

Interview Carl Wilkens

Frontline, November 19, 2003

He headed up the Adventist Development and Relief Agency International (ADRA) in Rwanda and was the only American who chose to stay while the rest evacuated. In describing that day watching the cars and trucks rolling by, he recalls, « This sadness just came over me. ... If people in Rwanda ever needed help, now was the time. And everybody's leaving. » In the weeks that followed, he recounts what he tried to do to help, including enlisting Rwanda's Hutu prime minister to stop a massacre of children in an orphanage. « There were times of real hopelessness. I basically had to say to myself, 'There's nothing I can do about that.' I could spend a lot of time in anger about why other people weren't making a difference, weren't doing it, but that wasn't going to help anything. » This interview was conducted on

Nov. 19, 2003.

... So now you're a pastor. You became a pastor because of what you went through in Rwanda?

I'm sure Rwanda had a huge impact on me becoming a pastor. I never wanted to be a pastor. ... But in Rwanda, [I] began to see that I love building stuff with my hands, and I love doing construction and I like building schools and clinics. But in Rwanda, you'd see those things destroyed; and you recognize the only thing that really lasted was relationships and what was happening between people. ...

... Where do you go mentally when you think back [about Rwanda]?

When I think back to Rwanda, I go different places. It was a great place for our kids to grow up. We moved there to a peaceful country in 1990. They hadn't had any kind of war for years. There was no violence.

You hardly saw a [camouflage] uniform, and I'd lived in other parts of Africa where that was part of the daily life. It was serene. It was peaceful, beautiful. People worked hard – kind, happy people.

Then your mind flashes to [the] other side, like that time of the genocide. For times, I won't go there; I won't go to the genocide. I will think about the five years of really good experiences.

I can just imagine survivors. I survived, but I'm not a survivor like the Rwandans. My beautiful [children], my incredible wife Theresa— They weren't killed. Surviving obviously is more than just staying alive; surviving is learning how to live again. In that way, I'm not a survivor like the Rwandans. ...

... The first few months of 1994— The peace process is going on; U.N. troops are there. What was your sense about what was going on? Did it feel like it was getting safer, or were you concerned?

We were home in the States, I think, around the summer of 1993. We came back to Rwanda with high hopes. They'd signed the peace accord in Arusha. I had already met many of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) leaders in my work. ... We would rehabilitate health centers in all parts that had been destroyed of the country. ...

But especially in the RPF area that they controlled, we'd gone up there. We'd evaluated health centers and we'd started to form a relationship. And, man, I saw some people there who I felt had some really good goals. I began to understand a little more their plight of wanting to come back into their country and be a part of their country. I'd had some interaction with some people in the government that I believed in, and so I was optimistic. I said, "Man, this is good. These huge displaced camps we'd worked with for three years— people are going to be able to go home. Dads who had lost all of their will to live, [who] couldn't provide for their family, just wasting away in a refugee camp – they're going to get back and work in their gardens, and life is going to be good again."

Then the RPF came down into Kigali. They were there with their battalion at the parliament, and we were optimistic in December and in January. But then, each time they got together to sign and put the new government in place, somebody didn't come. They'd shut all the roads down and make a big, big deal. Then something wasn't right in the papers; someone didn't come. In February, I remember a day where there was fighting in the city. People were being targeted. You could just feel the tension growing in February.

One of our workers called, and

was saying, “They’re killing people in our neighborhood. Can you help us?” I remember going— My father was in the country at the time. He was helping with a project, looking over the finances. He and I left the house and came past a truckload of youth with all of their party hats and flags and machetes and tools. And, man, just thinking, boy, do we turn off, or do we go straight on past them? I just stepped on the gas. I went right past them and went to the home. Fortunately, [our worker had] been rescued by someone else, and was gone when we got there.

But there in February— Things started to solidify like, man, this is going to blow. I even I sent a fax to our church headquarters, and I think I used the term like, “We’re sitting on a keg of dynamite here” — wanting them not to be surprised if things blew, and all of a sudden we were organizing evacuation of the missionaries, because we’d been having regular meetings at the embassy.

