

# Rwanda genocide survivor speaks

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With the comfortable lives we live here in Hawai'i, it's sometimes easy to forget the millions of people around the world who suffer on a daily basis.

Tonight and tomorrow at the Blaisdell Concert Hall, the community has a chance to step out of that comfort zone and hear an inspirational talk by a survivor of the 1994 Rwanda genocide.

Immaculée Ilibagiza has traveled all over the world sharing her story through talks and her book, "Left To Tell." Maui resident Dr. Wayne Dyer, internationally known self-development author and speaker, calls Ilibagiza's book "a story of a love for God that was so strong that hatred and revenge were forced to dissolve in its presence."

Ilibagiza was a college student in Rwanda who, like her peers, had hopes and dreams for her future. But when war broke out in April of 1994, her life was changed forever.

Most of her family was brutally murdered, and she was forced to spend three months in a cramped bathroom with seven other women. She spent her time struggling with her emotions and praying for God's guidance.

"In all my years of praying, I'd never focused so completely on God or been so keenly aware of the presence of darkness," she said.

Ilibagiza felt trapped and abandoned in that small bathroom.

"Did the world not see the madness that had seized this country? Was no one going to come and help us?" she asked herself. "I couldn't understand how other countries, especially the so-called civilized ones in the West, could turn their backs on us. They knew we were being massacred, yet they did nothing."



Courtesy of Waterhouse Lecture Series

Immaculée Ilibagiza

Ilibagiza fought with her hatred for weeks, praying for God to relieve her of it.

"I realized that my battle to survive this war would have to be fought inside of me," she said. She eventually came to forgive those who were causing this bloody war.

After Ilibagiza escaped and the war ended, she knew that her life would be much different than she'd planned. She decided that "helping others to forgive would be a big part of [her] life's work."

"God saved my life and spared my soul for a reason," she said. "He left me to tell my story to others and show as many people as possible the healing power of His love and forgiveness."

Ilibagiza now works for the United Nations in New York City and established the Left to Tell Charitable Fund to help others recuperate from their own struggles with genocide and war.

Her book, "Left to Tell," has sold more than 250,000 copies worldwide, been made into a documentary and has raised over \$150,000 for Rwanda orphans.

Ilibagiza will be speaking tonight and tomorrow at the Blaisdell Concert Hall from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. The talk will also feature special guest Na Leo Pilimehana. There is no admission fee, but a free-will offering will be taken. Doors open at 6 p.m., so come early.

*For more information, visit her Web site at <http://www.lefttotell.com/>*