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**Lila Swanepoel**

Video Editor

## FROM HOCHVELD TO HOLLYWOOD - BLAZING TRAILS FOR WOMEN FILMMAKERS

**Video Editors assemble recorded video footage into a suitable finished product ready for broadcast and screening. Putting together footage, dialogue, sound effects, graphics and special effects, they use digital editing software in building video sequences that are seamless and flow logically, in conveying a message to an audience. Meet video editor Lila Swanepoel, who owns her own production company. This is her story.**

### FARM GIRL

Born in Windhoek, Lila Swanepoel fell in love with cinematography at a very young age. Spending most of her childhood with her grandparents on their farm, Klawerjas, in the Hochfeld area, near Okahandja, watching movies was her favourite pastime and she knew that making movies was what she wanted to do in life. “My name is actually Cornelia, but according to my mother, I had difficulty pronouncing my name when I started to talk. I called myself Lila and somehow the name just stuck amongst family and friends. And little Lila has always just had a thing for television and movies”, she shares.

Initially thinking that it was just a phase that would wear off as she grows older, Lila’s family started to recognise the weightiness of the young girl’s dreams, when she started questioning them about how movies were made.

“Not only was I interested in the stories, what started to interest me more was how everything was put together. Their basic explanations of daunting work by actors filmed on camera did little to dissuade me. On the contrary, it just spurred me on to learn more and every spare moment I had was spent in front of the screen, watching my favourite programmes and movies. I guess you could say that there was little time to be naughty”, she adds.

### EARLY AMBITION

Although Lila’s mother, Marika, harboured hopes that sending her to South Africa’s Northern Cape Province to complete her secondary education at Upington’s Duineveld High School would make her relinquish this dream, and opt for a more viable and worthwhile career option instead, Lila, upon her return to Namibia, remained steadfast.

“I guess my mom somehow wished that a change of scenery would open up new horizons. However, when she asked me what I wanted to study upon my return, I was very clear that I still wanted to

enter the film industry. She asked me whether I was sure because she didn't had money to waste, but I remained adamant", Lila explains.

Mother Marika was still not convinced though and thought that her stubborn daughter perhaps just needed more time to reflect and think. "I didn't budge and remained steadfast. In fact, I ended up spending most of that gap year on the sofa watching TV, while working in a video rental shop. My persistence paid off and my mother eventually gave in for me to enroll at the Pretoria Technikon's Cinema and Television School for a three-year course", she adds.

## ARDUOUS TRAINING

Lila felt right at home at her alma mater - today known as the Tshwane University of Technology - where she studied under multi-award winning South African filmmaker and director Katinka Heyns, known for the feminist perspectives in her Afrikaans films, such as 'Fiela se Kind' and 'Die Storie van Klara Viljee'.

"Although I was the only Namibian in my class, I was surrounded by like-minded peers who shared my enthusiasm for cinema helped me to settle in; whereas the intensive training opened my eyes to the endless possibilities the film production industry had to offer", Lila shares. "Not that it was a breeze. Cinematography training is demanding and often of a very technical nature. It's not only about laying the groundwork for young filmmakers. It's a blend of science and art in nurturing and growing the apprentice's skill and creativity", she adds.

Spending most of her time in the art department, Lila early on took a deliberate decision to absorb and learn as much as she could about the film industry. "Film school is all about ensuring that you expose yourself to the full spectrum - from scriptwriting to camera directing; from lighting to sound; from motion graphics to video editing techniques. You need to acquire skills in all these areas. And then it's a continuous process of honing and nurturing your skill set and staying abreast with new technologies", Lila highlights.

## EXCITING WORK

After an eventful third year of practical apprenticeship, Lila graduated and entered the world of work. She soon landed opportunities in Johannesburg's lucrative business television production sector, while she also had a short stint

in England. Today, with nearly two decades of experience behind her back, she is considered by production houses as one of the best Namibia has to offer; having worked on the 2005 blockbuster, 'Lord of War', starring Nicolas Cage and of which parts were shot in Cape Town; and more recently, 'Mad Max- Fury Road', featuring Tom Hardy, which was shot here in Namibia in 2015.

