

# Foreword by Archbishop Desmond Tutu

When we first heard about HIV and AIDS, we whispered out of fear and didn't want to talk about it. Yet we became painfully aware of the devastating loss of life, especially on our beloved African continent, and some of us lived through the HIV and AIDS denial of governments that should have known better.

As like-minded people of conscience, we chose to turn things around. We campaigned to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission. We advocated for access to antiretroviral treatment. More people living with HIV began to disclose and tell their stories of living positively to overcome a small virus that had invaded our lives as human beings across nations, cultures and faiths. Our spirits enabled us to rise above stigma and to do what was right to save lives.

At the South African AIDS Conference in Durban in 2009, I invited Luyanda Ngcobo, a young man of 16, who was born with HIV, to speak alongside me. Luyanda said: "I want to be a leader, not a follower." These words should inspire us all to lead and take responsibility for reversing the HIV epidemic. As leaders, we need to talk openly and to learn from each other's journeys of living with and being deeply affected by HIV.

The first short story in this wonderful *Whisper not* collection is a tale of survival against the odds by Nombeko Mpongo, who I have met through her work with the Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation.



Archbishop Tutu with Nombeko Mpongo at the Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation youth centre launch in Masiphumelele, July 2010.

In her heartfelt poetry, Nombeko shares her numbing pain in contracting HIV through being brutally gang-raped. Her faith and her resilience enable her to move out of “the walking death” and to emerge from what she calls “the shadow in me” to proclaim:

“I release and let go of past hurts and grudges

Because I am blessed.

Now, I wipe my tears and give myself a hug

And walk in the victory shouting I love me no matter what.”

Nombeko’s story and these 14 other touching journeys of life and love beyond HIV reflect the rainbow people of Africa. They are diverse stories of ordinary people who have become heroes living extraordinary lives.

This is the time for us to be united as Africans and citizens of the world to embrace and support all people living with and affected by HIV. And this is the time to intensify our efforts to ensure access to treatment for HIV, TB and malaria for so many more of our people.

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