

# THAT GIRL



A film by

**Cornelia Gantner**

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Lucky Film GmbH

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## WHY “THAT GIRL”?

**In a self-confident and resolute way, Gladys strives for a self-determined life as a woman in Africa. What price is she willing to pay to make her vision come true? That is the same question the viewers are left with as they start to recognize themselves in the relationship dynamics between Gladys and her Swiss husband.**

Every day around the world, 37,000 girls under the age of 18 are married off, often do not graduate from school and thus remain dependent on their husbands for their entire lives. THAT GIRL is the true story of a Zambian woman who broke with traditions and expectations in order to lead an independent life. Now she is fighting for a better future for other teenagers in rural Zambia. But what started as a romance with Swiss national Thomas and with many bold plans for the development of a remote region in Zambia is turning into a bumpy journey: will Gladys manage to reconcile family, work and her marriage? And at what price?





## SUMMARY (short)

Who doesn't dream of living a self-determined life and changing the world at the same time? The young Zambian girl Gladys seizes the opportunity: Together with her Swiss husband Thomas, she follows the call of a local tribal chief to set up a cattle farm and improve the infrastructure in the remote village of Chewe as part of a community development project.

The young girls from Chewe remind Gladys of her own story: She decides to push for better education and medical care in the village so the local girls - and boys - will have a better shot at an independent life than Gladys had.

But her romantic ideas of the idyllic togetherness with Thomas and a better life for the people of Chewe are soon brought back to harsh reality: the challenges seem insurmountable, the couple risks to lose everything.

Will Gladys be able to reconcile family, work and relationships? And what price are Gladys and Thomas willing to pay to make their dreams come true?

The story of Gladys encourages all women – be it in Zambia or in Zurich – to live their dreams and be the women they always wanted to be.



## SUMMARY (extended)

*«When I was 16, I couldn't go to school because there was no money. So I left home and went to look for a job in the city. My mom was really angry. She said: 'No girl at your age goes to the city to look for a job'. But I said to her: 'I'm going to be **that girl!**'»*

Zambian Gladys, the teenager from back then, enters the stage in the film as a young woman who is still determined to go her own way through life - not out of rebellion against her parents nor to play the victim's card, but because she doesn't want to change for anything or anyone. The right to self-determination is sacred to her, and she trusts that she herself knows best which life plan is the right one for her. The first major hurdle she overcame when she was 16 when she successfully refused to be married off. The same fate meets around 37,000 girls worldwide - every day!

Despite all hardship, she remains open to the unexpected in her life: she falls in love with the Swiss environmental engineer Thomas, who is visiting his parents in Zambia. Soon, the two forge a plan for development work in the remote north of Zambia where a local tribal chief has asked for support. Gladys and Thomas plan to build a farm and a school. In Chewe, more than a thousand kilometres from the capital Lusaka, Gladys finds her calling. The girls from Chewe remind Gladys of her own story: She wants the children from the village to have a better shot at an education and thus the opportunity to take their lives into their own hands.

*“This was my chance and that of Thomas to do something big together in Chewe. And it felt good to feel like you're going to bring change to the people which are living in that remote area.”*

This is where the film sets in: With an outlook to life in seclusion, which Gladys looks forward to with adventurous anticipation, placing complete trust in her love for Thomas. But her romantic ideas soon land on the hard ground of reality: the villagers' lack of enthusiasm for helping to build the farm and the school, the notoriously complicated authorities, but also loneliness push her to her personal limits. As the wife of a white man with money from Switzerland, she has the means to do good for the village. At the same time, however, this makes her an outsider.

*«Whoever comes as a friend is not really a friend but someone who wants a little bit of something from me.»*

The situation escalates as the relationship between the two of them turns from a source of strength into a stress factor: While Thomas relishes being a pioneer and is progressing step by step, the many setbacks are affecting Gladys more and more. For the young woman, the question arises what price she is willing to pay for her vision of a better world. Thomas has to ask himself the same question when it becomes apparent that Gladys may turn her back on life in Chewe. The intense conversations in front of the camera about a common denominator for their individual fulfilment are brutally honest.

Yet in the end, love wins!

