

Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust Study Guide

Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust by Immaculée Ilibagiza

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Plot Summary

Immaculee Ilibagiza's story is one of terror, loss and faith. Immaculee had a happy childhood. She was raised in a close knit Roman Catholic family on the beautiful shores of Lake Kivu. Immaculee's parents, Rose and Leonard, were loving. There were four children in the family, of which Immaculee was the only daughter. As a child she experienced much joy and was especially close to her brother Damascene. Immaculee felt loved by her family, friends and community. She moved freely through her village, Mataba, and had many friendships. Immaculee was also blessed with intelligence. Her intelligence was fostered by her parents, who, as teachers, believed strongly in the importance of education. She excelled scholastically and earned an excellent education. She studied locally at her mother's school during her elementary years. Later, she attended boarding school for her high school education and finally at the National University in Butare.

Her idyllic life was shattered in 1990 when on her holiday visit home Immaculee came face to face with the increasing hostility amongst the three tribes of Rwanda. These tribes, the Hutus, Tutsis and Twa, had historically poor relations. In 1990 the animosity climaxed in a bloody war as the Hutus hunted and killed nearly a million Tutsis. The 1990 Rwandan Holocaust forced her to spend over three months in hiding. As a Tutsi, she was among the hunted. The conditions Immaculee and her companions endured during their time in hiding were harsh. She spent her time in forced silence and feared for her life. She was confined to a small bathroom barely large enough for one person, yet it was filled with eight women. However difficult the physical conditions may have been, the mental anguish was worse. While they were hiding, the women could hear and, to a limited extent, see what was occurring outside of their hiding place. They witnessed the murders of many Tutsi people at the hands of extremist Hutus.

The horror surrounding Immaculee motivated her to search within herself. While in hiding she focused on her faith and building her relationship with God. She prayed for many hours each day and experienced religious visions. Immaculee and her companions eventually left their hiding place and moved through multiple military camps before finding freedom. Immaculee attributes her hope and survival to her relationship with God. It would be a reasonable reaction to express fear, anger, or even hatred. Yet Immaculee chose a different path. Some would say that Immaculee did the unthinkable. Through a renewed and deepened faith she managed to forgive the killers who ravaged her village and create a legacy of courage for others to follow.



The Eternal Spring

The Eternal Spring Summary and Analysis

Immaculee was born into a loving family. Her parents, Leonard and Rose, gifted her with a name meaning 'shining and beautiful in body and soul'. Her name would prove to be true as she grew through childhood and into adulthood. Immaculee was one of four siblings and the only daughter in the family. In Rwandan culture, being a good girl—clean, well mannered and virtuous—was important to maintain personal status and family reputation. The expectations of society were mirrored in her home, although her parents also expected her to study and expand her horizons. Her parents were both trained as educators. In addition to being educators, her family subsidized their income by farming. They grew and harvested beans, coffee and bananas on their property near Lake Kivu. While Immaculee's family was wealthy by Rwandan standards, their profits were earned fairly through hard work. Because of this wealth, the family possessed much land on the shore of Lake Kivu, owned two vehicles—one automobile and one motorcycle—and had an ample home. While simple by American standards, their home was considered immense for Rwanda and its solar panels yielded one hour of electricity per day. This was considered luxurious living. Immaculee was raised on her family's property in the village of Mataba in the country of Rwanda. It is a poor area, although beautiful in topography. It is also politically tense. This first chapter introduces Immaculee and her family while providing critical information about Rwanda and its culture. This information increases the reader's understanding of her family life, which will be a central concept throughout the book.

Standing Up

Standing Up Summary and Analysis

Immaculee and her brothers routinely walked eight miles to the local elementary school. By some standards, this would seem like a long or unsafe journey, but as a child Immaculee never felt the need for protection. She felt at ease in Rwanda. On her first day in the fourth grade, having graduated from her mother's schoolhouse at the age of ten, Immaculee experienced ethnic segregation for the first time. During roll call the students were separated according to the categories of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. Immaculee had never been exposed to these terms before and did not know where she belonged. This gained her expulsion from the classroom and much embarrassment. It was also her introduction to Rwanda's ethnic divide. Following her embarrassment at roll call, her father approached the teacher. During the next day's roll call she was directed to stand with the Tutsi group. In this way she learned that she was Tutsi. She felt no shame and was thankful for the clarification. Immaculee's experience introduces the reader to her teacher, Buhoro, who would later hurt her by rudely dismissing her in her time of need.

Rwanda is composed of three tribes: Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. During Immaculee's childhood Hutus made up the majority of the population. Over many generations the Hutus and Tutsis had intermarried, however, and the gene pool had become mixed. Differences were not always obvious, and an individual could be mistaken for another tribe. Both tribes spoke the same language and attended church together. It was easy for Immaculee to assume their equality.

Generations before, a Tutsi king had ruled the land in prosperity and harmony. The colonial countries of Germany and Belgium settled in Rwanda and forced the peaceful monarchy into a system based on class that favored the Tutsi aristocracy. This created resentment and eventually upheaval that spurred the killing sprees of the 1960s and again in 1973. In fear for their families, many of those not killed decided to flee and became exiles of Rwanda. Thus, the Hutus came to be the powerful, governing class and racial tensions were profound. As children, Immaculee and her siblings were shielded from this unpleasantness. Immaculee had just one memory of the 1973 killings, and she had no context in which to place it. She recalled hiding at a neighbor's with her family, and returning to find that her house had burned to the ground. It would be years before Immaculee would recognize it as a hate crime targeted at her Tutsi family. By then, her father had rebuilt and hoped for a better future.



Higher Learning

Higher Learning Summary and Analysis

Immaculee was an excellent student but, like many Tutsis, she was overlooked in an effort to elevate Hutu children. The government intended to balance the school openings. Because the Hutus were the majority of the population, it was believed that Hutu children should also be the majority in the school system. Tutsi children had no rights protecting them from this discrimination and even the most gifted and deserving were often denied scholarships. When Immaculee was passed over for a scholarship to a good public school, her father took action. He sold two cows—an extravagant gesture both in money and reputation—to pay the tuition for Immaculee's first year of private high school. He was determined that his children would be well educated. Most families were not so fortunate, and outright payment of tuition was not possible for many. Immaculee studied hard and excelled and later took the government sponsored student exam and passed. She was invited to enter public high school and her parents threw a party to celebrate. She felt their pride and they shared in her joy.

As Immaculee entered high school the stage was set for increasing hostility between the Rwandan tribes. At the Lycee High School she made friends easily. She immediately befriended another Tutsi girl named Clementine. Immaculee felt safe and was loved by classmates, but could not venture beyond school walls because she feared for her safety. War broke out during her third and final year. In October of 1990 Immaculee learned about the existence of the Rwandan Patriotic Front. For the first time her classmates made her feel ashamed of her heritage. In the following days and weeks Immaculee grew increasingly ill at ease. The war was being fought in the north, but the school felt its residual tensions. The Hutu students began distancing themselves and acting cruel. In one instance, Immaculee was almost shot to death when an irrational, fearful girl mistook her for a soldier. Immaculee's teacher spoke about the war during class. He cautioned that it could go very badly for Tutsis. In response to the Hutu students' fear and anger Clementine devised a plan. If ever the campus became too hostile or was attacked by government soldiers, Clementine suggested that they retreat to the electrical room where they could commit suicide by electrocution. They argued that it was better than the alternative of torture or rape. Her contemplation of suicide reveals the serious nature of threats against Tutsis. Throughout her time at Lycee, Immaculee continued to hear the radio broadcasts. She also heard enough BBC reporting to know that much of what was aired on Rwanda's National Radio Station was unreliable. It was true that many Tutsis were being arrested without cause, and her father was amongst them. Her father's arrest introduces the reader to the burgomaster who would later order their family home to be burned down.



Off to University

Off to University Summary and Analysis

Off to University, the fourth chapter describes Immaculee's teenage years. In the summer of 1991 Immaculee was awarded a scholarship to the National University in Butare. Immaculee was the first girl in her family to attend a university and her family was very proud of her. Immaculee's high school friend Clementine was there as well. In addition to the opportunity to study, the girls received a stipend equal to \$30, which was a small fortune. Immaculee was smart, socially active, and felt independent with her new freedoms and her ability to pay for them. While at the university she met a protestant Hutu student named John. Leonard gave Immaculee his blessing to date John, as long as he didn't try to convert her to the protestant faith. He insisted that Immaculee continue with their family's faith and practices. Immaculee and John dated seriously and were monogamous. While her time at the University was filled with much studying and happy social outings, there were political undercurrents as well. The dichotomy between her social life and events in the north were seen. Hutus and Tutsis attempted and then broke peace many times over her collegiate years. It was at the University that Immaculee learned of the Interahamwe youth movement. Those who are angry, lacking direction, or abuse drugs and alcohol can easily be manipulated. This is how it happened that the Interahamwe, an established political party, attracted many youth and its popularity spread.

