

May 06, 2009

[World AIDS Orphans Day](#)

Tomorrow, May 7, is [World AIDS Orphans Day](#). World AIDS Orphans Day is a grassroots campaign to draw attention to and advocate on behalf of the millions of children orphaned by AIDS.

Here are some of the staggering facts. Please read them... please really stop and think a minute about these statistics.

- There are over **15 million children orphaned by AIDS** living around the world **RIGHT NOW**. 15 million is the equivalent to the number of all of the people living in New York, Paris, and Bangkok combined. That is an awful lot of children.
- Well over **12 million** AIDS orphans live in **Sub-Saharan Africa**, alone.
- Experts believe that **millions more orphans remain unaccounted for in India, China and Russia**.
- **At least 10 million more children will be orphans by AIDS by 2010.**

Do you know how many TOTAL global confirmed cases of the swine flu there have been? As of today (May 6), there have been 1,516 cases. Do you know how many people, world wide, have died of the swine flu as of today?? 31. And look at all the hype... all the action... all the caring.

Do you know how many people around the world DIED of HIV/AIDS in 2007? An estimated TWO MILLION people. That is over 5,400 people a day, dieing of HIV/AIDS. It has been estimated that now, in 2009, 6,500 people will die every day from AIDS, and an estimated 6,000 of those people will leave behind children when they die.

So today, another 6,000 children will be added to the already 15 million children world wide who have been orphaned by the HIV/AIDS crisis.

The result of being orphaned by AIDS is heart-breaking for these children. From the World AIDS Orphans Day website:

- In addition to the trauma of losing a parent, **orphans are often subject to discrimination and are less likely to receive healthcare, education** and other needed services.
- In HIV affected households lacking community support, **food consumption can drop by 40%** putting children at risk to hunger, malnutrition and stunting.
- Impoverished and often without support to educate and protect them, **orphans and vulnerable children face increased risk of HIV infection. (And there are already an estimated 2 million children currently living with HIV).**
- Orphans are often **easy prey to many forms of exploitation:** forced labor, prostitution and child soldiering.

In the United States, if a child loses a parent to accident or illness, it is considered a terrible tragedy. Such stories are covered by the media, communities mourn and show their support,

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etc. In Sub-Saharan Africa, parents dieing is a normal part of life. It is still a terrible tragedy for those children, but it happens so often that no one else really pays any attention.

And do you know what makes this really, truly horrible? Do you know what makes my gut twist and my heart ache? HIV IS COMPLETELY TREATABLE.

If a person contracts HIV in the United States or another country where there is treatment readily available, they have an excellent long term prognosis. Most HIV+ people receiving treatment now have close to normal life expectancies and can live in good overall health. With treatment, HIV+ children can be healthy and happy. They can go to school, grow up, go to college, have (healthy!) children, and live long enough to raise them and beyond. Without treatment, an estimated 50% of HIV+ children will die before the hit their second birthday. My Solomon was almost one of those 50%.

HIV does not have to be a death sentence, and yet for thousands of people every day, it is, because the world doesn't care enough to really do something about it.

Can you imagine for one minute if some terrible disease struck the United States (or whatever country you live in) and was killing thousands and orphaning thousands every day? Can you imagine if another country had treatment that could lead to good health and a long life, but it just was too expensive or too difficult or too much trouble to get that medicine to us? We wouldn't stand for it.

So why do we stand for it now?

I can't wrap my head around what 15 million orphans looks like. I can barely wrap my head around the 100 or so HIV+ orphans that I am trying to find adoptive families for. The numbers are staggering, and so is the need for action. Children are the future of our world, and I shudder to think about what this world will be like with so many millions of children growing up without the love and security of a family... and way too often growing up without adequate food, education and medical care. Where does that leave all of us?

Rich Stearns, President of World Vision, US said,

"I believe that this could very well be looked back on as the sin of our generation. I look at my parents and ask, where were they during the civil rights movement? I look at my grandparents and ask, what were they doing when the holocaust in Europe was occurring with regard to the Jews, and why didn't they speak up? And when we think of our great, great, great-grandparents, we think how could they have sat by and allowed slavery to exist? And I believe that our children and their children, 40 or 50 years from now, are going to ask me, what did you do while 40 million children became orphans in Africa?"

I know that it feels like the problem is way too big for us to really do anything to make a difference, but I know with all my heart that touching the life of just one, just ONE, child can truly make a difference. And if everyone touched the life of just one child, we could reach them all.

Here are some ways that you can help touch the life of an AIDS orphan this World AIDS Orphans Day.

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- Get educated. One of the biggest roadblocks in getting people to care and take action is the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS. This is not a disease that only strikes those who "deserve it" (yes, that is really how some people think!). This is a disease that strikes men, women and children... it strikes heterosexuals and homosexuals, it strikes people of all races and social classes and it strikes people in all countries. HIV/AIDS is a HUMAN problem.

Fear is another big roadblock. HIV can not be transmitted in any casual way, and people that are HIV+ are not a threat to those around them. HIV can only be transmitted through sexual contact, birth, breastfeeding and blood to blood contact (such as sharing needles).

I have written a ton about HIV/AIDS, and you can find those posts [here](#). Once you are educated, join my [Tell Two Campaign](#) and share the truth about HIV/AIDS with others.

Two excellent books to read about the HIV/AIDS crisis and the orphan crisis are [There is No Me Without You](#) and [28 Stories of AIDS in Africa](#).

- Sponsor an AIDS orphan. There are many wonderful organizations out there that allow you to sponsor a child for a very low cost per month. Doing so makes a great difference in the life of that child, and getting to know the child you sponsor through pictures, updates, letters, etc. will have a great impact on your life as well. I promise. Two wonderful organizations that I work with are [AHOPE for Children](#) (which supports AHOPE Ethiopia, a home and community support program for HIV+ children in Ethiopia) and [Hardthaven](#), a home for AIDS orphans in Ghana. I know that financially times are hard for many right now, but we live better than most people in the world and would have to sacrifice very very little to sponsor (and truly help) an orphaned child.

- Consider [adopting](#). Adoption is only an option for a tiny percentage of the 15 million AIDS orphans around the world and it is certainly not the solution to the AIDS crisis or the orphan crisis, but for the tiny percentage of children who do get adopted, it changes their world and their future dramatically (and for the adoptive parents, it is equally amazing). There are agencies and programs placing healthy and special needs orphans from all over the world with new families. If your heart may be open to adopting an HIV+ child, I have about 100 amazing children of all ages waiting for a second chance at love, family and life.

You can read [here](#) why I believe in adoption, and you can read [here](#) why I feel so passionately about adoption for HIV+ children.

- Support [From HIV to Home](#), an organization that helps provide care for HIV+ orphans and supports and helps parents adopting HIV+ children. They have a wonderful program to help raise money for parents adopting HIV+ children called [Kids Walking Kids Home](#).

- Support [Project HOPEFUL](#), whose mission is to "encourage, educate and enable parents adopting children with HIV/AIDS".

- Visit the [World AIDS Orphans website](#) for other ways to touch your heart, get educated and get involved. Please feel free to share this post anywhere you see fit. Thanks for reading.

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