

## Genocide Survivor Embraces Her Ordeal To Educate Others

July 26, 2010

BY [John Dorman](#)

[DoSomething](#), headed by Fast Company columnist Nancy Lublin, has recognized five young social entrepreneurs with \$10,000 grants--and one with a prize of \$100,000. Fast Company will profile one of these enterprising youth each day this week.



In 1994, the year Jacqueline Murekatete turned 9, her parents, her six siblings, nearly all her aunts, uncles, cousins, and extended family were murdered. All of them Tutsi, they died in the massive, mostly Hutu-perpetrated genocide that took some 1 million lives in a matter of weeks. "One day everything was normal and then we were being called cockroaches and snakes," she recalls, still with some disbelief. "The plan for extermination was set."

Murekatete was one of the lucky ones. She lived. She was granted political asylum and came to the United States to stay with her uncle. You might have expected Murekatete to keep her horrific ordeal a secret, but when she was 16, Murekatete began to tell her story. "A lot of

students had a sense of outrage and a determination to contribute towards the future of this country and the world," she says. "I suffered through things that no human being should have to experience and people need to know what happened."

In 2007, she started Jacqueline's Human Rights Corner through [Miracle Corners of the World](#), a not-for-profit organization dedicated to molding young people to become leaders of change. She knew that many Rwandan villages lacked places where citizens could come together and learn, so her idea for a community center was hatched. As a recent New York University political science graduate, Murekatete had high hopes for her community center. She helped raise nearly half of the \$200,000 needed for the center by 2008 but ran into some roadblocks. "I first had to find people that had a mission and starting my own nonprofit would have been so difficult with my schedule," she says. "There was also the challenge of getting funding during a recession, but I'm grateful that people have been so receptive."

Now a rising second-year student at the Benjamin Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University, Murekatete wants to ensure that her center provides beneficial counseling and leadership programs. Many survivors lack permanent shelter and are still psychologically traumatized. Medical services are still scarce, especially for mental health.

Murekatete is resolute when describing how her center will help the generation that wasn't alive in 1994. "I want to educate young people about genocide, hate, racism, and anti-Semitism through workshops and how they can prevent it from happening again," she says. "A lot of people think that what occurred in Rwanda was a war, and it wasn't. It was genocide. Over 1 million people were killed. Civilians were taken from their homes and murdered because of something that they couldn't change."

Thanks to her efforts so far to address something that can change--the mindsets of people in Rwanda today--Murekatete was a finalist for the 2010 Do Something Award, winning \$10,000. She will use her grant to start tolerance programs for Rwandan high school students and assist with health care initiatives.

In December she will do something that she hasn't done in 16 years--she will return to Rwanda for the first time since 1994. She will see her community center for the first time, too, and observe the ways in which her hometown has changed. "It will obviously be very difficult, particularly going back to my village and knowing some things will be the same but also realizing that your relatives won't be there," she says. "I'm hoping to document the experience because it's important for survivors that have lots of stories to tell."

Murekatete also now has an amazing platform from which to tell them. Last week at a glittering awards ceremony in Hollywood, she got her Do Something trophy from Oscar-winning actress Mira Sorvino and proudly lifted it in the air. Murekatete's beaming smile was a visible testament of her remarkable journey: She survived, and she has thrived.

*[Photograph by Gabriela Herman]*