



AIDS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND WHAT A CHILDREN'S BOOK CAN DO

The Hague, Worldaidsday, December 1st 2005

IS THE BOOK PRO?

Dear all, my name is Brenda Mugabona. I am Brenda from the book 'Brenda has a dragon in her blood'. I am a regular girl and I am doing fine, except for the fact that I have AIDS. You can read about all that in the book.



This was the heart warming opening sentence with which Brenda introduced herself to South Africa. The South African versions of the book in the 11 official languages were presented in Cape Town on the 21st of July in presence of more than 40 invited organisations working with (street) children.

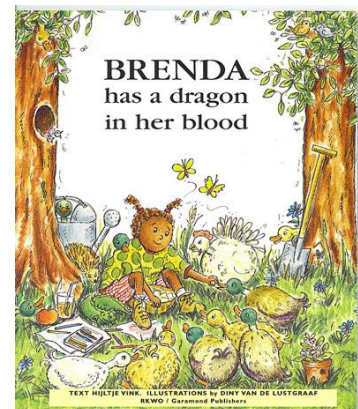
The national and regional media came in great numbers. 'Is the book pro?' was one of the returning questions. Yes, the book is 'pro', for those who like to

know. This means 'pro' the availability of anti retrovirals (medication to slow down Aids) because everybody deserves a medicine for his or her illness. Unfortunately, as the medication is so expensive and access to medication costs even more, the availability has become a complicated political issue.

SWIMMING IN THE SAME SWIMMINGPOOL IS OKE

AIDS hits children in South Africa in different ways. Children become orphans when they lose their parents or caretakers to the disease, and children are discriminated at school as soon as it is known they are HIV-positive. Children in the rural areas and in the township also have to deal with a decreasing level of education because of teachers getting sick. Talking about AIDS is a taboo because it means talking about sex. There is an urgent need with parents, caretakers and educators to discuss all these other issues, like discrimination and the anxieties about the future.

'Brenda has a dragon in her blood' has a positive message reaching out to HIV-negative children as well. You can play together, swim in the same swimming pool and lick from the same lollypop. From all these things you don't get AIDS. As Biblionef South Africa's Jean Williams likes to say: *'My friend with AIDS is still my friend.'*



PRUDENCE IS OPEN ABOUT HER DISEASE

Three interesting guest speakers were invited at the book launch in Cape Town. The first one was Prudence Mabele. She is adviser to the South African National Aids



Council and the executive director of Positive Women's Network. This is a NGO started by Prudence herself, reaching out to HIV-positive mothers and their children. Prudence was the first black woman in South Africa who said aloud: I have AIDS. Today, ten years later, still hardly anyone dares to do so. She impressed the audience with her story of a South African Brenda – Daisy – from Johannesburg. Daisy's mother and the school Daisy attends decided to openly talk

about her status from the very first day. A difficult decision, but a good one for Daisy. As she doesn't need to hide any 'secret', others cannot gossip about her.

TREATMENT ACTION CAMPAIGN (TAC)

The second guest speaker was Thembeke Majali, the provincial coordinator for the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). This organisation campaigns for access to affordable treatment, but also respect for AIDS patients in society. Thembeke painted the Western Cape situation and explained how TAC will use the book in the support groups of HIV-positive parents as well as in care centres where children go.



BOOK AT ALL ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Then Peter Fenton spoke; he is the Life Skills Coordinator for the Provincial Education Department. He promised to do his utmost best to get this book at all elementary schools: 'I'd like to see the book used - not necessarily as part of life skills or Life Orientation - but as part of Language and Literacy - and as first or second language.' For Biblionef, this message from a government representative really meant a lot. Finally, real Brenda was also a little bit present in Cape Town, as she had mailed photographs from herself and her sisters. She had written a letter too, in which she introduced herself. That was really brave and it made everybody very happy. Her letter is read in all other cities and places where Biblionef presented the book, like George, Johannesburg and Durban.

UNIQUE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The whole project wouldn't have been possible if Brenda and her Dutch foster mother Hiltje Vink had not cooperated inspired by their heart and believes (as they wrote one day so nicely). Biblionef Netherlands bought the rights for the books for South



Africa from the publisher for a low price. In July the 'Brenda family' visited the Biblionef children's book depot in the Netherlands. For them it was a special moment to see the story they know so well in the 11 South African official languages. The Afrikaans *Brenda het 'n drakie in haar bloed* and the Dutch *Brenda heeft een draakje in haar bloed* almost sounds the same, yet it isn't!

A few months later, in September, Dominique Pace from Biblionef France visited the

Netherlands. This Biblionef is thanks to a donation from Air France, about to print a first big print run of the French version of the book. Together with a delegation of Biblionef Nederland and Biblionef South Africa, Dominique was most welcome at Vink's place. While enjoying a sunny cup of tea everybody could meet and exchange stories.

WORLD AIDS DAY

On the 1st of December, World Aids Day, Brenda officially handed over her book ' in all 11 languages to the HIV/AIDS ambassador from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paul Bekkers, to Mrs. Ton a Tjen, member of parliament, to Aagje van Heekeren, executive director of the Biblionef foundation in the Netherlands, and to Gaëtane van Veen - Bouchez, the wife of Herman van Veen, a famous Dutch artist. Also Karin Hougaard - a famous actor in South Africa - was there and told a short story out of Brenda's book in Afrikaans. The Dream Throne's (Dream Throne's) Timo van den Heuvel has put together an engaging program for this day.



Brenda's class was fully present in The Hague during the hand over. They sang a song composed by Timo about 'a tiny little dragon'...



QUOTES FROM LETTERS TO BIBLIONEF SOUTH AFRICA AS A RESULT OF 'THE BRENDA BOOKLAUNCH'

Thank you very much for the generous donation of the Brenda books. We are very impressed with the book and thrilled to be able to make it part of our HIV/Aids package

Rina Scholtz, manager Professional Administration ACVV Head Office

It is clearly written, with language that is appealing and appropriate for younger children. It is right that from an early age, children should think of people with HIV infection as no different from themselves. The book presents appropriate and factual information about HIV and AIDS that is within the grasp of slightly older children.

Dr. Paul Roux, the head of Paediatric HIV/AIDS Service at Groote Schuur Hospital

Communicare works in Wallacedene, Bloekombos, Bishop Lavis and Nooitgedacht - all marginalised communities where we reach about 1200 children monthly requiring assistance due to poverty related hardship (including HIV/Aids). They are largely Xhosa and Afrikaans speaking and reading children. (...) We would be exceptionally pleased to receive copies of Brenda ... as these children are in daily contact with HIV/AIDS and there are still very many myths around this matter.

Beth Meyer, Communicare

It was for both groups more than one hour focused attention with wonderful questions from the children and afterwards discussion and talk with the older ones. Those of our children who are HIV positive themselves felt clearly empowered by "Brenda" and felt encouraged to tell more about their feelings and experiences (for example at school).

Lutz Van Dijk, Hokisa

A story, which should be shared and understood by all children in our country (and their teachers and parents). It's well written and cleverly illustrated.

Jay Heale, former secretary South African Children's Book Forum on Fine Music Radio

The supply of the book is highly appreciated in all three Western Cape languages
Thembeke Majali, TAC Coordinator for the Western Cape

BiblioneF South Africa: www.biblioneFsa.org.za

BiblioneF Netherlands: www.biblioneF.org

BiblioneF France: www.biblioneF.com

Den Haag, 1st of December 2005