



28: Stories of AIDS in Africa

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From one of our most widely read, award-winning journalists – comes the powerful, unputdownable story of the very human cost of a global pandemic of staggering scope and scale. It is essential reading for our times.

In **28**, Stephanie Nolen, the *Globe and Mail*'s Africa Bureau Chief, puts a human face to the crisis created by HIV-AIDS in Africa. She has achieved, in this amazing book, something extraordinary: she writes with a power, understanding and simplicity that makes us listen, makes us understand and care. Through riveting anecdotal stories – one for each of the million people living with HIV-AIDS in Africa – Nolen explores the effects of an epidemic that well exceeds the Black Plague in magnitude. It is a calamity that is unfolding just a 747-flight away, and one that will take the lives of these 28 million without the help of massive, immediate intervention on an unprecedented scale. **28** is a timely, transformative, thoroughly accessible book that shows us definitively why we continue to ignore the growth of HIV-AIDS in Africa only at our peril and at an intolerable moral cost.

28's stories are much more than a record of the suffering and loss in 28 emblematic lives. Here we meet women and men fighting vigorously on the frontlines of disease: Tigist Haile Michael, a smart, shy 14-year-old Ethiopian orphan fending for herself and her baby brother on the slum streets of Addis Ababa; Alice Kadzanja, an HIV-positive nurse in Malawi, where one in six adults has the virus, and where the average adult's life expectancy is 36; and Zackie Achmat, the hero of South Africa's politically fragmented battle against HIV-AIDS.

28 also tells us how the virus works, spreads and, ultimately, kills. It explains the connection of HIV-AIDS to conflict, famine and the collapse of states; shows us how easily treatment works for those lucky enough to get it and details the struggles of those who fight to stay alive with little support. It makes vivid the strong, desperate people doing all they can, and maintaining courage, dignity and hope against insurmountable odds. It is – in its humanity, beauty and sorrow – a call to action for all who read it.

28: Stories of AIDS in Africa Details

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Colt Bradley says

A heavy read but powerful, this book is great for anyone who wants a better undersheriff of HIV/AIDS in Africa.

Samantha Koller says

This book was not what I expected--in a good way. I've read works of non-fiction before that are structured as a collection of profiles of people, and I haven't enjoyed reading them very much because I felt like they didn't provide a lot of context so I didn't learn very much. What was so incredible about 28: Stories of AIDS in Africa was that, underneath the symbolism of telling 28 different stories there was a tremendous amount of contextual information. Structured more like a typical non-fiction book, each story built upon those that came before it to explore new topics. After reading the book, I felt like I had a good understanding of the issues around the transmission and treatment of AIDS in different regions of Africa, the social impact of the disease on individuals and on communities, and the challenges facing international aid efforts and government health programs. If the epidemic of AIDS in Africa is a cause that you care a lot about, I really recommend this book as an introduction to understanding the issue more in-depth. Stephanie Nolen is passionate about explaining the deep repercussions of the epidemic on economic and political stability, and her book can help those of us in the international community be more savvy about the donations we make and the international policies that we support.

Jonathan says

A very informative read on AIDS in Africa. Stephanie Nolen expertly weaves personal stories from people personally living with AIDS or working on the fight to stop it with historical facts on the disease and the science behind the preventative measures that are being developed. Each chapter covers one persons story with the illness as well as different aspects about AIDS treatment or the challenges of making treatment more available to people across Africa. Some of the chapters do not quite have the right balance between the personal accounts and other AIDS related information however Nolen succeeds in linking on the ground stories with the wider narrative of the fight against AIDS worldwide.

Valarie says

This book was well-researched and provided a very interesting perspective of the AIDS pandemic as it manifests in Africa. My only criticism would be that the author primarily interviewed upper-class, highly educated people who could speak English. I understand the limitation of being monolingual and attempting to interview a wide variety of people, but this means the book provided a narrow view of the issue. I read the ebook version, which had a lot of typos and formatting errors.

Kate says

Stephen Lewis, the former UN Special Envoy for AIDS in Africa, called Stephanie Nole's 28 Stories of AIDS in Africa, "the best book ever written about AIDS". I must admit that I was skeptical- how could a relatively short book of stories encapsulate this massive epidemic? By the time I'd finished the third of 28 stories, I'd changed my mind.