Life in Rwanda grew progressively worse. One day while visiting the city with John they witnessed a woman being robbed and attacked but were unable to help. John was convinced that if Immaculee were to defend the woman against her assailants, Immaculee would become a victim, too. John was not alone in his fears; all of the other passers-by continued without stopping as well. Because the Interahamwe and government were intertwined, asking the police for help was a futile effort. Immaculee encountered another similar situation not long afterward. While traveling with Damascene to a wedding, their bus was suddenly stopped. The bus could move no further because a large group of Interahamwe was blocking the way. Afraid to continue on, the bus driver announced that he was turning around in the direction from which they had come. After many debates and with great courage, Immaculee and Damascene left the bus and approached the roadblock. Immaculee proceeded forward with her rosary in one hand and her Rwandan issued identity card in the other. The Interahamwe seemed stunned by her boldness, but Immaculee was most surprised by her brother's fear. One month later President Habyarimana signed a peace agreement with the RPF leader Paul Kagame, which would have been a happy event if it were not for a military officer named Bagosora. Bagosora stormed away immediately following the agreement and vowed that he would never make peace with the Tutsis. Instead he vowed to create an apocalypse, a truly scary proposition. Foreshadowing can be seen in his reference to an apocalypse.



Returning Home

Returning Home Summary and Analysis

Immaculee awoke daily to the hatred spoken on her dorm room radio. Most students enjoyed the popular station RTL M and it fueled the division between Hutu and Tutsi students. Trying to ignore the awful commentary, Immaculee instead devoted herself to her studies and looked forward to returning home to visit her family for the Easter holiday. Upon leaving the campus for her vacation, Immaculee was accompanied by Vianney's friend, Augustine. Augustine was an extension of their family because, in addition to being friends with Vianney, he was also a brother of Sarah's (Immaculee's roommate). Together they returned to Mataba for the holiday.

Upon her arrival home, Immaculee was greeted by nearly her whole family. Aimable was the only one not present as he was completing his postgraduate work far away in Senegal. It was a joyous reunion filled with food and laughter. Yet it was not as happy an occasion as it could have been. Being as close to Damascene as she was, Immaculee could sense that although he was trying to be jovial, it was superficial and something was bothering him. While everyone else was enjoying themselves Immaculee questioned Damascene. Through much pain, sorrow and fear, Damascene admitted that he was troubled by the prospect of war in their village. He had seen the Interahamwe. Their conversation was overheard and rebutted by their father's assurances that their imaginations were running wild and things would settle down. Damascene countered his this by saying that he also knew of a list of targeted Tutsis, and their names were on it. Once again, his father reassured Damascene and despite Damascene's wanting to leave, they all spent the night. Immaculee and her siblings couldn't leave knowing their parents would be left alone to face the danger.

In the early hours of April 7, 1994, Damascene came to Immaculee's bedroom to alert her that the President's plane had been shot down the previous evening. Recalling the radio warnings that the president's assassination would surely be blamed on Tutsis, Immaculee was afraid. According to radio accounts, the President's plane had been shot down and the crash was fatal. The result was a country in turmoil, and a Tutsi hating government was now in power and roadblocks and military checkpoints were being created. Just twenty minutes after the plane crash, more than twenty Tutsi families had been killed, acts that were described as retribution. Among those killed on the first night was Immaculee's Uncle Twaza, a loving and peaceful man. Travel was immediately forbidden and public transportation was curtailed. Tutsi families were instructed to stay in their homes and literally await their deaths. Although it hadn't reached their village yet, the genocide had begun.



No Going Back

No Going Back Summary and Analysis

The national radio station continued to remind Tutsis to stay at home and also to encourage Hutus to use force against their neighboring Tutsis. The crimes were sanctioned. The government encouraged not just soldiers but also ordinary citizens to take action. Tutsis were described in desensitizing terms such as snake and cockroach, and their lives were thought to be meaningless. This was a recipe for death. Out of fear most Tutsis complied with the government's policy of house arrest and were killed in their own homes. Not knowing what else to do, Immaculee turned to her studies. This was more of a distraction than true learning, but it had the additional effect of making her appear calm and hopeful, traits that her brothers did not share.

Her family huddled by the radio constantly listening to the grim news. The only promising item was a message from Paul Kagame, the RPF leader, who promised that if the killing of Tutsis didn't stop he and his soldiers would fight their way in to rescue their Tutsi countrymen. This news struck her father as sensible- if they could just live through the next few days they would be liberated and safe once again. Immaculee had always been a good girl. She knew her place in her family and society and did not challenge her elders. Under the circumstances, though, for the first time she felt the need to voice her opinion. She disagreed with her father and said so.

At dawn the village of Mataba was attacked by Interahamwe. Homes were destroyed by grenades and any Tutsis who escaped the explosions were killed immediately by use of a machete, the common weapon of the Interahamwe. Following the sound of screams, Immaculee and her family looked down from their hilltop to view an awful scene. One of their neighbors was being mercilessly chopped to death with multiple machetes wielded by a group of Interahamwe. On their other side they saw more Tutsi friends and neighbors swarming towards their property. Because he was known as the peacemaker and problem solver, Leonard's home was a place for the community to seek refuge, both in body and spirit. Within a few hours over 2,000 people congregated at Leonard's home. At this point Immaculee began to question God as to why this was happening. It wasn't long before the crowd had increased to more than 10,000 Tutsi refugees. Forever the optimist, Leonard tried to console everyone. He reminded them to have faith. They outnumbered the Hutu extremists and the RPF was on its way. He reasoned that if they must fight to survive they would, but only once provoked and only as necessary for their own protection. The men of the group were able to repeatedly chase away the Interahamwe by throwing stones, but they knew they were surrounded and killings along the periphery continued.

Fearing for her father's safety in battle, Immaculee ran to her room to retrieve her scapular. Leonard took the gift and gave Immaculee his personal rosary in exchange. The Interahamwe continued to return in larger numbers, and Damascene feared for Immaculee's safety. He urged her to leave, but she resisted. She wanted to tend to her



family. By this time her father had realized the severity of the situation and agreed that she should leave. As a female Tutsi, if caught she would surely be raped as well as tortured and killed. She was directed to go to Pastor Murinzi's home until the fighting was over. Because Augustine was a guest of her father's home, he was also sent away to Pastor Murinzi's. They had the misfortune of coming across a band of Interahamwe along the road to the Pastor's home. What could have been disastrous ended without violence. Among the Interahamwe was a friend, Kageyo, who let them pass and instructed his brethren to do the same.



The Pastor's House

The Pastor's House Summary and Analysis

Immaculee was glad to arrive safely at Pastor Murinzi's. The trip there was frightening. Pastor Murinzi was the Protestant minister of the community. Although he and Leonard were both men of God, it was rumored that Pastor Murinzi harbored an unfavorable opinion of Immaculee's father, Leonard. Pastor Murinzi lived in a spacious home complete with indoor plumbing. It was nestled among the shacks of his congregation. Pastor Murinzi's children had been longtime friends of Immaculee's and the Pastor was also an uncle of her boyfriend, John.

While the pastor greeted her warmly, the same could not be said of his guests. The first familiar face she saw was that of Buhoro, the teacher who had long ago humiliated her during the daily roll call in his classroom. She approached him in a respectful manner as she had been taught to do, and he coldly assessed her before turning his back. Immaculee focused on her manners and continued to greet everyone in the room before retreating with Augustine. Next Immaculee saw Janet, her best friend since elementary school. Immaculee was overcome with happiness and said so. She spoke of how they would spend this difficult time together and expressed her friendship. Immaculee was heartbroken to find that her feelings were not reciprocated. Janet returned her greetings with a cold shoulder, emphasizing that they were not friends and neither she nor her family would be helping Immaculee. Their harsh treatment was a shock to Immaculee. Immaculee wondered how a friend could turn to foe so quickly. The reactions of the Pastor's guests towards Immaculee were a sign of how callous and cold people would be in future months.

The only kindness that day came from Lechim, Pastor Murinzi's youngest son and a close friend of Immaculee's. Lechim led her and Augustine to the room of Dusenge, one of Pastor Murinzi's daughters. She was also a kind soul and treated Immaculee and Augustine well. This may have been because Pastor Murinzi, who was now a widower, had married a Tutsi woman who bore all of his children. Thus, the children were of mixed heritage and could respect all people. The tension of the last few days was wearing on Immaculee and she drifted off to sleep. It wasn't long before she was awoken by Damascene. He brought news that he had been separated from their parents and their home had been burned down. Because her father wanted so much to believe in the inherent goodness of people, he had gone to request help from the government. In particular he had gone to ask for aid from the burgomaster Mr. Kabayi. This turned out to be a terrible mistake as Mr Kabayi was not his friend and had been responsible for his previous arrest. The soldiers taunted him and ultimately destroyed the house. During the attack, the thousands of Tutsis gathered there dispersed in all directions, including their parents who left the scene aboard Leonard's motorcycle. The realization that they were trapped was sickening. Immaculee tried desperately to hold onto hope and to instill it in her brothers, but it was slipping away. Damascene left Vianney, Augustine, and Immaculee at Pastor Murinzi's. He was aware of the Pastor's

feelings for their father and he had been seen arriving there. He hoped that by leaving the Pastor's house he could ensure their safety. It was the last time they would ever see Damascene alive.