"Having worked on commercials for the Sun International Group, Panasonic, Coca Cola, BMW, Samsung and MTC helped me to fit in seamlessly with these international productions. Video production is a collaborative process and editing is just the point at which all the preceding work comes together as a unified whole, integrating all the input - footage, sound, graphics and music - to create the ultimate vision. My job is this final, but important step in a long, complicated process. I just take it in my stride", she shares.

Lila has also won Best Production Design and Best Music Video Director awards from the Namibian Theatre and Film Awards, in 2014 and 2017 respectively. "Recognition is always reassuring. But, you cannot rest on your laurels. As a content creator, your workflow has to be very organised, and I try to move through the video editing process with efficiency and creativity. I feel content and creativity is king. It's what sets me apart from my competitors", Lila notes.

## MULTI-SKILLED PROFESSIONAL

Having her own production company allows Lila the creative freedom to excel. "I mean you can see on my face how happy it makes me. I really love video editing. The feeling that you get when you have created something and you can share it with people, fulfills me. To be able to create and share how I perceive the world makes me very, very happy", she notes.

Video editing can be physically and emotionally taxing. Editors spend most of their time in dark rooms in order to best view the images that have been captured for a project. Lila often work into the late morning hours as the pressure to meet deadlines is ever-present.

"I am a one-man show, because I offer the full package. It's exhausting and demanding work that can easily suppress your creativity. So, in keeping the creative juices flowing, I often travel between projects. The change of scenery broadens my horizons and gives me time to catch up on new

technological developments in our industry, in other countries. Being your own boss has its perks, I guess”, Lila shares. Asked about what drives her to work such long hours, Lila’s response is quite thoughtful. “I think it’s a matter of getting into a complete zone of focus; a complete zone of creativity. It has a lot to do with your mind and your passion about a specific project. I just love to create and be in such a zone of focus that I don’t even want to get up to do something else. It is such a personal and intense process, because you are adding a piece of yourself to your work. That is my passion. I love it”, she shares.

## CAREER CHAMPION

A good video editor not only possesses a mixture of practical and creative skills; but a good sense of visual awareness and a high level of attention to detail. The technically savvy Lila ticks all the boxes in working under pressure and meeting tight deadlines in a cut-throat production industry still dominated by men.

“I feel that in Namibia we need to encourage more female filmmakers to step up. Disappointingly, film-making is still a very male-dominated profession, although I am seeing more young females joining the fray. I am living proof that women can make it in this industry and I hope my story will inspire more young Namibian women to join in”, says Lila.



Lila has also embraced the epic rise of digital media and marketing through which many corporates today share their brands on different digital platforms. This development has not only changed the face of video editing, but speaks volumes about future employment prospects for this occupation in a world where video is leading the way.

“A key challenge video editors face is the omnipresence of social media, which requires you to convey a very strong message in a very short period of time. The

multitude of media platforms people are exposed to have made them so spoiled for choice and I think as a video editor, it is your goal to find the right ‘hook’ for your client and still convey the message in a very original way, while staying true to your client’s brand”, Lila highlights. “It’s been quite a shift. Smaller production companies like mine are consolidating the industry. You have to find a way to adapt and you have to find your niche. I think I have succeeded in finding my niche in the market. And if I can do it, others can too”, shares Lila.

Away from the demands of work, Lila unwinds by spending time with her close-knit family, especially when she has to babysit her sister’s children. “I love Hanneke’s kids. Seeing them grow up is so special and I’m very fortunate to have them in my life. My family is my support system. My successes are theirs; without them, I wouldn’t have achieved anything”, Lila concludes.

Lila Swanepoel: A creative, multi-skilled trailblazer. Despite her impressive CV, the single-minded focus of this humble and soft-spoken young woman teaches us that creativity is less about talent, and more about attitude. That true passion is not only about unleashing creativity, but about taking pride in what we do, in equal measure. That the best creativity is often the result of passion and good work habits. She is living her passion.

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