"My Name Is Anita" From Affliction to HIV/AIDS Activism

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In Namibia, a desert nation on the southwest coast of Africa, one in four people are infected with HIV. I traveled there to collect interviews from Anita Isaacs, one of the leading HIV/AIDS activists in the region. Background necessary before scripting my documentary included, but was not limited to researching the South West Africa People’s organization, the history of Namibia’s independence, the plight of HIV/AIDS in Namibia as well as the social implications of the disease, and Anita’s history of activism. More specifically, I reviewed literature and statistical analyses to track the explosion of AIDS in Africa, so that Anita’s story was not singular, but rather had context in the greater story of AIDS in Namibia. Over the course of my three weeks in Namibia, I came to know many of Anita’s stories: that she was part of Namibia’s liberation struggle against South Africa, that she contracted HIV from her husband, and that after she contracted the disease, she became a leader for another liberation struggle in Namibia: the fight against HIV/AIDS. Her life is laden with all of the makings of a memorable story: an unlikely hero, conflict on personal and national levels, success through social activism, and vivid anecdotes. As a filmmaker, I recognized the potential for an international audience to be entertained and inspired by Anita’s story. I therefore shot, edited, and produced a 30-minute documentary about Anita’s life. Documentaries are made about issues and people because giving global issues a face and a clear narrative arc often appeals to human understanding in a way scholarly articles fall short. They integrate empiricism with empathy. Even when people are overwhelmed and numbed by the sheer magnitude of this world’s problems, they can still be touched by the story of a compelling individual. Anita is certainly compelling. First the victim of AIDS, later an advocate for those afflicted by that disease, she is a metaphor for the heroic ideal. Anita Isaacs’ life will eventually end, but her story will live on through this film. Anita serves as an archetype. Her story will hold an audience’s attention and perhaps give hope while shaping perspectives on what it means to live with HIV/AIDS. It is a message of hope for change.