

## Beka's Story

I'm 3 years old and I come from the Hutu tribe. I grew up in Rwanda near the Tanzanian boarder. One day we heard that soldiers were coming. Our family gathered as many things as we could carry. But my parents and my brothers never made it out of the house. I hid in the tall grass in our manioc field until they were gone. I couldn't look at my house with its grey brick walls and tin roof. I had heard the guns and that was enough for me. I ran out to the road and joined a whole bunch of people, also running. When the sun started to dye the western sky with shades of red and orange we stopped for the night. I saw a lady crying. She reminded me of my mother and I started to cry too. She said I looked about the same age as her little girl. As we rested under some banana trees, the lady sat me down next to her. She shared some of her potatoes and beans and manioc with me and called me her little girl. So I stayed close to her. This was my first night away from my mother. I tried not to cry but I couldn't help it. My new mother pulled me close and tried to comfort me, sharing her blanket with me. No one asked any questions. You just didn't talk about these things. But from then on we stuck together. The next morning we started walking very early. We looked for shade once the sun got hot. Neatly terraced hills planted with rows of manioc, potatoes, beans, rice, sugar cane, banana and papaya trees lay abandonned. Animal pens lay empty. Houses dotted the green countryside, their doors hanging ajar but no children played around them and no charcoal fires cooked pots of food out front. We tried to travel mostly at night. It was easier to hide and it was cooler. Sometimes we could find food in the fields and every now and then there was a well where we could fill our water jugs. We dug potatoes and picked bananas when we could find them. The lady's husband, a Hutu soldier with a gun, took turns with the other men watching while we slept. Some of the other kids got so weak that they couldn't keep up. I sometimes felt like giving up too. I was always hungry. But I did not want to be one of those kids that lay on the road and didn't move. Finally one day, the crowd suddenly became more dense. The lady held on to my hand as tightly as she could. Just when I thought that I was not going to be able to breath, the lady's husband picked me up and carried me on his shoulder. Some people herded goats and even cows through the surging crownd. A few tried to drive their buses and cars through. We crossed over the boarder and walked into a city with huge houses and buildings made of stone and concrete. There was a lake on one side of the road surrounded by dark volcanic mountains. Jacaranda trees covered with light purple blossoms dotted the streets along with cactus. Some of our people layed down on the side of the road and never moved again. while others cried and tried to pull them up and make them walk. Men in uniform came and told us all to keep walking until we got out of town. We

followed the rest of the soldiers out to a place where a lot of other soldiers had set up camp and we did the same. We found a pond with some muddy water in it. The lady and her husband drank it and started to throw up. They were sick for a whole day. Some white people came and took them away. I tried to go along but they wouldn't let me so I cried. Would I ever see this kind lady again? The dull ache in my heart returned as memories of my own parents rushed back. They took me in a car and brought me to a little village and put me in one of the green tents with some other kids and gave me some food to eat. It was so different from the food I was used to that I was affraid to eat it. I was not hungry anymore. Little by little, I got to know the other kids in the camp. There was a crowd that gathered at the big grey tents every other day to get food that was scooped out of bags. There were two kind pastors who had sunday school for all the kids. There was a nice lady who asked me a lot of questions about my family. As I told my story, the memories all came back and with them the fear and the pain which made me cry again. The lady tried to comfort me by holding me on her lap for a little while. Oh how badly I wanted my family back. I knew that things would never be the same again. Each day some white ladies came to camp to take care of us kids. They put me on a scale and measured me. They did not look very pleased with the results. They talked to my tent mother about making sure that I ate. My tent mother tried very hard but I was not hungry. When I ate, I threw up. And then there were those terrible cramps. Sometimes I almost didn't make it to the latrines. The only thing I could eat were the biscuits that the white ladies gave me. My tent mother also got very sick. She lay down on the tent floor and shook and sweated even though she had a blanket. The white ladies came to see me again. They shook their heads and made arrangements to put me in another tent with a different tent mother. This one took me to the medical post to get medicine and some sugary mixture that I was supposed to drink. She tried very hard to get me to eat. She even bought me potatoes and bananas. But I only got more sick. Finally, she asked the white ladies to take me to the hospital. My feet had started to swell up and my face was puffy. My tent mother was not allowed to go with me to hospital. The dull ache in my heart returned and I cried again. I stayed in the hospital for a long time. There were a lot of other kids in the tent with me. The nurse gave me medicine and good food to eat. Slowly, I got stronger but I was not happy. I wanted to go back to the camp and to my tent mother. I knew that she cared about me. The white ladies from our village came to see me often. I was glad to see them. I have lived while many other children just like me did not make it. Could it be that there is a God who cares about kids like me? And could there be some reason that he spared me? Maybe now I can have a chance to find out.