*HOTEL RWANDA*: A BRIEF SELECTIVE HISTORY

All Rwandans share a common language, Kinyarwanda. They have the same cultural heritage, including a common national mythology which enshrines the origins and historical relationships of their three peoples: the Hutu (85% of the population); the Tutsi (14%); and the Twa, or Pygmy (1%).

In general, but with many exceptions, the Tutsi were taller and had sharper features. The Hutu (again generally and with many exceptions) were shorter with larger noses and blunter features. Tutsi tended cattle, and were overlords. Hutu farmed the land and were regarded as peasants. It was possible to change one's classification by intermarriage or "social climbing." In effect, the difference between Hutu and Tutsi was one of caste/class rather than ethnicity.

During the late 1950s, many African colonies became independent. The Belgians turned the government of Rwanda over to the majority Hutu, who promptly reversed the preferences that the Tutsi had enjoyed. After independence in 1962 it was Tutsi children who were excluded from school and Tutsi adults who could not get government jobs.

In 1990 the exiled Tutsi formed a rebel force, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, or RPF, to invade their homeland and win the right of return. This set the stage for the Hutu-dominated Rwandan government to paint all Tutsis as traitors. The government condoned or actually sponsored outbreaks of violence against the Tutsi. The RPF was better trained and had a brilliant general, Paul Kagame. By 1993 the RPF was a real threat to the Hutu-dominated Rwandan government.

A coalition government was announced in 1993 after negotiations in Arusha, Tanzania. The UN passed a resolution creating the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) under a Chapter VI mandate to assist in implementing the Arusha Accords. (Peacekeepers operating under Chapter VI of the U.N. Charter may only use force if they are attacked and only to defend themselves.) General Roméo Dallaire of Canada was appointed Force Commander. He first arrived in Rwanda on an information-gathering mission with little more than a map and an encyclopedia article on Rwanda. Dallaire requested 5,000 peacekeeping troops but was granted only 2,500.

The genocide was planned months or years in advance by Hutu extremists in the army and the government. It was launched in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, on April 7, 1994 when the plane carrying Rwandan president Habyarimana, and Burundian President Ntaryamira (also a Hutu) was shot down by a hand held, ground to air missile. The genocide ended only when the RPF completed its conquest of the country on July 18, 1994. Over the course of 100 days, over 800,000 Tutsis were slaughtered.