Farewell to the Boys

Farewell to the Boys Summary and Analysis

A few hours later the Pastor brought five additional Tutsi women to the room where Immaculee was waiting. He rushed them along and reminded them to be quiet before leaving as quickly as he had come. While they seemed familiar, these were not women Immaculee knew well. They were brought together by circumstance. Voices screaming "Kill them!" could be heard outside the house. The women each searched for a place to hide within the room. Immaculee noticed a crawl space in the ceiling. They all climbed up and remained there for two hours until the Pastor returned to his seemingly empty room. The Pastor confided that he didn't know what to do with the women. The situation on the streets was escalating. He reassured them that he would not release them to the streets and devised a plan. In the morning he would move them to another room where they would stay until the killing ceased. They had to be quiet because he was the only one allowed to know about their existence, and if the killers found out both the Pastor and the women would surely die. In light of this, he would tell everyone in the house, even his family, that he had sent the women away. He also announced to Immaculee that he would be sending away Augustine and Vianney, but he would grant Immaculee the privilege of saying goodbye. This was a difficult task for Immaculee. It was bittersweet to see Vianney and Augustine one last time and she feared for their safety.

Into the Bathroom

Into the Bathroom Summary and Analysis

The women's new place of shelter was a small bathroom. The Pastor expected absolute silence. He feared for himself as well as the women if they should be discovered. While the conditions were small and rough, neither they nor the Pastor expected that they would have to endure them for long. When the Pastor closed the door the women were plunged into complete quiet and darkness. There wasn't room for everyone, so the tallest sat with the youngest on their laps for hours at a time. Sleep came fitfully and emotions ran wild. They only changed positions a few times per day and their muscles ached and atrophied. On their second day in hiding they overheard the Pastor assuring soldiers that he was a good Hutu and would never hide Tutsis. The women knew that he had to keep them now—for better or for worse—because he had lied to the government.

Immaculee increased the time she spent in prayer. While in hiding Immaculee's thoughts often turned toward her family. She prayed for their safety, as well as her own, the safety of the women accompanying her and for all Tutsis. She realized that she was surrounded not by loving neighbors but by hateful extremists and pondered the meaning of faith and life. She thanked God for Pastor Murinzi's willingness to shelter them, but she found it impossible to pray for the Hutu extremist soldiers. She spent many hours—upwards of 18—in prayer with her father's rosary everyday.

At the top of the outside facing bathroom wall there was a small window that had a makeshift curtain of sorts but provided some air exchange and voices flowed in from outside. These voices were the ladies' source of information and torment. Immaculee once peeked out to see the house surrounded by seemingly crazed men that carried spears and machetes, dressed like devils in forest clothes, and chanting slogans of death directed toward Tutsis. While watching them Immaculee realized that these were not trained soldiers invading her village, but were her neighbors. They were people she had lived amongst peacefully for years. In response to this sight, Immaculee tried to pray but found she was without words. Instead she heard the Devil's temptation. She forced away the temptation to slide into fear and lose her faith. Instead she kept praying.



Confronting My Anger

Confronting My Anger Summary and Analysis

Over the next month the killers returned many times. The women could hear them searching the grounds outside Pastor Murinzi's house, and sometimes even inside the house. The Pastor would visit infrequently, and brought food when he could, which was not often enough. The first month was difficult on their bodies, minds and souls. Despite the conditions, Immaculee had developed an awareness of God. She was actively asking God questions and found that his answers came to her in prayer. The women began to lose weight, but the only sign was that their clothes were suddenly too large. Aside from not eating well, the emotional stress and isolation left them unable to sleep. On one of the Pastor's visits Immaculee had the idea of moving the Pastor's wardrobe in front of the bathroom door. The bulky piece of furniture was roughly the same size as the door and Immaculee hoped it would render the bathroom door unnoticeable, plus it was not easily moved due to its size. The Pastor agreed. The Pastor's wardrobe provides an example of how Immaculee's requests for help were answered by God. She felt that the idea to move it came through her from God, and it was beneficial. The wardrobe effectively hid the bathroom entrance from the Interahamwe's sight.

Over their time in isolation, the women were forced to create a sort of sign language to communicate because they were not allowed to speak. They prayed silently, used their sign language and moved just twice daily. The days were long and hard, but Immaculee focused her energies on prayer. Their menstrual cycles came and went without privacy, as did use of the toilet. Their food rations were increasingly sporadic and the quality of food declined. The Pastor feared cooking for anyone extra, so he brought only table scraps fit for the family's animals. They were allowed ample water to drink. Quiet days occurred, but the women were always scared back into reality when the killers returned.

One day the Pastor's son, Sembega, came to visit his father in his bedroom, which was adjacent to the bathroom in which they were hiding. The women overheard a troubling conversation in which Sembega endorsed the killing of Tutsis. Sembega was quoting his history lessons in school, which had taught him to hate Tutsis and retaliate. The killings were clearly supported by the government and its many branches. Pastor Murinzi tried unsuccessfully to remind Sembega of his mother's heritage and make him see the error of his thinking. This only caused Sembega to confront his father about the rumor that he was hiding Tutsis, which Pastor Murinzi strongly denied.



Struggling to Forgive

Struggling to Forgive Summary and Analysis

When Pastor Murinzi next came to visit the women he brought awful news. In his opinion, what was happening outside was far worse than the killings of 1959 and 1973. All commerce, transport, education, communication and employment in the city had ended. The government was talking about the job at hand (killing Tutsis) and the city's usual activities would not be restored until the task was completed. Tutsis had gone to the churches for protection, but even the sanctity of the churches had not been respected. Instead the churches became easy targets for mass slaughter. Pastor Murinzi informed them that the bodies were stacked high all along the streets and outside of homes and buildings. The resulting smell was unbearable. Immaculee responded with anger. She did not want the gruesome details to be shared with her. She did not want to lose her family. She did not want the genocide to be happening. She wanted to retaliate against the extremist Hutus who were persecuting her people. The women listened closely to the radio to ascertain the validity of Pastor Murinzi's words. Unfortunately, the radio almost always brought bad news and what they heard was often shocking. A government minister was using the radio to call out to all Hutus. He proclaimed that it was their duty to kill Tutsi people, including the elderly, women, and children. Rwandan culture had historically stressed obligation, and this request resounded with the Hutu people of Rwanda. The Tutsis only hope of survival lay with the RPF, which was slowly making progress southward.

Immaculee continued to pray on her rosary many hours each day. Immaculee faced inner turmoil. She tried to pray with an open heart and forgive all people including the killers. She found unconditional forgiveness hard to achieve. Compounding her difficulty were the sounds she heard drifting in through the window. One day they heard screaming followed by a baby's wail. Immaculee assumed the worst that she knew the killers were capable of. They had killed the mother and left the baby to die. How could she pray for people who committed such acts? She asked God for his help and he answered her through prayer. She suddenly knew that the reason he expected her to forgive, and to be able to pray, is because God sees everyone as his children, even those that partake in evil acts. Immaculee came to see the murderers as misguided children. She blamed evil for infecting their hearts and minds, but believed that they were not inherently evil. Through this conversation with God Immaculee was able to understand God's love more completely, and she was able to pray for everyone, including those inflicting harm. For the first time since she entered hiding Immaculee was able to sleep in peace.



No Friends to Turn To

No Friends to Turn To Summary and Analysis

Immaculee used the depth of her renewed faith and devoted herself anew to God. Even as atrocities occurred around her, she meditated and lost herself, and sometimes lost whole days, in prayer. Her peace was broken by one of Pastor Murinzi's visits. On this day he brought them table scraps and harsh words. He accused Immaculee's father of being a bad Tutsi. Immaculee didn't understand and the Pastor explained further. He had heard that her father had been planning a civil war in cooperation with the RPF. He told her that soldiers had found guns, grenades and a Hutu death list in her home. Immaculee believed fiercely in her family's goodness and knew these accusations couldn't be true. Immaculee knew instinctively that if people were spreading such awful stories about her father it was probably because they had already killed him. She chose to honor him by defending his virtuousness. She challenged Pastor Murinzi by asking if he had so many weapons, why hadn't he used them? Where were the weapons and had he actually seen or was he blindly believing lies and propaganda? Seeing how poor his evidence was Immaculee was reminded again how easily people could be fooled and manipulated. She was deeply upset by her confrontation with the Pastor and requested a bible. He brought her one and she replaced the awful words and images with God's word.

