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**INTERVIEW WITH jeanne d’ARC MUKANDAHIRO**

**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**

**Status of the interview: X public** 🞏confidential 🞏 anonymous

**Interviewee:** Jeanne d’Arc Mukandahiro (J.M.)

**Interviewer:** Monique Mukabalisa (M.M.)

**Videographer:** Sandra Isimbi

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**Editorial note:**

This conversation was easy to follow. The interlocutors spoke Kinyarwanda in a way that was easy to understand, and without hesitation. In my view, telling their life stories is a very important legacy that Rwandans have decided to share with others. These discussions will help those who hear them to better understand that we must, after all, rise up and continue on life’s journey. Let us rise up and find within ourselves constructive ideas and let us continue on our path.

**00:00:36**

**M.M.: I will first ask you to introduce yourself and tell us where you were born and, if you don’t mind, tell us your date of birth so that those who don’t know you and who will read this conversation can have a general idea of the person who is speaking.**

J.M.: My name is Jeanne d'Arc Mukandahiro. I was born in the Shyorongi Commune, in Kanyinya sector, in the city of Kigali. I am the daughter of Canisius Kambanda and Bellancille Mukasine. I was born in 1958. I am married to Jean Bosco Iyakaremye and we have five children: three boys and two girls. We used to live in Nyarugenge, more precisely in Kigali, and we now live in Canada.

**M.M.: Before moving on to the topics directly related to your life, tell us about the region where you were born and about that time of your life. Did you have the chance to know your maternal and paternal grandparents?**

J.M.: I didn’t know any of my grandparents. When I was born, they had already left this world. I was born into a family of six children and I was the fifth, but even my older siblings didn’t know them. My grandparents left us too early.

**M.M.: When you were old enough to understand, did you learn what their occupation was? How did they provide for their children and their families?**

J.M.: My father studied at the Groupe Scolaire in Butare, at the School of Charity. He studied administration. When I was young, he worked as a secretary at the Ministry of Education. I don’t remember in what year he retired, but later he became self-employed.

**M.M.: And your mother?**

J.M.: My mother looked after the house, the children and the family in general. She didn’t have another job.

**M.M: You are telling us that your mother was a housewife and that your father worked. They probably had to share the responsibilities for taking care of the children. Looking back, what do you remember about your upbringing? Was one of the parents more involved in that than the other? What can you tell us about how you were raised?**

J.M.: Looking back, I find that the two of them complemented each other. They were both involved in our upbringing, and above all, it was done with a lot of love. It was also clear that their goal was for the kids to be raised well and to study because that was one of the legacies our parents cared about the most. They wanted all their children to be educated in order to be well prepared for the future.

**M.M.: A question, out of curiosity: you told me that you had brothers and sisters. When you look back, do you find that you were all raised in the same way, the girls and the boys? Or do you find that, for example, Dad focused more on the boys’ upbringing or did your parents share the same responsibilities?**

**00:05:00**

J.M.: I was one of the youngest siblings, we all did the same tasks especially during school vacations. Being younger, I only saw my older brothers and sisters during school vacations. They had their responsibilities around the house, but we often helped them. For example, planting trees—everyone wanted to do their part to plant the forest. Otherwise, we all shared the rest of the tasks. At home, boys and girls all did the same tasks.

**M.M.: Your parents are now gone, I suppose. When you think of them, what memories would you like to share with us? What are some of the similarities between you and your parents? What memories do you have of your parents and of the family?**

J.M.: My family was very sociable, very loving towards others. Working was important too. One specific memory I have of many of my relatives is that they always had goals to achieve, always had a list of things to do. Even my parents were like that, they often talked about the projects they wanted to do in the coming year. Me too, I find that I often have projects, even though sometimes I can’t complete them.

**M.M.: And the other members of the family?**

J.M.: As I was saying, one of my memories of the family is that each person talked about what they would like to do when they get older, how they would prepare for the future, how they wanted their children to grow up. I remember we were all talking about this. We thought that our children would all get together at the grandparents’ house, and that we would also take vacations, and we would all meet there too and that we would make plans for the future. But we didn’t get to do all that, because the genocide separated us.

**M.M.: Are some of your relatives still alive?**

J.M.: There is one—my little sister and I are the only survivors.

