



Main Line Life photo - PETE BANNAN

Real life "Hotel Rwanda" hero Paul Rusesabagina spends a moment with Villanova Professor Maghan Keita (left) and Martin Ganda, a Villanova senior and president of the African Student Association.

Paul Rusesabagina tells his story at Villanova

By Jason Goldstein

On Tuesday night, the Main Line played host to an international hero.

A decorated humanitarian for his courage during the Rwandan genocide, Paul Rusesabagina spoke at Villanova University about his life-altering experience.

This is part of his worldwide journey to spread a message of peace, love and remembrance.

"My message, as I said, is a message of raising awareness," Rusesabagina said. "Tomorrow's world is yours and you can shape it the way you want it to be."

Rusesabagina's story inspired the Academy Award nominated film *Hotel Rwanda*, and has also been re-told in his autobiography "An Ordinary Man."

This is exactly the way that Rusesabagina sees his actions during the genocide.

"I never thought that it was easy for me. I just thought that I was a manager doing his day to day

duties," Rusesabagina said.

What he did during the 100 days of genocide in his country was anything but ordinary.

In Rwanda in 1994, there was a conflict between the country's ethnic Hutu and Tutsi populations.

A plane carrying both the President of Rwanda and the Hutu President of neighboring Burundi was shot down near Kigali, the capital of Rwanda.

The Hutu saw this as part of a conspiracy to wipe them out. They decided to organize militias to eliminate the Tutsi population first.

From April to mid-July of 1994, almost 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutu were murdered.

Rusesabagina's family could not leave the country during this time. When it became too dangerous to remain in their home, Rusesabagina moved them into the hotel where he had formerly been employed.

Due to his work as a diplomat, his business connections, and his friends in the military,

Rusesabagina was able to keep his family, and many others who came to him for help, safe inside of the Mille Collines Hotel.

Risking his own life numerous times and sacrificing all of his possessions, Rusesabagina was able to shelter over 1200 refugees in the Mille Collines until the conflict finally subsided.

Today, Rusesabagina wants to be remembered not for what he did, but as someone who witnessed genocide while the rest of the world stood by.

"First, what we need is a will," Rusesabagina said about preventing mass murder in the future.

He referenced the ongoing conflict in Darfur, a region in the Sudan where an estimated 400,000 people have been killed since 2003, as proof that we still do not have awareness or a will to change the world.

Despite the staggering challenges, Rusesabagina still has hope.

"I have hope for the future of Africa because I am never, in my life, pessimistic," Rusesabagina said.