

AOCM – the orphans' or



“Can anybody see him? Naphtal is the only one left, the rest of the family is dead. If you find him, kill him too!”

Naphtal holds his breath. He is lying in the river just a few metres from the men...

This happened in Rwanda in 1994, when at least 800,000 people were murdered in 100 days. 300,000 of them were children, and 100,000 children became orphans after the genocide.

Naphtal Ahishakiye lost his entire family, his mother, father and four brothers. As Naphtal lay there in the river, he could never have guessed that one day he would start AOCM, L'Association des Orphelins Chefs de Ménages (the Association of Orphan Heads of Households), an organization that would one day be nominated for the WCPRC, for its hard work to give 6,000 of the orphaned children in Rwanda a better life...

WHY HAS AOCM BEEN NOMINATED?

AOCM has been nominated for the WCPRC 2006 because the organisation fights for the children and young people whose parents were killed during the 1994 genocide. AOCM consists only of young people who lost their parents in the genocide, and together they now try to help each other create a better life. They want to be like a family in which you care about one another. Although most people in AOCM live in extreme poverty, they help each other with food, clothes, roofs over their heads, new families, access to healthcare and education. And most important of all: they give



each other friendship and love. Over 6,000 orphaned children and young people get a chance for a better life through AOCM – young people who might otherwise end up in a life on the street with drugs, violence, criminality and prostitution. AOCM fights for the orphans' cause in Rwanda, by constantly reminding the government and different organisations that the orphans exist.

ganization

Naphtal has only his nose above the water's surface. He hangs on tight to the roots growing on the riverbed. He is terrified. His heart beats so hard he thinks it's going to explode. Only several hours later, when it is dark, does he dare rise out of the water. The men have gone, but he knows that they will come back and look for him as soon as it gets lighter. He rests for a while, then he slides down into the water again. Thoughts swirl around in his head. All of his family are dead, and it all happened so fast...

Cockroaches

A few days earlier, the whole family sat and listened to the radio. Like so many times

recently, the voice on the radio said that all Tutsi people were Rwanda's enemies. It also said that the Hutu people should be prepared to defend themselves with weapons, and that Tutsis were as false as snakes and as dirty as cockroaches. The Hutus must get rid of the pests.

Naphtal's father said that the government supported the radio station. Because Naphtal's family were Tutsis they always worried when they listened to it. But this morning they became particularly worried. The radio said that the president had died in a plane crash. The plane had crashed as he was on his way home from a meeting in Tanzania with the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic

Front), which had been at war with Rwanda's government since 1990.

The RPF wanted to remove the government and said they wanted to create a country for both Hutus and Tutsis. Now that the President was dead the Hutus who didn't want peace with the RPF or to share power with Tutsis in Rwanda, could do what they wanted.

"Now it is over, The Hutus will begin to kill us. We must hide in the forest,

and everyone must find their own hiding place," said Naphtal's father.

Killed the family

A few days after the family went into hiding, a group of armed men came to their home. They smashed up the house, chopped down the banana trees, pulled the manioc and potatoes from the earth, and destroyed the fields. They stole the family's goats and cows. Naphtal saw everything from his hiding place, and he saw that



Alone and afraid

"When I hid in the forest I was scared all the time. If the trees creaked, or the leaves rustled in the wind I thought that the murderers had come to get me. It was terrible to sleep out there in the darkness completely alone," remembers Naphtal.



many who destroyed his home were their neighbours. The day after, the men came back. Then they found Naphtal's father and killed him. If Naphtal had tried to stop them, he would have been killed instantly. Two days later they found Naphtal's older brother. They tied his

hands and feet and killed him too. They then took Naphtal's three other brothers and lastly his mother...

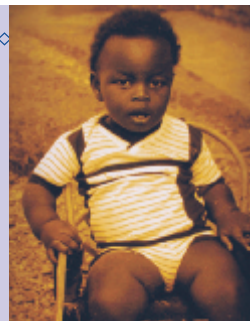
When Naphtal lay in the river he was the only one left. He was so scared that he didn't dare leave the water for three days and nights.

300,000 children were killed

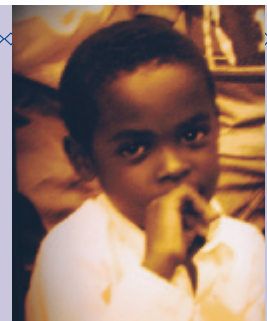
During the 1994 genocide nearly a million people in Rwanda were killed. 300,000 of them were children. If you want to pay tribute to them, you can write to: **Kigali Memorial Centre, B.P. 7251, Kigali, Rwanda.** These are some of the children who were killed:



Umutoni & Uwamwezi,
6 & 7 years old
Favourite toy: A doll which they shared.
Favourite food: Fresh fruit.
They were: Daddy's girls.



Fidèle, 9 years old
Favourite sport: Football.
Favourite food: Chips.
Liked: TV and being together with friends.



David, 10 years old
Favourite sport: Football.
Liked: To make people laugh.
Dream: Of becoming a doctor.



Children allowed to be children

AOCM wants the younger children in the organization to be able to go on trips. On excursions they can eat good food, drink fizzy drinks, play and have a good time. “We try to go on trips as often as possible, even if we can’t really afford it. Some think that we should use the money for things like school fees, food and rent, but I don’t agree. I think trips are just as important. Children are able to experience something different to their daily lives, meet each other and just have fun. They became adults far too early because their parents were murdered. On the trips they are allowed to be children,” says Naphtal.

“The trips are the most fun thing that happens all year!” says Jean Claude Habineza, 14, who takes care of his two younger cousins.

“I somehow survived in the forest for several months. I drank rain water and snuck into people’s gardens at night and ate bananas. At night I slept on the ground. I was incredibly sad and confused. Of course, I had seen my entire family being murdered and I felt ill.

I actually had no will to live. But something made me fight on,” says Naphtal.

A new family

When Naphtal had hidden in the forest for three months, the RPF managed to overpower the Rwandan army and force the govern-

ment to flee. The genocide was over at last. Naphtal and tens of thousands of others who had survived could come out of their hiding places in the forests and try to begin a new life.

