it happened that day, I was a little distracted, I realized that we saw the whole film with the children sitting next to us—I don’t know how it happened. And later my son told me—like two days later, he said, “Mom, why were those people killing the others?” And then he said, “Where was President Kagame?” And so I had to tell the history of the RPF, the history of the realities inside the country. He was, like, 7 years old, it was hard to explain. I tried to tell him briefly that there was a genocide in the country, that President Kagame wasn’t president yet, that at the time he was fighting those killers, that he wasn’t yet in a position to see things happening and that he became president later, after he was able to save people, etc. So it’s this kind of reality that we’re confronted with every day. It’s not a pleasant experience at all.

**[01:50:00]**

**M.M.: So, we’re discussing the period of ‘94 and how you tried to search [for your loved ones], and that finally you accepted that there was no one left. At one point you told us that, yes, you decided to go to university to continue your life. I’d like to know how did you rebuild your relationships. So you were at the university—who did you find there? And who didn’t you find? How did you start a new life with your friends, at the university? What stories did you tell to each other? And with whom?**

M.C.K.: Yes, of course it’s hard to restore relationships when you are yourself so deeply shaken up. It is very difficult, but at the same time, it is this [inaudible] that contributes to the reconstruction of the individual, of his personality, because we need the other. That’s the realization I came to afterwards. When I went back to university I was with one of my friends from before, her name is Rénette. She’s a friend of mine, she knew my family. She is someone very precious to me. So when I went to university, she was the only one I knew there. And then, little by little, we made friends. I made friends with people from my classes, and her as well, she made friends with people from her classes. And since I was her friend, I met her friends and she met mine. And over the years, our network grew. We don’t realize it, but it happens quickly: you are together in university, you have similar educational goals, you start by talking to each other about your courses, you help each other succeed and then a friendship settles. We met people from Burundi, young people from Uganda, Tanzania, all over the Great Lakes region. Families with children were returning [to Rwanda] and these children went to university. With time, we made new friends; some discovered family members there, at the university. That part wasn’t difficult, it wasn’t really all that difficult.

**M.M.: So it was easy to trust people? Was there some feeling of mistrust at all?**

M.C.K.: It wasn’t that easy, because we were behaving differently. There was, first of all, the community of young people who had stayed in Rwanda, who were the survivors, and together, we got along very well. We understood each other very well. But there was also the fact that there were people who had just come back, they used to be students back where they lived, but had to interrupt their studies because their parents had decided to return to Rwanda. So we ended up in this mixed company where everyone had different habits, depending on which country they came from. But by the end of the year, or at a certain point in time, there was a happy medium. A happy medium was established and all of us, we coexisted very well. Yes. Although certainly the beginning wasn’t easy. There was mistrust. We, the people who had stayed in the country, were accused of being too quiet. Those who were coming back were saying, “Oh, those *sope*”—we were called *sope*, *sopecya*—“why don’t these *sopes* like to talk? They are always withdrawn, they don’t communicate, they don’t speak proper French.” Things like that, small criticisms like that. But little by little, as we were getting to know each other, we realized that living together was a good thing. It happened before too long.

**M.M.: I come back to my question again. Among the people you met there were survivors, there were people who came—who came back—they weren’t born there—who came back [to Rwanda]. You even met Hutus, perhaps, I don’t know—this is a university campus, after all. How do you manage such a situation? What do you say to the people in one group and what don’t you say in the other? How do you see yourself in the middle of—**

**[01:55:00]**

M.C.K.: —of all those people? I will tell you: it depends on each person’s character, on both sides. Whether it’s survivors, like me or others, whether it’s people from these other groups, it’s on a case-by-case basis. Some people were open, there were some Hutus even who were open, who were sensible to our problems, with whom we collaborated, with whom we felt in good company. And there were people from abroad who were good too—it depends. It depends on the person. I think it’s difficult to make generalizations about this kind of relationships. It’s very personal. It depends on the two people meeting each other, it depends on their disposition, it depends on their habits. But what I can tell you is that it didn’t take long for us to find each other and to restore the links [of our friendship], links that exist even to this day. It didn’t take long.