**M.M.: You told me that your father had studied and that he worked. Can you give us an idea of ​​the situation in the region where you lived, tell us about the relationship between your parents and the neighbours and between the children in the neighbourhood. When you think about that time, what do you remember?**

J.M.: I thought that the relations between the neighbours were very good, very loving. There was a feeling of an unspoken promise between people and we thought no one would betray others. Many people came to our house, many villagers came over because those were hard times to find a job in the villages, so the ones who were working were helping others. For example, some villagers did some paid work [around our house]. Because of that, there was a lot of coming and going in the house, but also because we had many friends among our neighbours. My father was fond of the children who were going to school, so if a child didn’t want to go to school, the parents would come to see my father and ask him to talk to the child about it. And my father would promise to talk to the child, and thanks to this good parent many people in my neighbourhood went to school and he even paid the school fees for them. Because of this, there was a great sense of connection with people in the neighbourhood and even with people from more remote areas.

**00:10:38**

**M.M.: And did you feel comfortable around your neighbours and when you were visiting their houses?**

J.M.: There really was no problem. We went to their houses and they came over to our house without any problems. We were their children’s godparents and many swore by my father’s name because he gave them cows. I told you that when I was growing up, my father was working as a secretary at the Ministry of Education, but before that he was deputy chief of the Bumbogo region, so he managed that region during a long period of time and he was well-known because he had given cows and land to the people of that area. That’s why I was very surprised to learn that he was killed by the people who at one time swore by his name.

**M.M.: If I understand correctly, you had good neighbours, you grew up in a good environment. Can you also tell us about your studies? Did you study there? And can you tell us what memories do you have of your fellow students and your teachers?**

J.M.: The school was a bit farther from the house, about a two-hour walk.

**M.M.: Your primary school?**

J.M.: Yes, primary school. We did first to third grade in the Kanyinya sector—that was the name of that region at the time. We would run to school because we liked to run and we didn’t have a car. It took about an hour of walking to get there. I was very young when I was studying there and I don’t remember much of that time. But I remember my friends with whom we often played together. There was only one teacher who was teaching first grade in the morning and second grade in the afternoon. He was a good teacher and we liked him very much. We were smart and we didn’t have any problems at school.

**M.M.: And then, after third grade…**

J.M.: We left the Kanyinya sector and we started third or fourth grade, I don’t remember very well. But I remember that in fourth grade we were studying at a place that was very far away—that’s the place I was telling you about and that it took us two and a half hours to get there. It was in Shyorongi. We started school in the morning and finished in the evening, I think we started at half-past eight and finished at four, so I always got home at seven o'clock.

**M.M.: In the evening?**

J.M.: Yes. We had to bring lunch and eat it at noon, and we walked home in the evening. In fact, we felt like there was nothing else to do. You absolutely had to go to school and be among the best. The walk to and from the school was very tiring. There were good teachers from grade one to grade six and they were of all ages. All the students were treated the same way, no child was told that he was this or that. We simply felt like students and we felt like ourselves, the way you are Monique and I am myself. However, during certain classes, they would ask who among us were Tutsi and those students had to stand up, who were Hutu and they had to stand up, who were Twa and they had to stand up. There were two Twa students. We felt embarrassed and inferior when they were asking the Tutsis to stand up and we were only three or four people standing, but when it was Hutus’ turn, everyone stood up. Because of that, we always felt inferior and that’s one of the things I can’t forget.

**00:15:33**

**M.M.: How did a child in fourth or fifth grade know what his ethnicity is?**

J.M.: You learned it from your parents, because we talked all the time and they would raise the question of Hutus and Tutsis. There was no way of not knowing, because on our way to school we would pass—we would see Twa and we thought they were funny. So we knew that there were the ethnic groups of the Twas, the Hutus and the Tutsis. That’s how I knew, I think, but I became more aware of it in the classroom, when I developed an inferiority complex when I had to stand up and when I saw that the Twa student was even more embarrassed than I was to be the only one standing while the others were making faces at him.

**M.M.: There weren’t many Twa students, and the Tutsis were even fewer—they were only a few…**

J.M.: The Twa were less numerous than the Tutsis. There was about one Twa student, about three Tutsis and about forty Hutus. So you felt that… When they asked who the Tutsis were, you could see that your classmates were staring at you—the same classmates we were always together with.

**M.M.: Did you find that these teachers focused on your studies as much as the others? Did you find that you were all treated equally?**

J.M.: The teachers treated us all equally, especially since the teachers at these centres were all Tutsis, at least the ones I know of, and I know this because they were killed during the genocide. They have left this world; for some, their whole families were exterminated. The majority were Tutsi, maybe their supervisors were Hutu.

**M.M.: And after six years of studies, did you have the chance to continue…**

J.M.: Yes, I had the chance to continue my studies; I went to the Lycée Notre-Dame in Kigali. In 1973, they chased the Tutsis out of school, but after that we could go back, and so I was able to finish high school there.