“It wasn’t easy. But when the schools re-opened after the war, I still decided to try to study again. I wanted to honour my mother and father in some way, and I knew that they would have wanted me to try to do something good with my life, despite everything that had happened,” says Naphtal.

In school, Naphtal met

other children and young people who had lost their parents during the genocide. Everyone had terrible stories and they supported each other.

“When we began to talk to each other, we understood pretty quickly that none of us would manage alone. Those of us who had some money helped those who had nothing at all. I had some money because the people who had stolen my parents’ goats and cows were forced to pay me compensation. I bought exercise books and pens, and so on,



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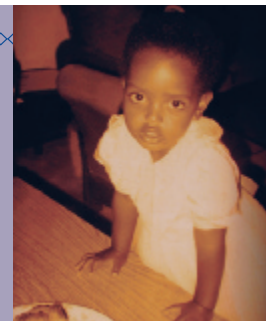
Francine, 12 years old
Favourite sport: Swimming.
Favourite food: Egg and chips.
Favourite drink: Milk and Fanta.
Best friend: Older sister Claudette.



Bernadin, 17 years old
Favourite sport: Football.
Favourite drink: Tea.
Favourite food: Rice.
He: did well at school.



Yvonne & Yves, 5 & 3 years old
Yvonne’s favourite drink: Tea with milk.
Yves’ favourite food: Chips.
They were: Daddy’s girl and mummy’s boy.



Nadia, 8 years old
Favourite sport: Jogging with her dad.
Favourite sweet: Chocolate.
Favourite drink: Milk.
Liked: TV and music.





AOCM supports 600 children so that they can go to school. The older children help the younger ones with their homework.



and gave them to those who didn't have any. In the evenings we studied together. Those who were a little older helped the younger ones with their homework. We became like a family, and it felt wonderful to not be alone anymore.

Love is most important

A few years later Naphtal, and a couple of others from his school, decided to try and help orphaned children throughout Rwanda in the same way they had helped

each other at school.

"In 2000 we started the AOCM organization so that we orphans could help each other create a better life." AOCM concentrated on some important problems.

- That everyone should have somewhere to live; the homes of most people had been destroyed.
- That everyone should be able to go to school and get the healthcare they need.
- That everyone should have food and clothes.

"But we felt that the most important thing for the whole organization was to try to create love between those of us who had lost our parents in the genocide. For if we felt love, we would care about each other and take care of one another," says Naphtal.

The word spread quickly. During the first week AOCM got 20 new members, the week after they got 20 more... Now AOCM has 1,800 families who are members – in total 6,100 orphaned

children and young people. AOCM has built 112 houses and financially supports 600 orphaned children so that they can go to school. They even help to start rearing pigs, and opening hairdressing salons, cafés and other projects so that the members are able to support themselves when they finish school.

Everybody needs somebody

"At the start it was our plan that all members would contribute 100 Rwandan francs

How was the genocide possible?

"It's difficult to explain how the genocide in Rwanda could happen, but I'll try," says Naphtal.

"In Rwanda, the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups have lived together for centuries. There have always been more Hutus than Tutsis, but for a long time Rwanda was ruled by kings who were Tutsis. From the end of the 1800s to 1962 Rwanda was

first ruled by Germany and then by Belgium. The Europeans ruled Rwanda through the king and gave the Tutsis many advantages. The Tutsis got good education and work, while the Hutus weren't allowed to go to school and only carried out

hard physical work. By doing this, the Europeans divided the people in Rwanda and made sure the Tutsis were on their side. Racism and hate was created between Hutus and Tutsis. Before independence the Belgians changed their minds and began to

Everybody is equal

“At the start, all members were supposed to contribute 100 Rwandan francs (about 18 US cents) per month, but most of our members don’t have 100 francs for the whole month! So that nobody would feel less important just because they couldn’t pay, we stopped the monthly payments. Everybody helps when they can instead.” says Naphtal.



(about 18 US cents) per month, but it isn’t possible. Most of our members don’t have 100 francs for the whole month! Now everybody helps when they can instead. If you have food you share it with those who haven’t. Those who have money buy pens and exercise books for those who haven’t. If someone becomes sick we help that person to the hospital. We want to be like any other family.

Nobody who works for AOCM is paid, not even Naphtal who leads the organization.

“I first go to my normal job, and then I work for AOCM in the afternoons, evenings, at nights and at weekends. I man the phone and then attend meetings with the government, authorities, organizations and rich people and ask for money for the orphaned children and young people in Rwanda, but there is never enough. In recent years, apart from the genocide, we have also had another big problem, the disease AIDS. People die of AIDS every day, and their children are left alone. We do as much as

support the Hutus instead. By independence in 1962, the people who thought that all power should belong to the Hutus began to rule Rwanda. Now they took revenge because the Tutsis had a much better life for such a long time. Many of those people didn’t want there to be any Tutsis left in the country at all. Those thoughts still remained up until 1994,

when the ruling Hutus succeeded in tricking large parts of the Hutu population into killing their Tutsi neighbours and friends. The government and the army gave weapons to ordinary civilians and told them to kill Tutsis.”

The world let down Rwanda

The UN’s staff in Rwanda in 1994 warned the headquar-

ters in New York that genocide might take place. They asked for more UN soldiers to be sent to Rwanda, but the UN chose not to send any. France, which had earlier trained the government’s army, let their soldiers create a “safe zone” in south-western Rwanda at the end of the genocide.

Many of those responsible for the genocide were pro-

Love is the most important thing

“The most important thing of all has been to make sure that all those who lost their parents in the genocide love and care for each other,” says Naphtal.

we can to help, but the need is enormous. There are hundreds of thousands of orphaned children in Rwanda. If they don’t get any help, they will end up on the streets and never get the chance to go to school.

“Everybody needs somebody. That is why we started AOCM, and we will continue to fight for orphaned children’s rights as long as necessary.”



PHOTO: ANDREAS LONIN PHOTO: MARK VUORI

tected there and were later given a safe place to stay in other countries. I think that the UN and the rest of the world have major responsibility for the fact that so many people were killed in Rwanda. The UN could have stopped the killings, but chose to do nothing.”