**M.M.: I didn’t even ask you, what did you study in university?**

M.C.K.: Ah, yes! When I went to university—

**M.M.: And how is admission done nowadays? You told us that there used to be an exam that you couldn’t pass—how are things now, after ‘94? What is the process like?**

M.C.K.: Yes. The university reopened in 1995.

**M.M.: A year later…**

M.C.K.: A year later. That’s when—it was in April or March, something like that—that’s when the university doors were opened again. And it was special. Why? There was our group, the people who had stayed in Rwanda, who had failed, failed, failed [the exam]—me and the others. And there were also the people who had just returned to the country, who had interrupted their studies or others who were just beginning—so you had to be able to manage all that. What did they do? How did they proceed? They proceeded by organizing tests for each faculty, depending on your choice of program. I had chosen to go into the humanities. So we were grouped together, the people who had selected that option, we were grouped together, we passed a test, I passed the test, I got the letter of acceptance and I started, like the others. So they organized an admission test at the same time for everyone. Because we didn’t even have papers, imagine. I didn’t have my high school diploma with me, because it was still at the École normale primaire in Zaza. I hadn’t picked it up yet. We had to pass a test to be evaluated. So they were really very flexible, very understanding, under these circumstances.

**M.M.: [You were] a survivor, a child, I’m not going to say “alone” because you had found a grandmother. Who contributed to your studies?**

M.C.K.: Oh, my uncles. And I also received a bursary and a student loan. The Ministry of Education—at the beginning of the year you signed a contract with the ministry that you were given a bursary at the end of each month and with this bursary you could manage your simple life. For sure, it was easier for those who had a family or friends. Me, for example, I tried to budget my bursary well, but when I was short on money and if I wanted to buy nice shoes, if I wanted to do my hair, if I wanted to be like a young lady, I had to ask my uncles. And they contributed, they helped a lot with my studies. But otherwise the bursary was only relatively sufficient. You could manage, maybe not lead a good life, but you could buy school supplies, food—we ate at the university, it was cheap on campus. With the bursary, it was manageable.

**[02:00:00]**

**M.M.: And how long was your program at the university?**

M.C.K.: Four years. From 1995 to 1999. That’s when I finished university. But I think I defended my thesis in 2000, I remember I was a little late. It was in 2000 that I finished everything.

**C.V.: So you did a Master’s degree?**

M.C.K.: In Butare, that’s a BA in Humanities. And I majored in History. So I studied History—and what did I do after that? I got married.

**M.M.: Ah!**

M.C.K.: Yes, I got married while at the university, when I was in my third year—no, my fourth year—my last year of university I got married. I got married in 1998, a year before the end of my studies. So I started a family.

**C.V.: Where did you meet your husband?**

M.C.K.: Where did I meet him? Through an acquaintance, while visiting a family we both knew, because he didn’t study at my university. He studied at Makelele University in Uganda, but we met during a visit to the family of a mutual friend of ours. That’s where we met and then we continued seeing each other [laughter]… But the starting point was that family.

**M.M.: And so you found yourself working again—for the second time, I think. Did you work after you finished your studies or during? How did you get back into the workforce?**

M.C.K.: So at that point I was married, I had a child. I had a normal life: someone who had just finished school, who had a family, who was responsible for her child, for her little home. I couldn’t wait to start working, to contribute to the development of my family. It wasn’t difficult. You follow the job offers and if you are selected for a position you pass an interview or a written or an oral test, it depends. If you are accepted—great. I had the chance to work at the KIST, the Kigali Institute of Science and Technology. They had a library and since I had studied history, I loved the book industry, I loved working with books and with the students. I was hired at that university as a librarian. I worked there for seven years. From 2000, towards the end of 2000, I started working at KIST as a librarian and in 2003 I started a Master’s degree in the field of library and information sciences. I came back to work in 2004, towards the end of 2004, and I continued working there as a librarian. Then in 2007 I changed positions and I started working at the Rwanda Information Technology Authority (RITA). It is an agency that deals with information technology in the country. I started working there. I worked there for two months, after which I came to Canada… [laughter]

**M.M.: So as soon as you started out in the field you left?**

M.C.K.: Yes, that’s it.

