



# DINING for WOMEN

## *MC PREVIEW OCTOBER 2006* *RWANDA*

This month DFW supports the work of Women for Women International among women survivors of the 1994 Rwanda genocide. In this month's *MC* look for features about

- How a war like the Rwandan genocide specifically affects women.
- How such a tragedy could take place while the world stood by and watched.
- How Rwandan women are taking leadership in rebuilding their country, with the help of organizations like WFWI.

### **Ideas for Chapter Meetings**

1) If video works for your group and you've obtained a copy of *God Sleeps in Rwanda*, you may want to show some or all of the documentary. For more info on the film, see [www.godsleepsinrwanda.com](http://www.godsleepsinrwanda.com)

2) If you'd like to show video and couldn't get a copy of that film, you might show the brief video provided on the WFWI website: <http://www.womenforwomen.org/watch.htm>

3) As usual, we encourage bringing the "voices" of women we're supporting into our chapter meetings. Rather than providing a list of quotes this month, I've been inspired by the poetry of WFWI founder Zainab Salbi's new book, *The Other Side of War: Women's Stories of Survival and Hope*, to compose a litany for use in chapter meetings. The litany uses the words of Zainab, poet Alice Walker (who wrote the preface to the book), and Rwandan women in WFWI's programs. I hope you find it as meaningful to perform as I did to write. You'll see it below, along with some suggestions for performance. Please note: I'm not sure that the Litany will appear in *MC* because of length and "surprise" factor for chapter meetings. (I may publish it in a later edition of *MC*.) It would be helpful to have a copy of the book on hand for your meeting, especially to show the photos of women, of Rwanda, and of one woman's handwritten letter to her sponsor. (See below under "Recommended Book.")

4) We're all about making connections—further and deeper. WFWI offers a particularly compelling way for DFW members to continue to connect with the women it serves. For \$27 a month for one year, an individual (or perhaps a DFW chapter) can sponsor a Rwandan woman in WFWI's training program, correspond with her, get to know her. In the litany, you'll hear testimony to how profound that experience can be. We encourage you to invite your members to consider it or to consider it as a chapter (perhaps with one person doing the corresponding). We won't mind if \$27 of your monthly DFW contribution goes toward a sponsorship, but please let us know and share your experience with us as it develops. And please let WFWI know your DFW connection. For more info, see <http://www.womenforwomen.org/scintro.htm>. Also: If you envision reading letters from the woman you sponsor in chapter meetings, please

underline on the application form that you would like to sponsor a woman who can correspond with you. Not all the women who WFWI supports are able to do that.

### **Recommended Book of the Month**

There are several moving books written by women about Rwanda. *MC* will introduce some of those as well as a few excellent films. Our book recommendation of the month, however, is Zainab Salbi, *The Other Side of War: Women's Stories of Survival and Hope* (National Geographic: 2006). It has a long section on Rwanda but also covers other war-torn places. If you purchase the book through amazon.com, please consider doing so via the DFW website so that DFW can receive a percentage from the sale. Go to <http://diningforwomen.org/getinvolved.html> and click on the amazon.com icon.

### **Socially Responsible Shopping**

You might enjoy Rwandan fair trade coffee at your next meeting or display a Rwandan peace basket (which figures in the litany). They come in a variety of sizes and prices. More info on both will be in *MC*. For now, here are links to sources for coffee and/or baskets:

[www.landofathousandhillscoffee.com](http://www.landofathousandhillscoffee.com)

[www.thousandhillscoffee.com](http://www.thousandhillscoffee.com)

[www.oneworldprojects.com](http://www.oneworldprojects.com)

[http://www1.macys.com/catalog/index.ognc?CategoryID=24089&PageID=24089\\*1\\*24\\*-1\\*-1](http://www1.macys.com/catalog/index.ognc?CategoryID=24089&PageID=24089*1*24*-1*-1)

Allegro (Whole Foods), Starbucks, and Green Mountain Roasters all carry Rwandan coffee, usually as a specialty item. So if you want to serve it at a meeting, please contact your store (or the website) ahead of time.

### **Dining with Women**

Since many members (especially the author of *MC!*) enjoy talking about food, *MC* will once again discuss foodways. Our “menu” for the month features an easy, make-ahead Rwandan Beef Stew. Rwandans generally have “one-dish” meals, but I’ve made suggestions based on ingredients common in Rwanda for items to round out an American meal.