What is genocide?

Genocide means trying to completely wipe out a particular group of people in one country or area. The Nazis' extermination of Jews during the Second World War (1939–1945) and the extermination of Tutsis in 1994 in Rwanda were both genocides.

The word “genocide” was created to describe the **Holocaust** – the Nazis' extermination of 6 million Jews and between 200,000 and 600,000 Roma people during the Second World War. Homosexuals and other people considered to be inferior were also murdered.

Anne Frank is one of the children who died in the Holocaust. She was posthumously given (after her death) **the World's Children's Honorary Award** when the WCPRC was awarded for the first time in 2000 (read about Anne at www.childrensworld.org).

Genocide has also taken place in **Cambodia**, where two million people were killed between 1975 and 1979 and in the **former Yugoslavia** where over 250,000 people were killed between 1992 and 1995.

What is the world doing?

One of the UN's most important tasks is to prevent genocide, which is seen as the worst crime against humanity.

In 1948, the UN approved the Genocide Convention. It says that genocide is an international crime and those countries that have signed the convention must prevent and punish genocide. The UN and the world failed to prevent the genocide in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. But since then, the UN has set up international courts to put on trial and punish those responsible for genocide. In 1993, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was set up in The Hague, the Netherlands, and in 1994 the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was set up in Arusha, Tanzania.

In 2002, the UN's international court, the International Criminal Court (ICC), was also set up in The Hague, the Netherlands. With the permanent court there, the UN hopes to be able to discover and stop genocide more quickly, and even be able to punish the guilty people more quickly. In May 2005, 99 countries had committed themselves to be part of the ICC, but countries like the USA, Russia, China and Japan still have not. This means that people from these countries cannot be put on trial by the ICC. 🌐



“Everybody needs somebody. That’s why we started AOCM, and that’s why we’ll keep fighting for the orphans,” says Naphtal.

Anne Frank



Marie Grâce beside her family's ruined house.



Marie Grâce

loves her AOCM house

Early one morning, in April 1994, all the Tutsi families were attacked in the village where Marie Grâce lived. Her mother and father were murdered and their home was totally destroyed.

“If we hadn’t been given a new house by AOCM, it would have been really difficult for me and my brothers and sisters to survive,” says Marie Grâce.

Marie Grâce carefully touches the broken house wall made of red clay. When she was a baby she lived here with her mother and father. It was a real home then. Now it’s just a ruin. Weeds are growing on the ground which was once the family’s bedroom and living room, and there is rubbish everywhere.

Marie Grâce was just one year old when the village was attacked, so she doesn’t

remember anything from that time. But she still feels sad when she is here. “It’s tragic. They destroyed our home to show they didn’t want to live with us. Thousands of people were made homeless. I don’t understand how people can do this. And I don’t understand why. It is so stupid.” After a while she walks over to her older brother Diogène who is looking at the banana trees in the family’s planta-



Marie Grâce Nyiraminani, 12

Lives: In the AOCM village outside Gitarama.

Loves: Being happy.

Hates: War.

The worst thing that has happened: That I lost my parents.

The best thing that has happened: When we got our house from AOCM.

Wants to be: A nurse.

Dreams: Of being rich and being able to help poor orphaned children.

tion, a small distance from the house. It was Diogène who saved her the morning they were forced to flee.

A worried older brother
“He carried me and ran as fast as he could. My other brothers and sisters were also with me. Because our



There is no difference between us

“I think Hutus and Tutsis should live together as neighbours and friends. There is no difference between us, and we must stop hating each other. I don’t hate those who murdered my parents because they are Hutus, but because they murdered my mother and father,” says Marie Grâce.



Marie Grâce makes a ball out of banana leaves.



Play banana ball!

Tayari, or banana ball, is based upon two people standing fifteen metres apart and throwing a ball of banana leaves to each other. Everybody who wants to take part stands between the two throwers. For those in the middle the aim is not to get hit when the two throwers suddenly throw the banana ball at them instead of each other. Those who are hit leave the middle team and change places with the thrower.

“Besides playing Tayari, we also play cards on Saturdays. Sometimes we tell stories and riddles as well. Here is one of my riddles,” says Marie Grâce:

**“Which house with no doors,
is made by a white hen?”**

The answer is at the bottom of the page.



mother and father were murdered and our old house was destroyed, we didn't know where we would go. We ended up in a refugee camp for children who had survived. We stayed there for three months.”

After a while many of the murderers, and even other Hutus, fled to Congo because they were scared of revenge attacks. Then many of the children who had survived the genocide moved into the abandoned houses. Marie Grâce and her brothers and sisters did too. They lived for free there and they could eat the bananas and vegetables from the abandoned plantations.

“But after a few years the refugees began to return and

we were forced to move. We were able to rent a house in town instead, and my big brother did everything he could so we would survive. But because there was hardly any work, it became incredibly hard for him to get enough money together for both the rent and food and everything else we needed. We were often hungry and Diogène was worried about how we would manage.

Saved by AOCM

But a few years ago, Marie Grâce's older brother Diogène, and many others who had lost their parents in the genocide, understood that they must begin to help each other if they were to survive. They began to coop-

erate with AOCM in Kigali, and in June 2003 something happened which totally changed the lives of Marie Grâce and her brothers and sisters.

“It was then we moved into our house in the AOCM village. We got the house for nothing and we didn't need to pay any rent! Before, nearly all of our money went on rent, but now we can buy food, clothes and other things we need instead. We could never have afforded to buy our own house, and if

AOCM had not helped us, it would have been very difficult for me and my brothers and sisters to survive. Life is still not easy for us, but it has become a lot better.”

When Marie Grâce returns from the family's old house, she runs down to the banana trees growing on the slope below the houses in the AOCM village. It is Saturday and she has a little time to play before she will help prepare a meal and do her homework. She wants to play banana ball, or Tayari



Visit Marie Grâce's new home! →



Ikigurudumu

Landouard, 12 comes running down the path between the houses in the AOCM village. In one hand he is holding a toy called an Ikigurudumu. The game is based upon trying to roll a wheel in front of you on the narrow path with the help of a stick and string while running.