**M.M.: Before I ask you about Canada—I asked you this about your parents, I’m going to ask you the same questions about yourself. You said that at a certain moment you became a wife, a mother, a civil servant. How did you manage to reconcile the three?**

**[02:05:00]**

**You are a mother, you are a wife, you have to work—how did you feel about all this? How did you manage to reconcile it all?**

M.C.K.: It is hard to respond to the call of this triple duty, so to speak. It’s very hard, but fortunately, in Rwanda, you have your family, you have people nearby who advise you, who help you. But there is also a system of domestics. You hire a domestic who comes, who lives in your house, you give her a salary at the end of the month, and she takes care of your children when you aren’t there; you can hire a boy [a young male servant] as well. And all you have to do is supervise them. You have two people at home that you pay to help you and you do the supervision. Sure, it’s hard; not having enough time for my children was hard for me. I was split between the obligations of work and social obligations, and I think I wasn’t doing enough especially for my children, because of lack of time. I worked from 8 to 5. So my kids—it’s true, the little one was at home all the time with the domestics in my absence and when I would come home, I was tired. If you come home tired, taking care of the children, taking care of the life of your family, sometimes seeing friends and extended family, you are divided between all that, it’s not easy to manage. But that’s the system, that’s the way of life. We try, we try to do our best as much as we can.

**M.M.: You told us that you worked at RITA and then after two months you left. We’re now having this conversation here in Montreal. I’m asking myself, or asking you rather—it seems like things are going well for you.**

M.C.K.: Ah! Thank you.

**M.M.: Why? Why did you leave? What prompted you to leave?**

M.C.K.: What prompted me to leave? There are, I would say, two reasons. We had a history professor who would say that for an event to take place there are immediate causes and there are also distant causes. A whole complex set of factors contributes to the realization of any event. [We left] for medical reasons concerning my son. But also as a survivor, I always had within me, I always kept deep inside those horrible memories of the events I had lived through and I didn’t want to—it’s not that I was afraid, it’s not that I didn’t have confidence, but I didn’t want one of my offspring to relive that one day: twenty years later, fifty years later… I don’t know. I wanted to offer other choices in the life of my children and my offspring—from my position as the only survivor in my family. It was something within me—deep, deep within—and something that I wanted to make happen. That’s it.

**M.M.: So at a certain point you said to yourself, “I wouldn’t want to see this happening again. For the well-being of my family and of my descendants— [inaudible] to leave…”**

M.C.K.: It’s true that everything was going well in Rwanda, I didn’t have any problems, I was advancing well, I had a family. But there was always something eating away at my heart and telling me: “Chantal, you were able to survive, you are the only survivor, if ever one of your grandchildren, one of your great-grandchildren goes through that again, what was it all worth?” And… well, that was my main thought. So it was a way to offer something different to my offspring: other choices in life, another country. Rwanda is our country and they are entitled to their country, but having another one too—so they can decide in the future where to live.

**[02:10:00]**

**C.V.: And your husband? Did he agree with this decision?**

M.C.K.: Yes, of course. He did, yes.

**M.M.: So you were convinced that you had to leave, even though you have made a good life there for yourself—was there anything that was difficult, that was holding you back? What was the hardest part? You had your reasons for leaving, but all the same, were there any reasons not to go?**

M.C.K.: Yes. Yes, as I said, I needed medical care for my son. We were constantly going to South Africa for tests or to consult doctors, it was hard. And here, I knew that the means—in Rwanda the health system wasn’t really up to meeting my needs. So I thought, “I’m going to go.” It was a direct need and I had to act immediately. And on this my husband and I, we understood each other well. And that was a big motivation. Your child’s life is important. That really contributed to our decision.

