

# Puppet Tour From Africa Promotes AIDS Awareness

by Suzanne Down

NELSON — Long ago, it was the tradition of puppetry to bring the secrets of life to the people. This was clothed in religious stories, fairy tales, myth and legend. Over the centuries, puppetry became a forum for political satire, as in Punch and Judy shows. In the 1900's, it focused on light hearted entertainment for children. Now in the '90s, puppet theatre is once again returning to its origins. This Tuesday, September 22, "Puppets Against AIDS" will bring the secrets of life, indeed saving life, to the people of Nelson.

Puppets Against AIDS, a South African based touring project of the African Research and Educational Puppetry Programme (AREPP), is a grassroots theatre. Its mandate is to use puppetry as a non-threatening medium to raise awareness and education of AIDS to as many people as possible. In Africa this is crucial. It is predicted that up to 70 per cent of the male population of Zimbabwe could be infected by the mid '90s.

On the road since 1988, the troupe travels regions of Southern Africa not easily accessible to AIDS educators. Puppets have historically been freer to speak out on controversial issues than humans. The culture in many parts of Africa forbids open discussion of sexuality. Yet puppet

shows can deal with a fearful issue and leave people open to hear the message.

The program begins at 6:30 at Rosy's (parking lot) Cappuccino Bar. The show is based on the tale of Joe, a philandering kind of guy, and his wife Mary. Joe refuses to wear a condom in his fooling around and consequently is infected with the HIV virus. He passes it on to pregnant Mary, who in turn transmits it to their baby. The play deals with death, with compassion, with the truth about AIDS.

The powerful performance is followed up by a condom demonstration and open discussion lead by these skilled AIDS educators. OXFAM is hosting the Canadian tour of this unique and important cultural presentation. Local community health workers and the Kootenay AIDS Group have been invited to attend and inform us on issues concerning AIDS in the Kootenays.

The show is free. Any donations are targeted toward a computer program especially designed for AIDS care for our sister city of Mutare. For further information, contact Michelle Hann at 352-2662 evenings.

We are all affected by this disease. Come in support of AIDS awareness locally and worldwide. □

