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—Princess Zulu

How did you get the name *Princess*?

Princess Zulu: As per Zambian tradition, my parents named me while burying my umbilical cord underneath a tree a week after I was born. Here my dad announced, “Her name is Princess. She will be a princess among princesses. She will meet with all the leaders of the world.” It’s amazing that when I was just one week old my dad had such insight into my future.

He felt free to chose the name *Princess* as he has royal lineage to two of Zambia’s chiefs, the traditional leaders of my country, so the name *Princess* does have a royal connection.

What are your first recollections of the then mystery illness, HIV?

Princess: In 1984 my parents gave birth to baby Linda, a baby girl I loved with all my heart. She wasted away and died before she ever had a chance to walk. Next, my parents started losing weight, and in time they too passed away. I now know these were among the first wave of deaths from a virus that would shatter my continent and leave fifteen million children orphaned around the world.

Why did you decide to share your story in *Warrior Princess*?

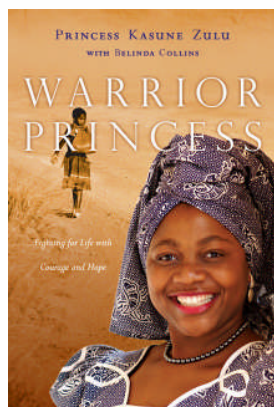
Princess: I wanted to make AIDS real, to put a human face and a name to the statistics. Otherwise, it’s just so hard for anyone to imagine the hold HIV and poverty have over my continent. Life expectancy in Zambia is now just forty years. AIDS is wiping out a whole generation of parents, teachers, farmers, doctors and nurses. What future do our children have if they are left alone with no one to care for them, or they are left with their frail elderly parents? I thought I had a responsibility to share my story, to break the silence and the stigma attached to HIV and AIDS.

By sharing my story I want to give people hope and inspire them to act with kindness, love and compassion. AIDS and poverty are locked in a deadly embrace, but fighting this duo can unite us and bring out the best in humanity.

It may surprise people that there is a globally agreed upon, fully costed plan in place to end the suffering caused by diseases like AIDS and other related terrors of extreme poverty. It’s called the Millennium Development Goals. Our governments have signed up to them, but we all have a role to play: We have to keep the pressure on our governments and tell them this is important to us. We don’t want this suffering to continue on our watch. More than that, churches, schools, colleges, businesses and individuals can all unite and make a difference. It really is within our grasp to end this deathly destruction within our lifetime. What a great legacy this would be for our generation.

Q&A

AUTHOR INTERVIEW



“The way I have chosen to view the virus that lives within me, to be open and proud and willing to share my stories, has led to incredible opportunities. It has literally taken me from a dusty Zambian village to the Oval Office, to the UN, to some of the world’s finest universities and churches.”

—Princess Zulu

HIV has touched your life in so many ways through the loss of loved ones and your own diagnosis. Looking back, how has HIV influenced your life?

Princess: When my baby sister died, no one realized it was AIDS that killed her. I now realize her death marked my first step in a very long journey—a life completely torn apart, transformed and rebirthed by HIV and AIDS. At the age of twenty-two, the moment I learned I too was HIV-positive, it all became clear. It was like the roof split apart and a bright light filled my heart. I was filled with the greatest sense of hope. I knew fighting this disease was my calling. Since that time in 1997 I have spent most of my life fighting this virus and raising funds for the fight.

In many ways, living with the world’s most infamous incurable disease is a blessing. I now live every day with the knowledge that my time is limited. This makes me clear about my mission. It makes me use my time wisely. I now realize just how precious our time on this earth is, and that is a lesson I wish every human being could learn. The way I have chosen to view the virus that lives within me, to be open and proud and willing to share my stories, has led to incredible opportunities. It has literally taken me from a dusty Zambian village to the Oval Office, to the UN, to some of the world’s finest universities and churches.

What do you want people to know about HIV?

Princess: There are two main things I want the world to know:

First, that each of the thirty-three million in the world infected with HIV is a person, just like me, with hopes, dreams and a family to love. We have the same eyes that see the same sunrise, the same ears to hear the same songs, the same lungs to breathe the same air and the same heart that feels the same pain.

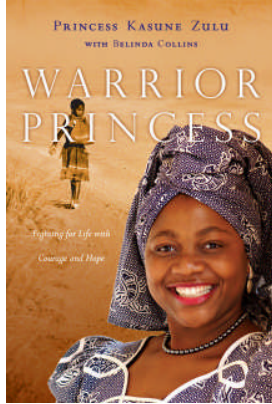
Second, in much of the world, HIV is a preventable, treatable disease, yet in my country, one in three children is an orphan. For the children’s sake, we must give everything to fighting this disease. A child’s future should not be determined by where she is born but rather all children should have the opportunity to grow in a safe, nurturing and nourishing environment.

Many people feel overwhelmed, like there isn’t much that they can do to change the HIV crisis. What would you say to those people?

Princess: There is so much we can do. I urge you to read about the Millennium Development Goals (www.undp.org/mdg/). If we stick to this road map, we will win. One calculation says we could end extreme poverty, and that includes halting the spread of AIDS, if each of us in the developed world contributed just two hundred dollars a year. Can you imagine?

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If we can't give money, we each have unique talents and treasures. I am so inspired by the lengths people go to once their eyes are open. I urge everyone to do the following:

1. Learn as much as you can about HIV and AIDS.

There's a great list of resources at the back of *Warrior Princess* and at www.princesszulu.com. Through reading my story and your further reading you will realize HIV and AIDS is not a stand-alone issue but is interrelated with education, water, food shortages, gender issues and other underlying challenges of extreme poverty.

2. Contemplate and pray.

Pray, meditate, ask for wisdom, grace and guidance to determine your course of action. This will be a path only you can take, according to your unique means and talents.

3. Tell someone!

Get everyone you know on board with your idea. In my experience, people want to help but they don't always know how. When you present a practical, effective way to make a change, people will be right with you.

4. Ask, "What practical things can I do and what should I encourage others to do?"

Recognize the power of one—each one teach one. We all make a difference and hope changes everything.

- Write to your local government representatives. They need to know we care. It really does make a difference. Urge them to keep their commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, to further reduction of unfair debt and to the creation of more fair global trade practices.
- Encourage your church, school or workplace to raise money or undertake projects that will help end poverty. Get creative. You are limited only by your imagination. You'll be surprised how quickly you generate a wave of change.
- Buy fair-trade products. Wherever possible, make sure the coffee, chocolates, clothes and other products are sold in a way that is fair and equitable to the people in the developing world who make them.
- Donate your own time and money to an organization fighting poverty, HIV and AIDS. There are so many incredible organizations to support. Find your favorite organization and give whatever you can afford.