Nolen successfully uses 28 human experiences of HIV/AIDS, gathered over years of reporting on the issue, to tackle each aspect of the pandemic: orphans, access to treatment, medical research, AIDS in conflict zones and within the military, at-risk groups such as truck drivers and sex workers, African political and international humanitarian approaches to HIV, experiences of children, women, elites, couples, families, activists, and the poorest of the poor. Her approach left me more knowledgeable, and intermittently heartbroken and ready for action. The book critically examines the role of each actor in the pandemic, from international to local in the present and since the first recorded infection. It emphasizes the complexity of the crisis, most importantly its intrinsic links to poverty, as well as including a vital section on how you can help.

Effectively, Nolen has written a book that provides an overview of the political, historical, cultural, and economic realities of HIV/AIDS in Africa while constantly drawing the reader back to one fundamental point: HIV/AIDS is first and foremost a human issue. She quotes Nelson Mandela (he is the main character in the 27th story), "Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity; it is an act of justice" (353).

Krista Greer says

This is one of my all time favourite books. It is well composed, thoughtful, and raw. Rather than focusing on how people die from AIDS, the book was able to demonstrate how people, communities and families can live with AIDS without diminishing the importance of the personal and societal struggles that the AIDS epidemic presents.

Sarah says

I loved this book--Nolen has gathered the stories of 28 different people touched by AIDS in Africa. Most are HIV positive themselves, and others are community activists and vaccine researchers. There is also an excellent profile on Nelson Mandela. Nolen's main mission here is to show that although thousands of people die of AIDS in Africa every day (5500/day is the stat that she uses), it is completely and totally devastating in the same way it would be if you were to start losing your family here. It's not really something that people can get completely used to. She also shows how the response to the epidemic has been less or more effective in different countries--there are 2 particularly infuriating stories on South Africa and Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe initially had a comprehensive response to the disease, but now it is almost completely absent due to Mugabe's corruption. Conditions are so bad that aid groups are pulling out and people die when ARVs are at the pharmacy down the street b/c of hyperinflation. Although conditions in South Africa are now different, years of leadership under Mbeki insisting that HIV didn't cause AIDS and that sick people should rely on "traditional" cures have taken their toll.

So, long story short, read it!

Abby says

This is a must-read for everyone. 28: Stories of Aids in Africa is a moving book compiled with stories from 28 Africans affected by AIDS (one story for every million individuals with HIV/AIDS in Africa), beautifully written by Canadian Stephanie Nolen.

Each story was well-crafted while not being wordy. Nolen really put HIV/AIDS into perspective, providing not only moving stories of real people but also providing astounding statistics about the incidence of HIV/AIDS, death rates, and so on. Further, not only did she capture the story of the highly infectious disease, she also wove in the political tales of each African country discussed as it related to the individual's story.

She selected 28 remarkable people to tell their unique stories. She included researchers, religious leaders, former South African president Nelson Mandela, wives, grandmothers, orphans, refugees, soldiers, nurses, and so on. Just when you finish one story and think it was the most touching story you will ever read in your entire life, you begin reading the next one and realize that there are so many moving stories out there and they are all so unique.

I gave this book a whopping 5 stars both for Nolen's writing craftsmanship as well as bringing HIV/AIDS to life in the developing world. We need to acknowledge what is happening to the millions of people in Africa affected and infected by the disease and find a solution to help them. I have to admit that I learned a lot from this book, both about the disease, its treatments (yes, there are some), the research that is being done, as well as the political histories of several of the African nations mentioned.

This is a powerful book about Africa and AIDS that everyone can benefit from reading.

Marianne says

Anyway, the book (other than the omission of the pages) was truly amazing. I was recommended it by a friend and I have an interest in that sort of thing so I bought it and I honestly didn't think I was as ignorant about the subject as I turned out to be. I always pride myself on being kinda savvy and stuff about world issues but that was completely thrown out the water. It's a great book - and there's stories from everyone from all walks of life in it. A prostitute old enough to be a grandmother who is immune to the disease, a little boy who got held back in school because he was too sick to pass his final exams, the girl who had lost her parents and was looking after her little brother who was dependant on the people of the village to look after them, lorry drivers, educators, soldiers, wives, husbands, aid workers, doctors, scientist - everyone. I don't know, I think because it delivered it in such a way that in the small snapshot you got you learned a little more. The misconception that the soldier had that as long as the prostitute was fat then he didn't have to worry about catching anything, the excuse of some official that there was no point giving African's drugs because they 'told the time using the sun' and wouldn't be able to adhere to the timing methods necessary to follow the guidelines because of it, the artist who always wore a condom but got infected because he went to help a neighbour after a break-in and he got injured and his blood crossed with an infected supply...

