

IMITI IKULA

by Sampa Kangwa and Simon Wilkie
26 minutes, Zambia

Memory is one of the 75 000 street kids in Lusaka, most of them orphans due to AIDS. Although she is hard, streetwise and ready to fight, she has a softer side which influences her daily living, like finding a way to watch the solar eclipse, getting her hair braided, cooking, singing and talking with her friends. She is a street child who fights for and finds her own identity and destiny. Vulnerable, yet strong, Memory is a compelling character.

Synopsis:

The film opens around a bonfire. The children are talking about Arnold Schwarzenegger. He is rich and strong and beats up those who mistreat children, and travels the world buying them blankets and food. The children seem to take on the strength and bravado of their hero.

We follow Memory around town as she taunts those who make comments; as she covets solar eclipse glasses; as Nyanja plaits her hair. We see Memory challenging the boys and fighting with them in the streets, until one discovers she is a girl. She contemplates herself in the bathroom of the bus-stop shower-room. At night around the fire her friends challenge her cooking. The children laugh and sing songs to each other.

We follow the children washing dishes for money and picking grains from the market floor to make up bags. Memory sells her bags and runs to the optometrist to buy the solar eclipse glasses. Proudly, she and Nyanja share in the once in a lifetime event of the eclipse, standing tall amongst the community. As the moon moves in front of the sun, Memory jumps, shouts and claps for joy.

One of the boys runs past and says Schwarzenegger is in Livingstone Town. The children race through the streets, Memory striding barefoot, to the train station. They squeeze under the fence and board the train as it leaves for Livingstone Town, seeking out their destiny.

Directors Biography:

Sampa Kanga-Wilkie was artistic director of the Groundwork Theatre Company, Lusaka, in 1995 and 1998, and Arts Co-ordinator of the Ebenezer Welfare Centre in London from 1996-1997. She acted as consultant to the Media Institute of Southern Africa for live radio broadcast, as casting director for the film *Uno s World* and as Theatre Consultant to Namibia s Forum for the Future during 2000. She has also worked as a researcher for Oxford University Press for the Women Writing for Africa Project. She has been

involved in six different HIV/AIDS related projects in Namibia, Zambia, and the United Kingdom since 1994.

Simon Wilkie received a Diploma in Screen Arts and Sciences (Cinematography) from the National Film & Television School, Beaconsfield, England, in 1993. He has been director of photography on more than twenty different documentary productions and three drama productions since 1992, including, in 2000, *Lydia s Room* a portrait of a family coming to terms with the death of a sister from AIDS, and *Hans & Ulrike* a portrait of a young HIV-positive couple. He is currently the director of Mubasen Film & Video Productions (Pty) Ltd and of the non-profit company Dipontsho Audiovisual Renaissance for Africa. He is a member of the Task Force for the Namibian HIV & AIDS Media Campaign.

Directors Comments:

This is a story about survival; a story about kids so determined to survive that they refuse to be victims. They live their lives and dream their dreams regardless of any economic indicators, or UNDP reports on poverty in Zambia.

Making the film was traumatic; moving and unique. It was traumatic because it became clearer and clearer each day that our main character Memory was indispensable and highly irreplaceable. I found her strong, independent and uncontrollable nature difficult to bear. Even more painful was living with the fact that there was nothing I could possibly do, but endure her. Where else could I have found the likeness of Memory?

So unique and compelling are her experiences, her character, her influence, everything about her makes her highly irreplaceable. Had it been a drama I would have had her replaced. In future I would like to work with replaceable people. Being pregnant at the time, I definitely had a crash course in parenting.

But making this film was also a very moving and unique experience. The ability for Memory to cope with the hostility of the people surrounding her beats everything I have seen in my life. In the six weeks that I spent with her not a single soul had anything good to say about her, she's an outcast, a lost cause, everyone judged her from a distance. Sometimes she hit back verbally and physically, most times she ignored them and moved on, and sometimes she wept without stopping. Today I can say I learnt more from Memory than she did from me. My priorities and values are changing. I now see things differently.

The message in the film is that no human being is so simple that they just want food; that the needs and dreams of street kids go beyond eating; that it is about time people changed the way they look at street kids. The reality is that these kids are survivors, with or without you they will make it. What they will

become, we can only wait and see. It is therefore up to us to make a difference in their lives while we can."

This film is important in the context of HIV/AIDS in that the increasing number of children relocating to the streets are mainly a result of HIV/AIDS. I also find it frightening that Memory, at eleven years of age, has been raped on numerous occasions over the last five years and has a history of STD's behind her. Her street friend, now dead of HIV/AIDS related illnesses, was raped by a man who had also raped Memory. I have hope that Memory will escape the streets one day, but I have little hope she will escape healthy."

- Sampa Kanga Wilkie

This is a story of survival. Yet the leading character, Memory, is so much more than a survivor — she fashions her own destiny. She has a gift for turning things out of nothing. We focused on the positives in her life, because she simply brushes off the negatives. She has coped with numerous rapes and her recreation as a boy is probably largely a survival response.

The making of the film was traumatic. The children do not often let their guard down and let people in; somehow they let us in and trusted us. And all the time we knew we would have to leave eventually. Without a doubt after we left they suffered, for we had helped fill the need to talk and be loved.

We hope the resourcefulness and courage depicted in the film will help to dismantle the prejudice so many feel towards these street children, and that a more favourable attitude will develop toward them in those who watch it. It is very easy to write these children off as a disaster area but they are not. The title of the film refers to a proverb which originally said trees become a forest, in other words, children are the forests of tomorrow. In Zambia the proverb became corrupted to mean trees become charcoal, that is, are destroyed. These children provide the hope that they may against all odds become a forest.

This is especially important in the context of HIV/AIDS, with more and more orphans joining the street community. — **Simon Wilkie**

Credits:

Production Company	Mubasen Film & Video Productions
Director	Sampa Kangwa Simon Wilkie
Producer	Carla Hoffmann Laurence Dworkin
Cinematographer	Simon Wilkie
Sound	David Benade
Editor	Jari Heikkinen
Music	Sakala Brothers Shalawambe
Professional Support	Niels Pagh Andersen