I was the warden for the Adventist missionaries, so I was the contact person for the coordination of their evacuation. We had the points marked out in town where [we were to] assemble. We’d met with the missionaries, and said, “There’s no heroes, no cowards, if things blow here.” Of course, when we said “blow,” we’re thinking something where you might have a little more fighting, and the-

re’d be chaos for several days. ...

We told the people, “Hey, if stuff blows, you make a choice with your family what you’re going to do.” Although we weren’t the oldest couple in that group of missionaries, my wife and I had probably been in Africa and in Rwanda longer. So we shared some [of] our experiences from other countries, and then it was up to each person. So it was by no means a surprise — except of course, the intensity, and the huge numbers and the time that it went on. [In my] wildest dreams, [I] wouldn’t have ever have predicted that.

Let me ask you about the planning for an evacuation. ...

We had town hall meetings at the embassy, where they would talk about evacuation plans and how it would happen. That went on for maybe several weeks, so you knew there was a realized level of awareness. But I kind of thought, OK, it might happen, but still there’d be a core group who would stick by the ambassador, a few key staff members and women and children. Non-essential staff might go.

When this thing blew and they started [calling for the] evacuation, I was over eavesdropping unashamedly on my ham radio with our ambassador talking to the assistant secretary of state [about] shredding documents. I was, like, the ambassador’s leaving? Everybody’s leaving. It was

just so fast, and none of us – although we thought we were prepared – man, stuff just was rolling so fast, it left your head spinning.

So where were you on [April] 6?

Wednesday night, [the] electricity had gone off down at the office in the industrial park, and I said to my folks– My mom actually came over for the end of my dad’s three-month term, so she was there, too. She’d been helping organize files and stuff. I said, “Hey Mom and Dad, let’s head home, because the kids are going to be scared. If the electricity’s off here, it might be off at home.” I knew that my wife wasn’t home. They were with the house girl, and they’d been fine. ...

As we got home, there was still electricity, and so it just looked like another normal evening at home. [Then I received] a telephone call. A friend, a Canadian missionary out at our university called ... and he says, “One of my Rwandan friends just heard on the radio [that] the president’s plane’s been shot down.” Now we couldn’t see the airport. It was probably only five or seven miles from us, but the hills, you couldn’t see anything. But then we remembered we’d heard some big explosions and Dad had said, “Boy, that was no grenade.” We [didn’t] know what it was, but that was the first indication that stuff went awry.

Then as the evening wore on, the gunfire increased and the shouting and the fighting [increased]. We moved everybody into the hallway of the house, our three kids and Mom and Dad. That’s where we all spent a very restless night, that first night.

Do you remember when you first got on the wardens’ network at the embassy?

It seems like I’d been on the wardens’ network loosely for a year or two, maybe three years.

But that night when they first powered it up after the plane went down–

When the plane went down, I got on the phone. ... I called someone first who verified that [the plane had been shot down]. But then I called the embassy, and they’re not verifying anything about a president’s plane down or anything like that. So we started saying, “Well, we’ll keep contact,” and we’d already established radio frequencies where we could talk if phones went out. They just started telling everybody [to] sit tight, and so we tried to communicate to the other missionaries. ...

Really, I think, what we all thought was that this thing would blow so fast, nobody [that] would have a chance to flee, and we would all just hunker down for a couple of days. I think we’d been told that the

RPF, who was disciplined and well trained, that they would pretty much take [the city] in just a couple of days. So basically there was a thought among many people that there won't be time to evacuate; it's going to be a thing [where] you just hunker down. So we're all wondering at this time, "OK, are we going to just hold down, or will there be an evacuation?"

It was probably the next day when they started talking about [having] evacuation assembly points.

So who's "they?" Was it Laura and other—

Laura Lane was our main contact person, and then there were a few other miscellaneous radio operators from the embassy.

And she was getting on and saying what—?

The next day, we were in contact with orphanage and school people [who] were fleeing onto these compounds and were being killed. I was kind of their connection point in Kigali, and I was on the phone to the U.N. saying, "Can't you get some soldiers out to our orphanage out in the east of the country?" And they say, "We can't get out of the city. We don't even have the airport." I was [like], "What? You lost control of the airport?"