**M.M.: Could you already choose a field of specialization? What was the process like of choosing a school program? How would you explain this process to someone who has never lived in Rwanda?**

J.M.: I don’t know what the others did, but in my case my parents helped me, especially my father. I was interested in social work—in fact I continued my studies in this field after I came here. My father said that it was a good choice for my future and that people who study social work can go to law school; he said it was a good direction. So that’s how he helped me, but I don’t know about the others.

**M.M.: So, you had the chance to apply for this program, you got in, you studied and you graduated?**

J.M.: Yes, I was admitted and I finished it.

**M.M.: And you found a job in this field in Rwanda?**

J.M.: No, I didn’t work in this field. I did other things for a while. I was self-employed at first. In fact, after my studies, I got married right away and I had a business. I didn’t want to work for others.

**M.M.: I’m not going to ask you questions about job search, then. From what I understand, you didn’t have to look for a job.**

J.M.: I didn’t spend time on that. I was rather looking for ways to become self-employed, especially because finding a job…—sometimes it was very difficult. Many doors were closed, so we preferred to try something else.

**M.M.: The question I was going to ask you was whether you chose to be self-employed because the government and businesses were not paying well enough or because it wasn’t the kind of job you wanted to do? In this case, what would motivate someone who has just graduated to decide to work on their own rather than continue in their field of study?**

J.M.: I preferred to be self-employed so that I can have the freedom to be present in my children’s lives. I didn’t want to depend on others, but I wanted to do something that generates income and that allows me to achieve my goals.

**00:20:36**

**M.M.: After that, I suppose you got married, you had children. Just as I asked you which one of your parents took care of your upbringing, can you give us an idea of how you managed that with your own children, especially since both you and your husband worked?**

J.M.: It was difficult, but it was a problem we both had to solve. Often, while we were at work, we would catch ourselves wondering how the children were doing, especially since there were no phones at the time to call and ask. At the end of the day, we would very quickly wrap up and go home and if we were lucky the children would be there and doing fine. But at other times, we would find one of them with a fever, and for me that was difficult. All the time I had, I dedicated to them, and I imposed certain principles on myself. For example, I didn’t make any plans right after work, I went home first and made sure that the children had come home from school, that they had eaten and that they were doing fine. It was much more difficult to juggle work and raising children when they were too young to go to kindergarten, especially since we couldn’t be completely sure that the people who were looking after them were treating them exactly as we wished, but we were reassuring each other. At that time, we didn’t yet notice the wickedness in people; people hadn’t yet lost their humanity.

**M.M.: You said you have five children?**

J.M: Yes, I have five children.

**M.M.: I suppose they were all born in Kigali and that you raised them while you were working. Going back to the question of how the children were raised, would you say that the girls and the boys were brought up in the same way, as much by you as by their father?**

J.M.: Raising children in the city is very different from raising children in the village. In the village, each child has tasks to do and he knows what he has to do even if he shares his tasks with others. But in the city, the kids didn’t have tasks, but had, rather, people doing things for them. So it was only after, when they were grown, that we wanted to teach them how to do some of the housework chores, and it was difficult. For example, we asked the boys to wash their own clothes, but they would damage them. And that’s what was different between us, who had grown up in the village, because we knew that no one else was going to do it for us. Everyone took responsibility for their own things, including washing their clothes, but that’s not the case with kids who have grown up in the city, because they knew they had people doing things for them. So, integrating them in the housework was a problem at first, but little by little, it worked. They weren’t given many tasks. Their job was to study, and people did the rest for them, and it was like this until high school when the older boys started washing their clothes on Saturdays and Sundays, but they didn’t do this for too long because we left Rwanda to come here. I think the girls were even younger. They didn’t have any household chores to do, but sometimes we reminded them to make their beds, for example. They would agree to do it, but they knew that there would be someone else who would finish the work for them. So, in terms of housework, it was very different.

**00:25:18**

**M.M.: You said earlier that when you were in high school, in 1973, you were dismissed from school. I would like to go back to this and ask you about what happened and how did you continue on with your life and going back to school. But most importantly, what was the main reason for this dismissal?**