"I made it myself. First I took a knife and cut out the wheel from an old car tyre which I found on a scrap yard. Then I made the string out of old cloth rags which I tied together. Then I went out into the bushes and got this stick, and then my Ikigurudumu was ready. It took two days to make it."

as it is really called, but first she must make the ball. She cuts dry leaves from the banana tree which she gathers in a pile on the ground. When she has enough she goes and sits by the house. There she tears the leaves into thin strips and she binds and spins them layer upon layer until they become a ball. She wets the last strips in water to give the ball a really good shape. After 15 minutes she is ready.

Playing with everyone

At first just Marie Grâce and her older sister Emma stand

and throw the ball to one another. But soon children from all directions begin to show up who want to join in and play. Many of the children don't live in the village. "We who live here in the AOCM village are Tutsis because we had our houses destroyed in 1994. But the children who live in the villages around us are often Hutus. We play together and it's no problem. It is the same thing in school. I have both Hutus and Tutsis as friends. And when I think about it, I actually don't have any idea about who is what. I see no difference and



I don't care either! I think everyone is worth the same. Many adults don't think so, but they ought to. If the adults don't think like us children, I'm worried that there will be war in Rwanda again." 🌍



Welcome to my new house!

WELCOME!
BIENVENUE!
MURAKAZA NEZA!
KARIBU!

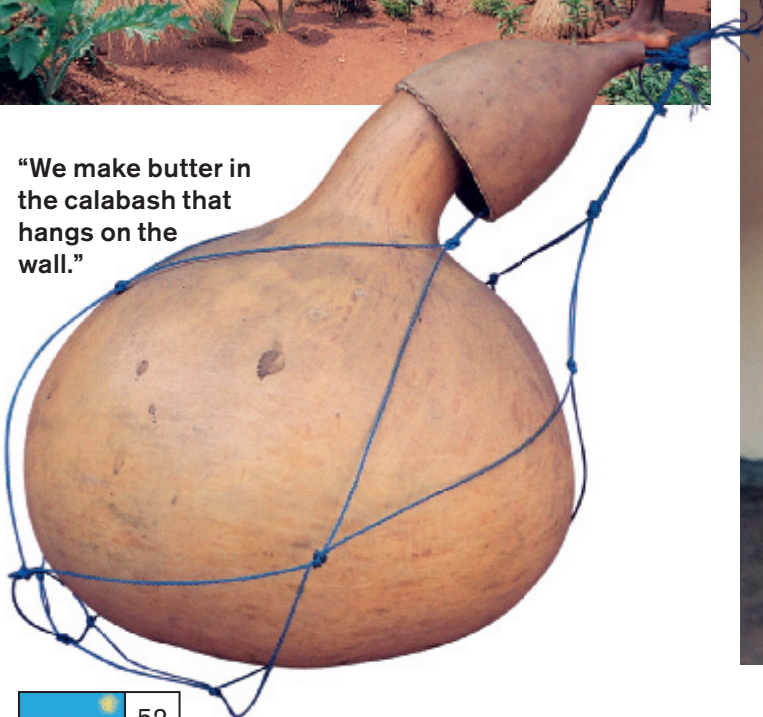
"I get up at six o'clock every morning and do the cleaning, both in the house and out in the yard."



"I think this bouquet of silk flowers is the finest thing we have in the house."



"We make butter in the calabash that hangs on the wall."





“Out in the yard, we wash clothes, prepare food and socialise.”



“I cook when I get home from school. I often prepare beans and plantains, but my favourite food is rice. I cook over an open fire. We eat dinner in the living room.”



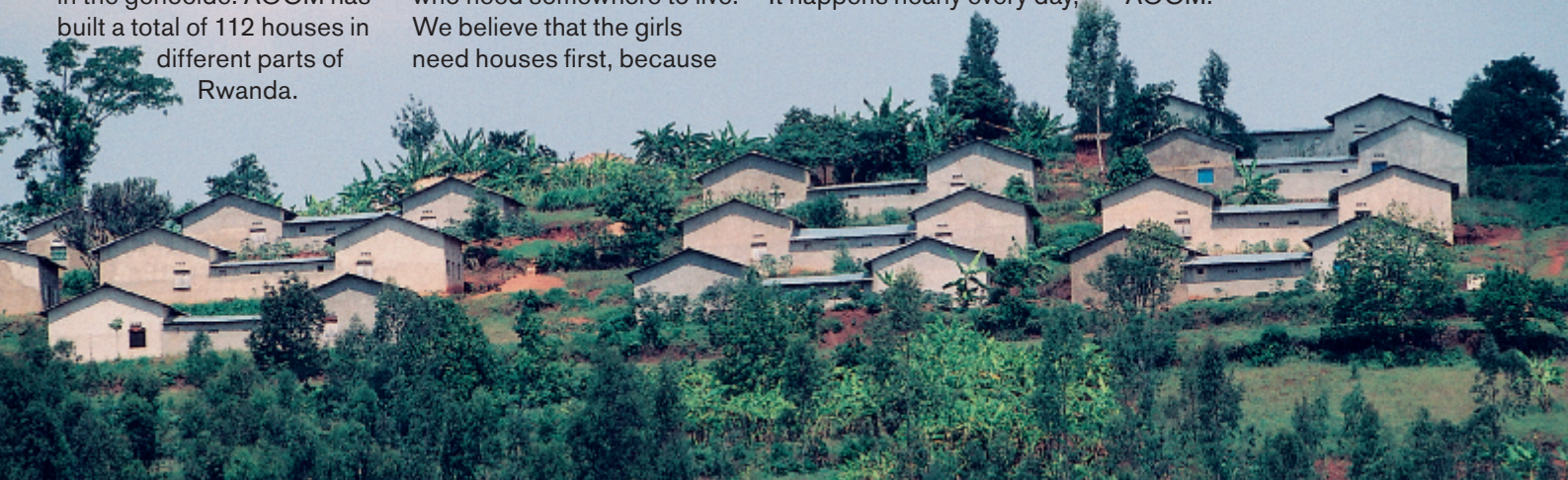
Girls first...