#### Menu

Appetizers: Roasted peanuts, Terra Chips (which contain common Rwandan ingredients taro, sweet potato, and cassava—also called yucca), and avocado dip

Main Dish: Rwandan Beef Stew with Mashed Sweet Potatoes or Cassava (recipes below)

Side Vegetable: Leafy Greens or Green Beans would be appropriate

Dessert: Mixed fruit bowl of pineapple, banana, and mango. Or, a traditional dish from the African American South inspired by one of Rwanda’s favorite foods, Sweet Potato Pie (recipe below).

#### Rwandan Beef Stew with Mashed Sweet Potatoes

*Adapted from Fran Osseo-Asare, Food Culture in Sub-Saharan Africa (Greenwood Press, 2006)*

Serves 4-6. Easily doubled in a large dutch oven or covered stewpot, but may require longer cooking time.

1 lb stewing beef cubed (see note below)

1 onion, chopped  
3 T vegetable oil  
2 green (not ripe) plantains or 3 very green bananas (see note below)  
juice of a lemon (a couple of Tbs)  
1/3 c tomato sauce (I use Muir Glenn)  
1/4 t ground sage or five or so fresh sage leaves  
1 c water  
1 t salt  
1/4 t red pepper flakes (gives nice spice but not too much heat) or to taste  
1 c pre-cooked green beans, optional

NOTE: I used a boneless chuck roast and cut in approximately 1/2" cubes, trimming the visible fat. Buying a chuck roast rather than pre-cut stew beef has two advantages: it's cheaper and it's usually more flavorful and tender.

Plantains are slightly trickier to peel than bananas because they are much firmer. To peel a plantain, cut off both ends and then cut around the center of the plantain through the skin but not into the flesh. Then make a long cut through the skin the length of the plantain. At the intersection of the cuts at the center, use a knife tip to pry loose the skin to get started peeling. Remove any fibrous strings as well as the peel. If you must use bananas, add them halfway through cooking.

Peel the plantain and cut into pieces the same size as the meat. Toss them with enough lemon juice to coat them lightly. Heat half the oil in a dutch oven or large pot (with a lid) and cook the onion in it until golden. Remove the onion, leaving as much oil as possible. Add the remaining oil and when it's hot, add the beef, turning it occasionally to brown it on all sides. You will probably need to do this in batches, removing pieces as they brown and adding more—don't crowd the pan or the beef will not brown properly. When all the meat is browned, add it all back to the pot along with the onion. Add the plantains and cook for five minutes. Plantains are very starchy and as the starch releases it tends to stick; so you'll need to stir as you cook here. Then add all the other ingredients and mix well, scraping up any browned bits or stuck particles on the bottom of the pot. Bring to a boil. Lower the heat to maintain a simmer, cover the pot and cook until the meat is tender, stirring it just occasionally. Check at 30 and 45 minutes, but it may take as long as an hour depending on the size of the meat cubes. When cooked, plantains remain somewhat firm (more like potato cubes than bananas). During the last five minutes or so of cooking, add the green beans if you like. Serve with either mashed sweet potatoes or cassava (see below). This recipe recommended sweet potatoes and I can attest that they are very good with the stew. Make this one or two days ahead—it improves over a day or two in the fridge. (You can add the pre-cooked beans when you reheat the stew in order to retain their vivid green. The beans should be cooked through however, not crunchy.)

#### Mashed Sweet Potatoes

4 medium sweet potatoes, unpeeled  
3 T butter, room temperature

You can do this two ways. First way: Preheat oven to 425. Rub sweet potatoes with a little oil and prick in several places with a fork or knife. Place on a foil-lined cookie sheet and bake for approximately one hour until tender when pierced with a knife. Allow to

cool enough to handle and then peel. Mash with butter and a little salt to taste (or better, blend with a mixer or in food processor for a smoother puree).

Second way: Boil the whole unpeeled sweet potatoes in salted water until tender. Drain and proceed as directed above.

