



IN TOUCH: Thembi Ngubane (22) at the Jabulani Technical School in Soweto, where she spoke about living with HIV/Aids – which she affectionately refers to as her “trespasser”. **PICTURE: ALON SKUY**

‘Hello trespasser, it’s me, Thembi’

South African’s struggle with HIV/Aids touches world audiences

BY JILLIAN GREEN
Aids Writer

Every day Thembi Ngubane tells the HIV virus in her body that it is a trespasser and that she is in charge.

“Hello HIV, you trespasser. You are in my body, so you have to obey the rules. If you don’t hurt me, I won’t hurt you,” she says in a radio documentary, *Thembi’s Aids Diary – A Year in the life of a South African Teenager*.

For a year, Ngubane – now 22 – walked around with a tape recorder, keeping an audio diary of her struggle with HIV/Aids.

And in the past three years her story has touched the lives of listeners in the US, Britain, Canada and Australia.

Today Ngubane was to launch her edited audio diary at the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg under the auspices of the US-based National Public Radio.

It will later be aired on South African radio stations like SAfm

and Ukhozi FM.

The half-an-hour-long documentary – giving listeners a true, unscripted and emotional account of a teenager’s journey with her “trespasser” – begins with Ngubane greeting her virus in front of a mirror in her house in Cape Town’s sprawling Khayelitsha township.

It ends with her considering what life would be like if she were dead.

In between there are live recordings of her interactions with her doctors, her disclosure of her status to her beloved father, her discussions with her boyfriend over whether he blames her for his infection, and her thoughts on having a child.

The documentary has received rave reviews internationally, and its executive producer, Joe Richman, hopes it will be greeted with the same enthusiasm here.

And Ngubane hopes so too.

“The airing of it here is a healing process for me. I will feel good

even if only one person learns from my experience,” says Ngubane, who found out she was HIV-positive five years ago.

Two years later she met Richman, the executive producer of Radio Diaries, a programme run by National Public Radio.

At the time, he was working on a documentary about Nelson Mandela and the history of apartheid, but had also been interviewing dozens of teenagers in Khayelitsha about their experiences with HIV.

“Until I met Thembi, I wasn’t sure that it would be possible to make a radio diary about such an enormous topic,” he says.

“But her charisma, her off-beat take on the disease and her honesty immediately struck me. I realised the story would not be about HIV/Aids, it would be about Thembi.

“Thembi’s story has transcended the airwaves and has taken on a life of its own, locally and globally.”