Her reverie was broken by the voice of the new president on the radio. He wanted to personally congratulate the Hutus on the excellent progress they were making in ridding the country of Tutsis. He promised such rewards as food and beer, celebrations and paradise. This was a tempting offer for many Hutus. Upon learning that the killings were rampant and that the majority of Tutsis were dead, the women felt despair. In this weak moment Immaculee experienced further insult. She overheard her life long friend, Janet, expressing her distaste for Immaculee. This was a crushing blow for Immaculee. She was learning that many of her friends and neighbors had easily turned toward hatred and violence. Hearing Janet's harsh words caused Immaculee to wish she were safe back at her university dorm. This was not a likely scenario. The radio was broadcasting a victory at Immaculee's university campus. The Tutsi population there had been massacred, along with some moderate Hutus. If Immaculee had not returned home for Easter, she would have been killed as well. She had escaped the university killing spree. Instead she was a refugee in hiding, surrounded by people wishing her harm. Immaculee felt as though she was losing everyone she loved, both her friends and family, and was reconciling herself to her new life. She was hardening her heart against the continuous stream of bad news she heard. Her only comforts were the biblical psalms reminding her of God's love and safety.



A Gathering of Orphans

A Gathering of Orphans Summary and Analysis

In an effort to complete the genocide, the government was directing the radio stations and verbally encouraging Hutu acts of violence. The government distributed machetes at local gas stations and military personnel were delivering guns and grenades in a door to door fashion. The radio stations could be heard reminding Hutus of their obligation to destroy all Tutsis including children. Rwandan crops were failing, but the genocide remained the government's priority. The Pastor's home was not immune to the weapons distributors. Even though he was a man of God, he was given a rifle. While this appeared frightening, he assured the women that it was only to make his act believable, and he would not use it unless necessary. Because the women could also hear the occasional BBC broadcast from their hiding spot, they felt that the happenings in Rwanda were known across the world. The United Nations had withdrawn its troops instead of bolstering forces. How could the larger nations not come to their aid? Would help never come? Would every Tutsi lay dead? In an effort to make it appear that Tutsis had never existed, government officials began destroying documents, first from school and work records, then birth, marriage and death certificates. That information wouldn't be needed once the Tutsis were eradicated.

The killing dragged on. Days had turned into months and Pastor Murinzi worried that he wouldn't be able to continue hiding the ladies. No one had had any idea that the war would last so long when it began. With failing crops and halted commerce, the Pastor was concerned that he wouldn't be able to find additional food without arousing suspicions. The Pastor turned to prayer, but it was not a comforting prayer. He asked the women to pray with him for the government's speedy victory. He was asking them to pray for their own deaths! Instead, Immaculee held the Pastor's hand, but silently prayed her own version. She prayed for the souls of the murdered Tutsis who had gone before her, and then she prayed for their killers.

During their time in hiding Immaculee was not the only one who spent time thinking. Pastor Murinzi was also making plans. His idea was to smuggle the girls out of the area after the war's end and bring them to a remote island in the middle of Lake Kivu. There they could live with the Abashi tribesmen. The Pastor feared that his part in their survival would be discovered. He also reasoned that there would be no remaining Tutsis anyway, so starting over somewhere new seemed plausible. Unfortunately for the women, living among the Abashi tribe was not a comforting thought. The Abashi were a primitive tribe. In fact, Rwandan parents would often scare their children into obedience with threats of sending them to live with the Abashi.

Far from being alone, Immaculee felt like a child of God. What the Pastor said was true: most of her people had been lost in the genocide, but her relationship with God was thriving. She was comforted by the thought that she would never be alone because she was with God. Immaculee and her companions were also adopted by Pastor Murinzi's

children, Lechim and Dusenge. For the first month of their hiding the Pastor shared their whereabouts with no one. However, as the stress of concealing them became too difficult, he shared their presence with the two people he most trusted. Lechim and Dusenge were like a breath of fresh air and always treated the women with kindness when they were together.

One night in May, in their second month in hiding, two additional Tutsi survivors greeted the women. The survivors were disguised as Interahamwe. Their costume had assured their safe passage but it terrified Immaculee and her companions who feared they'd been discovered. After recovering from their surprise, the women learned that the two newest arrivals had been hiding in the home of Pastor Murinzi's eldest daughter since the war broke out. Like the Pastor, her home had been searched repeatedly and she feared for their safety. The women told stories of the bodies they had seen on the streets along the way to Pastor Murinzi's. The corpses were rotting and dogs were ravaging those that were fresh. They also explained how the country had gone wild. Despite the atrocities she learned about that day, Immaculee managed to fall asleep. That night she dreamed of Jesus. He told her that her family had perished but that she should not be afraid. They were with him and were happy. The dream was a sort of solace to Immaculee. Of course, she hoped that it were not true; she wanted her family to be alive and waiting for her when the war ended; but if it were true and they were gone, then she and her family had been promised God's unconditional love and companionship through Jesus.

Immaculee had experienced times of anger, sadness and shock during her time in hiding. Because of the danger associated with making noise she had never cried. Instead she turned to silent prayer and meditation. That changed on the day she learned of Damascene's death. While in her hiding spot she overheard a conversation amongst killers outside the bathroom window. They were laughing at how they had taunted a Tutsi master's student and opened his skull to see what such a smart brain looked like. Because not many Rwandans were fortunate enough to experience such a high level of schooling, Immaculee correctly assumed that they were speaking of her beloved brother Damascene. On this day she cried heavily and never cried again until after gaining her freedom.



The Gift of Tongues

The Gift of Tongues Summary and Analysis

The second month of hiding found the women gaunt, weak and infected with lice. They were suffering but it was necessary to remain in hiding until the war ended. While outwardly an unattractive sight, Immaculee felt loved by God. She was thankful for each day that she was allowed to survive. As her days of confinement increased, Immaculee felt more confident about her survival. She rationalized that God wouldn't let her survive that long for no reason. She was sick with high fevers and delirium during her time in hiding. No medication was available and Immaculee prayed for God's intervention. She was spared which further enhanced her feeling of ultimate safety and belief in God.

The women were a captive audience. They overheard everything that occurred both inside and out of the house and absorbed it. Then, during extensive times of silence, they thought about what they had heard. One day Immaculee heard the Pastor's excitement as he related news that the UN was considering sending troops to Rwanda for aid. Anticipating an end to the war, Immaculee started to wonder what Rwanda would be like. She would be exposed to English speaking people and so she decided to learn the English language. Immaculee obtained a French-English dictionary and an additional book written in English from the Pastor. Because the French speaking country of Belgium had colonized Rwanda in times past, Rwandan citizens learned French as part of their education. Immaculee utilized her background in French as well as the dictionary to translate the book provided by Pastor Murinzi. Immaculee believed that God gave strength, but it was up to the individual to make things happen. She studied hard and taught herself the English language in just three weeks. To complete her plans, she continued to think positively. She imagined herself working for the UN, which she hoped would help end the war and reconstruct Rwanda. She focused on conversational English and the words she would most likely need to obtain employment. She dreamed of what life would be like after the war.

In June Immaculee realized that life after the war would not be as she had expected prior to the genocide. As the rebel Tutsi soldiers fought and pushed back the Interahamwe, they were moving south. Many Hutus feared retaliation and were also moving south, just ahead of the RPF soldiers. Among these Hutus was John, Immaculee's boyfriend before the war. Because he was a relative of Pastor Murinzi, he came to the Pastor's house to visit. Immaculee could hear his laughter during her confinement that day. She hoped he would treat her lovingly and that all would be well between them. Late that night when they were reunited she was disappointed. He was happy to see her, but the love between them had passed.

Unlikely Saviors

Unlikely Saviors Summary and Analysis

The Interahamwe could be heard beneath the bathroom window boasting about killings and gang rapes they had conducted personally, witnessed or heard about. Their information made the women sick with disgust and anger. When the bragging had ended, some of the soldiers began to discuss the politics of war. Sembeba mentioned that he'd heard France was sending troops to Rwanda to stop the fighting. While France historically had good relations with the Rwandan government, it was unclear if they would support the genocide. With the scrutiny of the world they were equally as likely to help the RPF. The French intervention was called Operation Turquoise and would be stationed at Lake Kivu. The UN was supporting France's efforts, and public announcements said that Tutsi survivors would be protected in French camps. However, Tutsi survivors had to safely arrive at the safe havens and Interahamwe were still scouting the streets and forests. Pastor Murinzi was not in favor of them seeking French protection. Immaculee felt differently and asked the Pastor to take her to the French soldiers. The women were excited by the prospect of leaving the bathroom after three months of confinement. The French soldiers would either help them or kill them swiftly, but either result seemed better than waiting to be found and then tortured. The Pastor agreed to find the French camp. He was concerned about the women's condition. After remaining so long in hiding he worried about how they would function outside of his home. One evening prior to their release he invited them to the living room for a late night movie showing. This initiated more trouble for the women and their keeper. The light from the television was noticed and reported to the Interahamwe by Pastor Murinzi's houseboy.