**M.M.: And why did you choose Canada? Did you know people here? Did you have acquaintances?**

M.C.K.: No. How did I choose Canada? I don’t know. Oh, yes, I have a sister-in-law who lives in England, she has a family here, she has friends here who would always tell her that Canada is a good country. So when I spoke with my sister-in-law—at first I dreamed of going to France because I had lived there for a year, a year and a half. I had also visited Great Britain and loved it. I was torn between France and Great Britain. But she knew, she had come to Canada to visit her family who lived here. She told me that she likes—that she loves Canada. And I wanted to discover this country she was telling me about. [laughter] Yes, I wanted to discover Canada and that’s how I came here. So I came to Canada on someone’s advice.

**M.M.: So you were convinced [you wanted to go], you left, you came to Canada with your three children. What did you do then? Where does one start in a situation like that?**

M.C.K.: During the first days, everything was a surprise. You are surprised by everything you’re experiencing. You give up all your well-built life, you start again. It’s an adventure. You start something that you don’t even know will succeed. You feel remorse during the first days, you say to yourself: “Oh my god, can I do this?” It’s hard to manage, it’s stressful getting used to this, to doing so many things all at once. When we were in Rwanda, there were many of us: my husband was there to help me, the domestics, all our friends were there as well, there was a whole sociocultural group there, a whole structure, which is always behind you for support and encouragement. And here I found myself all alone, with my three children and I had to face life and at the same time I didn’t have the right not to face it—there is a force pushing you forward, you can’t give up. It’s a great effort, it’s hard. It was a difficult period, 2007–2008 was a difficult period for me. The winter—I’ve never known a winter like that.

**[02:15:00]**

I’ve seen winter in France, but that was like spring or autumn here. And here, I found that the winter is very hard and very painful and very difficult. So you have to adapt, you have to find extra effort to make life work. So I found myself in this situation, and I was a fighter. I engaged in this fight and I am still in it.

**C.V.: And especially that you didn’t know anyone here, right?**

M.C.K.: Right, I didn’t know anyone. I met people thanks to the Rwandan social networks: someone who lives in Calgary and who says to you, “Oh, you know, I have a friend who’s there, her name is Carole, or her name is Monique, I’ll put you in touch.” Okay, step by step. After a while I started discovering other connections, like two friends from university, Suzanne and Diane, who were here at the Université de Montréal. In the beginning—but later I began discovering that there were, around here, people I know. When I first arrived, I didn’t know they were here, but little by little, I discovered that. And it makes you feel better.

**M.M.: I understand that you’ve discovered, I won’t say easily, but perhaps quickly, the Rwandan network. But did you use any specific services in Canada?**

M.C.K.: Yes. Community associations, like CARI in the City of Saint-Laurent, or CACI in the Cartierville neighbourhood. I consulted these two organizations, they give me a whole range of information, they helped me, they organized appointments with such and such specialist or with such and such social worker. It’s good. And when you have—I remember one social worker at the CARI, her name was Chantal, same as me, we—every time I had a problem I called her: “Chantal, I need this, where should I go?” Or I’d call Monique or—for the moment, things are okay. I—whether through the Rwandan network or through these community organizations, I can function.

**M.M.: You’ve been here for three years—three years?**

M.C.K.: Two and a half.

**M.M.: Two and a half years. Did you discover, through the network, activities that relate to Rwanda, that you can join in, that are of interest to you, where you can continue to—the culture, traditions and the conversations? Have you discovered these things?**

M.C.K.: Yes, I discovered the Community-University Research Alliance project [CURA], and this same project—I found Rwandans who are involved in this project and it’s as if, in this way, I continue to contribute to the Rwandan cause. CURA is the only one such activity, but I’m happy with what it’s brought to my life. The way of doing things, the way of collaborating, the topics that are discussed, I think it’s good, for me it’s a way to stay connected to all that can contribute to the development of my country, even from a distance.

