

# Years later, genocide roils Rwanda

Special to Sentinel-Voice

DALLAS (NNPA) — Many may disagree with Paul Rusesabagina when he refers to himself as an ordinary man. And in the early spring of 1994, he actually was an ordinary hotel manager in a Kigali, Rwanda hotel.

Then extraordinary events erupted in the central African country that gave him extraordinary challenges. Within a few months, Rusesabagina had stared down death and pure evil, emerging as an extraordinary hero.

He's alive 12 years later and was at a downtown Dallas hotel recently to promote his book, "An Ordinary Man."

Going beyond publicizing his autobiography, which included details of his heroics during the 100 horrid days of the Rwandan genocide and massacre, he is calling for peace and harmony between the warring Hutu and Tutsi tribes in his home country and for the world to get involved.

"My mission is to have the Hutus and Tutsis share power for perhaps the first time in the country's history," Rusesabagina said. "I want the world to help us get everyone around the table. Let us talk, then negotiate."

Rusesabagina is the real life figure that was depicted by actor Don Cheadle in the 2004 movie "Hotel Rwanda," which chronicled how he saved the lives of close to 1,200 Rwandans by using his hotel as a refuge and negotiating with the violent Hutu army out for slaughter. The film was nominated for three Oscars in 2005: Don Cheadle, Best Actor; Sophie Okonedo (playing Rusesabagina's wife, Tatiana), Best Supporting Actor; and Best Original Screenplay.

Rusesabagina recalled interacting with Cheadle while working as an advisor for the movie. They would talk for several hours at a time. They met in Johannesburg, where part of the film was made, and stayed together for a week.

"He was very much concerned because he wanted to portray me the way I was," Rusesabagina said. "I was also concerned because I was not supposed to be manipulated by the Hollywood way of doing things."

Cheadle really wanted to know what this "ordinary

*"They took advantage to divide and conquer. Outside of colonialism, the history of Black American history and Rwandan history is more or less the same."*

— Paul Rusesabagina

man" was like.

"There were things, some specific, but mostly it was just getting a sense of the nature of him and a sense of his spirit and a sense of how he approached the world," Cheadle told entertainment website IGN.com when the movie was released.

"Being with him in social settings, being with him one on one, being at a restaurant with him getting drunk... (Laughs) It was just kind of getting a whole picture of who he was, not just the 110 pages of the script or interviews that I'd seen, but really just sitting with him and joking with him and telling stories and him meeting my kids and me meeting his kids, those things, little details would come off of those things..."

Rusesabagina said of Cheadle's work: "He portrayed me the way I am. He's an excellent actor."

His real life experience standing at the center of one of mankind's most horrendous massacres was not an acting matter. The United Nations estimate that 800,000 Rwandan men, women and children were killed; the Rwandan government counted 1 million.

"We were sensing something bad was going to happen, but not as bad as it did happen," Rusesabagina said. "We expected people to be killed."

He saved 1,200 lives but still saw the many dead bodies, many of them decapitated, others with bellies cut open. There were babies cut out of mothers' wombs, then chopped up themselves."

"I was very much scared, but I learned how to deal with evil."

Rusesabagina was just as horrid as to how, up to the release of the movie, very few people knew of the tragedy, which had been largely ignored by the world, including the American government and media.

"But since the movie has come out, the word is spreading all over the world," he said.

Although a Hutu, Rusesabagina tells his story with no bias toward his own tribe or the Tutsi. He speaks

as a man who yearns for peace between both people, as a man who sees more commonalities than differences. He's the son of a Tutsi mother and Hutu father. His wife is Tutsi.

In 1994, it was mostly the Hutus attacking the Tutsi. At other times in the country's history it has been the other way around, a massive nationwide version of a drive-by gang war.

"Hutus were considered the good guys, Tutsis the bad guys," he said. But then a generation passes and political manipulation reverses the two roles. One tribe or an-

other has dominated.

"Tutsi rebels were also killing Hutus. Either you're down or you're up. There's no middle ground," Rusesabagina said.

He then speaks of the original source of the ongoing conflict, a source that can be appreciated by African-Americans.

Very acute on Rwandan history, he tells it with a razor-sharp sense of how the colonizing German and Belgium republics drove continuous political wedges between the Hutus and Tutsis, very much like the way American slaves were divided into house and field Negroes and how African-Americans may be divided today.

"They took advantage to divide and conquer," Rusesabagina said. "Outside of colonialism, the history of

Black American history and Rwandan history is more or less the same."

At one time the Hutus were made slaves to the Tutsis.

"Tutsis were more close to Europeans. They were considered to have more attractive physical features, to be more clever, more wise, they are made to be leaders. Hutus were supposed to work the land."