*“I love you. I can come to Chewe with you, I can go anywhere with you - but not if I’m supposed to be in the kitchen.”*

Gladys and Thomas give themselves a push – for their relationship and for the people of Chewe, for whom the couple has become a beacon of hope for a better future. Indeed, the two of them manage to get the ball rolling. Because they don't give up easily, and Gladys has learned over time that the path to progress in Chewe is through people's hearts.

*“The truth is, I had underestimated how much it would take to bring progress to Chewe. First, I had to build trust with the people, only then would they accept and support me. ”*

## **INTERVIEW with the director** by Christine Maier, journalist

***“That Girl” is a touching documentary about a young, strong African woman who wants to build a farm and a school with her Swiss husband. Cornelia Gantner's debut film follows the couple over five years on their challenging mission in the remote north of Zambia. Without any sugar-coating, the film shows in an honest way how laborious development work can be. And why it is still worthwhile to see it through – a mindset which applies to both difficult projects as well as love. [“That Girl” premiered in autumn 2020 at the Zurich Film Festival, the interview dates from before].***

**Christine Maier: "No girl goes to town to earn her own tuition," Gladys 'mother once said to her daughter. Gladys replied defiantly: "Then I'm going to be that girl!" Mrs. Gantner, your debut work “That Girl” begins with this memory of young Zambian Gladys - how did it all start?**

Cornelia Gantner: Through our foundation “Second Mile”, my husband and I have been involved in humanitarian work for over 20 years. Among other things, we support the great work of the Swiss doctor couple Matthias and Kathrin Furrer, who build hospitals and train medical staff in Africa. When their son Thomas made plans to respond to a call for help from a local chieftain and build a farm with his wife Gladys in northern Zambia, I was thrilled.

**Why is that?**

As chair of the Second Mile foundation board and as a trained journalist, I felt one day I should accompany a development project from the beginning to the end. To show how high the hurdles can be, how much potential for frustration there is, but also for happiness when - as in the case of Gladys and Thomas - after years, the farm is finally in place and the school is built. Beyond that though, it has also become a film about a great love ...

**... which, like many love stories, began very romantically, but then soon had to face tough realities. This is where your film starts.**

Right. You have to imagine that both of them renounced their dreams in favour of their common journey. After his childhood in Cameroon, Thomas built up a career as an environmental engineer in Switzerland. Gladys really wanted to live in the capital, work as a teacher, and be financially independent. And then the two found each other in the remote north of Zambia, in Chewe, a small, barren village where there is nothing, no distraction, no possibility to distance yourself.

### **What do the people of Chewe live on?**

They are poor and live on what they plant and harvest. The walk to the small town 20 km away is arduous, the rickety bridge over the river is regularly washed away. To buy groceries, Thomas and Gladys initially drove eight hours by car on bumpy slopes. Gladys was more distressed by this isolation than Thomas.

### **What was the result?**

After the birth of her daughter Zoé, Gladys did not want to return to the farm, to the unfinished house with the dirty floor and no warm water. Nor did she see how she could reconcile child and work. In fact, Gladys had started building a secondary school in the village, her very own ambitious project. Gladys and Thomas had intense and sometimes difficult discussions, arguments that couples in this country probably know very well. We were there with the camera, were able to follow their struggle for their marriage and their love.

### **What happened next?**

Nonetheless, Gladys decided to return, rolled up her sleeves, organized herself, focused on her goal: the young people of Chewe should have a better future than she had, having to fight hard for her education. Now, after years of struggles, times of hopelessness, fights against corruption and unreliable authorities, the school now actually stands in the middle of nowhere of Chewe. And Gladys became the ultimate role model for the teenagers in the village - an offline / real-life «influencer» of the first order! That's what I've captured in my film.

### **Is that why the focus in the film is on the young woman?**

Yes indeed. This turned out to be the focal point over the course of five years of shooting: This woman who doesn't let anything get her down, who



gets up again and again, fights for her dreams, for whom no hurdles are too high and who doesn't care what others think of her. And who also is not a "perfect" heroine, but shows her weaknesses in a very human way. Gladys fascinated and touched me.

### **Because you are "That Girl" too?**

(Laughs) let's put it that way, I'm sure there is a little bit of it in me too.

### **Could that have something to do with the fact that you grew up the daughter of an Indian father and a Swiss mother?**

That may be. In the 1970s, I was the only child with a darker complexion in that small hamlet in the Canton of Aargau.