J.M.: It’s the same problem of Hutus and Tutsis. In 1973, they decided to expel Tutsi children from schools. I remember very well how it all started in my high school. It happened one morning and we were scared. We saw one of the teachers, her name was Victoria Nsaza—Nsanzubuhoro. She was an older mother and she saw that we were curious. We were three students in ninth grade, I think, and we were standing [outside the school] and talking. One was telling us that she had heard that in Saint-André they had started cutting people with machetes and the students had been expelled. The other one was telling us that it had started nearby, at the Medical Assistants school. We then went up the stairs towards the classroom. We saw three students, boys, standing outside the front door of the school. We thought they were going to attack us, so we started running and I went home to Shyorongi. What happened after that at the school, I don’t know, I had already left. I arrived home before Dad and when he came home, he asked me what had happened. I told him the whole story and he started to worry about the others [Jeanne d’Arc’s brothers and sisters] as well. One was studying at the Butare Groupe Scolaire, another one was studying in Rwamagana. He said he had learned that the same thing had happened the day before in Rwamagana and he wondered why they hadn’t come home yet. He feared they’d been killed. I only went back [to the school] much later to get my things. When we got there, we were prevented from entering and we were told that all the students who had gone home had to wait to be called for a meeting and that we could all go back to school at the same time. In fact, no one, even among the other students, knew what had really happened at the school. It appears that there were people who wanted to attack the school and that the nuns knew that beforehand and they told the students to go home. Nothing happened to anyone, unless something else was going on during the night.

**M.M.: So you went back to school after how long?**

J.M.: After a while. It was a long time before the schools opened again. When my high school reopened, they only accepted a few people per class. In fact, they didn’t take back the same number of Tutsis, some Tutsis had to start the application process all over again, so some went to other schools.

**M.M.: I suppose there were others who didn’t even want to go back to school?**

J.M.: Many, many didn’t.

**M.M.: So their studies ended there. I want to go back now to what you told me: that you and your little sister are the only survivors [in your family]. I wanted to ask if you could tell us what happened to the others.**

J.M.: They were killed during the genocide of the Tutsis in 1994. They died, my father too. My father was killed in his home in Nyamweru, in the Shyorongi sector. They killed him along with his eldest daughter, who had come a few days before because she lived in Gitarama. As for my mother, she had passed away eight months prior. She didn’t die during the genocide. My brothers died while they were en route. In fact, a large majority of the family perished in the area between Nyanza and Butare. They were all put in a septic tank in the house of the Nyanza nuns, because one of our aunts who was a nun lived there. My brother, his wife, their children, and the wife of my other brother—he had died previously—with her five children, had all fled to her [the nun’s] home. We were also going there, but we were lucky that we couldn’t find a way to get to her house, otherwise we would be with them in that hole. So my brother, my two sisters-in-law and eight children lost their lives there. As for our house, those who lost their lives there were my father and my older sister—whose children were lucky to survive—and many other people who were at home. My little sister and I, we took the same road to find refuge, but we didn’t hide in the same place and it was only after the genocide that I found out she was still alive. I was in Bugesera when a soldier told me that she was working in the hospital and that she had given birth, because she was pregnant during the genocide. I asked the soldier if he could call her so that I could make sure that it really was her, because neither of us knew we were both alive. That’s how we found each other, and she now lives in Kigali.

**00:32:27**

**M.M.: She was with her husband?**

J.M.: Yes, she was with her husband. At the time, her husband was a student in Butare, they didn’t go through these difficult times together. My sister lived in Kigali, she was a nurse, and her husband was studying in Butare. They were able to reunite after they were lucky enough to survive.

**M.M.: From what we have heard, the bodies of many of the people who died during the genocide were never found and they could not be buried. Were you able to find the bodies of your relatives and to bury them?**

J.M.: There are two that we haven’t been able to find: François Kambanda and his wife, Odette Kamanzi. We couldn’t find them, but they died in the area between Nyanza and Butare. We looked for them everywhere. I thought that they must be in the memorial sites somewhere, because people were brought to these sites from wherever they happened to be killed and were placed in funerary monuments so they could be buried in peace. So I think they must be there too, as they are the only ones whose place of death we weren’t able to find.

**M.M.: And you buried the others?**

J.M.: They were picked up on the hills. In 1995, someone showed us where my father, my older sister and our neighbours were killed. We buried them at the house where we were born. And more recently, on July 12, 2009, we exhumed their bodies and brought them to the Gisozi Memorial Site, at the place for remembrance where the bodies of all the others are. The other members of the family, those who were with my aunt, Mother Augustine [the nun] and the head of this religious establishment and their families, were in a mass grave in Nyanza, but they were then placed elsewhere. The nuns were brought to Save and the other members of the family were brought to the Nyanza Memorial Site. I couldn’t be there for the transfer of the remains of the other family members to Nyanza, because I was here and I didn’t find out about it in time. I only knew about the transfer of the remains of the nuns and I went to Save in 2004.