You asked me earlier if we felt secure. It was strange, because on the one hand, here's little groups of eight U.N. soldiers, fully decked out with

all of their gear and their machine guns and everything, patrolling the city. We used to joke [that] you can't spit without hitting a U.N. car. So you've got all [these] white vehicles, black U.N. [logos] all over them, and you've got these soldiers – now foot patrols, on the street. Occasionally you would see some white tanks or something.

There was an incredible sense of security in that. Yet we also knew things were going to blow, so that, as everybody knows now, turned out to be a huge false security. But we thought, shoot, at least they'll keep the airport. ...

Do you remember when you started, [when] you first realized that this wasn't just an RPF advance on Kigali, but that it was something else?

When this thing blew, and the fighting broke out and the president's plane was shot down, my first thoughts weren't [that] the war is starting up again, because almost right away neighbors were being killed. So while we were used to sporadic gunfire, grenades going off from time to time – we'd kind of become used to that – right away when the screaming, the shouting, the shooting started within our neighborhood, we knew this wasn't just RPF and government soldiers. We knew the tension that there had been already. We had heard about pickup trucks co-

ming into ... the high-density housing areas, of weapons coming in. We knew tension was growing there.

The word “genocide” didn’t come into our thoughts at that time. But we knew that there was a real tension. ...

There wasn’t a tension between Hutus and Tutsis for the time we lived there initially. These people worked together, worshipped together, married together, drank beer together. They did everything together. I worked with them in my work crews. I sometimes didn’t know who was Hutu and who was Tutsi, and they laughed together, and you didn’t know. Of course, it played out some fears, some hurts, some betrayals that were brought back to the surface in this event. Those who were orchestrating it knew exactly what buttons to push to enflame this.

But the average person in Rwanda, they would not sooner kill their neighbor than you or I. But when the killing began by those who were ready to do it, the fear just took a hold of people, and it went like wildfire.

You could hear it from your compound?

Oh, yes. Actually, there was a missionary compound for our group, and I was in a rented house, just in a residential section. We could hear up and down the streets. We saw them carrying the furniture out of the neighbors’ house after they killed

them the next day. Then we had in our house a young lady who was a house girl who was a Tutsi, and a young man who was a night watchman who was a Tutsi. They were the immediate faces for us of those who were threatened. I’m not sure why – I guess just from the months before we knew that there was this tension between the Hutu and the Tutsi – so right away, it was communicated that these people were fleeing onto the compounds and they were being killed.

So we knew these two people right away would be killed, our workers. Then the next morning, [my wife] was talking to our neighbors through the fence, and our neighbor said, “Last night, they came to your house, and they were ready to come in and to kill everybody and to loot your house.” ... Many of [the killers] at the beginning [were] not from our neighborhood. They would be brought in from other places, and then they would recruit local people. And our neighbors came in and said, “No, these people aren’t part of this. Their kids play with our kids, and when we’re sick, they take us to the hospital.” It’s interesting, the simplest little things you couldn’t give a second thought to, and [the] little kindnesses all of a sudden took on a huge importance. ...

The killing was happening right there. Our kids were listening in while they’re describing [the killings] on

the radio. I'm talking back to [my kids] and saying how people are being killed in their front yard. I'm saying, "We're trying to get help, and we're just trying to figure out what we can do." This whole drama's unfolding. Our kids are standing there glued to [the radio]. I [tell] Theresa [to] take them away.

It's in our children that you can begin to understand the terrors of these things. We've all been conditioned and we see adults killed, and sadly enough, we're conditioned to it. But all of a sudden, it's in your children. When I had a break later that day, I was even playing a silly little game with them, where we were trying to get from one end of the hall to the other without gunfire. Whoever was on their feet when a bullet shot was heard had to go back to the beginning. We were doing anything to distract our kids, and our kids were really fortunate they didn't witness a whole lot besides what they heard. ...

[Tell us about the decision to evacuate.]