### **How did that shape you?**

I was not a victim of racism, if you mean that. But: I never really belonged, I was always somehow different. That is probably why I learned to go my own way, not to pay too much attention to what others think of me.

### **So is «That Girl» a film for women?**

No, to the contrary: Those men who have already seen the film feel very involved too and emotionally touched. They identify with Thomas, who is torn between his passion for his work and his role as father and a husband. Many men know this situation. The relationship dynamics that I observed in the Zambian bush are identical to what couples experience in Switzerland! And that shows that we humans all have the same challenges, be it in Zambia or in Zurich.

### **What was filming in Zambia like?**

For the first couple of years, my cameraman and I camped in tents, there was no running water, we spent hours under the scorching African sun. That was exhausting and adventurous. But we were richly compensated by the beauty of this country, the openness and friendliness of the local people and the friendship with Gladys and Thomas. It was a wonderful time.

### **What roles do you have other than as a producer of the film?**

I'm the director, the screenwriter, and I was involved in the editing throughout. And on site, I was also running all errands (laughs).

**What is the budget of «That Girl»? You have shot over and over again in Zambia for five years and brought home over 130 hours of film material. Other filmmakers could only dream of this ...**

I know I'm in a privileged position because I was able to produce this documentary privately, without relying on external financing. But private also means that I don't want to answer any detailed questions about budget and financing. Just this much: thanks to the smallest possible team and on-site local filmmakers, strict cost control and a lot of personal effort over the years, I was able to complete the entire production in the 6-digit range.

**Then let's talk about development aid in Africa. With your film, you paint a sobering picture: The efforts of people who get involved are slowed down, made impossible by corruption, torpedoed. Many projects are not sustainable.**

Unfortunately, that's partly true. Even Gladys as a native and Thomas with his vast experience of the local conditions ran the risk of failure several times. This despite the fact that they worked closely with the people, committed themselves to things that the population expressly wanted and obviously needed. It took years for the farm to start operations and teachers to teach at school. It really was plain desperation at times. And it still isn't as the two had planned.

**The question arises whether development aid generally makes sense. In the past 50 years, Western countries have paid over \$ 1,000 billion USD to African governments. Practically nothing of it has stuck.**

I like cite the author Dambisa Moyo on this question. Born in Zambia, educated at Harvard, she is one of the world's most sought-after economists today. She wrote the controversial book "Dead Aid", which I can only recommend. There, Moyo explains, based on facts, why development aid, with an emphasis on "aid", is counterproductive: Because it creates dependencies, lets African states off the hook and promotes corruption. It is much easier to spend money that you receive than to earn it yourself. Moyo conclusively shows how Africa can do it on its own.

### **What is the solution?**

Let me explain it to you using the example of “Second Mile”. We don't just give money, we rather initiate a project, such as the farm or the school in Chewe. Then right from the start, we motivate the population to get involved, to work with us, to support the project. We offer help for self-help and design projects in such a way that the population has strong incentives to support them. That's how the Furrer family has approached all their projects. The government, local authorities and the population are being involved in the development work so that the Furrers can withdraw as soon as possible – enabling them to turn to a new project.

**The people in Chewe were not particularly enthusiastic about having to do their share - for example when it comes to maintaining the vital bridge built by Thomas, even though Thomas patiently tries to encourage them to do so.**

Yes, it is indeed very difficult for us to understand and can be very frustrating for everyone involved.

### **How do you explain that?**

Well, the people in the region have always lived from hand to mouth. Making plans for the future doesn't make much sense. First, because they practically don't have any options, and secondly, because tomorrow everything can be different. A simple illness or a snakebite can mean death. A bad harvest leads to hunger.

### **Have you spoken to the people of Chewe about what you expect?**

Of course. By doing so, I realized that they do indeed have a vision of a better life. But it is difficult to muster the mental strength and patience to take the countless small steps to get there. We at “Second Mile” as well as the Furrer family insist on personal contributions. And it worked: the farm is in place and so is the school.

### **Your film will now premiere at the Zurich Film Festival. What does that mean to you?**

I feel very honoured and I am very excited! And of course I hope that this will result in many valuable discussions, especially on the importance of following your dreams – if the situation allows it. And also on getting up again if you fall down. And finally on the fact that the world already has but

also needs more “That Girls” who have the courage to break out of conventions and traditions in order to go their own way and lead a self-determined life!