It's just a great book and I highly recommend it to anyone. It's an eye-opener and although the stories are about something tragic and the numbers and some of the things that happen are tragic, it isn't a book that is

solely about that, which sounds weird but it's true.

Friederike Knabe says

Graça Machel, wife of former South African President Nelson Mandela and, with him, long time activist in the fight against HIV/AIDS, said: "... we can't fill all the spaces that are left." Five and a half thousand people die in Africa every day of AIDS and related diseases, with an estimated 28 million people infected by the HIV virus.

These figures are too overwhelming to comprehend and Stephanie Nolen's book opens an evocative window for us into the struggle, the suffering and the hope of ordinary Africans through 28 portraits. From her diverse and multi-year experience and research into the pandemic in a number of sub-Saharan Africa countries, she focuses on the individuals, their families and their circumstances, resulting in an intimate, sometimes heart wrenching, sometimes uplifting, yet always deeply moving and inspiring account of what HIV/AIDS has done and continues to do to Africans: to individuals, relations, communities and countries.

Each chapter in Nolen's book starts with a photograph of the primary individual as she or he reveals the tragedy of their lives. Her ability to convey their stories vividly and with great empathy brings us as reader not only close to the unique aspects of each "case", but assists our better appreciation of cultural and political traditions and realities in African societies. The critical components of the HIV/AIDS crisis unique to African countries are addressed within the narrative without losing the personal and emotional primacy of the subject matter.

For close to ten years, Nolen, a Canadian journalist for the *Globe & Mail*, based in South Africa, has been following the HIV/AIDS crisis all over the continent. She has visited families, health clinics, scientists, care centres for AIDS orphans, and activists' organizations. She has walked with health care providers among remote rural communities lacking any medicines, yet trying their best to comfort and help the sick. Stigmas still attached to the infection have meant that misconceptions flourish: those identified with it have been shunned, thrown out of their family's house and left to die. For a long time, testing positive for the virus was perceived by people as an automatic death sentence, resulting too often in changing behaviour patterns. Without any concrete knowledge of this "disease of many names" it robbed families of one young woman or man after another and villages in despair with the ever increasing number of orphans left behind.

Contrary to the long-held prevalent view in Africa as elsewhere - that HIV/AIDS is a disease of minorities and of the poor - Nolen demonstrates the fallacy of this perception that has cost many their lives needlessly. Poverty remains an important factor where nutrition is inadequate, education non-existent, and money for treatment and care is not available. Nolen discusses how traditional societal norms of behaviour still contribute to the persistence of high infection rates, in particular among women. Abstinence, promoted by international, in particular US, aid agencies as a primary method to reduce infections, is only rarely an acceptable option, Nolen contends. Anita in Mozambique stands for many: "None of it" she said, "was up to me". On the other side, there are young professionals, like Lydia in Uganda or Ibrahim in Nigeria, fully aware of their condition, that are still caring for others, lobbying and fighting for access to life prolonging ARVs (antiretroviral medication). What shines through all the stories, is determination and hope despite the odds, the courage, resolve and perseverance that the individuals show in the face of unimaginable obstacles.

As Machel put it: "I don't think I comprehend the dimensions of the havoc, disruption, discontinuity". Nolen's book stands out for her insightful descriptions of the human costs as well as the its fluid integration

into the stories of aspects of socio-economic conditions and up-to-date science research surrounding the pandemic. Yet, she never loses the focus on the human beings who she got to know and who candidly shared with her their life's story. If you think you can only cope with one book on this subject, read this one.

Elizabeth says

Eye opening and truly remarkable. It makes me want to go to Africa and save lives right now.