**M.M.: I’m wondering now if, when you get together with Rwandans in Montreal, sometimes when you talk about Rwanda—before, when we were talking about Rwanda and about going back to university, I asked you, “When you were with your friends, how did you rebuild your life? What did you talk about with your friends?” Now in Montreal, when you meet other Rwandans, do you talk about Montreal? Or are you still mentally in Rwanda?**

**[02:20:00]**

M.C.K.: Of course, Rwanda is the starting point before we found ourselves here! [laughter] We reminisce about our country and we try to find out if, by chance, we know the same people. For example, where did I meet Monique? At university in Rwanda and so we talk about past events back there. We try to get to know each other through these past events. In Montreal, yes, we talk about things that relate to Montreal, we try to adapt, we try to integrate better. Yes, and I ask questions: “How do we find jobs? Where can we bring our children to play?” Yes, in Montreal, we talk about that too. In fact, it’s like being split between the two. It’s good to talk about Rwanda, but we also need to talk about Montreal because this is where we live now and we need to talk about it.

**M.M.: Precisely, you just said that you ask questions, you need information. What has your journey been like since you’ve come here? How would you describe your journey?**

M.C.K.: What have I done since I’ve arrived? The most important thing for me was to integrate the children because it was an abrupt change for them, they left their relatives behind, their friends, and they find themselves here, with their mom, all alone. So I tried to give some structure in their lives, to be available for them as much as possible; to accompany them everywhere. So, the first two years, I think, I was much more dedicated to the integration of my children, to be there for them. So, I haven’t started working full-time yet. But I’m thinking about it, I’m thinking about it. I dream of going back to work one day.

**M.M.: One cannot escape from one’s personal experience. How does your experience as a genocide survivor affect your life here in Montreal?**

M.C.K.: My experience—maybe I didn’t understand the question…

**M.M.: You are a survivor of the genocide, you have lived through that. Being here, do you think your life in Montreal is like that of anyone else’s, anyone coming from any other country? Or do you find that your personal experience influences your life here?**

M.C.K.: Oh, I understand. Yes, I think my experience played a role in my integration here. Why? Because after the genocide, I found myself alone, I had to continue living. And after leaving everyone in my country, here again I find myself alone. It’s true, [in Rwanda] I had rebuilt a family and social life that were working for me, and here I have to start again from zero. I have to find friends, I have to do everything. So yes, that experience helped me a lot. It’s as if this painful past—had you accepted to live through it—it’s as if you develop internal mechanisms of patience, of understanding. There are certain mechanisms that you develop to be able to adapt and they help you wherever you are, especially patience and understanding. I remain patient, I remain understanding of everything that is happening, all the while I also remain determined to achieve my goals. All of these are things that I draw from my past, from my experience.

**[02:25:00]**

**M.M.: So your personal past plays a role, your values…**

M.C.K.: …family values…

**M.M.: …that you are drawing on...**

M.C.K.: Yes… all that, it is within me, it helps me still. The similar experience that I lived through in the aftermath of the genocide has armed me sufficiently, has made me a different person who is, I would say, able to adapt, once again, here in Montreal.

**M.M.: Do you have the impression that the people of Montreal or Canada are looking at you differently when they learn that you are a genocide survivor?**

M.C.K.: I don’t think so. I don’t meet that many people, but I think that people here in Montreal are sensitive to everything that has happened in Rwanda—the people I meet, at least. They are sensitive, they know, in one way or another, that there was a genocide in Rwanda, and they know that there are people who have lived through this genocide and who are still there, who remember. Yes, they are understanding, I think they are understanding, at least the people that I meet. They are not ignorant about this issue and neither—yes, I find them sympathetic to this issue.

**M.M.: Let me go back a bit. We talked about the contribution, the support, so very important, that you have received from your family, but is there a flip side: do you sometimes tell to yourself, “I would have liked to have that support from my family now, or from the Rwandan community; but I don’t have it”?**

M.C.K.: It’s hard, it’s hard to explain. Personally, I appreciate what the people around me have done for me. If I am here now, I owe it to many, many people who have helped me, who have been understanding, who have talked to me, who have given me advice, who have been there for me. Whether it’s members of my family, whether it’s friends, whether it’s people that I meet every day, I appreciate it, I appreciate them, and I have no regrets. On the contrary, I feel appreciation for this entire network of people. I appreciate them and I am grateful to them, I thank them.

