

Grandmother Power

Changing the world one grandma at a time

Joelle Tomlinson
Saskatoon Express

A woman who has travelled the world photographing and interviewing activist grandmothers is coming to Saskatoon to share her experiences.

The author of five books, Paola Gianturco has interviewed and photographed 120 grandmothers in 15 countries. The 73-year-old photojournalist was inspired to write her new book, *Grandmother Power*, after witnessing the effect of the AIDS epidemic in Kenya.

"It suddenly became so apparent to me that the future of that whole continent rested in the hands of the grandmothers," Gianturco said in an interview from California. "There are so many millions of children that are being raised by their grandmothers here because they are orphaned by AIDS."

Then, as fate would have it, Gianturco met a woman who asked if she could share Gianturco's pictures with a grandmother group in Canada.

"She asked if she could give some pictures I had taken in Zimbabwe, and she wanted to give these pictures to the Stephen Lewis Foundation. Now, I never give my pictures away," said Gianturco with a laugh. "But, she vouched for them, and the next time I was in Toronto, I thought I better find out what that organization is.

"I knocked on their door, and they knocked my socks off. They were doing such wonderful work. I was so overwhelmed with what Stephen Lewis and the grandmothers were doing that I started wondering, 'What are grandmothers doing in other places?' And I discovered that they are doing a great deal."

The Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF)

are a part of an unheralded international grandmothers' movement and that, in fact, grandmothers are changing the world in ways that people can't imagine," said Gianturco. "I wanted to bring light to that, and it also made me feel very proud of being a grandmother in a new way."

Part of Gianturco's book focuses on the SLF and its partners in international destinations. Other chapters tell the stories of grandmothers changing their community in their own unique ways.

"In India, they are bringing light to their villages that have no electricity by learning how to be solar engineers," said Gianturco. "I was in amazement. They are illiterate, these grandmothers. But they learned at a school called Barefoot College, which teaches not with manuals, but by demonstration.

"Now, these grandmothers go home to their villages and bring light, and everything changes. Midwives can see to deliver babies in the middle of the night. Kids can study without getting black lung disease caused by the kerosene lanterns. Refrigerators can run so they can preserve food. It's amazing."

Gianturco says that there is a common attitude among all the grandmothers.

"They are very aware of the troubled world we live in. And just all of them share this attitude that says, 'Not good enough for my grandchildren!' So they tackle whatever issue is most important to them locally," said Gianturco. "I'm very excited to bring this story to Saskatoon."

The book has been selected as a finalist in the Grandparenting book category for the Reader's Choice Awards of About.com. The photojournalist has also been a guest on the Oprah Winfrey Show, CNN, NPR and Voice of America programs as well as many other TV and radio programs around the world.



Author Paola Gianturco will make a presentation March 1 in Saskatoon (Photo submitted)

launched the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign in 2006 in response to the emerging crisis faced by African grandmothers as they care for AIDS orphans. All proceeds from *Grandmother Power* will go to the SLF.

Gianturco, a grandmother to two, said that the grandmother movement is almost unheard of around the world.

"Suddenly, I discovered that grandmothers

"It makes me happy as a clam. People can vote for one month every 24 hours, and I hope they will," said Gianturco. "It's not about winning as much as it is gaining attention for the book so that those proceeds can go toward the grandmothers who are in Africa raising AIDS orphans. It's just a wonderful opportunity."

Gianturco will speak and present a slideshow at 5 p.m. at the Western Development Museum on March 1. There will be a craft sale, silent auction, dinner and book signing as well. For tickets to the presentation, call Lily Krause at 652-8209. The next day Gianturco will be at McNally Robinson at 1 p.m. to sign copies of *Grandmother Power*. To vote for *Grandmother Power* on About.com, go to <http://tinyurl.com/voteforpaola>.