In Marie Grâce's village, AOCM has built 34 houses for 130 children and young people who lost their parents in the genocide. AOCM has built a total of 112 houses in different parts of Rwanda.

“We are always trying to get more money to build more houses, because there are still very many people who need somewhere to live. We believe that the girls need houses first, because

they are the most at risk. Girls are often forced to sell themselves to adult men to afford to rent a room for themselves and their younger brothers and sisters. Many of the girls get AIDS and die. It happens nearly every day,

and the small children who are left behind have to manage on their own. When we sometimes distribute food and clothes it is always the girls who get them first,” says Naphtal, leader of AOCM.



Pigs have their own house ...

Close to Marie Grâce's house, 20 pigs grunt and root around in a fine house of their own. AOCM has given the pigs to the village. All the families in the village will eventually be able to raise pigs, for both eating and selling.

“I like pigs, and I believe they will help us have a better life,” says Marie Grâce. Soon, 1,000 chickens and 20 goats will also be moving to the AOCM-village.

Janvier is a

Janvier's father and younger sister were murdered in the 1994 genocide. A few years later his mother died in a car accident. Since then he has lived on the streets of the capital, Kigali. Thousands of orphaned children in Rwanda live like Janvier.

Janvier is both tired and hungry. As usual he has been at the car park by the bus station all day. Janvier walks from car to car, stretches out his hand and says: "Would you so be kind as to help me? I need money for food."

But today no one gives him money. It is often like this.

"I ask everyone for help because at least everyone has more money than I do. A few are kind, but most of them are nasty. They give me nothing and say that I ought to go home to my village and grow vegetables instead. It's mean because I have neither a home village nor any land to grow vegetables on. I feel angry and sad when adults say that. I obviously don't want to live like this and beg from others, but I don't know how I would survive otherwise," says Janvier.

His father was murdered

When Janvier was just two, his father and younger sister were killed in the genocide. Since that day nothing has been easy.

"Mum and I had a really hard time after dad's death. Mum worked hard on other people's fields and succeeded in getting enough money together for us to manage. When I got older I tried to help her as much as I could.

I fetched water, washed-up and a lot more. I really loved my mum. Despite us having hardly any money at all, she paid my school fees so that I could go to school in both the first and second year."

But one day the unthinkable happened: Janvier's mother died in a car accident, and suddenly he was completely alone.

"I cried a lot then. I was scared and I missed my mother so much. There was no one who could take care of me and I had no idea how I would cope. How would I get food? Where would I live?"

Forced to drop out of school

Because Janvier had no money at all, he was first forced to stop going to school – and he loved school. And then it wasn't long before he was forced to move out of his house, and he ended up on the street. From that day he has survived by begging in the city. From early in the morning to late at night. Every day.

"I don't really know how long I have been here now, but it's a very long time and I hate living like this. I want nothing more than to start school again, but it's impossible. Who will pay for my school fees, uniform and all the books? I have no one who can help me."

It is nearly seven o'clock in the evening and the sun begins to go down behind the mountains around Kigali. No one has given Janvier money. He goes round the cars one last time, but then he gives up. He can't manage any more.

Living on the pavement

Janvier walks from the car park down towards the traffic lights at the crossroads where he usually sleeps.



Janvier Tuyishimire, 13

Lives: On the streets in Kigali.

Loves: Playing football.

Hates: When adults hit children.

The worst thing that has happened: When his mother and father died.

Wants to become a: Successful businessman.

Dreams: Of having a house and a nice car.

one



Poor children are beaten

“A few evenings a week I go to sleep without having eaten anything all day. But it doesn’t matter how hungry I am. I would never steal money or food. If people catch you they can beat you to death. I’ve seen myself how other children who live on the street have received an incredible beating from adults, including the police, because they have stolen things. I think it is completely wrong. Poor children who live on the street can’t help but steal. They are hungry.”

Many people are on their way home from work. And everywhere, among the cars and street sellers, small gangs of children who live on the streets are on the move. But Janvier is alone. He is nearly always alone.

“It’s better to be alone, there is too much fighting otherwise. Many children who live on the street sniff glue to try to forget that their parents were killed, and then they become violent. Everybody wants to show that they are the toughest and that they are the leaders of the gang.

When Janvier reaches the traffic lights he pulls out a bit of cardboard he has hidden there. He sits on the cardboard and leans against the pole. This is his home. In

a little while he will lie down and try to sleep.

“I lie beside the traffic light because it is light all night. The bigger boys on the street often attack those of us who are smaller and take our money. I have been kicked and hit several times, and then they have taken the small amount I have managed to get together during the day. But here in the light there are many people who can see if someone tries to harm me.”

All Alone

Janvier has no blanket so he is nearly always cold when he lies on the pavement at night. Then all the difficult thoughts come. He knows he doesn’t have any future because he doesn’t go to

school. And he knows that he doesn’t want a family and to have his own children, because he is petrified that they will also end up on the street and have a hard life like his. “Often when I feel down and alone I think of my mother, father and

younger sister who are dead. I really miss them. But I try to not think about it. Mum and dad will never come back to me no matter how much I think about them.” 🌐

Help children on the streets

“We want all orphaned children who live on the streets in Rwanda to receive help and be able to go to school”, says Naphtal, leader of AOCM. The UN’s children’s fund Unicef estimates that 7,000 children live on the streets in Rwanda.



Jean-Claude is an



Jean-Claude Habineza, 14

Lives: In Kigali with his two younger cousins.

Loves: Peace, Manchester United and Mercedes-Benz.

Hates: War and being alone.

The worst thing that has happened: When mum and dad were murdered.

The best thing that has happened: When the genocide stopped.

Wants to become: Car mechanic or the Social Affairs Minister.

Dreams: That the rights of the world's orphaned children will be respected.

The best kind of water stopper.

Jean Claude knows that he has had an opportunity that many orphaned children in Rwanda can only dream about.

“If AOCM hadn’t helped me, I would have ended up on the streets without the chance to go to school,” he says.