**M.M.: We talked about many things and, as I said earlier—and I could be wrong—but it seems to me that you are doing okay. I cannot not ask you this question: Given your journey, if things are working out, if it seems that they are working out, do you, Chantal, have your own personal strategies that keep you going, that help you move forward?**

M.C.K.: I do, for sure. The first strategy is what? It’s the strength I get from my family. And after losing my family, I have given myself a guiding principle or, rather, a responsibility: my life… I live it for them. They are not here anymore, but I live for them. Everything I do, all my successes, everything I do, I do it in the name of my parents, my sisters, my brother.

**[02:30:00]**

So that’s something that I have developed and that gives me strength. I can’t give up because of them—if I give up, it’s like I give up on them. If I work and I succeed, they are happy. It’s as if they are there, in my imagination, I am with them. They live with me always and when I accomplish something good, it’s for them, and that encourages me. Because of that, I can never give up the fight. That’s my first strategy. And what else? I say to myself: “There is a reason why I am here, why I am alive, so I have to live, I have to live.” But above all, the first strategy—that’s where my strength lies.

**M.M.: I know you haven’t gone back to Rwanda yet, or you don’t have time yet to go for a visit, but later on, do you see yourself returning, either from time to time or even permanently to Rwanda?**

M.C.K.: Yes, of course. I have family there, I have a grandmother, Alivera, who calls me all the time, who sometimes says to me: “Chantal, I’m going to die without seeing you again,” and it hurts me very much to hear that. When she’s sick, she calls me, or she asks my husband to call me, my husband goes to her house and they call me together. And when she calls me, the first thing she says is: “Chantal, I’m slowly losing my strength, I’m advancing in age, I don’t want to die without seeing you again.” It hurts me deeply hearing that. So this is to say how much I am looking forward to going back to my country. I want to go back for many, many reasons: family, friends, I miss the whole Rwandan sociocultural context. Here we try to recreate this context, but we will never succeed. I feel that we can’t do it. So I miss the experience of being there, that way of life. The moment the opportunity presents itself, I will go back.

**M.M.: I’m going to ask you this anyway, even though you kind of answered my question: What do you miss the most? [laughter]**

M.C.K.: From Rwanda? Oh my god, what do I miss the most? I miss everything. [laughter] The way of life, the way people behave, our culture, the way of communicating, the social aspect. What do I mean by “social aspect”? I mean friends, family, get-togethers, calling people regularly on the phone, socializing. Rwandan way of life is entirely connected with and inseparable from being social. So I miss the warmth in interpersonal relations, the whole atmosphere. Even if we try to recreate the same thing here, we can’t do it. We have a very special way of life, very beautiful, very admirable, we can’t replicate that here. So I miss all that. The people, seeing the people, admiring the people, that’s it.

**M.M.: Do you sometimes try to avoid thinking about what happened there? Or in your life?**

M.C.K.: In Rwanda?

**M.M.: And in your life. Do you—as I said just now, you have your own personal strategies that help you move forward, but do you sometimes say to yourself: “I shouldn’t think about that”?**

**[02:35:00]**

M.C.K.: Yes. I’m going to tell you something. There are things—I don’t know if it’s a strategy or an instinct, but when I feel that something is destructive for me, I put it aside. Many, many questions remain unanswered for me. I avoid placing them front and centre, but I keep them somewhere within. Maybe one day I will have the time, I will have the solution, but if I don’t immediately have the solution to something, I frame it somewhere at the back of my mind; I avoid it. Yes, I avoid it, there are things that I avoid.

**M.M.: And this is not preventing you from moving forward?**

M.C.K.: Not necessarily in terms of advancing, but in terms of breaking me.

