

NYDailyNews.com

DAILY NEWS

Jacqueline Murekatete, survivor of 1994 Rwandan Genocide, to be honored for activism by VH1

BY [Gina Salamone](#)

DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Sunday, July 18th 2010, 4:00 AM



Xanthos/News

Jacqueline Murekatete, a survivor of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, is one of the final five nominees and grant recipients of the 2010 VH1 Do Something Awards.

Celebrities from TV, movies and music take the stage at tomorrow night's "Do Something Awards," but the real stars of the show aren't in entertainment.

[Jacqueline Murekatete](#), a [Rwandan](#) native who now calls [Brooklyn](#) home, is one of five young finalists being celebrated for social activism on the show, which airs live from Hollywood on [VH1](#). Her [Manhattan](#)-based charity, Jacqueline's Human Rights Corner, educates others about genocide.

"I'm very excited," said Murekatete, 25. "I know it's going to be fun. And there are going to be musicians there that I listen to and admire."

She'll be a guest of honor among attendees like [Mira Sorvino](#), [Alyssa Milano](#), [George Lopez](#) and [Pete Wentz](#), and she's hoping to spot [Shakira](#), who's up for an activism award in the music category.

The star-studded event is worlds away from her painful past.

"Rwanda was a country that was full of a lot of injustices, particularly against the Tutsis," Murekatete said. "But at the same time, I was 9, I had my family, and my parents always tried to encourage us to pursue our goals.

"Most people in Rwanda have large families, so I had many cousins, uncles and aunts, and was always surrounded by people who loved me and who I loved."

Then things changed.

"Obviously, it was a result of many years of discrimination," Murekatete said, "but it seemed one day we were children, going to school with hopes and dreams, and then on national radio we were being called cockroaches and snakes to be exterminated. We were forced to leave from our homes. It was a huge and very difficult change."

Murekatete's parents and six siblings were among those slaughtered during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide.

Her grandmother placed her in an orphanage, where she survived several raids. After learning most of her family had been killed, she came to live with an uncle in [Virginia](#) at age 10, then moved to Brooklyn with him a year later.

"It was a very difficult time and it was culture shock because a lot of things were very new to me," Murekatete said. "And I was still trying to understand what happened."

She started speaking publicly about her trauma at 16, after a Holocaust survivor spoke to her high school class, and she saw similarities to what she went through. She has since traveled around the world speaking to schools about tolerance.

In 2007, Murekatete launched Jacqueline's Human Rights Corner, which just completed a community center in the Bugesera District in Rwanda. If financial goals are met, programs will begin there in August offering everything from counseling to genocide survivors to computer and English lessons.

The \$10,000 grant she'll score for being a "Do Something" finalist will be a big help. She's also in the running for the \$100,000 grand prize, which will be announced tomorrow night. If she takes the top honor, she plans to start a school here in [New York](#) teaching tolerance.

The "Do Something Awards" honor activists ages 25 and under for their work helping others. Stars like [Lady Gaga](#), [Salma Hayek](#), [Matt Damon](#) and [Tyra Banks](#) are also up for awards in special celebrity categories.