****EDIT****

I have downgraded my rating of this book after doing some research of my own and realizing just how liberal Stephanie Nolen actually is. Particularly in the second half of the book, she talks about how the responsibility of taking care of the AIDS crisis falls into the hands of rich countries with a lot of *money*. Even she writes about times when money does nothing, so I'd imagine her ability to reason logically would allow her to conclude that pouring money at problems doesn't ever actually fix anything. However, she keeps shouting at the reader that we need to throw money into Africa, into organizations and governments that clearly are not able to maintain the infrastructure necessary to quell the epidemic. I think it is all well and good for better-off first-world citizens to do what they can to help, but it's really just ridiculous to assume that adding to the Global Fund etc. is going to do anything if you have people who still don't use condoms while sleeping with six people concurrently. Money simply will not fix poor lifestyle choices. Whether that makes you feel guilty or not is entirely personal, but this book actually made me less likely to put effort into helping Africa because I realize just how futile it would really be.

Diane says

It is probably the best book I've ever read about the subject. It's definitely the best book I've read so far this year. The author did an amazing job of humanizing people, including the long-haul truck drivers who are a major factor in the spread of HIV.

The first story was about a woman in Swaziland. The second story was about 2 children in Ethiopia. The third story was about Kenya, the first African country I'd ever visited and what drew me into and kept me tied to the continent. Followed shortly thereafter by a story from Mozambique, a beautiful country and home to half of my son's extended family. I felt like I'd been punched in the stomach and that she was talking to me directly. "Here! Read this! You KNOW these people! Do something!"

The problem...so huge. The vacuum inside me...so huge.

Courtney Smith says

Everyone should read this book!! I wish it didn't have to exist, but it does a phenomenal job of highlighting how HIV/AIDS affects people all over Africa. Through examining 28 stories from young to old, you can really understand the way HIV/AIDS spreads and why it is such a problem on this continent as compared to

others. Maybe if everyone read this book, there would be more pressure put on the world to find vaccines, spermicides, etc. to helping stop the spread of HIV/AIDS.

MUST READ!

Neelam Babul says

A very thought provoking book full of breathtaking and heart wrenching stories. The book contains 28 stories of individuals suffering from AIDS from various countries across Africa.

Each story will leave you in tears and full of intense emotions. Within all these stories is a hope that things could get better. The things that we take for granted often are things that others haven't even experienced once in their lives.

A must read for everyone.

Jessica says

A little outdated about what HIV in Africa looks like today, but the stories give great context for the first 25 years of the pandemic.

Beatrice says

Simply presented, but utterly compelling. "28" is the story of 28 people living with AIDS in Africa. Why 28? Because at the time the book was written, there were 28 million people around the world living with HIV. At first, you think that this is just a collection of human interest stories. But in fact, these 28 stories of how HIV and AIDS have impacted these people's lives only serve as the velvet-covered handrail you hold on to as you follow the staircase down, down, down into the real issues that AIDS has brought to the surface: racial and gender inequality, crushing cultural and religious beliefs, economic policies and World Bank decisions. Ms Nolen shows how AIDS is the fulcrum which has allowed all these factors to combine to nearly destroy a continent. I have worked in the field of AIDS for a dozen years, but I still learned a great deal. You care about the people whose stories she presents, but, even more, you begin to understand how this disease has warped an entire generation - not just in Africa but around the world - and we begin to sense the terrible price that our generation and the ones that follow will have to pay for our ignorance and neglect.

Danka says

This book gives an extraordinary insight into the struggle with HIV/AIDS in Africa. Behind each of the 28 stories the author traces back to the genetic evolution of the virus and its particular strains, its spread throughout the continent, and explores its mysteries on epidemiological and geographical levels, e.g. why it's difficult to develop a vaccine after years and years of research; why some people never get infected despite constant exposure to HIV; or why ARVs treatment does not always work.

Without being overly melodramatic the author points out how HIV/AIDS have become a political matter since the crumbled economies of many African states as well as G8 countries' indifferent approach to solving the problem on a global level have fatally compromised the ability to supply the poorest with the necessary treatment.

Brilliant and staggering at the same time, this is one of the best books on the topic.

Kellie says

This is the best book I have read on this subject, and perhaps the best book I have read this year, period. The people she writes about in this book are very real - not romanticized, patronized, or demonized but portrayed honestly. This is hard to find in books by Westerners about Africa or HIV/AIDS, IMO. It is a devastating but important book.