**M.M.: So that it doesn’t break you.**

M.C.K.: Yes. I want to avoid being broken, and I know which things can break me and I avoid them.

**M.M.: That’s a good strategy that needs to be shared… [laughter]**

M.C.K.: Well, there are some things that you avoid and that you don’t—if you can’t avoid certain things, you will never be able to move forward. I spent many years without—without ambition… The first years were very painful for me, and that’s how I learned that there is—if I’m on this earth—when I made a choice to remain alive, that’s when I realized there are some things I have to put aside. Since I can’t find solutions, why continue thinking about it. So I live with it, but it’s as if I have created a page on which I’m constantly writing these things down. The page is long, I don’t know how many pages there are, but I keep them and I continue. I try to differentiate the things that can break me, I write them down on that page and I continue on.

**M.M.: We spoke at length about your experience, which is closely linked to Rwanda. A genocide is an event of great proportions, it’s been talked about, it’s in the news, people have discussed it quite a bit. How do you see the way in which the genocide of the Tutsis has been covered and explained in the media?**

M.C.K.: Oh, I don’t like it, I don’t like it. There are many trends. There are many trends, several hypotheses—it has been interpreted—how can I say… Every person has their own interpretation. Every person—if they want to make a comedy out of it, if they want to talk about what really happened, if they want to play politics, it’s been interpreted accordingly. Everyone in their own way. Everyone in their own way, but it’s unfortunate, when you see the people who, at the cost of the blood of a million people and even more—I don’t think there has been for the moment an exhaustive identification of the victims of the genocide—so I find it regrettable that people dare turning it into anything they personally want at the cost of all those who died. I find that unfortunate.

**M.M.: When you say that it’s unfortunate, you mean that you don’t like that—**

M.C.K.: It shouldn’t, no…

**M.M.: —they make a movie out of it?**

M.C.K.: No—the movie, yes. When you want to communicate, the film—well, it depends on how you make this film. It depends on the message you want the audience to hear. If you want them to hear—the problem is not the film, it’s not the book, it’s not the show about the genocide. The problem is: what comes out of it. How do you interpret, what do you want people to understand? If you want people to understand that there was a genocide in Rwanda, that the Tutsis were killed and how, and so on in a similar logic, then everything is fine.

**[02:40:00]**

But if you want to prove the opposite, that’s what I detest. But if all media contributed to the search for the truth that we are still looking for, that would be better. We would like all media to help us to understand the truth surrounding the genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda. We would like—if the whole world could collaborate for this cause!

**M.M.: So if there is an advice to give to those who would use this subject in the media, in theater, in cinema, you, as a survivor, what would you say to them?**

M.C.K.: I would tell them to be thorough and to be on the ground. To document things, to document the facts at the very least. Facts are complicated, but nevertheless they should contact the survivors, because it is the survivors who know the truth. Instead of reading a book, relying on a book you’ve read, relying on a movie you’ve seen, try to consult with people: meet with them, talk to them, this is where you will find out what happened. Otherwise, the media—it’s true, some media outlets try to talk about things objectively, but not all of them do that. Not all the media. What I would like is this: that every opportunity be used to tell the truth of what really happened, instead of talking around the genocide—and what happened was a genocide—instead of surrounding this reality with other things for various reasons, I would like for the truth to come out. So that we can finally live! Otherwise, ours is not a life, we are constantly frustrated and confronted with things that make us angry, and that’s not good.

**M.M.: Do you think there are roles that could be played about what happened, roles that show what the survivors have lived through? And do you think that the survivors themselves should play these roles? Or would it be better if somebody else played them?**

M.C.K.: I think that both are necessary: it’s true that the survivors have lived through this reality and they can speak from the heart, but we also need the expertise of the other. The other’s observation, the interpretation of the other. The two together can make something good. Because when something happens to us, sometimes it’s—we stay immersed in it. The fact that—it’s difficult to maintain a distance from that and to say—it’s difficult to communicate in an objective and scientific manner, so to speak. To make—it’s hard to step back from that, and to tell the story of it. We try, but it’s not always easy. There are many factors at play, emotions—there are many, many things that can have an impact, while if the two are combined, they can create something good, accurate, objective. I would say that we need the experience and the expertise of others.

