



A NATION OF  ORPHANS

# Under AIDS' scythe



"I know I'm going to pass at any time; I fear it. I fear it in my heart."

**MAVIS GUMELE**  
raising nine grandchildren

Story and photos by Sherri Williams  
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

**M**ANDINI, South Africa — Mounds of freshly turned dirt are piled high within inches of each other near a muddy river. They're crowned with bunches of wilting or artificial flowers.

"It's getting full," Bongani Ngema said as he looked over the Tugela Cemetery. "There's no place now; there's not enough space. Maybe right here in Sundumbili Township, 20 to 30 people die a week."

Ngema has prayed over and buried some of them as pastor at Dost Crown with Glory and Majesty Church and as a funeral director.

The graveyard doesn't begin to tell the whole story.

"Sometimes families leave bodies at the hospital and don't claim bodies because they don't have money to pay for burials," he said. Others bury their loved ones at home on their own land.

South Africa, with a population of 44 million, has the greatest number of people living with AIDS in the world, 5.3 million, according to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

## Few suffer more

Mandini, once dubbed the AIDS capital of the world by the South African magazine *Drum*, is a poor rural town where a paper factory and sugar-cane fields are the primary employers. It's in the heart of Sundumbili Township in KwaZulu-Natal, the province with the highest rate of HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

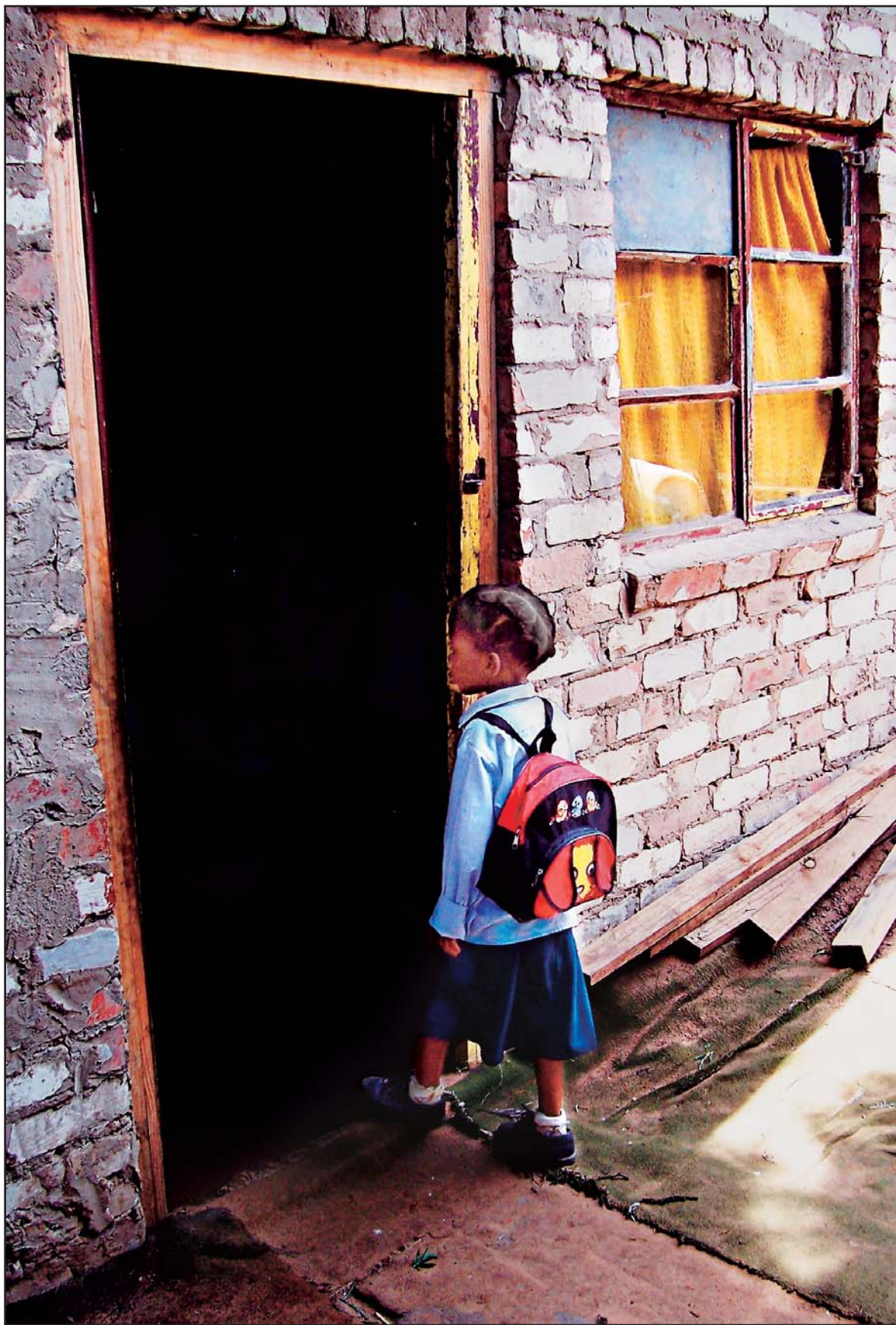
When it comes to death and devastation by the AIDS pandemic, the town is perhaps the hardest hit of any community in the world.

One in four people in Mandini is infected with the human immunodeficiency virus, which causes AIDS. Poverty, cultural myths, the subordinate position of women and an overextended health-care system help spread the disease.