Keeping the Faith

Keeping the Faith Summary and Analysis

This chapter brings the reader back to the time that was foreshadowed in the introduction. The Interahamwe again search the Pastor's house, but this search was different from the others. The killers had specific information that originated from the Pastor's houseboy who had witnessed the lighted room at a time when the house should have been dark. Because of the nature of the tip, the killers were ambitious. They arrived calling Immaculee's name. One killer even taunted her by saying he had killed 399 already, and she would make his 400th—a good number. They also threatened the Pastor. Immaculee fainted from fear and exhaustion. In her sleep she dreamed of Jesus. She dreamed she was floating above the room. Although she could see and hear the commotion she was not afraid. God said he would put a cross upon the door to protect her, and she saw the vision of a cross on the bathroom door. She knew she and the others were safe. Eventually the killers left and blamed the houseboy for misinforming them. The ladies had come extremely close to being discovered and it was time for them to leave.

Over the next week they waited for the French to set up camp. It seemed a second houseboy had discovered them when he requested to clean the bathroom. His request was denied, which seemed odd. When the Pastor left for the day the houseboy stood beneath the window listening intently. He appeared to want confirmation of their presence before bringing his suspicions to the Interahamwe as the last houseboy had done. Fortunately the Pastor had found the French soldiers and planned to evacuate the women early the next morning. Prior to leaving, the Pastor wanted them to meet his family. The Pastor's ten children, all except Lechim and Dusenge, were concurrently appalled by the women's condition and amazed that their father had kept them secret for so long. He told his children that if ever they were in the same predicament, even if it meant risking their life as he had, he hoped they would act in accordance with God and offer help. The children all seemed to have pride and respect for their father and what he had done. Sembega, who had outwardly mixed with the Interahamwe, was the only exception. Immaculee was touched by the tenderness between the Pastor and his children.



The Pain of Freedom

The Pain of Freedom Summary and Analysis

Leaving the bathroom exposed Immaculee's senses to many forgotten sensations. She felt happy to be alive. Pastor Murinzi and his family (except Sembeba) escorted the ladies. They were armed with spears and knives and created a protective circle around the women, but Immaculee wondered if the circle could protect them from the Interahamwe. They did pass Interahamwe on their way but went unnoticed amongst the men in the dark night. After passing the Interahamwe the Pastor became scared and forced the women to go the rest of the way unprotected and alone. The Pastor and his family hid in the bushes and watched the women as they proceeded forward, but Immaculee wondered if the women would be rescued should they need it. It was 500 yards to the camp and the women ran as fast as their weak bodies could carry them. Immaculee spoke to the soldiers in French and told them her identity but the soldiers were skeptical. It seemed unlikely that a group of eight women would escape and find their way to the safety of the camp. After some convincing, the survivors were ushered into the camp and fed. After months of terror the women felt safe under the protection of trained soldiers carrying weapons for their protection and not their demise.

Jean Paul, another survivor at the camp, recognized Immaculee and greeted her with tears of joy. She and Jean Paul exchanged their stories and he had news of her family. He confirmed that her father had died on April 14th, just a few days after her mother. Vianney, his friend Augustine, and Damascene were also confirmed dead. With the details of their deaths, though, Immaculee was able to ascertain the location of her mother's and Damascene's remains. She had much to mourn and retreated to a quiet corner for prayer.

That night they were moved from the field camp to a base camp by military truck. The drive was difficult and they had to pass through multiple Hutu checkpoints. Although the French soldiers were armed they were outnumbered. It could have been a disaster but God seemed to be protecting them again and the survivors arrived safely. The base camp had been set up at her mother's old school house, an irony that did not go unnoticed by Immaculee. At the schoolhouse Immaculee discovered that two of her aunts and three of her cousins had also survived. In some ways their conditions were worse than Immaculee's. They had hid in the forest foraging food and avoiding the Interahamwe as best as they could. Despite their best efforts most of their families had been killed. Their bodies were covered with open and infected sores and their clothes were threadbare. Immaculee's Aunt Esperance had managed to cling to a letter written by Damascene and meant for Immaculee. She was finally able to deliver it.



A Letter from Damascene

A Letter from Damascene Summary and Analysis

Reading Damascene's letter was an incredibly painful process for Immaculee. First, she knew that Damascene had been killed, and so these were his last words to her. Second, he began the letter hopeful, but then, after learning of their parents' and Vianney's deaths, the tone of the letter changed. Still, he signed it with love and Immaculee knew how he had cared for her. Immaculee would later learn that even as he was being tortured, Damascene refused to divulge the details of Immaculee's hiding place. Damascene's death was brutal but he died with dignity. Learning of his death was difficult for Immaculee and reading the letter from him brought her sadness.



Camp Comfort

Camp Comfort Summary and Analysis

The French Camp was constructed well. It was a place of safety that kept Tutsi survivors in and vengeful Hutus out. The soldiers socialized with the Tutsi survivors, making them laugh and trying to restore some sense of normalcy to their days. While there, Immaculee began to heal a little and was nourished with food. For the first time in months she was able to clean herself with soap. She met a French soldier who apologized for having not arrived sooner and also for his country's indecision. In his opinion, their delayed response allowed the killings to continue for far too long. Another soldier developed a crush on Immaculee. He was attracted to her strength of character and sense of humor. He expressed his feelings for her but Immaculee was far from ready to love again. Because Immaculee was bilingual she was asked to assist the soldiers. She recorded the daily inflow of Tutsi survivors and reported their needs to the soldiers. She also recorded their personal stories. Immaculee found that this task suited her and she was pleased to help. Immaculee made some close friends during her stay in the camp.

Communications were still down and the country was in turmoil, although the French were helping. Immaculee knew Aimable was far away, hopefully studying peacefully in Senegal, but she had no way to reach him. While she waited, Immaculee concentrated on helping the French translate and aiding the survivors of the camp. More Tutsis arrived daily and many were ill. They had been tortured physically and mentally. Some had infections and could not possibly survive. Among the most distressing aspect were the many orphans. Immaculee vowed to help the orphans throughout her life.

One day a burst of happiness arrived at the camp. The deep laughter emanated from a woman named Aloise. She was confined to a wheel chair and had two young children accompanying her. Aloise had been a friend of Immaculee's mother, Rose. Because of her respect for Rose, Aloise offered Immaculee and her friends a place to stay after the war. Immaculee had once again been adopted and was convinced God had a plan for her.



The Road to the Rebels

The Road to the Rebels Summary and Analysis

Late in August the French government declared that Operation Turquoise was ending. All survivors were to be transferred to RPF custody for their protection. The survivors piled into the back of a French military truck and started their journey. Along the way they were surrounded by Interahamwe and the familiar feeling of dread filled Immaculee. Half way to the RPF camp the French driver received orders to stop the truck. There were reports of fighting up ahead and he had been ordered not to engage. This meant the Tutsi survivors must get out of the truck and walk the rest of the way themselves without protection from the French soldiers. Just ten feet away stood the Interahamwe with weapons, yet Immaculee and her friends were forced to disembark. With courage she exuded but didn't truly feel, Immaculee started walking and encouraged her friends to do the same. They made slow progress because they were pushing Aloise's wheelchair over the rutted roads and carrying her children. With the constant Interahamwe presence they decided it was best to split up. Immaculee prayed and then forged ahead with two of her friends. Killers, some of which recognized her, surrounded Immaculee and her fellow survivors, but still they moved on. Immaculee prayed constantly and after just one half of a mile she realized the Interahamwe had left.



On to Kigali

On to Kigali Summary and Analysis

Immaculee and her friends arrived safely at the RPF roadblock but were treated with disdain. The RPF found it difficult to believe that the Tutsis had survived and questioned them as if they were Hutu spies. Eventually Immaculee was recognized by her friend, Bazil, who was an RPF soldier. They were then accepted and a rescue party was sent to retrieve Aloise and the others. Surrounded by fellow Tutsis and finally safe from harm, Immaculee wondered how to rebuild her life. She had no family, no job, no money, and worst of all no prospects for a future; but she had her faith, the clothes on her back, and her father's rosary. She prayed. Her prayers were answered in the form of RPF Major Ntwali, who offered to bring her and her eleven friends back to Aloise's home in Kigali. The major also loaded the transport truck with enough food to last them a few months. His generosity was appreciated and they looked forward to returning to a home. Unfortunately, the state of Kigali was not good when they returned. The bustling city had turned into an empty city full of rubble. Aloise's home was in disrepair. Explosions during the war had blown out the windows, the walls had bullet holes, and the roof was falling in. Aloise was reunited with her husband, though, and together they began to rebuild.



