

## Using Rwandan Video Testimony to Understand the Patterns of Genocide

### BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE: KIZITO KALIMA

*This biography is derived from Kizito Kalima's testimony in the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive.*



**K**izito Dixieme Kalima was born on June 3, 1979, in Nyanza, Rwanda in the Butare region to Dennis and Cecilia. He is the youngest of ten children, nine of which survived the genocide. He was raised in an upper-class home as his father was from a powerful lineage, and lived very near all of his extended family. His grandfather was killed in 1959 during the first genocide, and his father was a political leader prior to the Hutus' rise to power in the early 1960s. As a result, his father spent some time in exile prior to returning to Rwanda to be a school administrator.

Big Z, as his friends know him, says he always gravitated towards sports and stood out because of his athleticism and his height (6'9). According to Kizito's testimony, it was a stereotype that Tutsis were taller, so he was always reminded by others about being a Tutsi. He also shares how as a child on the soccer fields, he was first called "snake" or "cockroach." In the testimony Kizito describes how this made him "more careful about his relationships, even at an early age." As a Tutsi he was not picked to attend an advanced military academy in fourth grade. This was not the way Kizito was raised, he remembers how his father "never taught him the difference between the Hutu and Tutsi," but instead instilled in him that "all were human and equal."

Upon return from exile, his father became a prominent community leader. Kizito explains that due to his father's past, their family received extra scrutiny from the government, including the setup of roadblocks near his house. In the month just prior to the genocide, his father was murdered.

After the president's plane was shot down, Kizito's family began seeing Tutsi houses vandalized and set on fire. The family evacuated and sought shelter from a Hutu friend, but when it was clear he and his family were not safe there, they moved around with other family members seeking shelter. Soon they were caught and militia members attacked them with machetes and clubs. A family member covered Kizito, preventing him from being struck by a bat, but Kizito was still wounded in the head by a machete. His uncle died there, but Kizito pretended to be dead in a ditch and was able to escape.

As Kizito and his cousins ran to find a safe place, they came across the near-dead bodies of some of his aunts. Z stopped to hear them cry for milk and covered them with a cloth. Later he found himself caught and detained by the mayor of the local town. It was while he was imprisoned that he saw his mother for the last time at the end of May. She gave him food and told him she was prepared to die. "You'll be a man," she said. "I won't raise you. It's time to grow up. Take care of your sister and cousins." He watched as she was pushed into the back of a Nissan truck, never to be seen again.

With two of his cousins, Kizito escaped and managed to survive in the marshlands and swamps for nearly three months until he was liberated by the Rwandan Patriotic Front at the end of July 1994.

After the genocide, Kizito fled to Kenya to look for an older brother. While there he turned to basketball and was signed up to play for an amateur team at a school in Uganda. Afterwards he was mentored by a coach who offered him a chance to come to the United States and play basketball in an international junior basketball tournament in Georgia in 1998. He stayed in the United States for high school and college, playing the sport that had become a refuge for him when he was in Africa.

Kizito Kalima lives in Indianapolis, Indiana, and is married to his wife, Stacey. Together they adopted two Rwandan orphans, daughters Josiane and Liliane. He now speaks regularly about his experiences to students throughout Indiana in an effort to spread awareness of the dangers of genocide.