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Children contribute experiences to Fort Worth book about AIDS

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If you want to better understand the graces that come from great tribulation, talk to children who have loved ones with HIV/AIDS, says Deborah Jung, co-author of the new children's book *Angels at My Door*.

The book features a cluster of angels who arrive at the narrator's door to deliver special blessings -- goodness, temperance, longsuffering, love, peace, faith, gentleness and joy.

"We came out of your great courage," one of the angels says when the narrator asks where they came from.

Angels at My Door grew from a three-day creativity camp at Samaritan House, the community organization providing low-cost housing, meals and counseling to people with HIV/AIDS and their families. Jung worked with eight young volunteers to weave their compelling stories and artwork into a unique book that they could call their own.

"A child is easily connected to spiritual and wondrous views of the world," Jung says. "[A child is] more open and forgiving, a child sees AIDS through the eyes of hope: how to love someone with AIDS, how to pray for them, how to remind them to take care of themselves, and that no matter what, everything will be OK."

How did the book come about?

The book was inspired by the opera production *Angels in America*, but the "angels" theme emerged naturally as a common thread as children shared their thoughts about AIDS during writing workshops at the creativity camp, says Jung, who was asked to work with the children because she writes and produces original shows for Kids Who Care every summer.

"What we've been doing for 20 years is going from writing a new work to production; this year we went from writing to publishing," says Jung, executive director of Kids Who Care. "Angels fit. The children immediately identified with angels. You ask, 'Do you believe ...?', and all of them say, 'Oh, yes.' They all believe in God and angels. They are already full of hope. They gathered steam and energy as we talked about AIDS and angels. It was one of those serendipitous projects that turned out to be such a blessing."

What happens at Saturday's celebration?

Child actors will be reading and staging *Angels at My Door* and singing original music that goes with it -- "somewhere between a play reading and a production of monologues," Jung says.

Also, angel-themed artwork by Fort Worth school district students will be on display, and winners of the angel art competition will be announced. Some of the more than 90 works entered in the competition were chosen to illustrate the book.

Three thousand copies of the book, made possible by the Fort Worth Public Library Foundation through a gift from the Alvin and Lucy Owsley Foundation, have been printed and will be given to schools and community organizations and sold online.

What do children say in the book?

"When my mama entered a room, the whole place lit up ... She had one tattoo. My mama had light-brown eyes that when she looked at you, you melted ... She fought AIDS for seven years, and she taught me everything there is to know. My mama is the type of mama you would want ... I miss her," says Kia, 16.

"I used to live in a one-bedroom house ... If it was cold ... we had to sleep by the stove so we could at least get a little bit of heat. Then my angel appears! She was dressed like she was going to go to church. She had on khaki pants and a blue shirt," says Luis, age 13.

"People with AIDS don't feel left out. Sooner or later we are going to come up with something to help you. You are not alone. I am by your side. No matter what, I am going to do all I can to help you," says Omar, age 7.

Angels at My Door

10:30 a.m. Saturday, at the Central Library, downtown Fort Worth

This is a celebration of *Angels at My Door*, a new book by children touched by HIV/AIDS with Deborah Jung, executive director of Kids Who Care, featuring music, dramatic readings and an art show of original works by Fort Worth school district students.