"Grannies" grieve for their sons and daughters as they step in to parent their children's children.

"These grandmothers won't have anybody to bury them," said Leonard

See **MANDINI** Page C2



AIDS orphan Portia Mathongo, 7, arrives home from school. She is infected with HIV.

## AIDS across the world

Adults and children estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS at the end of 2003:



# Many U.S. blacks say virus came from lab

By Darryl Fears  
THE WASHINGTON POST

More than 20 years after the AIDS epidemic arrived in the United States, many African-Americans embrace the theory that government scientists created the disease to control or wipe out their communities, according to a study released by Rand Corp. and Oregon State University.

That belief markedly hurts efforts to prevent the spread of the disease among black Americans, the study's authors and activists said. African-Americans represent 13 percent of the U.S. population, yet they account for 50 percent of new HIV infections in the nation, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Nearly half of the 500 African-Americans surveyed said that HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is man-made. The

"The findings are striking, and a wake-up call to the prevention community."

**LAURA BOGART**  
co-author of study

study, which was supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, appeared in the Feb. 1 edition of the *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes*.

More than one-quarter said they thought that AIDS was produced in a government laboratory, and 12 percent thought it was created and spread by the CIA.

A slight majority said a cure for AIDS is being withheld from the poor. Forty-four percent said people who

take the new medicines for HIV are government guinea pigs, and 15 percent said AIDS is a form of genocide against black people.

At the same time, 75 percent said they think medical and public health agencies are working to stop the spread of AIDS in black communities. But the responses alarmed the researchers.

"As a researcher knowing that these beliefs were out there, I wasn't as surprised as people I share the study with," said Laura Bogart, a behavioral scientist for the Rand Corp., who co-wrote the study with Sheryl Thorburn, associate professor in the College of Health and Human Sciences at Oregon State.

"But the findings are striking, and a wake-up call to the prevention community," Bogart said. "The prevention community has not addressed conspiracy beliefs in the

context of prevention."

The findings were also no surprise to Na'im Akbar, a professor of psychology at Florida State University who specializes in African-American behavior.

"This is not a bunch of crazy people running around saying they're out to get us," Akbar said. The belief "comes from the reality of 300 years of slavery and 100 years of post-slavery exploitation."

Akbar cited the Tuskegee experiment conducted by the federal government between 1932 and 1972. In it, scientists told black men they were being treated for syphilis but actually withheld treatment so they could study the course of the disease.

Today, he said, African-Americans are more likely to live in communities near pollution sources, such as freeways and oil refineries, and far from health care centers.

## THE INSIDE STORY

### Now livelier, dispatch.com is worth a look

Being in the ink-on-paper business, we can't provide readers with breaking news in the way our electronic competitors can.

That is, until recently.

On Monday morning, when

COSI announced that Kathryn Sullivan was stepping down as president, dispatch.com broke the news.

Tuesday afternoon, when the Columbus Public Schools announced that it was closing



**BENJAMIN J. MARRISON**

Kent Elementary as part of \$20.8 million in cuts, education reporter Bill Bush phoned in a story to our Web site to give our readers the first word.

The previous week, just before Gov. Bob Taft rolled out his proposed two-year budget, Statehouse reporters Catherine Candisky and Mark Niquette broke the news that the governor was proposing to expand the school voucher program.

If this is all news to you because you don't make a habit of visiting dispatch.com, we understand.

While the Web site was among the best (if not *the* best) in the state, it was static. It didn't change much throughout the day.

Recently, we appointed Gary Kiefer to the position of managing editor/new media. He will lead the content side of dispatch.com, to push the newsroom to file breaking stories so we can tell the community what's going on.

In a few short months, the Web site has changed dramatically. Where in the past the stories featured on the site in the morning were the same as those featured in the afternoon, the site now routinely has fresh content in the most prominent positions.

We also are using the Web site to publish photographs and information that we either can't fit or choose not to use in the paper.

For instance, we published much of the State of the Union and State of the State addresses but posted the entire speeches on our Web site.

When City Hall reporter Jodi Andes reported on how much city employees were being paid in overtime, we printed about 20 names in the paper and posted the rest online. If you wanted to know how much everyone was paid in overtime in the streets department, for example, you could easily find it.

Our focus on dispatch.com will be on breaking local news. There are plenty of places to get breaking national and international news, and we'll post some of our own on the Web site.

Sometimes, we'll post a national event live, as we did with the Grammy Awards a week ago.

But we believe readers care most about what's going on in their communities, and we think dispatch.com is a good place for people to find out what is making news — such as immediate results of this month's special election, posted after the polls closed.

We will hold back exclusive stories to be printed in the newspaper first. Sometimes, though, a competitor will force our hand.

For instance, the day before Mayor Michael Coleman officially announced he would run for governor, a competing newspaper posted a two- or three-sentence story on its Web site. It said little, other than that sources said he would announce his candidacy the next day.

With the cat out of the bag, we published part of our interview with the mayor on our Web site.

Our biggest challenge will be deciding which stories need to be posted immediately and which, because they are exclusive to *The Dispatch*, can wait until the morning paper.

We believe this strategy will give our subscribers the best of both worlds: the immediacy of broadcast and electronic publishing, and the depth of newspapers.

If you haven't been to dispatch.com recently, you should give it a look. And tell us what you think.

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