Comic Relief

South Africa’s mighty tyke becomes an animated hero

June 1, 2004 By Akiko Matsuda

At the 2000 International AIDS Conference, 11-year old Nkosi Johnson delivered a heart wrenching speech, criticizing South African President Mbeki’s denialist AIDS policies and pleading for meds to fight mother-to-child transmission. Now, three years after his death, his call sounds louder than ever in the new children’s comic book, *Nkosi Johnson: The Legacy*. Written and illustrated by Senco 5, a Senegalese publisher, the touching full-color volume traces Nkosi’s battle for medication and HIVer rights.

Born HIV positive in Johannesburg, Nkosi was given up for adoption by his HIVer mom. His white foster mother, Gail Johnson, had to battle to get him into public school; she later founded Nkosi’s Haven, a center for mothers and children affected by AIDS. “The center is [intended] to keep infected mothers and their children together,” Johnson told *POZ*, adding that Nkosi was torn away from his own mother because of her HIV. “[The center] is what Nkosi wanted.” The cartoon also touches on financial squabbles between Gail and Nkosi’s biological family, tracing the turbulence caused by the tiny hero.

The publishers hope the comic book can teach South African schoolchildren about AIDS, but they lack distribution funding. To help out or get your own copy, contact Mbaye Dieng in Senegal (221.639.1111 or lawdieng@hotmail.com) and live the legacy.

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