**M.M.: I wonder, when you go back to Shyorongi, where you were born, or to Nyanza, where your relatives were killed, when you meet your old neighbours or maybe the people that you know have killed your family, what is your reaction? Do you talk to them? Do they avoid you?**

J.M.: They don’t avoid me. They come to greet me as if nothing has happened. I was looking at them and was wondering what was the purpose of all this for them. I said to one person that they all used to live in peace in this region and that they’ve killed all the others and that I find that it didn’t serve them any purpose—on the contrary, they didn’t seem to be doing well. He then began telling me that it wasn’t him who had killed them, but so and so had done it, but he was naming people that didn’t exist or that I couldn’t identify. So given all this, I don’t know what to say to them anymore; you can only look at them and you can’t find appropriate words. When you’re there, you feel completely confounded.

**00:37:12**

**M.M.: Can you explain to us how a person continues to live after all this? Because so many people are gone, but you still have children and a husband. Where do you find the strength to continue, what do you say to the children, how do you raise them after having gone through all this?**

J.M.: I really don’t know how one manages to live. It is a miracle from God because after all this, you feel as if you are nothing, you have the impression that your life is for nothing. For me, I got strength from seeing my friends who had lost their children or husbands, and were all alone. It made me realize that I was luckier than them, because I have lost family members, but they had as well, in addition to their children. They are all alone, but when you look at them, they seem strong. These are the things that give you the strength to continue living. But that doesn’t prevent an enduring sense of crisis: every little thing reminds you that you no longer have brothers or sisters and that you are an orphan. Even though we are older now and being an orphan might be easier to bear, we also feel we need our parents. We might have had more luck, but it doesn’t mean that life isn’t difficult sometimes and that’s what we say in Kinyarwanda: one parent consoles the other. When you are sad, you think of the other person who has lost everything and you say to yourself that if the other can continue, how can you give up? As for the children, we always try to remind them of their cousins ​​by asking them, for example, “Do you remember Olive?” Olive was their cousin, she was a year and a half or two years older than my daughter, but they grew up together and they were friends. I often remind her of Olive, asking her if she has any idea how old Olive, Marie-Ange’s sister, would be now. I also remind them of Olive’s big brother. I see that they understand and they remain strong, but I can’t talk about it without crying because to me these are people we can’t forget. We can’t forget, we are saddened, but we just have to keep our faith in God and continue living.

**00:40:53**

**M.M.: Actually, by asking you this question, what I mostly wanted to know was what do you say to a child who’s growing up without neither a grandfather nor a grandmother? Do you talk to your children about what happened to your grandparents, your parents and yourself? Or do you let them find out for themselves?**

J.M.: You have to explain to them because these are not things to be silent about. I think it’s good to explain to them what happened, and how people were senselessly killed so that they grow up knowing what a genocide is, and what caused it, so they don’t minimize its impact and so that they too can explain it to others. You can also direct them to documentation centres where they can find a lot of information to read, and you can ask them to do research on the topic so that the genocide doesn’t happen again because everyone would know what it is and everyone would help to fight against it.

**M.M.: You told us that already in 1973 you had heard about schools being attacked, and that you were afraid. In 1994, before the genocide began, were there any warning signs? Looking back, when do you think it actually started? And how did it degenerate to the point of becoming a genocide?**

J.M.: There is something that my mother told me when political parties such as the LP [Liberal Party] and the RDM [Republican Democratic Movement] were created in Kigali, and many people were going into politics, she told us, “My children, you’ll see what the parties are going to lead to, they’re going to kill people.” She told us about what had happened long time ago with the creation of political parties such as *Runari* [*Unar*], *Raderi* [*Rader*] and others like them. She told us that it was these parties that provoked the war, and that’s how she knew that the creation of parties leads to war. She was telling us all of this as lived history. So, what I mean is that these were the early warning signs such as the creation of political parties like the *Interahamwe* and the conflicts between opposition parties. It was also rumoured that in some places, people were throwing rocks at the houses every night for no reason, people were killing each other, the *Interahamwe* were killing people, people attacked Gikondo and it was at that time that Katumba died. All this gave us an idea of ​​what was to come, it was clear that these killings would not be limited to Gikondo or other places, that they would spread everywhere.

**M.M.: When considering the relations between neighbours, do you think neighbours were able to hide people or it wasn’t possible for them to do that?**

J.M.: During the genocide?

**M.M.: Yes.**

J.M.: I believe that everyone who survived the genocide did so because there was someone who had helped them hide. Some wanted to hide people and others didn’t. There are also those who could do it and those who couldn’t. It depended on the status of the person: if it was an influential individual, he could hide people in his home and no one was going to attack him at home, if no one knew they were hiding people there, of course, it had to be done in secret. Very few people were able to do that. If everyone had a good heart, and each person had hidden ten Tutsis, whole families wouldn’t have been extinguished. It didn’t happen because there was little will.

