

Memoir or Ruse?

As Tony Johnson's editor, I've listened to him work fiercely on his book even when his TB barely allowed him to gasp for breath. But never have I heard him so upset as he was after he saw *NEWSWEEK*'s piece suggesting that he may not exist, let alone have written "A Rock and a Hard Place," his memoir of triumphing over abuse and living with AIDS ("The Author Nobody's Met," *FAMILY*, May 31). Your remarks were an insult to the reputation of National Book Award winner Paul Monette, who, you suggest, may have written Tony's book, and an insult to victims of abuse everywhere. How many will come forward now?

DAVID GROFF, Senior Editor
Crown Publishers, Inc.
New York, N.Y.

Your article is a perfect example of why there are laws to protect the confidentiality of minors and people with AIDS: many

☎ Denotes letters received via telephone mail, 1-900-990-MAIL.

so-called journalists are willing to expose and exploit people with AIDS and victims of child abuse for the sake of a story. I applaud Tony's mother for "ferociously" guarding her son's confidentiality. I have known Tony and his mother since the fall of 1991, when they contacted my agency seeking services for Tony, who had been recently diagnosed with AIDS. Since then I have spoken to Tony dozens of times by telephone. Yes, Tony is real. I have had scores of run-of-the-mill conversations with him as well as some very serious discussions, just as I have had with all of my good friends. Yes, Tony is a very good writer; he is very wise and thoughtful for his age. And he doesn't just write books—Tony has also written pieces for me to use in our training of volunteers who work with HIV-positive children. He is also the editor of our newsletter, *The Northern Light*. Tony is very talented and exceptional, but he is also very much a 15-year-old. This is not the first time a child prodigy's words have met with skepticism or been dismissed as the work of some adult. Fortunately, Tony has enough self-esteem to believe in himself,

whether or not *NEWSWEEK* does. And he and his friends and family are content to let the people who read his book decide what they want to believe.

AMY AMABILE, Executive Director
Northern Lights Alternatives-NY
New York, N.Y.

I am saddened as well as outraged by your piece shedding doubt as to my reality. I spoke with your reporter in good faith, and we entered into a verbal contract to talk about information pertaining to my book. Its contents were the only thing that I ever agreed to make public. I reserve the right to preserve my privacy. Reality number 1: I exist; prove to me that you do! There is something unreal about a reporter who can joke and laugh with a person and then turn around and suggest that person does not exist. Reality number 2: You say my cultural markers seem closer to a man in his 40s than a teenager ["Zeke the janitor's eyeglasses are 'as thick as Coke bottles,' writes a boy who grew up in an era of recyclable cans"]. I have always acted older than my age. I collect Coke bottles (yes, in

MAIL CALL

A Mystery Continues

N*EWSWEEK*'S May 31 story "The Author Nobody's Met," about the book "A Rock and a Hard Place" by Anthony Godby Johnson, drew a heated response, both from readers and in the press. The article questioned whether the book—presented as the autobiography of an abused teenager who learns he has AIDS—was all it claimed to be, or was in fact a ruse. Neither the book's publisher, agent, nor editor had ever met the author, nor were any members of the press at the time allowed to interview him, except by telephone.

Since the story ran *NEWSWEEK* has received, through Johnson's agent, a fax purportedly from Johnson repudiating the article (see this page). An Associated Press reporter, Leslie Dreyfous, said she was granted an interview with Johnson. She described a boy with "a Yankee cap pulled over his swollen

face" and "the same [voice] as the one I've spoken to over the weeks" by telephone. Under agreement with Johnson's adoptive mother, Dreyfous provided no quotations or other details, either in the story or when questioned by *NEWSWEEK*. "[Mrs. Johnson] was nonnegotiable," she said. Mrs. Johnson has said she fears threats from unnamed people who, according to the book, abused the boy with the aid of his biological parents.

National Book Award-winning author Paul Monette, who did not return calls for *NEWSWEEK*'S story, has since publicly and vehemently denied *NEWSWEEK*'S suggestion that he might have written or helped write the book. Monette, who admits he has never met Johnson, has also insisted that the boy exists.

NEWSWEEK has continued to search for Anthony Godby Johnson without success. Many questions still remain open concerning the book and its author.

Both Mrs. Johnson and

Crown Publishing have steadfastly refused *NEWSWEEK*'S requests to interview Johnson in person or to make available a videotape of him or any hospital or legal papers that might help solve the mystery. They have also denied requests for the name of the prosecutor who, they said, successfully prosecuted

Johnson's biological parents in a New York City court for child abuse. Supposedly they were sent to prison for 25 years to life. A spokesman for Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau said, "Our office has no institutional memory of this

case." Officials in the New York City Police Department's Pedophile Squad and in the Special Victims Squad (formerly the Manhattan Sex Crimes Squad) could not recall a case resembling this one. Jack Godby, a supportive HIV counselor whom Johnson refers to in the book as "Dad" (though he, too, has never met the boy), told *NEWSWEEK* that all records from the case are sealed. In a criminal trial like this,

according to prosecutors, records are not sealed.

Crown officials said that part of their proof that Johnson exists is an application for a computer from the New Jersey Make-a-Wish Foundation, signed by the Johnsons' family doctor. Crown officials gave *NEWSWEEK* that doctor's name. New York and New Jersey's licensing agencies said they had no record that a doctor by that name was licensed to practice in either state.