The Lord's Work

The Lord's Work Summary and Analysis

Despite the awful conditions of Kigali, Immaculee continued to think positively. Land mines were hidden in the streets and there were corpses everywhere. Immaculee was careful as she made her way to the UN building to request employment. She had washed her clothes and practiced her English. Despite her efforts, she was turned away repeatedly. Immaculee began thinking about things that would improve her chances of finding a job. She needed new clothes and proof that she was educated. She resolved to return to her university dorm and sort through her possessions. The drive was four hours and a taxi was not an option. A solution presented itself in the form of Dr. Abel, one of her university professors. He recognized her and gave her a ride to the campus. The beautiful campus held many memories for her, but its current condition didn't resemble any of her recollections. The war had ravaged the exterior, and the soldiers had plundered the interior. Her clothing was gone but she did manage to find her documents, a few family pictures and some money. Immaculee paid for a taxi back to Kigali, purchased some new clothes for herself, and bought groceries for her friends. The following day she returned to the UN again searching for work. She was not granted a job through the usual channels, but she was mistaken for someone else which proved beneficial. A UN spokesman, Mr. Pierre Mehu, had mistaken her for a former employee who had been killed in the genocide. After hearing Immaculee's story he was inclined to help. While he could not give her a job, he could enroll her in the appropriate testing and help her through the process. Her ardent study habits paid off again, and Immaculee passed her United Nations clerical exams.

Immaculee loved working as a clerk for the UN. She had a stable and rewarding job. She was able to contribute to Aloise's family and support herself. She was learning how to live again and focusing on her blessings. By October more than a million Tutsis living in exile had returned to Rwanda. They almost equaled in number the Tutsis that had been murdered. The country was changing and Immaculee felt it was time to leave. Among her many prayers Immaculee asked God to find her a new home. Sarah, her friend and university roommate, had been searching for Immaculee and discovered her at Aloise's home. It was the answer to Immaculee's prayers, and she packed right away to go live with Sarah's family. It was in Sarah's home that Immaculee began the healing process and mourned the loss of her family. This chapter was about a new beginning for Immaculee.

Burying the Dead

Burying the Dead Summary and Analysis

The years following the genocide were ones of faith for Immaculee. While at Sarah's she continued to heal and transfer her story to paper. She kept her job at the UN. Consequently, the genocide was never far from her mind but she was integrating it with her current life. A UN employee, Colonel Gueye, would eventually bring Immaculee and Sarah back to Mataba for a visit. While there, Immaculee exhumed the remains of her mother and Damascene, and buried them properly on the grounds of her old family home, surrounded by friends, neighbors and survivors. She also visited her aunts and surviving cousins who continued to struggle after returning to their village.

Forgiving the Living and Epilogue

Forgiving the Living and Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Immaculee's story could be one of horror, despair or hate, but it is not. Instead it is a story of love and faith. Immaculee's faith in God protected her and saw her through an awful period in history. Immaculee visited the Kibuye prison and confronted the leader of the gang accused of murdering her family. She granted him her forgiveness. She moved forward from the atrocities and married a peaceful, catholic man with whom she bore two beautiful children. She was reunited with her only surviving brother, Aimable, who also married after the genocide. Immaculee and her husband continue to work with the United Nations creating peace abroad. The final chapter of *Left to Tell* provides closure.



Characters

Immaculee Ilibagiza

Immaculee is the main character of this autobiography. Immaculee was raised on the shores of Lake Kivu in a village called Mataba in the country of Rwanda. Immaculee was the only daughter in the family and she had three brothers named Aimable, Damascene and Vianney. Her parents were kind hearted people, teachers within the community. *Left to Tell* gives a review of her complete life with specific detail to the atrocities that occurred during the 1990 Rwandan Holocaust. During the Holocaust Immaculee spent over three months in hiding. While in hiding she suffered enormously yet grew in faith. The holocaust was the result of ethnic rivalry between the extremist Hutus and their victims, the Tutsis. The genocide took the lives of nearly a million Tutsi people including the majority of Immaculee's family. Because of the killing of Tutsis, and being a Tutsi herself, Immaculee was forced into hiding during the genocide. She hid in a small bathroom with seven other women. They were often lacking in food and Immaculee became sick multiple times. To survive this horrific time Immaculee embraced her faith. Immaculee prayed daily and had several spiritual visions. Through her communications with God she learned to forgive her aggressors. Her goal in writing this book is to share not just her story but also the steps with which others can grow in faith and ultimately forgive as well.

Pastor Murinzi

Pastor Murinzi is the Protestant pastor who hid Immaculee and seven other women during the holocaust. Pastor Murinzi was known to harbor ill feeling towards Immaculee's father, Leonard, yet he welcomed her into his home. Hiding the women was risky for himself and for his family. Extremist Hutus were killing not only Tutsis during the genocide, but also moderate Hutus and Hutus who were found to be helping Tutsis.

The Pastor's home was repeatedly searched by the Interahamwe. The Pastor had times of charity and times of insensitivity. At one point he accused Immaculee's father of conspiring to start a civil war. Another time he devised a plan to send the women to a remote island for the rest of their lives. Overall, though, he managed to keep the women alive during the war and eventually arranged their escape. Pastor Murinzi had interesting relationships within his family. Although Pastor Murinzi was a Hutu, he had married a Tutsi woman. By the time of the story she had passed away, but their children, according to custom, were considered Hutu. The Pastor had tried to instill the idea of equality among the races within his children. Two of his children were especially kind and respected their mother's heritage. The opposite could be said of his son, Sembeba. Immaculee expressed thanks to God for sending Pastor Murinzi to watch over them.



Rose- Immaculee's mother

Immaculee's mother was also involved in the community. Rose was a kind-hearted woman known to go above and beyond her call of duty. She was respectfully referred to as Teacher, not just for her profession, but for the thoughtful ways she aided the village and the many hours she spent tutoring children, even those not enrolled in her classes. Rose could often be found sewing school uniforms for the students at no charge. She had once extended her monthly salary and personal time to purchase the material and sew all of the dresses for the wedding of a neighbor's daughter, whose family was unable to afford the event.

Rose tended to the fields each morning while the family slept. She checked on the crops, gave tools and instruction to the laborers employed there, fed and watered the family's animals. Only then, after significant effort, would she return home and get everyone fed and ready for the day. She then walked to the small school where she was employed full time as a teacher. She also cleaned the home, prepared all of the family's meals and even served as barber.

Leonard

Leonard was Immaculee's father. Leonard was the Roman Catholic Pastor of Mataba. He was revered by his fellow villagers and was often looked to for guidance. He was known to be fair and compassionate and abided by his faith. He prayed the rosary often and consulted God daily. He reminded his children that one could never pray too much. Immaculee attended mass regularly along with all of the members of her family. Following God's love, her parents saw no boundaries between religions, social status or ethnicity. They fully embodied the term Christian. Immaculee's father dedicated many hours to his community, enriching it through religious, building, and scholastic ventures. He was eventually elevated to the director of his school. Leonard's teachings had a profound effect on Immaculee's faith.

Brothers- Aimable and Vianney

The eldest son was named Aimable. He was known as the serious brother. He was also humble and shy. Aimable was very peaceful by nature, following in his father's footsteps and taking his responsibilities seriously. He was five years older than Immaculee, and played the caring role of big brother and protector. Next in birth order were Damascene and Immaculee. After Immaculee came one more child, her baby brother, Vianney, who was easy to love. Immaculee felt responsible for his welfare.

Damascene

Damascene was three years older than, and closest in both proximity and heart, to Immaculee. Damascene was smart and clever and had a great sense of humor.



Damascene was both scholar and athlete. He was Immaculee's best friend as well as brother, and they enjoyed laughter together every day. It was Damascene who would boost Immaculee's spirits, include her in every adventure, and even skip the occasional outing to stay home with her. Damascene's death proved to be the lowest point of Immaculee's hardship.

Janet

Immaculee was a kind person and made friendships readily. Janet and Immaculee had been friends since grammar school. Immaculee learned how a heart could grow cold, however, when her Hutu friend denied their friendship once war broke out. This experience was devastating for Immaculee.

Friends- Sarah and Clementine

Sarah and Clementine were Tutsi teenagers just like Immaculee. Clementine and Immaculee became close friends during their studies at Lycee High School and were together again at the National University in Butare. Sarah was Immaculee's friend and roommate at the university. Sarah's family would eventually provide a home for Immaculee after the war.

Interahamwe

The Interahamwe was an established political party of organized youth whose name means "those who attack together." The government of Rwanda supported the Interahamwe, supplied them with weapons, and encouraged their massive killing sprees which targeted Tutsis.

RPF

The acronym RPF stands for the Rwandan Patriotic Front. Its leader was Paul Kagame. The RPF were considered rebels because they were not part of the established government. Instead, many were exiles from Rwanda living in neighboring countries following the wars of 1959 and 1973. They fought to return to Rwanda, but they wanted Rwanda to be governed equally between the three tribes residing there. After the genocide began, the RPF became the only hope for the Tutsi people. The RPF vowed to fight their way back into Rwanda and aid the Tutsis.