Rwandans eat a lot of sweet potatoes, but they'd also be likely to eat this stew with cassava (yucca—we'll discuss this staple food in *MC*). It usually can be found at major foodstores and in Hispanic or African markets. If you'd like to try it, there's an easy recipe for Mashed Yucca with Garlic at

[http://www.foodnetwork.com/food/recipes/recipe/0,,FOOD\\_9936\\_27898,00.html](http://www.foodnetwork.com/food/recipes/recipe/0,,FOOD_9936_27898,00.html)

### Sweet Potato Pie

*Adapted from Mrs. Wilkes' Boardinghouse Cookbook*

1 c brown sugar

1 t cinnamon

1/4 t ground cloves

1/4 t ground nutmeg

1/4 t salt

2 eggs

1 2/3 c evaporated milk

1 1/2 c boiled, peeled sweet potatoes, beaten smooth with a mixer (or use canned sweet potato puree—not “pie filling”—without sugar)

1 10” pie crust (recipe below or use pre-made in a pinch)

Preheat oven to 425. Combine the sugar and spices. Beat eggs with the milk. Add sugar mixture to the egg mixture and then add the sweet potatoes. Mix until smooth. Pour into a saucepan and heat until the pie filling almost boils. Pour into the unbaked crust. Bake 15 minutes, reduce heat to 350 and bake another 15-20 minutes until a knife inserted in the middle of the pie comes out clean. Allow to cool at least to warm room temp before attempting to slice. Serve with whipped cream.

### Pie Crust

2 1/2 c all purpose flour

1 t salt

1/2 c shortening (better: good lard if you can find it), chilled

1/2 c butter, cold

5 T cold water, approximately

Cut butter and shortening in small pieces. In a food processor (or bowl), mix flour and salt. Add shortening and butter in small pieces. Pulse several times in the food processor until the consistency of coarse meal or chopped nuts (or combine with flour using a fork or pastry blender to same consistency). Add water 1 T at a time, pulsing briefly, until dough just comes together. Place on plastic wrap and push the dough together into a disk-shape. Cover with plastic and chill until needed. Roll out and fit into a 10” pie pan or well-seasoned cast-iron skillet. Chill until ready to add filling.

Litany is next.... More later in *MC*!

**At the Woman's Table**  
**A Litany for Rwandan Women and All Women**

This litany is based on the words of Rwandan women survivors, WFWI founder Zainab Salbi, and poet Alice Walker found in *The Other Side of War: Women Stories of Survival and Hope* and on the Women for Women International website.

The litany calls for 17 voices, although a smaller group could double-up on parts. Alice and Zainab speak several times and most others only once or twice. There are a couple of times where “ALL” the voices speak together. The “ALL” could include everyone in attendance. “Readers 1-3” should use their own names where instructed. The title is taken from Alice Walker’s preface. As it implies, you might perform this sitting around a table (if you have one big enough) or in a circle. If you have a Rwandan peace basket, you might place it in the center of the table. Please make enough copies so that everyone can follow along whether taking a role or not.

As people arrive at your meeting, recruit volunteers to take roles. It’s a good idea for each person to look over her part briefly before the performance. Though it might make “perfect,” there’s really no need for the group to practice—this is fairly straightforward. It should take between 12-15 minutes to perform.

**The Litany**

**Alice:**

What is happening  
In Africa  
(and elsewhere)  
is because  
the men  
did not listen  
to the women  
& the women  
did not listen  
to the women  
either  
& because  
the people did not listen  
to each other  
& because  
nobody listened

to the children  
&  
the poets

I am Alice, a poet.

**Zainab:** War is not a computer-generated missile striking a digital map. War is the color of earth as it explodes in our faces, the sound of a child pleading, the smell of smoke and fear. Women survivors of war are not the image portrayed on the television screen, but the glue that holds families and countries together. Perhaps by understanding women, and the other side of war, we will have more humility in our discussions of wars. Perhaps it is time to listen to women's side of history. I am Zainab, a peacemaker.

**Reader 1:** Who can imagine 800,000 people being hacked to death with machetes in the span of four months? I am (your own name), a witness.

**Beata:** When the conflict started, it made no sense to any of us. We did not consider each other as enemies. We were intermarried. We lived the same life.... They hacked my ribs with a machete and left me to die. That night I slept in my blood, the blood of my children, and of my husband. I am Beata, a widow.

**Reader 2:** Who can truly grasp the horror of 500,000 women and girls being raped? I am (your own name), a witness.

**Beatrice:** I remember machetes flying around right and left as they cut people. I woke up many hours later to see that I was still alive. On top of me were the bodies of my seven children. I am Beatrice, who survived.