Now Jean Claude takes care of his two younger cousins Eric and Gloriose. They are a family and AOCM is helping them.

Jean Claude is walking home from school as fast as he can. It is hilly in Kigali and it usually takes him an hour to get home. When he finally sees the house down the slope it is half past two. He has a couple of hours at most before his cousins Eric, 11, and Gloriose, 12, come home from school. Before this he must fetch water and begin cooking dinner, so he is in a hurry. It’s like this every day.

Jean Claude changes into shorts and a t-shirt and

fetches the yellow 10-litre container. He has to walk to the area’s water tap, because they don’t have running water in the house. It takes half an hour to get there and back. On the way home he carries the container on his head. It is heavy. When he gets home Jean Claude quickly lights a fire and begins to heat the water. At the same time, he prepares the plantains and beans he bought at the market yesterday.

He lost his family

Finally the food is cooking in the pot and Jean Claude is happy. He made it in time today as well.

“Hello. How are you?”

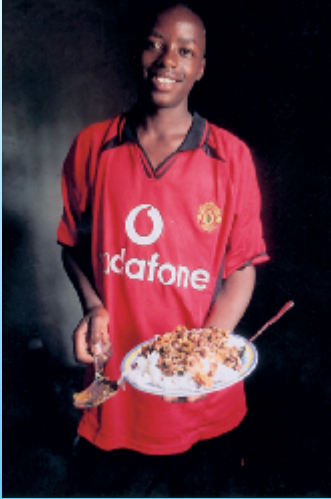
Gloriose and Eric have come. Jean Claude smiles. Nothing makes him as happy as seeing his younger brother and sister. He calls them brother and sister even though they are his cousins, because that is what he feels about Eric and Gloriose. Jean Claude will never forget the day he found out



Jean Claude makes a start on the plantains.



Orphan and a “dad”



Manchester United is the best!

“I used to play football, but since the car accident I limp a little and get pains in my leg when I do a lot of physical activity. But I often listen to the radio and try to follow the different leagues. I love football, and Manchester United is my favourite team.”

they existed. It was the happiest day of his life. Before that, life had been hard, unfair and lonely.

“My mother, father, older brother and younger sister were murdered in the 1994 genocide. Everybody disappeared and I was the only one left. I was just three years old. In one way you can say that I was lucky, because my father’s uncle managed to save me. We crossed the Akanyaru River to our neighbouring land Burundi, and I ended up in a refugee camp for children who had fled from Rwanda. After six months we were put on buses back home. I remember that all the buses were full of children. When we returned to Rwanda, we ended up in a big home for children who had lost their parents in the genocide.”

New setbacks

“At first I waited all the time for my mother to come and get me. But she never came. When a couple of years had passed I understood that she would never come. I understood that she had also been killed.”

But when Jean Claude was 11, and had lived for nearly seven years at the orphanage, something happened that gave him new hope.

“My aunt Léocadie, who had also survived, somehow managed to find me and wanted me to stay with her. That was exactly what I wanted. She loved me very much and treated me like her own son. It felt like I had a new mother! Finally it seemed that life would be good again.”

But Jean Claude hadn’t lived with Léocadie

My favourite possession

“I love my radio! Every evening I usually listen to news and stories, but I prefer to listen to music. My favourite artist is Munyanshoza Dieudonné, who also survived the genocide. He sings a lot about all the terrible things that happened, but also about love and a better and peaceful Rwanda.”

Listen to Munyanshoza Dieudonné on www.childrensworld.org



The AOCM family



Today, Ange and Pamela are eating together with Jean Claude and his cousins.

“We share the little we have. Next time we will eat at someone else’s house. That’s how it works within AOCM. All members are poor but we try to help each other as much as we can. When we don’t have money or food, the other orphans share the little they have. If something serious has happened, for example if Eric or Gloriose is ill, I ask Naphtal or any of the other leaders for help. Then I always get

money so that we can go to hospital or buy medicine.”

“I also go to an AOCM meeting three times a month. That’s where we try to help each other cope with life despite everything that has happened. In the meetings we also say if we need help with money or something else. Seeing as everyone else has the same problems, I don’t feel so alone. We are like a family, and without each other we wouldn’t have survived,” says Jean Claude.





Homework by candlelight. Jean Claude helps his cousins Gloriose and Eric as much as he can.

➔ for more than a year when the accident happened. “My aunt had a problem with her eyes, and one day when we were on our way home from the doctor the taxi driver lost control of the minibus. He drove straight into a tree and my aunt died straight away. I had a serious leg injury and was in hospital for six months.”

A new family

AOCM had built the house where Jean Claude lived together with his aunt before the accident. When he came out of the hospital he was allowed to live there

free of charge. But Jean Claude had lost the will to live.

“Life felt so meaningless and unfair. I just wanted to die. But one day one of the neighbours said that she had heard that two of my younger cousins were still alive, and that they lived at an orphanage. At first I thought it wasn’t true. Then I became incredibly glad because I had thought that I was completely alone! I had lived in an orphanage myself so I knew what it was like. Even if you get food, somewhere to live and are maybe even allowed to go school, it

always feels as if there is something missing. I was tired of being alone and I wanted to give Eric and Gloriose a chance to have a real family.”

AOCM promised to help Jean Claude take care of the cousins, and he took the bus to the orphanage. He told the manager that Eric and Gloriose were his cousins and that he wanted them to live with him in Kigali.

“The manager agreed to it, and my cousins were overjoyed. Since then we have been a family and have lived together for over two years now. I love them.”

A future

When Jean Claude, Eric and Gloriose have finished their dinner it is getting dark, and Jean Claude lights a candle he puts on the table. They chat with each other, giggle and laugh. After a while Gloriose and Eric get out their school books and begin their homework. Jean Claude helps as much as he can. He has decided that he will always do everything so they can continue to go to school.



At the weekends Jean Claude does the washing.



Trying to be dad

“Things are often really good. But some days are tough. We think about why our parents were murdered and such things. Eric and Gloriose are often sad and cry during those days. I try to comfort them and try not to show that I am sad too. But sometimes I go out or lock myself in another room and cry when they don't

see. I also miss mum and dad very much. I would like to have parents just like other children. Parents can give everything that is good for a child. Tenderness, love and a feeling that you belong somewhere. I try to give Eric and Gloriose all of that. It's the most important thing of all to me,” says Jean Claude.

