This Time, It’s Personal

Hannelore Williams explores today’s pandemic in her docu-series Dirty 30.

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Williams at the Mandela House in South Africa.

Before filmmaker and actress Hannelore Williams (Blue Bloods, One Life to Live) left the United States to volunteer at an HIV shelter in South Africa, she decided to research the epidemic. Realizing how much she didn’t know, she was inspired to get educated and to turn that process into a 10-part docu-series called Dirty 30. (The title references the 30th anniversary of AIDS, which is when Williams began the project.) Sleek and current as a music video, the series was filmed on three continents and is broken into subjects such as “Black Women and Single Motherhood,” “Monogamy and Sexual Healing,” “AIDS Inc.” and “Men: The Straight and the Gay.” POZ spoke with Williams as she was posting episodes of Dirty 30 on YouTube, a platform she hopes will reach the widest audience.

What was your goal in taking on this project?
To make a series about HIV that I could relate to. There are amazing films and documentaries out about HIV and AIDS, but none of the ones I have seen reflected how it has affected my family and friends.

Whose voices did you want to capture?
I went for one of three people to interview: 1) people infected or affected directly by the pandemic, 2) experts, workers and scientists in the field, and 3) your average person who has an opinion about HIV. I did this because I wanted to see where we are today with the virus. People who don’t consider themselves part of this pandemic are still a part of it. We all play a role in where we are today.

Are you concerned when an average person’s viewpoints might come across as politically incorrect or at odds with prevailing wisdom? For example, several interviewees mention men on the down low in a disparaging context, but researchers have shown that these men are not responsible for the high HIV rates among black women.
I let people speak honestly about how they feel, to hold a mirror up to our preconceived notions. When I present an idea that might be statistically incorrect, I place an interview or factoid to balance it or show the other side of that statement. I do this because these “ideas” don’t just belong to this one person; they represent a large group of people who feel the same way. If you can relate to those statements, then maybe Dirty 30 [will] introduce you to some other ways of thinking. Then maybe we can have a productive dialogue around stigma and see some growth and healing.

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