**00:45:50**

**M.M.: Today, at the time of this conversation, do you live in Montreal?**

J.M.: Yes.

**M.M.: I wanted to ask you more questions concerning your decision to come here. How did this come about? How did you choose this destination?**

J.M.: It didn’t take us any time to decide. After surviving the genocide, there were many reasons that led us to make this decision. People were saying that the same thing can happen again while we live in the country with our children. Our main motivation was to find a better place to educate our children and to live in safety. Had some relatives from our extended family been outside of the country during the genocide, there would have been more survivors in our family. Maybe we would still have a brother for whom people would say that he is the descendant of Kambanda. This is not possible now.

**M.M.: So, the goal was to bring the children to a place where you knew nothing would happen to them?**

J.M.: There was a feeling of insecurity at that time, we were talking about that even after we came here. It was the period during which the *Interahamwe* returned to the country and were killing survivors. It got to a point where you couldn’t even trust the people working for you. These were all factors that motivated us to leave the country, to change our surroundings and start a new life.

**M.M.: When did you arrive here?**

J.M.: In 1998.

**M.M.: How would you describe the transition to a new country for someone who leaves the country where they grew up and where they have lived all their lives?**

J.M.: It’s a very difficult thing to do, because it’s a difficult life. Little by little, you learn how to start a new life. Integration takes many years before you start feeling that you are where you are supposed to be, even though sometimes you don’t feel that you have fully integrated. And you force yourself because you know you can’t go back. In spite of the difficult things that you’ve lived through in Rwanda, when you arrive here, you realize that you don’t know how you’re going to manage and sometimes you think you won’t be able to do it. But step by step, you integrate and you meet other people who help you.

**M.M.: Looking back, what was the most difficult thing you had to do when you arrived here and that you accomplished successfully?**

J.M.: For me, it was getting a sense of orientation and knowing where to go. We often got lost, we would take the metro without knowing where it would bring us and we often got on the wrong line. We needed resources to help us stay on track.

**M.M.: You speak of resources—I wanted to ask if you’ve met Rwandans who had come here long before you and who helped you or if there were any non-Rwandans or organizations that helped? How would you describe the welcome that newcomers receive here?**

J.M.: When we arrived here, we knew a few Rwandans who helped us in the little time they had because everyone is busy with their lives. Otherwise, to me it seemed that we were received warmly in the country. I like the way things are done here even if sometimes it takes time to obtain certain documents, but at least you don’t feel threatened. We have everything we need to live, the children go to school. The more you integrate, the more beautiful life becomes.

**M.M.: For someone who arrives here without knowing anyone, do you think they would find people to guide them?**

J.M.: There are services specifically for immigrants, I believe that when you arrive at immigration where you declare your status, you are directed to these services. But it’s not the same thing as when you find someone from your own community, because that person can accompany you or give you a piece of paper with an address or a phone number written on it. Some people don’t even know how to use the phones here. These services are useful, but it’s not the same thing as when you find an acquaintance to help you.

**M.M.: I suppose it’s easier, indeed.**

J.M.: Yes.

**00:53:35**

**M.M.: When you were living in Rwanda, you were able to meet your needs and those of your children: the children were going to school and you were self-employed. When you arrived here, were you able to find a job and enrol the children in school? Was it easy or difficult?**

J.M.: When we arrived here the children were still little, they continued their schooling, those who were going to primary school continued in primary here and those who were going to high school continued in high school. At that time, our children were not yet at the university level. I didn’t go back to school for at least another five years, but I was working during that time. I was able to integrate easily with the help of the people from the community with whom I was in touch. They referred me to a place where I could do a caregiver training, but I didn’t stay there long. Otherwise, I was at home for most of the time, doing housework and waiting for the kids to come home from school. I went back to study social work for two years. After graduating, I found a job and I’m still working in this field. With time, we establish a routine, because at the beginning it is difficult to combine working and taking care of the home.

**M.M.: And was the father of your children also able to find a job?**

J.M.: He continued his studies immediately, but he didn’t find work right away. It took time, but he eventually got a job.

**M.M.: The problems in Rwanda where some people committed genocide by killing others—when you came to Canada, did you not find the same problem because both ethnic groups live here as well? How do you behave in these circumstances?**

J.M.: Here in Canada, I never see people from the other ethnic group, the one that committed the genocide—they keep it to themselves. I don’t meet them on the streets, and I don’t see them even at weddings. To recognize them, one has to talk to every Black person one meets; even at work where I meet people from the same community—I never see them. It’s difficult to answer this question because I never see them.

