

# The 'quiet' hero of Rwanda's genocide

## GENOCIDE

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Paul Rusesabagina has been called a hero, a life-saver, even a godsend.

In 1994, while the world watched as hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda were slaughtered at the hands of Hutu militias, Rusesabagina lived in the thick of the nightmare.

While the militias went house to house searching for people to kill, Rusesabagina hid and sheltered people in the luxury hotel he managed in Kigali.

He was the hotel's frontman and took that job to heart. When I met him, he came across as unassuming, even quiet. If you met him, you probably wouldn't think that here was a man whose actions changed the course of many lives from what would have been certain death and inspired the Hollywood film, "Hotel Rwanda."

Yet, this quiet, unassuming man had a determination about him. It's almost as if the attention he received after the genocide, after the film, and after his book "An Ordinary Man," cemented in him the realization that his life had more of a purpose than he ever thought.

Saving more than a thousand people during the genocide was something he says he did without even thinking. For him, it just had to be done. When I asked him how he saw himself back then, he said he was always a little different from the other managers.

He said, "I always care for those who had no one to care for them...Those who do not have anyone to care for them are the ones I will always welcome and give them jobs."

While Paul Rusesabagina is known for his heroism, he is also a father who is proud of his six children, two of whom are his nieces who he adopted after they lost their parents in the genocide.

While we walked along London's famed Carnaby Street on a sunny spring day, Rusesabagina spoke about his life now, living in Texas, but yet keeping his eyes firmly on affairs in Africa.

He said, "I am a humanitarian and a human rights advocate..." He was in London to act as patron of the Save the Congo campaign to raise awareness for what he describes as a "proxy war... (where) approximately 17 million innocent civilians have been killed."

Throughout the interview I wondered how this seemingly patient, quiet man who had seen the worst of humanity playing out in front of his very own eyes could still smile, and still believe in the best in people.

Yet here he was, smiling and in his gentle way talking about his own dreams and aspirations which include perhaps owning his own hotel somewhere one day.

When I asked him where he got his strength, he said: "Was I really that strong? I don't think I was that stronger than all the Rwandans but what I believe is that this is my conviction...I have learnt since I was a young boy to listen to myself.

"I always call my conscience my own adviser who will never confuse right to wrong or wrong to right.