**Zainab:** Beatrice ran from the church where her children were massacred, only to be captured, raped, hacked with a machete, and left for dead.

**Reader 3:** What has happened to a world that ignores them? I am (your own name), a witness.

**Rosine:** There were sixty-two of us; they took and threw us into a lake. Only three people survived—me and my two girls. When they threw us in the lake, we were dropped on the side in shallow water. I managed to get out

of the water and run with the children to hide in the bushes. I am Rosine, a mother.

**Zainab:** Jemince survived the genocide with her nine-month old baby strapped to her back.

**Jemince:** We did not know why we were brought to the church to be slaughtered. People were falling all over me. I was soaked in blood. There were dead bodies and blood everywhere. But my little boy did not cry. It was as if he knew keeping silent meant his life. For certain if he had cried they would have looked for the noise, and they would have killed us. I am Jemince, no longer quiet.

**Reader 1:** A century ago, 90 percent of war casualties were male soldiers. Today, an estimated 90 percent of casualties are civilians, and 75 percent of these are women and children.

**Alice:** Will our disbelief, confusion, and fear only be activated toward change when we hear the sound of killers at our own door?

**Zainab:** If we are to understand war fully, we need to understand not only what happens on the front lines, but what happens on the back lines as well, where women are in charge of keeping life going.

**Beata:** Thinking about those images, meditating on my problems, at times, I find it difficult to sleep at night. The images come to me often. I am living in the same house, surviving and coping.

**Reader 2:** When a man is injured in war, he is a hero. But when a woman is raped or mutilated because of rape, she is more likely hidden, an object of shame.

**Zainab:** Today Beatrice lives in a two-room hut built with the help of other women survivors. Beatrice bore the child that resulted from the rape and has adopted five more orphaned children.

**Reader 3:** Women are more likely to be displaced as a result of war, more likely to be sole providers for children and the elderly, more likely to die of disease.

**Jemince:** Those of us who adopted orphans did so with little or no means to care for ourselves and our own surviving children. But we had no choice. There were too many children left orphaned. It was not possible to sit on the side and do nothing.

**Marie Claire:** I was alone when I found out.... I was devastated and angry, angry that this could happen to me. I could not believe that it was me. I have never been with another man except for my husband; I could not understand how I could be sick with this virus. Surviving the genocide, I did not believe that living with HIV/AIDS would be my fate. He is dying. We are dying. I worry about dying before my little girl, Bobette. I also worry about her dying before me. I am Marie Claire, living with AIDS.

**Zainab:** Francine was 21 and pregnant during the genocide. A refugee for two years in Congo, she learned upon return to Rwanda that her husband was dead. She was struggling on her own to raise an orphaned girl along with her own daughter before finding out about Women for Women.

**Francine:** We had nothing, we were very poor. I had no resource to care for them, to feed them, and to send them to school. I knew that I was poor but I didn't know what to do about my poverty. I am Francine. Now I know.

**Rosine:** I search for help anywhere and everywhere. Our situation was desperate. I was disgusted with myself and suicidal.

**Zainab:** She went on for the sake of her daughters.

**Reader I:** How can the world live without war? Someone must know.

**Alice:** We, having been nearly destroyed, can use what we learned from our destruction to start the world again.

**Zainab:** Beatrice chose to live. She has empowered a family and helped restore a community.

**Marie Claire:** If I am angry I will be paralyzed. There is no time for me to be angry. There is too much to do.

**Reader 1:** We will never forget what war has taught us. Never again will we be resigned to illiteracy, weakness, and powerlessness, forced to let selfish



men, whether fathers, brothers, lovers, husbands or friends lead us into ever darkening ignorance and servitude.

**Rosine:** By sharing my experience with other women in the program, I have come to feel better about myself. My late husband's uncle wanted to marry me. I did not want to marry him. Had I not had the means to support myself and my children or the self-confidence to stand up, I would have probably married him out of pressure. And this would have brought me a life of misery.

**Beata:** I had lost appreciation for life and myself. I wanted to die. I didn't want to take any medicine. I felt no joy. Now through the program, things are different. I value myself.

**Reader 2:** We have had enough. We insist on acquiring knowledge for ourselves and for our daughters, having learned the hardest ways possible that ignorance and peace cannot coexist.

