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Tiny Speckles of Hope

Genocide is a phenomenon that demonstrates the evil in the hearts of man, in its most severe and merciless form. The act of genocide affects not only those involved, but a generation, an entire people, and the culture those people embody. When the topic of genocide and mass extermination of people is brought to attention, the apex of conversation is the Jewish Holocaust in the 1930s and 40s. The world will never forget the atrocities that took place in Germany. But often overlooked are the other genocides. While their players may not be as influential, the human lives lost are just as precious and tragic. Thus is the case of Rwanda, a small Central African country. Close to one million people were slaughtered by the hands of their own countrymen. The murders were driven by the conflict between the dominate Hutu tribe and the minority Tutsi tribe. The horrendous acts that occurred in 1994 were pushed under the rug by most of the world. Even to this day, not all responsible parties have been punished.

Stories of survivors and their perseverance inspire a sense of hope. Hope that faith in a higher being will pull them through the hardest of trials. Hope that determination and sheer human stubbornness will prevail. And finally, hope that reconciliation and redemption is possible.

Immaculée Ilibagiza is living proof that hope can exist amidst a holocaustic backdrop. She tells her story in her memoir *Left to Tell*. Immaculée was a member of the persecuted Tutsi ethnic group in Rwanda. For three months, extremists of the Hutu ethnic group were in pursuit of

Immaculée, and anyone else that got in their murderous path. Immaculée was restrained to the close quarters of a bathroom with six other women. And even though she believed her brutal death was imminent, she still retained hope that she would survive. Immaculée's hope was God. She grasped that hope with every bit of strength she had. She believed that her faith would save her and that if she remained loyal to her Christian principles, she would survive.

And she did. escaped persecution to live the rest of her life without fear of murder from her neighbors. Unfortunately Immaculée did not escape completely unscathed. During the events in Rwanda, Immaculée lost her mother, father, and two of her brothers. It was a tragedy for Immaculée. The entire construct of her family was destroyed. While the reality of her situation was hard to grasp, she again, relied on her faith to cope with her loss.

A perspective that is often lost is the view of the violator. The violator is a man soaked with blood and sweat, foaming at the mouth. The violator is more beast than man. He is a creature cast from the pits of damnation. The graphic novel, *Deogratias*, explains that this is not always the case. The brutal killers are still people, people who love someone, people who worry, and people who have to come to terms with their deeds.

Deogratias is the protagonist in the novel by the same name. His story is one of regret, guilt and escapism. Deogratias was a Hutu during the Rwandan genocide. Even though Deogratias had friends who were Tutsi, he was still pressured into participating in the acts of violence.

The most influential conflict in the story is within Deogratias himself. He is plagued by his conscious. He is haunted by the stars. As he begins to understand the weight of his actions, he is transformed into the creature that feasts upon his deeds, a dog. During the genocide, bodies stacked up along the road side. The corpses rotted and decayed and became the meal for many

stray animals. The dogs were the digesters of the genocide, and Deogratias had to digest his actions by becoming a dog.

Hope is not found in Deogratias, he has decided his life is over. Hope is not found in his victims, for they are all gone as well. Hope is found in the people who survived long enough to see Deogratias's descent into madness. It is in this madness that they were able to understand that Deogratias was sorry for his actions, and that he was regretful. And if Deogratias was remorseful for his actions, others who lived through the same experiences will have that same understanding. And, through understanding, comes redemption. Through redemption, comes hope.

The people who live to see the end of genocide are changed. They see landscapes of war and hatred all around them, when only weeks ago, it was their home. Genocide is ugly, foul, and gruesome. Murder is grotesque, disfigured, and black. Even in these dark times of political and cultural strife, tiny speckles of hope can still permeate through the bloodshed.

Works Cited

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