When [the embassy] had their plans in place, they [told us the] evacuation points and they told us, "We're going to take a group out on Saturday and we're going to take a group out on Sunday. We're driving out to Burundi; we don't think it's safe to go through the airport," although the airport is back in the hands [of] the French and Belgians.

[But the embassy] felt like people were shelling on the airport and shelling on those going towards the airport. They felt it was too big a risk, so I think it was the Americans, Canadians and Germans who decided to drive out.

As a group of Adventist American missionaries, we [told them] we're going to wait and go on Sunday. So that happened to be the last of the two convoys. I think the ambassador himself went with that group. That was a pretty tough time. Much of the time I lost myself in communicating to others all the things that had to be done – collecting passport numbers, making sure we knew how many people were at different places, and just coordinating the evacuation. But then every once in a while, Theresa and I would go back to the bedroom and we would talk, because we had made a decision that I wouldn't evacuate. We would pray, and I'd say, "Does this still seem right?" and she said, "Yes, it does." To my mom and dad, it didn't seem right, and to people on the outside we're communicating with it, didn't seem right.

Then we'd get back in mode preparing for evacuation, getting the suitcase packed. We carried a bunch of extra stuff each time we came back to Africa for [our] kids' birthdays and for Christmas stuff, and so we were breaking out everything. ...

Then it actually came down to

the evacuation, and we were sending the missionaries from one compound over. I remember getting on the radio and saying to Laura Lane, “The missionaries are coming over from the compound, and that group is coming around to the ambassador’s house. I’m sending my family to the ambassador’s house, too.” She came back on there and said, “Wait. What do you mean you’re sending your family?” I said, “Well, Laura, I’m not leaving”. She said, “No, you don’t understand – other times there were options. There’s no option this time. You have to come out with them.” I said, “Laura, as a private citizen, I think I can make that choice, and I have to [stay].” ... [So] finally she says, “You need to write down that you’ve refused the help of the U.S. government to evacuate.”...

I remember getting one of the kids’ pieces of school notebook paper and writing a handwritten note that I had refused the help and was staying on my own accord, and folding that little paper up and handing it to my wife. It was a very, very empty feeling as my family pulled away. ...

Why did you decide not to go?

Sometimes the hardest questions almost have the simplest answers, and yet in their simplicity, we almost don’t believe it. For a while, when people would ask me why [I] choose to stay, I would try to go into some

detail [about] that Tutsi young lady and that Tutsi young man [who worked for me]. [They] were [the] faces [of the victims of the genocide], representing the country and I felt if I left, they were going to be killed. ...

The first three weeks, I never left my house, and I was wondering, why did I stay? What am I doing? [Then I realized] the two people in my house [were] still alive, and I [was] very grateful for that. ...

When the Americans decide to close the embassy temporarily and evacuate– Being American, what do you think of that? ...

When the genocide came, we’d lived in Rwanda for [about] 10 years. Sometimes you thought of yourself as an American, and sometimes you thought of yourself as an African. ... Sometimes you were proud to be an American, and sometimes you were not proud of your country. ... I was never ashamed of [being American], but sometimes of the policies of our government. We try to do stuff to people sometimes instead of with them. You’d see that again and again. ...

They gave a 72-hour window for all the foreigners to leave. I sat on the front porch of our house there, and I watched the buses come down the road from the city and go up the road out towards the airport, and the trucks and the cars [leaving]. This sadness just kind of came over me, be-

cause now, if people in Rwanda ever needed help – and I mean [Rwanda] was really blessed with a lot of aid organizations and everything else – but if they ever needed help, now was the time; and everybody’s leaving.

So you really focused on the job that’s at hand, but when you stop and reflect, when I’d lie down at night in the hallway, there was a hope that something’s going to happen. Something’s got to happen. This thing didn’t end in a couple of days like we thought it [would]; it didn’t end in a week or two like we thought it would. Somebody’s going to do something. By the time the genocide was over, I was so angry at America – America the beautiful, America the brave.

