

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

***WE ARE ALL THE SAME:
A Story of a Boy's Courage
and a Mother's Love.***

By Jim Wooten. Penguin Press.
243 pp. \$19.95

"Listen to me, Jim. . . . I wish that God had made me white," 10-year-old Xolani Nkosi told Jim Wooten. "The reason I wish that is because I believe that white children don't get HIV and I think black children do get HIV." As often happened when ABC senior correspondent Wooten found himself with Nkosi in South Africa, he was forced to yield in silence to the boy's perspicacity. From where they were sitting in 1999, there was devastation and death from the HIV/AIDS pandemic as far as the eye could see—and a president, Thabo Mbeki, in fervent denial that the disease existed.

The accidents of Nkosi's short life made him a unique spokesman for the tens of millions of African children orphaned by and afflicted with AIDS. He seemed to have a knack for touching the heart of everyone he met, not least Wooten, who confesses himself never so moved by a subject as he was by Nkosi. "I think," Wooten writes, "it was that grin that got me."

On the ruined landscape that once had been Zululand, Nkosi was born in 1989, an alarmingly small and sick baby. His unmarried mother, Daphne, "was not yet 20 years old, yet she was already dying—and on the very first day of his life, so was her son." Wooten sketches the hardscabble life of a group of women and children trying to survive in the inhospitable land; that these people are condemned to suffer death by AIDS on top of every other hardship is unspeakable. Realizing that she will die soon, Daphne bravely moves to the city, takes her sick baby to a hospice for gay white AIDS sufferers in Johannesburg, and asks, "Can he

come and stay in this place?" Remarkably, the door opens, and the plagued, isolated white men embrace the black baby.

The hospice founder is Gail Johnson, a feisty, plain-speaking South African white woman who owns a small PR business. When the hospice loses its funding and the dying men are turned out, Johnson ends up with baby Nkosi. The two will change each other's lives and, Wooten argues, the world.

Nkosi spends the next few years coddled by the four-member Johnson family and enjoying the life of middle-class whites in a sunny, split-level house. He loses the languages of his



South African Xolani Nkosi lies next to his adoptive mother, Gail Johnson. Nkosi died of AIDS in 2001, at age 12.

people but proves a bright and fluent speaker of English. This transracial, cross-cultural upbringing—and the fact that good nutrition, good hygiene, and regular doctors' visits allow Nkosi to live well beyond the two or three years allotted to him as an HIV-positive black baby in a township—enables him to "speak truth to power" in the language of the powerful. His observations are those of any smart African child surveying the world's cruelty, but he wears the crisp uniform of a Johannesburg schoolboy and speaks in the quick accents of the whites.

"You haven't asked me about death," the boy says to the journalist one day. "I feel like I'm going to die pretty soon, like my mother died. . . . But at least she got to be a

grownup. I don't think I will ever be a grownup." As usual, Nkosi is right. He dies an international celebrity in 2001, age 12, weighing 20 pounds.

Playfulness, affection, courage, and sorrow entwine in the wasted body of the boy, and in this astute and heartfelt memoir. Wooten knows it's not possible for American readers to care about five million, 10 million, 20 million orphans, but he makes us care about one, and that's a start.

—MELISSA FAY GREENE

FREE WORLD:

America, Europe, and the Surprising Future of the West.

By Timothy Garton Ash. Random House. 286 pp. \$24.95

Among specialists in international relations, the terrorist attack that toppled the World Trade Center also shattered the optimism to which the end of the Cold War had given rise. History, it turned out, had *not* ended. Globalization, the Big Idea of the 1990s, wasn't likely to provide an all-purpose remedy for the world's ills. As for the much-touted "unipolar moment," its defining feature turned out to be not peace and stability but the prospect of open-ended conflict. Contemptuous of allies and disdainful of international norms, the Bush administration seemingly went out of its way to alienate the rest of the world. In the eyes of more than a few informed observers, the United States became a rogue nation. To critics who excoriated the administration for its arrogance and warmongering, the future of the world order began to look bleak indeed.

In this upbeat and admirable if ultimately unsatisfying book, Timothy Garton Ash argues that such gloom is misplaced. The signs of the times call not for despair, he believes, but for the West to redouble its efforts to build a "Free World," making available to all the blessings of peace, liberty, and prosperity. The opportunity to create such a global order is at hand, but fleeting: Fail to seize the opportunity now and it may be lost forever.

A prolific journalist and historian who teaches at Oxford University, Garton Ash

builds his book around a series of immensely readable essays examining the predicament in which Great Britain, the United States, and continental Europe now find themselves. The result is far more nuanced than Robert Kagan's caricature of a feisty American Mars and a played-out European Venus talking past each other. It is far more interesting and persuasive as well.

According to Garton Ash, nations on both sides of the Atlantic—not least his own Britain—are internally divided, poorly led, and mired in myth, jealousy, and old resentments. As a consequence, they are unable to grasp where their true interests lie. In fact, he emphasizes, the divisions currently besetting the Atlantic community are trivial in comparison with the values that its members hold in common. Quoting Freud, he dismisses the West's intramural quarrels as the "narcissism of minor differences." Instead of squabbling about Iraq, farm subsidies, or the death penalty, Europeans and Americans ought to return to their true calling—nurturing the creation of a Free World that by all rights ought to encompass the entire globe.

Assigning to Britain the pivotal role of patching up the transatlantic divide, Garton Ash calls for a massive collaborative effort to make good on the promise of liberalism. Through free trade, greatly expanded support for international development and human rights, and efforts to forestall the impending crisis of global warming, Garton Ash believes that the West can eliminate global poverty, foster the final triumph of democracy, and ensure that the planet remains inhabitable for future generations.

But don't count on the likes of George W. Bush, Jacques Chirac, and Gerhard Schröder to take up this cause anytime soon. According to Garton Ash, "foreign policy is too important to be left to the politicians," who often as not "don't know what they're doing." Instead, he advocates a sort of transnational populism, summoning "the thousand million" inhabitants of the developed nations to unite behind a "well-informed, enlightened, strategic approach to the rest of the world"—and to do so now, before environmental damage becomes ir-