That included the measuring of noses to see which ones were more similar to Europeans.

"There's not a clear difference between Hutus and Tutsis. In 80 percent of the cases, you can't tell," Rusesabagina said.

Leaving behind such turmoil, Rusesabagina left Rwanda in June 1994, returning only in 2003 to help make the film. He now lives in

Belgium. But he travels the world telling his story, not necessarily for his own gain and fame, but as a call-out to the world to help build a bridge among his people. He was happy to see former Liberian dictator Charles Taylor brought out of exile in Nigeria and returned to Liberia to face war crimes during that country's bloody civil war. Yet he looks another way and sees the genocide taking place in Darfur, Sudan. He's calling for the United Nations to freeze the bank accounts of dictators who rip riches from their country.

"We need to send a message that they're not untouchable," Rusesabagina said. "They can, one day, face justice."

Gordon Jackson writes for the Dallas Examiner.

## Your Horoscope Says... May 11-17

### ARIES

Believe that it is true when a friend or family member praises you this week. There is something good happening with you that you cannot see. Expect good news about a publishing, educational or legal venture. Romance is in the air, revel in it.

Soul Affirmation: All the good things said about me this week are absolutely true.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 43, 50

### TAURUS

This week let your nurturing spirit shines through. Your tremendous adaptability will make it possible for you to show kindness even where it is not deserved. Know that your kindness is appreciated. All week long, you'll find yourself in helpful conversations with friends or family members. Heed what is said.

Soul Affirmation: Everyone deserves kindness this week.

Lucky Numbers: 11, 32, 39

### GEMINI

This week is a good week for new investment of money, time or energy. Your investment will be attractive to someone who wants to help. Make the call. This week let the feeling of being special bathe you.

Soul Affirmation: I invest new faith in everything I do this week.

Lucky Numbers: 34, 39, 52

### CANCER

Opportunity knocks this week, be ready and waiting. An old love may resurface. Take a good look. This week is good for you financially. Look for a special opportunity at work. Families matter; spend time with yours.

Soul Affirmation: I look inside myself and find all the love I need.

Lucky Numbers: 12, 43, 51

### LEO

Spend a quiet week. Usually you like to talk, and it seems you were put on earth to speak your mind, but practice something counter to your usual nature. Even if you know someone is speaking against you, try not to respond. This is excellent training.

Soul Affirmation: I am patient with all that comes my way this week.

Lucky Numbers: 18, 29, 50

### VIRGO

Keep focused. Your energies are likely to be scattered in a lot of directions this week.

Your attention is likely to be pulled in many directions. Don't let yourself be seduced by something that looks a whole lot better than it'll turn out to be.

Soul Affirmation: I judge no one, especially myself this week.

Lucky Numbers: 9, 29, 53

### LIBRA

Use your communications skills to make a great impression on influential people. An issue that you've been avoiding can now be faced. This week the vibes are good with the people who can make things happen for you. With them, you can be the star.

Soul Affirmation: I give thanks for who I am this week.

Lucky Numbers: 6, 7, 20

### SCORPIO

Send out some good vibrations to someone you've been thinking about. Your cheerful attitude is contagious. Keep it strong. Good things are meant to happen for you if you don't block them by holding a grudge. Let it seep out of your mind. Plan for a good week.

Soul Affirmation: Faith keeps me calm in the storms of life.

Lucky Numbers: 4, 12, 30

### SAGITTARIUS

This week your thoughtfulness and generosity is very evident among those

close to you. Do something adventurous and surprise and impress your lover. Try to sneak away at lunchtime together and enjoy each other's company. Things will be looking even brighter for you in the next few weeks. Stay happy.

Soul Affirmation: I face each week with a smile and the week smiles back at me.

Lucky Numbers: 20, 47, 48

### CAPRICORN

Exercise your social skills in a new and inventive way at work. Make yourself noticed in a positive way. Buy a new scent or wear that daring red item that you've been too shy to put on. Try to resolve the conflict between two of your friends, but you might have to let them go through the motions of anger, and stay out of it.

Soul Affirmation: Time is the greatest peacemaker of them all.

Lucky Numbers: 31, 37, 55

### AQUARIUS

Nobody expects the world from you, but a little more effort would be appreciated. Let go of the grudge that you've been harboring and start living again. You'll feel much more lighthearted and free when you forgive and forget about the past.

Soul Affirmation: With my spirit I co-create my week.

Lucky Numbers: 2, 46, 47

### PISCES

This week you will feel like you're on top of the world when you finish completing the project that you've been working feverishly on. Take some time off and splurge on a vacation spot that has been tantalizing you.

Soul Affirmation: I focus on the positive things that are happening in my life.

Lucky Numbers: 12, 21, 30