ZIP ZIP MY BRAIN HARTS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANGELA BUCKLAND with text by KATHLEEN McDougALL, LESLIE SWARTZ and AMELIA VAN DER MERWE and published by the HSRC PRESS

"Every parent's secret dread is a 'dodgy' child."
Angela Buckland.

ZIP ZIP My Brain Harts is the result of an unusual experiment – a collaboration between photographer Angie Buckland and researchers concerned with disability issues. This remarkable series of photographs interspersed with challenging text is a unique expression of the fullness of human experience, with all its joy, pain and confusion.

Buckland is the mother of a disabled child, Nikki. As a professional photographer, her work in this book forms a part of what she does to make disability more visible and accessible. Her photographs focus primarily on Nikki, as well as a small group of families with disabled children. McDougall, Swartz and Van der Merwe are all involved in disability research, within specific disciplines including psychology and media studies. The combination of personal documentation with powerful research commentary is groundbreaking. The contributors hope that the photographs and text will encourage "thinking and debate, disagreement and even anger" about an issue which all too often is hidden, pushed aside, made invisible.

Buckland explains that the book is, in a sense, a disclosure of something secret. "The photographs are public expressions of the sometimes painfully private experience of being the parent of a disabled child in South Africa," she says. The three main series in the book - Dysmorphic Series, Stickytape Juice Collection and Where's Nikki? - have recently been exhibited in South African art galleries.

There is a tendency for disability in South Africa to be a secret. The challenges that face families of people with disability are also often hidden away. Part of the reason is that disability is sometimes (still) seen as a shame, a disgrace, a source of stigma.

But, argue the authors in this book, what if disability were considered ordinary or everyday? What if disability were seen as just one among many differences that there already are between people? What if disability were defined not simply as a physical or mental medical state, but were understood to be a societal problem – in terms of how other people react to disability, even how geographical and social spaces can be discriminatory?

These are some of the key issues raised in Zip Zip My Brain Harts, with Buckland's images forming a pivotal core around which debate revolves.

The intention is not to portray disability and parenting disability as an intrinsically different experience of life. Rather, Zip Zip My Brain Harts hopes to show that it is both different and the same. Most importantly, the book aims to open up a space for dialogue about an issue that ultimately affects every single person in this country.