Tara Jennings says

Any amazing book of 28 short stories following individuals, families, and communities in Africa forced to deal with AIDS. I found that each story was a perfect length to read before bed. However, before I read the book I thought my dream may be filled with nightmares... quite the contrary actually. Although the book may appear to be depressing, I found a lot of the stories actually uplifting. The goodness of humanity is represented. I was shocked to find out that the book doesn't just contain short stories, however, also has contains a lot of information surrounding the issue of AIDS. I remember a lot of the focus is on blaming the corporate world for the slow movement to stop AIDS. I wanted to read this book because I was lucky enough to meet Stephanie Nolan at Dalhousie University. At the time I believe she was the African correspondent for the Globe and Mail (where she got all of the stories). She seems very knowledgeable and frank on all of the issues dealing with AIDS. I also have traveled to the area in South Africa most effected by AIDS. This book is not simply about reading depressing stories, it is about learning about the larger issues surrounding AIDS and what can be done about it. The only disappointing thing I found about this book is that at the end Stephanie states that she does not recommend people traveling down to Africa to help because the resources used to do this would be much better going to reputable charities. However, I believe the only way to get people to care about AIDS is to get them to see it, first hand. People need to see to believe. I am sure if Stephanie never saw the real impact of AIDS she would have never made such a great effort to stop it.

Kamalia Ramlan says

Sebuah buku yang membuka mata tentang AIDS di Afrika. Baru aku tahu yang penyakit ini ada ubatnya, cuma kau kena jaga pemakanan dan beberapa pantang laranglah. Kalau kau terlalu bersedih akan sesuatu, AIDS dalam badan boleh menyerang kembali dan kau akan jadi sangat lemah. Jadi, selain jaga hal-hal fizikal, perlu juga jaga emosi. Wanita penghidap AIDS yang mengandung juga boleh melahirkan anak yang sihat (kurang risiko untuk dapat HIV melalui ubat nevirapine).

Namun, di benua Afrika yang kadar kematian disebabkan AIDS adalah sangat tinggi, ubat-ubatan sangat mahal, kekurangan perkhidmatan perubatan yang kronik, ia adalah sangat menyukarkan untuk penghidap AIDS hidup dalam keadaan tenang.

Buku ini bercerita tentang kisah 28 individu daripada pelbagai latar belakang di Afrika tentang AIDS. Ada yang merupakan pekerja seks, pemandu lori, ratu cantik, malah doktor dan jururawat juga ada yang menghidap AIDS. Nelson Mandela juga bercerita tentang beberapa orang keluarganya (termasuk anak lelakinya) yang mati kerana AIDS serta usahanya dan isteri untuk membantu pesakit-pesakit AIDS di Afrika Selatan.

Mereka yang dikisahkan di dalam buku ini datang dari pelbagai negara di benua Afrika - Burundi, Congo, Uganda, Malawi, Nigeria, Swaziland, Afrika Selatan (sekadar menyebut beberapa nama).

Masalah utama mereka selain kekurangan fasiliti perubatan, pakar perubatan dan, kemiskinan ialah stigma masyarakat terhadap penyakit dan pesakit AIDS. Mereka tidak bercerita tentang AIDS secara terang-terangan kerana ia adalah tabu (apa-apa yang melibatkan hal seks adalah sangat tabu), walhal kematian disebabkan AIDS sangat tinggi - 6000 orang mati setiap hari di benua Afrika kerana AIDS. Malah, purata umur penduduk perempuan bagi sesetengah negara di sana sekitar 34-37 tahun sahaja kerana ramai yang meninggal muda kerana AIDS. Dan wanita serta kanak-kanaklah yang selalu menjadi mangsa.

Paling menyedihkan, di sebuah negara miskin, ada para pekerja yang kecewa jika mereka disahkan negatif HIV kerana terlepaslah peluang mereka untuk dapat elauan daripada pihak kerajaan yang dikhaskan untuk pesakit AIDS. Elauan itulah yang digunakan untuk membeli makanan keperluan harian. Sampai begitu sekali.

Ada banyak lagi cerita yang meruntun perasaan. Aku suka cara penulis menulis setiap kisah, seperti membaca buku cerita tetapi hakikatnya ia adalah kisah realiti di sana.

28 itu mewakili 28 juta rakyat Afrika yang dijangkiti dengan AIDS.