Tribes

Rwanda was composed of three tribes. These were the Tutsis, the Hutus and the Twa. Prior to the genocide, the Hutus were the majority and could be recognized by their shorter stature, darker skin and broad noses. Tutsis were the minority and were



distinguished by tallness, light skin and narrow noses. Twas were a forest dwelling tribe of people known for being small and reclusive.

Aloise

Aloise had been a friend of Immaculee's mother, Rose. Aloise told Immaculee her story. She had contracted polio as a child and could never walk again, but she didn't let that hold her back. She was a gifted student. When Rose discovered Aloise couldn't pay the required school tuition, Rose paid it for her. Over the years, Rose continued to support Aloise. Aloise attributed her many successes to Rose's generosity. In an effort to repay Rose's kindness, Aloise offered Immaculee and her friends a place to stay when they were liberated.

Lechim and Dusenge

Lechim and Dusenge were friends of Immaculee's prior to the onset of war. They were also Pastor Murinzi's children. When the Pastor could no longer care for the women by himself, he selected Lechim and Dusenge to be his confidants. They treated the women with respect and kindness.

Sembeba

Sembeba is one of Pastor Murinzi's children. He personifies the thinking of extremist Hutus. He quotes his education, which was biased and filled with hatred, to rationalize the genocide. Although Pastor Murinzi tries to reason with him, he will not be swayed and continues to be filled with hatred.



Objects/Places

Lake Kivu appears in non-fiction

Immaculee was raised on her family's property in the village of Mataba, in Kibuye, Rwanda. Rwanda is a lush country approximately the size of the American state of Maryland. It has the densest population in Africa and is the smallest country nestled in the heart of central Africa. It is a poor area, although beautiful in topography. Adjacent to the property of Immaculee's family is a body of water known as Lake Kivu. Lake Kivu supplies clean water and adds to the lushness of Mataba. Immaculee has fond memories of the lake. It was the location of daily swims with her brothers and wonderful family times. Lake Kivu would become important in a different way after the genocide began. Lake Kivu serves as a boundary between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (also known as Zaire). When war broke out many Tutsis fled to Lake Kivu hoping to buy transport across the lake and escape the genocide. This path did not always lead to safety. A few kind people would offer transport services, but it was more likely that the Tutsis who were fleeing Rwanda would be intercepted by Interahamwe and killed. When the RPF had battled their way south and finally arrived in Mataba, Lake Kivu was where they chose to set up camp. In a complete turn of events, Lake Kivu was also a source of escape for Hutus fearing revenge once the RPF had gained control and halted the genocide.

The Bathroom appears in non-fiction

The bathroom became Immaculee's home for three months. It was her safe haven from the out-of-control world surrounding her. Immaculee shared the bathroom with other women whose number eventually totaled eight. The women's place of shelter was a small bathroom measuring four feet by three feet. Of that space, a toilet and shower stall took up substantial room. Although the space allowed for hygiene, the women were not allowed to indulge. While in the bathroom they had to be absolutely still and quiet. If it was necessary to flush the toilet, they could do so only on a limited basis, and only at precisely the same time that the other bathroom's toilet was being flushed to muffle the sound. They were allowed to change positions infrequently and sat on each other's laps due to lack of space. Movement of all eight bodies was a synchronized dance requiring silent communication. For this reason the ladies created their own sign language while in hiding. Although the conditions seem unbearable to the reader, Immaculee overcame her discomforts. She found sanctuary within her prayers. In this way she spent the majority of her days and nights and kept evil thoughts at bay. She continued to praise God while hiding in the bathroom. It was a gift and she was able to more deeply understand her faith during her stay.



United Nations appears in non-fiction

The United Nations (UN) was not just a place for Immaculee, it was a dream. During her months in hiding Immaculee often wondered what life would be like after the war. She fantasized that she would work for the UN and she studied hard to make that a reality. The mental energy required to wait while being exposed to brutality is immense. Through constantly praying, and later dividing her time between prayer and study, Immaculee was able to stay sane. She kept her mind sharp and prepared for the day of her freedom. Focusing on that goal set her on the path God had created for her. Once free she arrived early each morning at the UN requesting employment. It took many weeks but she was eventually successful. Working for the UN was a great fit for Immaculee. She was a fast learner and devoted to the UN's mission. She would eventually meet her husband through the UN. After gaining her freedom and working in the Rwandan UN for a while, Immaculee immigrated to the United States. The UN continues to be an important part of her life. Both she and her husband, Bryan, are employed there.

Kigali appears in non-fiction

Kigali is a city in Rwanda. Prior to the war, Kigali was a prosperous place. After the war, Aloise brought Immaculee and her friends to her home in Kigali. Upon their return, they discovered that Aloise's home had sustained much damage and the city no longer prospered. However, they all worked together and restored Aloise's home. The UN was nearby and Immaculee continued to live in Kigali with Aloise while she searched for employment.

Operation Turquoise appears in non-fiction

Operation Turquoise was the code name for the French deployment to Rwanda. The French government's aim was to calm the area and set up safe havens for Tutsi survivors.

French Camps appears in non-fiction

Operation Turquoise was helpful. It was difficult for survivors, of whom there were initially few, to find the camps because Interahamwe still hunted the streets. However, if the survivors could reach a French camp they were then cared for. The French had field camps from which they transferred survivors to their base camp. Immaculee stayed at one such field camp, where she was reunited with a friend who confirmed her family's deaths, before being moved to the base camp. While there she was fed well and bathed for the first time in months. Due to her fluency in French as well as her native language, Immaculee served as an interpreter for the French. She recorded the inflow of Tutsi survivors and explained their needs to the French soldiers. In this way she passed many days productively in the French camp. Immaculee also made some new friends



while at the French camp. Immaculee was united with her mother's friend, Aloise, while at the French camp.

RPF camp appears in non-fiction

The RPF camp was a positive place for Immaculee. She felt protected from the Hutu extremists and was surrounded by fellow survivors. Immaculee began to focus on her prospects for a future. At the RPF camp she was introduced to Major Ntwali who would arrange her transport to Kigali after the war.

Damascene's letter appears in non-fiction

Damascene's letter is a poignant reminder of all that Immaculee lost during the war. It is amazing that it arrived safely to Immaculee. At the beginning of the letter Damascene is not aware of his family's losses, but he makes alterations throughout the letter as he learns of his parents' and Vianney's deaths. Immaculee treasures this last communication from Damascene and displays a picture of the letter within the pages of *Left to Tell*.

Scapular appears in non-fiction

Immaculee and her family were devout Roman Catholics. During the attack on her village, Immaculee exchanged religious items with her father. She gave him her scapular. The scapular is a sacred Catholic prayer cloth worn around one's neck. It is said to speed the journey to heaven as those who wear it do so in faith and are at peace. Immaculee felt confident that it would protect her father during the fighting.

Rosary appears in non-fiction

Leonard entrusted his personal rosary to Immaculee. His rosary would be a source of comfort to Immaculee during her extended time in hiding. She prayed on it daily. Immaculee also recalls carrying it with her on the dangerous travels to, and transfers in between, the French and RPF camps.



Themes

Fear

Immaculee Ilibagiza's life was riddled with fear. There was an undercurrent of tension in Rwanda prior to the war but she was shielded from it. However, that changed when she went away to boarding school. Suddenly there were whispers and looks of disdain all around her. It was a very unsettling experience. Once the war broke out and her family was separated she truly felt afraid. She was afraid for her safety as well as for the safety of her family. While in hiding she could hear the sounds of killing and worried the killers would discover her. The killers returned to the house many times, each time bringing a new sense of terror. When Immaculee was finally freed from her bathroom hiding spot, she thought the worst was over. Yet she still had to walk to the French camp, and later to the RPF camp. Those walks were treacherous and she is lucky to have survived.

Immaculee's strength and faith in God sustained her. Even though she was afraid, she believed in God's love. She may have been unique in this trait. Immaculee's brothers had trouble sharing in her hope. They were afraid. Immaculee felt Damascene's fear for the first time when they encountered an Interahamwe roadblock on their way to a wedding together. Seeing her brother's fear was a stunning glimpse into his psyche. During their youth he was always jovial. His fear made her realize just how serious the situation was. Later, after their Easter dinner, Damascene was clearly anxious and wanted to leave their village. Vianney expressed fear as well. Vianney and his friend, Augustine, agreed with Damascene's assessment of the situation. They were all afraid of what was to come.

Immaculee countered her fear with prayer. Damascene was not able to counter his fear until the end of his life. After he had been captured and taunted he was prepared to die. He was also aware that the killers hadn't found Immaculee yet. This may have given him the courage to die with dignity.