**M.M.: Do you plan to return to Rwanda one day?**

J.M.: Yes, I’m considering it because I don’t think I will grow old in Canada.

**M.M.: If possible, can you explain why you don’t think you will grow old in Canada?**

J.M.: As we get older, we reach a point where we can’t take care of ourselves any longer. It’s too [early?] to say, but I think it’s better to grow old in your country of birth.

**M.M.: I don’t know if you have been in touch with others who have lived here and then returned to Rwanda. How was it for them, going back?**

J.M.: I haven’t had the chance yet to speak to those who have returned, but in my opinion, I think that having to reintegrate can be difficult, I think it takes time.

**M.M.: You told me that you’ve been back. When you go back, how do people welcome you? Do you feel as comfortable as before? How do you talk to people? Can you give us an idea about that?**

J.M.: Which people are you talking about?

**M.M.: The people you meet when you go back to Rwanda.**

J.M.: I see the people I’ve been friends with for a long time, and who have remained friends. The people I meet there are friends of the family, people I often talk to on the phone. These are people that when you see them, you feel as though you often spend time together because you have much to say to each other. But what remains a shock is that you don’t see your brothers and sisters coming to welcome you. Your friends are there, but you should be seeing your brothers and sisters. There is always an absence, there are always people missing.

**M.M.: In your opinion, for someone who has left and has stayed abroad for a long time—or not so long—do you think going back is a good thing? Is it relaxing or tiring?**

J.M.: When we go back, we relive the life we ​​lived there before, reconnecting with the people you were laughing with before and you are happy despite the ever-present sadness. But you feel like you’re on vacation. You feel rested, but there is always something missing, not everything is at 100 percent, as it is supposed to be.

**01:01:30**

**M.M.: We talked about the experience of returning to Rwanda, but also you talked about life here and the fact that you meet other Rwandans here. How are things going between Rwandans who meet here? Do they talk about Rwanda, or do they talk more about their life in Canada? I don’t know if you have met many Rwandans here, but I was wondering if you could tell us about that.**

J.M.: Rwandan survivors of the genocide?

**M.M.: Survivors or not, people that you meet.**

J.M.: In fact, when we see each other we don’t talk about Canada. When we see each other, and if we have time, we talk about what we have experienced during the genocide. Canada is only the physical place where we are. Even the people who were here during the genocide are curious and ask us questions, and we explain to them, we each in turn tell our story. Everyone is eager to recount what he has experienced during the genocide of the Tutsis. As for Canada, we mention it but only to say that it’s very hot or cold here, we don’t find other topics of discussion, because our talks are often an opportunity to bring on the surface what’s deep within each of us.

**M.M.: Apart from the times someone pays you a visit, are there other opportunities for you to meet? Are there events that bring you together? And when you do meet what do you do together?**

J.M.: There are few community activities that bring us together. Often it is the weddings and funerals that bring us together and in those moments, the topics of conversation depend on the circumstances. Otherwise, the community activities that bring us together are rare, except perhaps sharing a meal with the children at Christmas time, but there aren’t many other events.

**M.M.: Sometimes when a major event happens, the journalists publish it in the newspapers or talk about it in the news. When you look at what happened in Rwanda and at how it was reported on in the press, do you think the reality of the situation was well-represented? Do you find that it was given more importance or less?**

J.M.: I think what happened in Rwanda has been commercialized, the genocide has been commercialized, and people found a way to make a movie out of it—to be seen and bought by the greatest number of people. But they didn’t approach the people who have lived through the genocide asking them to star in the film. They use their own means, and that’s why I say that it seems commercialized to me, because the people who star in these films only imitate, while those who have lived through it are still around… I don’t know if that answers your question.

**M.M.: It does. This is also a difficult problem because some say that giving this task to people who have not lived through the genocide is less important because they don’t benefit from the experience of someone who has lived it. When you watch those movies, would you say it’s a way to give voice to the survivors, or are these films talking about things that have nothing to do with what happened? That’s what I meant when I asked if you find that the newspapers have truthfully described what happened, in a way that those who have experienced it can see themselves reflected in the story.**

J.M.: Yes, sometimes it is the reality, but it’s not a 100 percent. But it helps, it shows the reality to whoever wants to know what happened.

