

An Ordinary Hero

Something to Think About

A nameless, ordinary, man. His story is part of a bigger story you might remember, a news story about genocide in Rwanda, a country in East Africa. The news story is the typical kind of horror we've grown accustomed to hearing over our meat loaf and mashed potatoes, evening after evening — brutality, inhumanity, astounding cruelty. Maybe the real horror is that such stories are commonplace.

In Rwanda, Hutus butchered the Tutsis with machetes. They slaughtered old and young, adults and children, men and women. Hutus in charge ordered ordinary Hutus to kill all the Tutsis they could find. Their only crime was that they were Tutsis.

One man refused. When the order was given, this nameless Hutu refused to obey. Instead, he hid seventeen Tutsis and saved their lives.

Looking at him on television there's nothing special about him. He's so ordinary that his namelessness seems right. He could represent every person who has ever said no to the madness pressing in around them — a strong, determined *no* that isn't going to change because it's uncomfortable.

The Hutu man exhibited no signs of anger, rage, passion, defiance, or even pride in what he'd done. He didn't understand what the fuss was about. He had done the thing that seemed right, what human beings are supposed to do. He's the stuff saints, heroes, and martyrs are made of, and yet he's lost in the ordinary crowd. Saints lurk among us. We're not aware of them.

This man's courage is exceptional because he stood alone. Every other Hutu went about hacking their Tutsi neighbors to death, but he made a naked decision not to join in the madness. He chose to resist, and he chose it at obvious danger to himself. The ordinary human being at his ordinary best.