Then they started coming in when it was over, like, “Here we are, here we are!” I didn’t want to salute a flag. As time went on and I processed it, I visited people. I had little ladies say, “I laid a little article about you on my coffee table, and every time I walked past, I prayed for you.” I had loggers in Idaho say, “We were praying for you.” I had a high school kid come up to me and say, “Every day I prayed for you, and then school got out and I went home and I lost track, and now you’re alive.”

And it just hit me; I wasn’t angry with America, America’s people, like that. I was angry with our government. I was angry with people who could do something, even the simplest

things, and they didn’t. ...

You were in your home for three weeks. One day you go outside. Why?

For three weeks, we couldn’t leave our home. ... I was in a section of the city still controlled by the old Rwandan government. They impose a curfew and said nobody can go anywhere. Eventually, they lightened up a little bit and said, “Well, you can walk around your neighborhood.”

It’s interesting. During this curfew, there still were looters moving about. I remember seeing them move in the valley like army ants with bags of beans on their head and all kinds of stuff they’d looted out of the warehouses. We had a ton of food in the city. It was a huge blessing, because there were all these displaced people from Burundi when the genocide hit, so the aid organizations had a gob of food in the city for those people.

Then everything broke down and the aid organizations all fled, so you had these warehouses full [of] food. ... The Rwandan pastor and his wife who stayed with me in my house— [The wife] would buy from the looters, over the fence. She would buy toilet paper, she’d buy beans, she’d [buy] a bottle of propane, and she would go down to the corner market and find a few tomatoes or carrots. But after three weeks past, the government said, “OK. Heads of organizations, owners of businesses can go

out and check out your businesses.”

... But I remember sitting in my living room, and lacing my shoes and thinking, “I haven’t had my shoes on for three weeks.” I’d been just like a prisoner in [my own] house. It was a pretty scary thought to leave. There were all kinds of killing going on around, and you’d see the bombs fall and you’d hear the gunfire constantly. Somehow you felt almost safe in this little cocoon. So when I went out with the Rwandan pastor to go check on our offices and warehouses. It was wild. First, not even a block from my house, I’m stopped by militia. “Where’s your identity?” ... So you’d go through different barriers, and we finally got to our ADRA place in the industrial park.

It was like a ghost town. ... It was weird. There were horses roaming the streets, and there are no horses in Rwanda except at the Belgian Club. Someone, I guess, had let them out of their stalls. There were guys sitting at roadblocks in couches, and they’d have an old shotgun across their lap and they’d have like a monkey on a leash – some foreigner’s pet who’d fled. Little kids were playing with all kinds of Western toys all over the city. Little Rwandan kids had never seen these toys before, much less been able to touch them and play with them. ... It was a wild place out there.

What did it smell like?

By the time I was able to leave

my house, Kigali had pretty much been cleaned up of all of the bodies on the streets. There was still a few there ... – it wasn’t the horror picture that greeted me that greeted so many of the U.N. soldiers, so many of the foreigners when they fled the country. There were not particular smells then. ... But I remember smells very much when the genocide was over – the distinct smell of human flesh. It’s different from animals or any other smell.

But it was amazing how much the city had been cleaned up just after three weeks. Not to say that the killing had stopped, but it wasn’t in open large numbers all over the place. It still would happen here and there, and people were found from hiding, but not like the initial three weeks in the city. ...

You made contact with [Philippe Gaillard at the International Committee of the Red Cross].

Yes, once you started to be able to get out and move around you tried to see – where can we do something? Who is still around here? It was really neat when we got to the Red Cross to find Philippe. I had known him before in other planning meetings. We were all in what we called a postwar rehabilitation, because we thought the war was over when the genocide hit and in that time before. During the course of the genocide, I

would [meet with him] every opportunity I could get, which might be once a week or something like that.

I would stop by the Red Cross. I couldn't always get up to his office, but each time, I did I got a cold soda, and that was a real treat. But the biggest treat was seeing someone who really, really cared. I always kept thinking, after a couple of weeks Philippe [would] be gone, and someone else [would] come take his place. ... [He] cared. ... I [had] tons of respect for him. ...

Talk about some of your own experiences [of saving lives].