**M.M.: It's a question that often arises as to whether—at the time of making a film or making a theater play about the genocide or any other subject related to violence—whether to choose actors who have lived this experience or others. What do you think?**

J.M.: I think that those who lived through it can play these roles, because they can bring out their emotions, while others would only imitate, it would be like a game for them. It depends on how a person is: some would have the strength to do so and others wouldn’t be able to because of what they have experienced.

**M.M.: If you were asked to play some scenes of what happened, do you think you would accept?**

J.M.: I could play scenes from my own experience, but I don’t think I can play for example what happened at the Hôtel des mille collines since I wasn’t there. But I could play what happened while I was following my own path because I haven’t forgotten anything.

**M.M.: Before concluding the interview, I wanted to ask you: when you meet and talk with other survivors, what are the major difficulties that they are still facing?**

J.M.: I find that each person still bears a lot of sadness, they feel that they have been victimized, and sometimes they say that they aren’t able to return home, because that’s where those who have killed their families still live, because those who have gone to prison are now free, and the survivors feel as though they, who have experienced this misfortune, are no longer relevant. There is a wound that isn’t healing and that still hurts.

**M.M.: Referring to justice, precisely, in Rwanda the trials were closed and the *gacaca* were instituted. Do you find that the *gacaca* represent the survivors and speak on behalf of the survivors or is it the case that the survivors don’t trust them?**

J.M.: I think that the *gacaca* represent the survivors, because they revealed who had killed whom and in the different regions. What I didn’t appreciate were the convictions, I find that they don’t measure up to the deaths of our families. The killers are given a short sentence and in a short time they find themselves free. I personally asked one of them—I had heard that he had been imprisoned and then freed—and he told me that he was given a short sentence of 13 years only, and he had done his time. When listening to his answer, you realize that he himself is aware that his sentence doesn’t match his crime. That’s what I’m referring to when I talk about the wound that still hurts.

**M.M.: I was thinking, precisely, that at least those who committed the genocide think that they have been forgiven, but what is the benefit of the *gacaca* for the survivors?**

J.M.: I never had the opportunity to go, but I know people who have gone and who came back rather depressed. It’s depressing, especially because they tell you about the death of your parent, saying, for example, that he was struck by so and so with a hammer or a knife, and that’s what they talk about at the *gacaca*, and whoever goes there and hears about the death of their relatives, comes back sick. I think hearing this hurts even more and it’s better not to hear anything. Normally, criminals are punished. I think that what can help us is to find people to talk to about it on a regular basis so that you don’t always keep it in your heart and don’t remain sad, even if the sadness will never completely go away, but it’s still worth talking with those who have also had the experience or those who are interested in hearing about it. Through discussions, the genocide remains an important topic, and I think that’s all we can do for our departed ones, and nothing else.

**M.M.: Before we end the interview, what can one wish for the survivors of the genocide?**

J.M.: We can wish them to remain courageous, not to give in to weakness caused by the death of their loved ones and by other things in life. You must remain strong so that those who have caused you harm don’t rejoice at the sight of you going mad. Also try to talk a lot with others so you don’t have to be alone, because it’s better to talk than thinking about it alone.

**M.M.: This is the message you would give to everyone or only to the Rwandans on account of what happened to them. Before concluding, is there anything else you would like to add to our conversation?**

J.M.: I think we talked about almost everything, even though we didn’t have time to expand on some topics. The message I would like to send is to say that it is good to discuss this together so that we always remember—because we couldn’t write a book. It would be good if you could talk with everyone else so that we continue talking about our genocide, because it’s us and no one else who will keep the topic open. I say it’s “our genocide” because we are the ones who have suffered.

**M.M.: What would you say to the Canadians who cross paths with Rwandans? What do they need to know about Rwandans?**

J.M.: I would explain to them the genocide and what happened to us, because most of them ask us anyways about what caused it. So we have to take the time to explain who the genocide perpetrators are so that Canadians are not left with the impression that all Rwandans were perpetrators. They might meet a person from the other group and after hearing their perspective Canadians might think that the genocide perpetrators were the Tutsis. So we have to find the time to explain the causes of the genocide, its inception and who were the people who were killed.

**M.M.: Is there anything that characterizes you more generally and that you would like to share with people, starting with the Rwandans? What would you like people to know about you?**

J.M.: That’s a difficult question… What can I say… I’m just a survivor of the genocide and that’s all. What I can add to the previous question is to ask that we continue to teach about the genocide in schools so that the young children grow up knowing what it is, so that it isn’t something that only adults know about and that only this generation will remember, but on the contrary: that it is known from one generation to the next.

**M.M.: Thank you very much.**

J.M.: Thank you.

**M.M.: The next step is to help us teach that.**

**[End of session 1 of 1]**