**Dorothy:** I want to make sure that my children continue with their education, for I was not able to continue with mine and I think education is the salvation of the poor. I am Dorothy. I care for my mother and children.

**Francine:** I am always looking for ways to increase my knowledge and to improve my life. I am not bitter. I am hopeful for myself, my community, and my country. My life is a testimony to that optimism.

**Zainab:** Today Francine is president of a local cooperative.

**Reader 3:** We have learned all we need to know of leadership that insults, marginalizes, and ignores us.

**Cecile:** Now I participate in meeting with our nation's most important people like journalists, mayors. I even participated in a senators' meeting once. After attending a meeting outside my village, I came back and organized my fellow villagers' meeting. I am Cecile. I am a leader.

**Solange:** I want the women of Rwanda, from the rural poor to the urban elite, to be independent, to be educated. I want them to be peacemakers. I am Solange, a member of the Rwandan parliament.

**Reader 1:** As Alice says...

**ALL:** To change the world for the better, to make it safe for the feminine, which is to make it safe for everyone, women must work together.

**Alice:** Out of the deep feminine values of caring, compassion, and courage, we bring whatever we have to the common table of woman. There we meet our sisters. They have brought what they have as well.

**Christine:** A letter to my dearest Catherine, my sponsor: How are you doing? Here in Rwanda we are also fine. Now we are in the rainy season. It's cold in the nights, and we are growing many vegetables now. Thank you for your picture. Myself, I have five children. My oldest is 18 years old, and he is studying mechanics, the second one is in secondary school. He is 14 years and is very bright. The others are in primary school and my last one is in kindergarten. I have managed to put them in school with your help. I really would like to hear from you and am so glad to have met you. We thank you for the love you've shown us, Christine.

**Francine:** My relationship with my sponsor Michelle has opened a new world for me. I have talked to my sponsor about Rwanda, my husband, my evolution with the program. My sponsor has also talked to me about her life. That relationship has contributed to changing some of my perceptions in life.

**Zainab:** Afraid to move, to cry, to even breathe, Violette and her two children lay on the floor of a church for an entire week pretending to be dead...

**Liz:** Her husband was killed. She and her children were on brink of death and fought for their lives. She was able to save her family and rise above the carnage. She has been able to forgive the individual who killed her husband. I can't imagine how she can do that. Somehow she is able to get past that and forgive. I told her, "You've got to be a bigger person than I am because I can't imagine having my husband senselessly killed and getting past that." I'm Liz, Violette's sponsor.

**Zainab:** Liz pledged to provide \$27 a month for one year to support Violette's training and education as well as give a cash allowance to help her pay for food, school fees and clothing. As the year progressed, Violette flourished. She has become a local businesswoman and a leader in her

community.

**Liz:** I am just amazed by all that she has accomplished and thrilled for her and her children. She was able to rise above the circumstances that life dealt her.

**Zainab:** Using money that Liz sent, Violette expanded her fledgling sorghum harvest into a full-fledged business making sorghum-based drinks. Violette also has a considerable bean harvest. From her bean harvest alone, she makes nearly \$1800, nearly seven times the average Rwandan income. Violette has been able to hire local laborers, often other women, to work the fields and help her manage her business. Violette has been awarded a bank loan to bring water to her business and to her community.

**Liz:** I think about her all the time, in fact on a daily basis. I just had my second girl, and between her and my two year-old toddler, it just seems like a lot. I sometimes feel overwhelmed and there is too much to handle. But then I think of Violette and women like her. What I have to go through is so little to handle in comparison. She has provided me with tremendous perspective that you can't get from just reading an article or watching a news story. Just to know a woman with the kind of the strength that Violette has has given me a perspective that I would not otherwise gain.

**Zainab:** She has become the president of a local women's crafts cooperative that is made up of graduates of her rights awareness training group. Together they make and sell traditional Rwandan baskets that have become symbols of peace. Hutu, Tutsi and Twa women sit side by side to weave "peace baskets."

**Violette:** This program has changed my life. My mind has been opened.

**Zainab:** The poet Rumi said, "Between the worlds of right-doing and wrong-doing, there is a field; I will meet you there." In today's world there is a field between the worlds of war and peace, and women are meeting there.

**Alice:** And so may it be.

**All:** And so may it be.