**M.M.: As a survivor, do you think that you could play a role in a production that represents the genocide: a theater play, a film? Would you feel comfortable acting?**

M.C.K.: Of course, yes. What can I say? I am—I don’t have enough power, but I know that I have this idea within me to ​​make others discover what has happened to us. I feel a sense of responsibility to defend our cause.

**[02:45:00]**

So anything that can help to communicate, to understand, because we’re trying to—there are misconceptions out there, sometimes we think that you have understood, but that’s not the case. So if I can help others understand, to explain to them—that’s why, by the way, I accepted to do this interview. I thought that if in some way my interview, my story can help people understand what happened in Rwanda in 1994, why not! That’s why I immediately said yes when you contacted me for this project. That’s what motivates me always: to be able to explain and at the same time to understand and also help others understand, to communicate. It’s this search that is within me, these misconceptions that I seek to address, so why not! Yes. It’s possible.

**M.M.: Before we finish the interview, I would like to ask if you have a message to give, including—you have some good strategies, you have a beautiful way of looking at life, which reflects nicely on you. Do you have a message for the survivors of the genocide?**

M.C.K.: A message of love, a message of support, a message of resolve in our struggle, a message of compassion, sisterly words of care, what else can I say? A message that I am there for them. I would tell them not to give up the fight, I won’t hide the fact that it’s difficult, but I can say that together we can continue the fight and things are possible. A message of hope and daring to shed light on everything we see. That’s it.

**M.M.: Do you have anything to say to the outside world that is removed from your experience? To Montrealers, for example? To those removed from the events of the genocide?**

M.C.K.: What can I tell them [inaudible]? To Montrealers, I can say, “Thank you for welcoming us.” We are here, they understand us. In a more general way, I would say to the whole world to see us as people who have suffered and who sometimes continue to suffer, who struggle to keep on living and to understand what has happened. Because sometimes we find that people don’t understand, they don’t grasp the true meaning of what has happened. I can tell them that we are here to explain, they can contact us at any time, it would be our pleasure to share our experience with them. Because, personally, I wouldn’t want what happened to me to happen to anyone else, whether it is a Montrealer, a Canadian, a person from France or from England. I would never wish that what happened to me happens to someone else. So I wish we could fight, this is a fight in which everyone can participate, a fight for a better world, a world where children can grow up next to their parents, where parents can enjoy life with their children and their grandchildren, where someone who is sick can benefit from the help of his daughter, his daughter-in-law…, to make of this world a better place. And, if possible, I would like that all citizens of the world engage in this cause.

**[02:50:00]**

**M.M.: [inaudible] campus…, you were talking about the campus…**

M.C.K.: Yes, I was talking about the campus, our experience as students, and being together as survivors, to test what we have learned. And what did help me there? Before, I thought I was a survivor who has been through the worst in the world. I thought of myself as being special, and alone in this situation. And when I arrived at the university and met others there, I knew, I could see that I wasn’t the only one. I met other young people of my age who had the same problems as me, and I thought, “Oh, I’m not the only one.” That was a very important and powerful factor for me. To find each other, we lived together, we shared, we lent clothes to each other, we gave each other soap, we gave each other skin cream, since the bursaries we had weren’t enough, we teamed up in order to be able to finish our studies. And I said to myself, “Oh, I had thought I was the most miserable person in the world and now I see that there are others, as unhappy and unfortunate as myself. So what do I have to say? I’m not exceptional!” So that was something. And sometimes you find that there is—I’m a survivor, I lost everything but I still have my head on my shoulders, I haven’t lost my hand, arm or leg. There were people there with physical scars—so what am I going to say? Nothing. All of this shows that together—sharing, talking, meeting others—can be very, very constructive. That’s what I have to add.

**M.M.: Thank you.**