Whenever you're in a nasty situation, you're looking for an ally, and sometimes you find allies where you would never expect. I had militia Interahamwe who helped me in certain situations. The colonel in Kigali, he—The guys were giving me hassles at the barriers, and one day [the colonel] had a meeting with all of the militia. I don't know what he said, but he had to say something [that made them] lay off ADRA, because after that, I could go through the barriers so easy in town. The [guards] in some places would [act like they loved] ADRA, and wave at me [like] some long-lost friends.

I had friends who were in hiding, workers from ADRA – my accountant and others. Some of their hiding places were partially discovered, and they sent messages to me [that said]

“Come and help us.” [I don't know] how they'd been safe for so long. They're still alive; what if I go and try to get them out, and come to the first barrier, and [the Interahamwe] come to my car and kill them right there?

In that case, the Rwandan pastor who was with me – good sound counseling – he says, “You need to go talk to the [prime minister]; you've built a relationship with him.” I'm like, “But wait a minute – yes, he's the military, and he's fighting the RPF. But we also know the government's connection with all of this killing of the Tutsis. [I should] go ask him for help?”

... Probably the most incredible experience was [when] I had gone to the colonel, and he had put me in touch with some of the groups of orphans around the city that needed help. The Gisimba orphanage was a really desperate case, because they were in the heart of the nastiest part of the city. The most belligerent killers were there in that part of Nyamirambo, and the U.N. couldn't get through [easily]. ... It was just a terrible section of the city. These guys [at the orphanage] were starving. They [had] no water, kids were being killed [and] were dying from dysentery. So I started working with that orphanage.

One day, we brought a load of water to them ... and as I pulled in the parking lot, here is a younger brother

to the orphanage director. ... I said, "Where's your brother?" and he says, "They came last night. They killed some people. They said they're coming back to finish us all off today, and [my brother] has gone to try to find help, to try to find food." As we're talking, this counselor for the area comes ripping in his little stolen Mercedes station wagon. As he got out of his car, I looked around, and here surrounding the orphanage, just materializing – it's about 50 militia guys [with] camouflage jackets or camouflage pants, but all of them with machine guns. ...

I said to my Rwandan colleague, who was driving the truck, I said, "Siphon as slow as you can. We've got to make this last. I don't know what we're going to do, but it seems like [the gendarmeries who could help us] are not coming while we're here."...

It's terrible. You're sick to your stomach. Finally it just seemed [right] to go, and I— Yes, you're just saving your own skin, but I promised to him, "I'll come back. I can get help." [The younger brother] just still adamantly [doesn't want me to go], but I'd made the decision. I left, partially thinking as I pull out, "They'll stop me at the next barrier, [and] they'll shoot me." But they let me out of there.

I went to the police camp [and] finally found a guy who was in charge there. I had actually met him before the genocide, and he was surprised to

see me. He says, "Oh, you're at the orphanage, and I don't have any more men I can send out there." I said, "Maybe I'll try the army." But the special army phone couldn't get anybody. ...

I went to the headquarters office and a young secretary I'd become friends with ... [told me] the colonel wasn't in; he was out of town that day, but his assistant [was] eating down in the basement. So I said, "Well, I'll go to Mark at the other orphanage two blocks away, and I'll be right back." [When he] got back, he said, "He's down [there], but you won't believe it – the prime minister's here." I'm like, "So what's that mean?" and he's like, "Ask him."

I'm like, "Ask him?" It's like that's the stupidest thing you could imagine – to ask this guy who is obviously orchestrating the genocide, a key player, and yet I have no other options. ... [He's like], "Just go out in the hallway. He's in the next office. When he comes out, ask him." So I went out [into the hallway] ... and [a] door opens. Everybody snaps to attention, and here comes [the prime minister] and his little entourage. They're coming down the hall, and I am, too.

I put my hand out and I said, "Mr. Prime Minister, I'm Carl Wilkins, the director of ADRA." He stops and he looks at me, and then he takes my hand and shakes it and said, "Yes, I've heard about you and your work.