“I have a lot of responsibility because they only have me. And I must work really hard to have time for everything. I'm nearly always tired because I both go to school and take care of the family. At weekends I wash clothes and do other chores, so I almost never have free time then either. But even though my life is hard, I know that I have had an opportunity that many other orphans in Rwanda

only dream about. If AOCM hadn't helped me I would have ended up on the street and would never have got the chance to go to school. Children who live on the street and don't go to school will always find it hard to survive. Now it actually feels as if my brother and sister and I have a future.” 🌍

We are a family

“I love Jean Claude. He came and fetched us and now we are a family. In the evenings when we have done our homework, we usually sit and tell riddles, jokes and stories to each other. We laugh a lot and then I feel good,” says Gloriose. Here is one of my riddles:

– What is always talking to itself?

The answer is at the bottom of the page.

“And this is a saying I have learnt:

‘The bird that dares not fly, will never know where the sweetest sorghum grows.’”

* Sorghum is a common kind of grain that grows in Rwanda.





Jean-Claude

wants to be Social Affairs

Jean Claude's greatest dream is to have a blue Mercedes and be the Minister for Social Affairs so that he can help orphaned children.

Jean Claude lies under one of the old cars in the school's workshop and is busy repairing the car. A week ago he fell ill with malaria and couldn't manage to go to school for a few days. He is glad to be back.

"I love school. When I'm here I learn important things for the future, but it's such fun too! For a few hours I forget everything terrible that has happened and I don't worry about the future. I just work on the

cars that I love. My favourite make of car is Mercedes-Benz. It doesn't matter which model, just as long as it's blue," says Jean Claude and laughs.

There are 45 boys in Jean Claude's class, and during this lesson all of them are working with cars and engines in the workshop. For Jean Claude the hour goes far too quickly. He thinks he has hardly had time to begin when one of the teachers says:

"Take a short break before the theory lesson in mechanics begins, boys!"

Jean Claude crawls out from under the car and brushes away the dirt from his overalls. He goes out to the school yard with the others, but he would have preferred to stay and work in the workshop. He is incredibly grateful that AOCM has given him the chance to go to school, and he wants to learn as much as he can.

"It would have been com-

pletely impossible for me to go to school if AOCM had not helped me with the school fees."

On his own two feet

The course will last for two years, and when Jean Claude is finished at school he can work as a car mechanic if he wants to.

"I chose to do this vocational training. It's good for me in several ways. The school days are shorter here than in usual schools, so I have time to go home and take care of Eric and Glorioso. The training is also pretty short and teaches me a trade. If I am lucky I'll get a job quickly and can



Trying to be friends

“There are both Hutus and Tutsis in my class. We try to be friends despite what happened, but it isn’t so easy. It often feels as if we are playing a game. I’m scared that what happened in 1994 can happen again because we’re not true friends,” says Jean Claude.



irs Minister

begin to earn my own money. I want to be able to take care of the family without always needing to ask others for help. Asking for help every day is embarrassing and you feel small in a way. If I get a job it will also be a lot easier for Eric and Glorioso to have a good life. Then perhaps they can even go to university in the future.

The only thing Jean Claude thinks is bad with the training course is that you cannot study any other subjects besides those to do with cars and technology.

“I think it’s important to learn something else as well, for example, what the world looks like and history and

things. I usually borrow geography and history books from friends who go to an ordinary school, which I read before I fall asleep in the evening. I also try to read the paper as often as I can, because I want to know what is happening both in Rwanda and abroad. I’m interested in such things, and even though I want to become a car mechanic, my dream is to become Rwanda’s Social Affairs Minister. Then I would help all orphaned children so that they had enough food, had somewhere to stay and were given the chance to go to school.” 🌐

AOCM supports 600 young people

“We think that an education is the most important tool for a good life. At the moment we support 600 youths financially so they can go to school – from primary school to vocational schools and university. We try to help with school fees, transport to and from schools, school uniforms and sometimes even school materials such as books, notepads and pens. 146 of those we support are adults who had to stop school because of the 1994 genocide. We give them a chance to finish compulsory school.”

“At the moment, we can’t

afford to support more than 600 pupils financially, but we help many more in other ways. We want to be the parents who the children have lost, so we try to do the things their parents would have done if they had lived. If a child has problems in school and begins to play truant, for example, we go and meet them and try to find out what’s wrong. We encourage the child to continue even if it is difficult. We also visit the school and talk with the teachers if needed so that the child will return.”

Naphtal Ahishakiye,
leader of AOCM



Vestine wants to forgive the murderers

Vestine is looking out over the beautiful Lake Kivu in south-west Rwanda. The neighbouring country of Congo lies on the other side and can clearly be seen from the beach where she stands.

“The people who killed my family probably hid themselves in the forests in Congo. I’m scared to meet them, but I still hope I will some time,” says Vestine, 15.



Vestine Uwinbabire, 15

Lives: In the boarding school in Cyangugu, by Lake Kivu.

Loves: Going to school and dancing.

Hates: War.

The worst thing that has happened: That I lost my parents.

The best thing that has happened: When peace came to Rwanda.

Wants to be: A doctor.

Dreams: That there aren't any wars on the entire earth.

It is 11 o'clock in the morning in a village outside the town of Cyangugu where Vestine lives. In the glade in front of the little school over 200 people have gathered. Most of them have already sat in the grass and waited for a couple of hours. But despite there being so many, it is almost completely silent. Everybody is waiting for the week's "village court" – or *Gacaca* as it is known – to begin.

Vestine sits far back with a group of women. She looks around carefully. This week's *Gacaca* is special for her. She has decided to tell her story today to everybody who is here. And she knows that many of those who are sitting in the grass around her were there when nearly all of her family were killed.

Finally, the chairperson, Modeste, says:

“Today we are going to begin talking about what happened to Vestine’s family. Please come to the front, Vestine.”