Love

Immaculee is filled with love. At the beginning of the story she is a young girl who adores her family. She has tremendous respect and love for both of her parents. She loves her brothers and has an incredibly strong relationship with her brother Damascene. Her love for Damascene is not a product of obligation. She enjoys his company and wants to be around him. She grows into a teenager and then a woman. Along the way she experiences much love and loss. Aside from familial love, Immaculee finds love with her boyfriend, John. During her stay in the bathroom she often focuses on her family and on John. She thinks of them often, praying for their safety because she loves them. She hopes that they love her as well.



Immaculee has another significant relationship. Immaculee has love for her God. Possibly more important is her belief that he loves her. She mentions repeatedly that she is confident in his love and that he will not allow harm to come to her. This loving relationship sustains her. Immaculee believes that God's love flows through her. In that light, one can see that her ability to forgive the killers is an extension of God's love. Because she was able to forgive she moved on after the genocide and found peace. Immaculee found love, married, and had two children. This healthy relationship resulted from her loving nature.

Faith

Faith is not a tangible thing. Faith was preached by Immaculee's father, Leonard. Leonard instilled the family's religion in his children. As an adult it was Immaculee's responsibility to make a deeper connection. Immaculee deepened her faith through prayer. Not only did she recite prayers on her father's rosary, but she meditated. During her meditations she contemplated what it meant to love, have faith, and forgive. Through her faith she was not alone. She felt God's presence and protection while the war continued just yards away from her. She had faith that God would give her the answers if only she prayed and listened. She asked for help and received it. She walked the path that God had set for her. In her own words, she gave herself over to God.

Anger

Anger was portrayed many times in this book. The Interahamwe attacked because they were angry. It was inferred that the aimless youth were also looking for a cause. They were enticed with offerings of fun, gifts and pleasure. However, it was their anger that allowed them to kill. The RPF retaliated because they were angry that the Tutsis were being treated poorly. The RPF had its own agenda based on past events. Regardless of its pre-existing plans, the RPF were forced to retaliate when the genocide began.

Immaculee also felt anger. She was angry that the genocide was occurring. She was angry that her faith was tested and that she was tempted by evil. Immaculee experienced anger when she listened to Hutus speak of her people. An excellent example is when she overheard Sembeba describing how the killing of Tutsis was justified. It was equally awful to hear the killers laughing while they hunted Tutsis and boasted about their killing sprees. She felt anger toward Pastor Murinzi when he spoke unkindly of her father. Most of all, she was angered by her own difficulty in forgiving the killers. She knew this was hindering her relationship with God. Not until she confronted her anger was she able to find peace.

Style

Perspective

Immaculee Ilibagiza is the author of the autobiography, *Left to Tell*. It is a story about her experiences during the Rwandan Holocaust of 1990. As such, the story is written in the first person style. It is told from her point of view and it is therefore possible that it may contain bias information (this is true of any personal account). Use of the first person keeps the reader interested in what happens to Immaculee, the main character. While reading the book one feels as if they have shadowed Immaculee's life and been present on her journey. Hearing her thoughts allows one to understand what she experiences during her silent time in hiding. Immaculee uses a combination of statement of fact (for example the topography and geography of Rwanda), her own recollections and mindset, and quotes spoken by others that she remembers vividly. There is little dialogue because during the largest period of time (which she spent in hiding) she was silent. Immaculee recognized the importance of forgiveness during her time in hiding. She vowed to spread forgiveness, promote healing, and care for the orphans of Rwanda. Writing this book serves to address those goals and reach a wide audience.

Tone

The tone of *Left to Tell* is contemplative. Immaculee spends much of her time contemplating the ideas of love, faith and anger. She tries to understand the war and come to terms with its ramifications. The language is informal. This creates a feeling of familiarity with the author and her experiences. The use of informal language also increases the ease of reading for the audience. When she is angry or frustrated it comes through. Equally as clear are her moments of peace and gratitude. Immaculee is not cynical or cold. Instead the novel exudes a feeling of warmth and hope. Part of her desire is that readers latch onto this sense of hope and search for healing within their own lives.

Structure

Immaculee's story is well structured. The book is composed of three parts. Each part is further subdivided into chapters for a total of twenty-four chapters. The book also contains a foreword, introduction and epilogue which help the reader to understand Immaculee's mindset as well as how she may be perceived by others. She wrote the original manuscript for *Left to Tell* by herself. It was published with the help of a secondary author who adjusted it to read smoothly in English. The book opens with a terrifying (yet captivating) moment near the end of the war. After that scene it reverts back to a review of Immaculee's childhood and proceeds forward. Characters and settings are clearly described with vivid details. When possible, Immaculee does include dates to help create a time frame for events. The historical section about Rwanda is

helpful for understanding the war and its causes. Also included are several pages of family pictures which remind the reader that the events that occurred in Rwanda are real- they are not works of fiction. Immaculee is an excellent writer. The book moves along and is not at all slow or confusing. It is the kind of book one wants to read and then recommend to a friend.



Quotes

"There were many voices, many killers. I could see them in my mind: my former friends and neighbors, who had always greeted me with love and kindness, moving through the house carrying spears and machetes and calling my name." Introduction, page xix

"But these were history lessons our parents didn't want my brothers and me to learn, at least not while we were young." Chapter 1, Standing Up, page 15

"Let's do what you always suggest when we have a problem, Damascene. Let's pray and trust that God will protect us." Chapter 4, Off to University, page 35

"I wish I had known that that night was to be our last family supper together. I would have stood up and thanked God for all of them. I would have told everyone sitting around that table how much I loved them and thanked them for loving me. But I didn't know." Chapter 5, Returning Home, page 41

"Why is this happening?" I cried into my pillow. "What have we done to deserve this? Why is being a Tutsi so wrong? Why are you letting this happen to us, God?" Chapter 6, No Going Back, page 49

"I moaned as my body went limp. I simply didn't have the strength to live through another of the killers' hunting expeditions." Chapter 9, Into the Bathroom, page 81

"Well, if that's the kind of evidence you use to condemn a man, then I can understand why killing comes so easily to people around here." Chapter 12, No Friends to Turn To, page 97

"John stepped back quickly, looking me up and down before finally saying, "I can't believe how skinny you are, Immaculee. Hugging you is like holding a bag of bones!" Chapter 14, The Gift of Tongues, pg 119

"My heart softened toward the pastor. Sure, there had been many times during the past few months I'd been furious with his behavior, and some of the things he'd said were insensitive, ignorant, and cruel...but he had risked everything for us, and he had saved our lives." Chapter 16, Keeping the Faith, page 134

"Damascene managed to get to his feet one more time, and then he smiled at the killers. His fearlessness confused them-they'd murdered many Tutsis and always enjoyed listening to their victims plead for their lives. Damascene's composure robbed them of that pleasure." Chapter 18, A Letter from Damascene, page 154

"I prayed that God would touch the captain's heart with His forgiveness, and I prayed again for the killers to put down their machetes and beg for God's mercy." Chapter 19, Camp Comfort, page 159



"I walked without looking at my feet, not knowing if I was about to stumble over rocks or bodies, putting all my trust in God to guide me to safety. We were moving very briskly, but the killers were all around us now, circling us, slicing the air with their machetes. We were defenseless, so why were they waiting to strike?" Chapter 20, The Road to the Rebels, page 173

"I covered my mouth, my eyes wide in horror. Then the soldier pointed beyond the piles to a deep pit at least 30 yards across by 20 feet deep. It was filled with bodies, maybe tens of thousands of them." Chapter 21, On to Kigali, page 179

"The people who'd hurt my family had hurt themselves even more, and they deserved my pity. There was no doubt that they had to be punished for their crimes against humanity and against God. There was already talk at the UN about creating an international tribunal to capture those responsible, and I prayed that it would happen. But I prayed for compassion as well." Chapter 23, Burying the Dead, page 197

"I could feel his shame. He looked up at me, for only a moment, but our eyes met. I reached out, touched his hands lightly, and quietly said what I'd come to say." Chapter 24, Forgiving the Living, page 204



Topics for Discussion

How does the meaning of Immaculee's name exemplify her as an adult?

Explore the political tensions of Rwanda. What historically caused them?

How did John squander his relationship with Immaculee?

Throughout the book Immaculee was surprised at how ordinary people could hold such hatred and be swayed from friend to foe. Discuss this transition and site examples.

Immaculee was a good girl according to Rwandan standards. What does this mean? Please list her attributes.

Compare and contrast the RPF and the Interahamwe.

Immaculee had a deep respect for her family. What caused her to disagree with her father?

Aloise played a special role with regards to Immaculee as Immaculee was struggling to rebuild her life. What was Aloise's reasoning and how was she helpful?

Discuss the idea of friendship. It surfaced many times throughout the book. Who were Immaculee's friends? Every relationship in our lives has a purpose. In what ways did Immaculee's friendships affect her?

Immaculee was able to forgive. It is an amazing act of faith. How did she get to that point? Was it any easy decision for her to forgive, or was it a journey? Please extrapolate.