How is it?" I said, "Well, honestly, sir, it's not very good right now. The orphans at Gisimba are surrounded, and I think there's going to be a massacre, if there hasn't been already." He turns around, talks to some of his aides or whatever, [and he turns back to me and] he says, "We're aware of the situation, and those orphans are going to be safe. I'll see to it."

So what's that mean? Now are they going to go and kill them all? What's it mean? But there were certain times in this thing where you just [have to say], I've done everything I could. Do I go back there and tell them the prime minister said they're going to be OK? It's getting late in the evening. The mortars are falling heavier now, [and I have] people back at the house.

I chose to go home. I chose to trust. You recognize it's not about you. You're not it. There's bigger things happening again. So I went home and they were safe, and that was just a couple of days later that they were all moved to a safer part of a bad town. It was an incredible reunion as we found all of those orphans moved out.

I didn't have to go there. I was always worried about [being] labeled as trying to rescue Tutsis, and then I wouldn't be able to move around the city. I wouldn't be able to help any groups of orphans. And this was all done without me even being there. ...

The genocide is so complicated. People think, "Oh, you're implicated – and you're not." I was in so many positions that could have been interpreted as compromising or even collaborating with the enemy. ... Who's going to believe someone who goes to court and says, "Well, actually I asked [the prime minister] to help me save some Tutsis?" "Who's going to believe that? The stuff in the genocide just turns. That's why the thing about this is we've got to recognize in each one of us, there's such a potential for good and there's such a potential for evil. ...

Why did the commander help you?

There are some different ideas that I've had about why he helped me. The French had this zone in the area. There was a time there in Kigali, right before the genocide ended, where they were sewing together every piece of red, white and blue to make a French flag that they could. They were writing on chalkboards ripped out of classrooms "Viva la France." I think there was a real hope among the people of the old government, those who were in the genocide, that the French would come to Kigali and prop up [the government]. ...

You hear these stories and other examples where individuals were able to stop groups of people from being killed [in the genocide]. ... As you sat

there, and not only saw the Americans leaving and foreign community leaving, but then the U.N. pulling the bulk of its troops out— ... What was going through your mind? Do you think that more could have been done?

You're often frustrated with the outsider's view. They're not there on the ground. They don't know, and yet they're the ones who seem to be making decisions that matter. You wonder what could you do to communicate to them, what really is the situation, and even if you did, would they listen? There were times of real hopelessness. I basically had to say to myself that, "There's nothing I can do about that."

You look at what you think you can do, where you can have an impact, and you go for it. The other areas, you just have to [realize you can't do anything about them]; otherwise you'll drive yourself nuts. So I would look for areas where I could make a difference. I could spend a lot of time in anger and frustration about why other people weren't making a difference, why other people weren't doing it, but that wasn't going to help anything.

I trusted there were people. There were BBC reporters right there that sometimes had better information than we [did]; I was really impressed with that. There was CNN with all of its cameras, communicating to

the people outside. [That] definitely wasn't my role. That was being done by others. [So] there were times when I was discouraged, and yet they wouldn't last long. ...

Ten years now, why, to what extent is it worth remembering what happened there?

A lot of people would like to just say, "Hey, that's done, let's get on with life." In many ways, we do need to move on, but there are certain things we cannot let go of, we cannot try to forget or erase. I learned lessons as I reflect back on what happened then, what I'm doing now – parallels. I'm not in the middle of a genocide now, but I sure am in the middle of a self-seeking, self-satisfying influence all around me. I know where that ultimately leads. I know the destruction that a constant focus on an insatiable self-appetite leads [to].

I think we need to remember – recognize – the potential that each of us had for evil, and the potential that each of us has for good. It didn't, in many ways, serve as a reality check for me. It may not be the obvious outward reality I'm living in right now, but that's where things really boil down to – the battle between good and evil, and whose side I'm going to take. ...

It reminds me that one person can make a difference, and it reminds us to look outside of ourselves and to reach outside. What can you do to

help? I'm thankful that people remember this 10 years later, because there [are] people in Rwanda who will never forget it, and we need to have a connection. We need to live for each other.