Her parents were murdered

Many look amazed as Vestine walks forward. It is unusual for children and young people to speak in the “village courts”. But Vestine has already done it a couple of times before, and she

Vestine tells of the awful things that happened to her family.

begins to speak with a steady voice.

“One morning all of our houses were burnt down and many Tutsis were murdered. The killing went on for several days. My grandfather was killed when he tried to hide amongst the banana trees. A few days later they killed my older brother and my grandmother. Mum and dad were murdered here in the valley right behind us, she says and points.”

Vestine says the names of everybody in the family who was killed, and even the names of the murderers she knows. Her voice isn't nearly as strong and steady anymore, and finally she begins to cry. Many who listen are also crying.

When Vestine goes and sits down an older woman



walks forward and begins to speak.

“I accept how hard it was here in the village in 1994. Many Tutsis had their hous-





It's Vestine's turn to talk about what happened to her family before the Gacaca, the village court.



The terrible memories make Vestine sad when she has finished telling her story.

es burnt down and were then murdered. Women screamed and children fled in all directions. Personally, I stole clothes, tin roofs, TV sets and video recorders from Tutsis who had suffered. I want to apologise and I think that everybody else should do so, so that we can live in peace with each other.”

Nightmares

After the *Gacaca* Vestine is tired and sad. Many unpleasant memories have returned.

“Even though I was just four years old when it happened, I still remember the screaming and all the blood on the ground.”

“I still have nightmares, and it is difficult to talk about all terrible things that

happened. But it is even worse to keep all the thoughts and feelings to myself. It feels better when I talk about my experiences with others who have witnessed similar things. That is why I go to the *Gacaca*.”

But Vestine goes there for another reason as well. One day she hopes that those who killed her family will be there when she tells her story.

“Many of the murderers are hiding in Congo, but some of them are in prison here in Rwanda. When they are released we will meet in the *Gacaca*. It scares me because I know that I can be killed if I tell the truth. But I hope that they ask for forgiveness instead. I will never forget what they did to me and my family, but I want to try and forgive. I’m part of

AOCM and we encourage each other to speak about our lives in the *Gacaca*, and forgive those who killed our parents. It is hard, but I believe that it is the only way for us in Rwanda to have a good future.”

AOCM's Dance Troupe

Towards the afternoon Vestine feels better again. Tonight is a rehearsal with AOCM's dance troupe. It is what Vestine enjoys most. The practice is held in the yard at the home of one of her friends. When Vestine arrives she quickly gets changed inside the house and then runs out to the others. One of the boys begins to sing and beats the drum hard and rhythmically. It is a wedding song and soon everyone is singing along.





The dance troupe is like a big family for Vestine. Everyone in the group has lost their parents. They buy food, school materials and clothes for the money they earn when they perform.



Meet Vestine and the dance troupe at:
www.childrensworld.org

Saved by Hutus

“The same day my mother was killed, me and four of my brothers and sisters were saved by a Hutu woman called Francine. She was good friends with our mum. When we arrived, five Tutsi children who had also survived were already there. Francine had her own children, so she couldn’t take care of us all. We were split between different families. I ended up with a woman who I called Bibiane. She was also a Hutu. When peace came some months later, my brothers and sisters and I moved into an orphanage. I now live in a boarding school here in Cyangugu.”

➔ The girls dance in a line and move like a snake through the courtyard. Vestine smiles. When she dances she feels calm, and all the terrible memories that came back at “village court” this morning slowly begin to disappear. After a while she doesn’t think about anything else but the drum, the song, the dance and her friends. For a moment she is just happy.

The dance troupe is my family

“It is really important for me to be part of AOCM’s dance troupe, especially when I feel alone and sad. Everybody in the troupe has lost their parents and we try to encourage and support

each other. We are like a family. Most of us started to dance when we lived in the orphanage right after the genocide. There are actually 62 of us in the troupe, but because many people are studying in other places there are fewer of us during term time. We perform at weddings, parties and different festivals. We always share the money we get when we dance. We buy school materials, clothes, food and other things we need. Our songs are about the genocide, AIDS, the *Gacaca*, joy, weddings, love..., anything is possible!” says Vestine. ☺



TEXT: ANDREAS LÖNN PHOTO: MARK VUORI

What is a Gacaca?

After the genocide in Rwanda, over 100,000 people sat in prison awaiting trial for participating in the genocide. Despite the fact that the UN had established the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania, and that Rwanda had set up several courts that would only deal with the genocide, Rwanda realised that it would take more than 100 years to put all the people on trial!

In 2001 they decided to introduce an old system of “village courts” called Gacaca. The word Gacaca roughly means to “sit on the grass.” Before, it meant that people in the villages sat down and tried to solve simple quarrels together. 250,000 people, who had been chosen by the inhabitants of their own villages and communities, were trained to be judges in the new village courts. In Rwanda, there are

approximately 11,000 Gacaca courts today, which really have several purposes. One is to hear and judge the people who took part in the genocide, another is to listen to the victims’ stories. It is also hoped that the victims and those who committed the crimes can, in some way, be able to meet, forgive and move on.

AOCM encourages its members to participate in the Gacaca courts.

“We believe that this is the only chance for everyone in Rwanda to move on. Talking about what you or your family went through can actually make you feel better. And we must tell each other what happened, so that we never forget all the awful things that happened. It must never happen again,” says Naphtal, AOCM’s leader. 🌍

Children in Rwanda

Rwanda is one of Africa’s smallest and poorest countries. 8 million people live here. Half of them are children under 18. Life is hard for many of the children. 1 in 5 children die before they are 5 years old, and over half of all children in Rwanda are malnourished.

- Orphaned children:** 613,000
- Children who are the head of their families:** 101,000
- Children who don’t go to school:** 400,000
- Child workers:** 120,000
- Street children:** 7,000
- Children under 14 with HIV/AIDS:** 22,000
- Children who are refugees in Congo-Kinshasa:** 2,500

Many children in Rwanda have mental health problems after the 1994 genocide. Thousands of children experienced violence and assaults and thousands of others were forced to murder and commit acts of violence against their will. Many of the children later ended up in prison.