



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Meeting Grace Rutagengwa, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide

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| ISSUE: **HUMAN RIGHTS**



Grace Rutagengwa is a survivor of the Rwandan genocide which claimed the lives of her parents and three siblings. As one of her last acts, Grace's mother hid three year old Grace under her skirt, to protect her from their attackers.

A neighbor – who was named Providence -- found Grace and provided shelter for her until she could be safely transported out of the country, hidden in a large suitcase.

All alone, the young orphaned Grace endured overcrowded, abusive and unsanitary conditions in camps in Congo and Burundi. She was eventually relocated back to Rwanda, and as an excellent and determined athlete, she was selected to play with a traveling Rwandan basketball team. When the team competed in a basketball tournament in New Jersey, she and a teammate sought political asylum.

While visiting a friend at Fulton Montgomery Community College, she met [Robin DeVito](#), who works as a disability counselor at FMCC. Robin, a mother of two, had already taken another FMCC student from west Africa into her home, but she welcomed Grace into her household as well.

Grace was the recipient of FMCC's Distinguished Service Award for her volunteerism as a student ambassador, welcoming new students to campus and conducting campus tours, and for sharing her survivor's story at local high schools, churches and even at the United Nations.

Meeting Grace was a truly inspiring event for me. I know she is going to go on to achieve great things.