In the book and in interviews, Johnson says he was enrolled in a progressive-education program in a regular public school on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. "Across from my school," the book contends, "was a special-ed facility that had an enrollment of three hundred or more students with problems ranging from Down's syndrome to cerebral palsy." Despite numerous attempts, no school in Manhattan could be found to match the description.

Apart from Dreyfous, no individual has come forward to claim he or she has ever met Johnson in person. *NEWSWEEK* continues to report the story.



A voice for the multinationals

It's become popular in recent years to bang on bigness as though it were inherently "bad." And, if you happen to be a company that's big and a multinational to boot, the problem is compounded.

But, in the words of the old Gershwin tune, "It ain't necessarily so."

To prove it, we would like to explode a few myths about big American companies with foreign interests:

For example, they're making gizmos and gadgets overseas more than ever before. And that obviously means they're hiring more people "there" and fewer people here. Right?

Wrong.

And to add insult to injury, they probably sell all those foreign-made things back to us in the U.S.A. Right?

Wrong.

And that must be why we've got this enormous trade deficit.

Wrong, wrong, WRONG.

Let's look at some of the facts:

- America's multinational corporations are the biggest contributors to the plus-side of the U.S. economy, according to soon-to-be-released findings of the Emergency Committee for American Trade.

- From 1989 to 1991, exports accounted for approximately 90 percent of U.S. real economic growth, and American multinationals generated about two-thirds of those exports.

- As America continues to struggle with a deep trade deficit, America's multinationals have a hefty and growing trade surplus. In 1990, the surplus in their overall balance of payments—a combination of repatriated income and the value of exports less imports—reached \$130 billion.

- American companies that invest overseas the most also export the most. It stands to reason: Most of their foreign operations rely on American components, services and technology. Where investment leads, trade will follow.

- Over 90 percent of sales by American-owned manufacturers in foreign countries, excluding Canada, goes to markets outside the U.S. And those foreign operations are largely financed by their own earnings, not by windfalls from their U.S. parents.

- In fact, a great deal of what is not reinvested by those foreign affiliates finds its way back to this country. Some \$48 billion in net income was repatriated to the U.S. in 1992, thus providing additional investment funds and creating jobs here at home.

What does all this mean for American jobs? Many American multinationals may have had to lay off workers because of declining revenues, or lagging productivity. But not because they're moving jobs overseas.

On the contrary, American multinationals and their growing trade surpluses create American jobs. Every billion dollars in manufactured exports creates more than 14,000 manufacturing jobs in the U.S. In 1990, they accounted for 2.4 million jobs. And that was just in manufacturing. Manufactured exports also stimulate job creation in trade, service, transportation and other sectors. In 1990, that meant five million American workers owed their jobs to manufactured exports by American multinationals.

Globalization is the ticket to the future, particularly as overseas markets continue to grow at higher rates than our own. That's why our country must vigorously support an open system of global trade and investment. The positive contribution of U.S. foreign investment to our economy is in jeopardy. Many well-intended policymakers want to put foreign investment on a tighter leash. They think that's the way to keep dollars and jobs in America. But that's wrong. Not just in theory, but in fact.

Mobil®

© 1993 Mobil Corporation

the age of recycling they are still sold) and anyone who has ever heard any references made to James Thurber knows that it was said that his glasses were like Coke bottles because his eyesight was so poor. I am very in touch with incidents and cultural information that happened before I was born. Turn on "Nick at Nite" and you'll see [an obvious source of such information]. I can recap every "I Love Lucy" episode, despite the fact that these shows were reruns when my parents were children. Reality number 3: By discrediting me you are closing doors for other children and teenagers who are terrified to come forth and talk about their own abuse because they are fearful that they will be received in this same insensitive manner. To even admit to having been abused is traumatic enough. You couldn't begin to imagine how it feels to have to take a stand like this, being labeled once again as a nonexistent part of the world. Paul Monette is a talented and gifted writer—our friendship was born because I wrote and told him so—but I am Anthony Godby Johnson, proud and happy for the first time in my life to be able to speak for myself.

ANTHONY GODBY JOHNSON
c/o Wendy Weil Agency, Inc.
New York, N.Y.

✓ *Editor's Note:* NEWSWEEK received this letter from the literary agency handling "A Rock and a Hard Place." We were unable to reach Anthony Johnson by phone for confirmation; our requests that he call us back went unanswered.

Yes! Congratulations to NEWSWEEK for intelligently and seriously questioning the existence of the putative teenage author of "A Rock and a Hard Place." I too am convinced that this memoir is ridiculously improbable. I, too, have been looking for this elusive pen in a haystack with no more success than your reporter had in her more inquisitive search. I, too, was given the kind of bizarre evasions she received, but no disclosures that rose even close to evidentiary level. I'm convinced that you've spotted an elaborate and cunning hoax. Go get 'em, NEWSWEEK.

DONALD SHAPIRO
West Bloomfield, Mich.

Letters to the Editor, with the writer's name, address and daytime phone number, should be sent to: **Letters Editor, NEWSWEEK, 444 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022** or faxed to: (212) 350-4120. You may also phone NEWSWEEK'S **Telephone Mail Desk, 1-900-990-MAIL**, and voice your comments. The cost is \$1.95 for the first minute, \$.95 each additional minute. Calls and letters may be edited for space and clarity.