**You want to support these women more in the future, don't you?**

Yes, indeed – that's why in addition to “Second Mile”, in September 2020 I established a new foundation that will exclusively focus on women: The “Be That Girl Foundation”. It shall outlive the film and do a lot of good for the lives of women, their families and their entire environment. Advised by an international foundation board and in collaboration with select partners, Be That Girl Foundation implements innovative programmes supporting young women to live a self-determined live. This is my vision.

Mehr Informationen unter [www.bethatgirl.org](http://www.bethatgirl.org),  
<http://www.instagram.com/bethatgirlfoundation/>  
and <https://roargirl.bethatgirl.org/home/de/roargirl>



# CORNELIA GANTNER

## Director and Producer



Cornelia Gantner was born in Switzerland in 1972 and studied journalism in the USA. Since 1999, she and her husband have supported humanitarian work in the field of education and health through their foundation “Second Mile”. Her directorial debut “That Girl” combines her longstanding humanitarian commitment with her passion for journalism and documentary film. For this, she founded her own production company, CG Productions GmbH. Encouraged by the feedback from the audience and the press following the world premiere at the Zurich Film Festival, in September 2020 Cornelia Gantner established “Be That Girl Foundation”. Advised by an international foundation board and in collaboration with select partners, Be That Girl Foundation implements innovative programmes supporting young women to live a self-determined live. Cornelia Gantner is a mother of five adult children.



## GLADYS SHONGA

«that girl»



Gladys was born in Lusaka, Zambia, in 1990. She has the following memories of her childhood and youth:

«When I was in 3rd grade, we moved to the countryside, far away from Lusaka, because my parents could no longer afford life in the city. Both were teachers by profession, my father was already retired. The village where I lived and went to school was one of those countless ‘street villages’ in Zambia: two or three little shops along the road, straw huts and fields scattered around in the bush.

I remember that I was always hungry. For breakfast, I scraped bits of cornmeal from the night before out of the saucepan by the fire. There was no lunch. I often hoped that the day would pass quickly because there was a meal in the evening. This consisted of maize porridge and vegetables from the garden during the rainy season. There was usually not enough money for cooking oil, and now and then we had small, dried fish.

My older sisters finished school and learned a trade as did my brothers, of course. For me, the youngest girl, my parents could no longer afford the school fees. If there had been a secondary school in the village it wouldn't have been a problem. But living, eating and schooling somewhere far away was beyond my parents' budget.

I was now 16 years old and I was desperate. There was no way I would stay in the village and get married - that was my parents' plan. So I ran away from home to work in the city and earn my own school fees. After a few months, my big sister felt sorry for me. She took me in and made sure I could finish school.

When I was finally ready to go to college, my family expected me to be available as a babysitter and domestic helper. This weighted me down so much that I began to ignore the phone calls from my siblings – also those from my sister Precious. I was 23 years old now and ready to go my own way, do my own thing. But Precious insisted that she needed me to help with the household and with the children. At the end, I gave in and travelled to the village where she lived. Coincidence would have it that exactly during those weeks, Thomas was visiting his parents who were working in that village. Every time I took Precious' kids to school, he caught up and flirted with me. However, I was determined never to get married because all of my older sisters were unhappily married or divorced and now single mothers. So I gave Thomas the cold shoulder.

After a few weeks, Thomas returned to Switzerland and I didn't expect to see him again. But lo and behold: he returned, courted me and won my heart. Soon we began to plan our future together. I felt that Thomas was just too good a man for me to turn him down. So I threw overboard my decision never to get married.

I've always been determined to fight for a better life. I was never ready to simply accept the status quo. But what I have achieved now exceeds my wildest dreams, and I thank God every day for the blessings in my life. Sadly, however, most of my friends have turned away from me, look down on me, tell me that nothing connects us anymore."

(Recorded by Cornelia Gantner in February 2019)



## **THOMAS FURRER**

### **Environmental Engineer, Entrepreneur, Farmer**

Thomas was born in Switzerland in 1980. When he was five years old, his parents, both doctors, accepted an assignment to do development work in rural Cameroon. There, Thomas attended the local primary school. He still remembers how lots of children were crowding against the few school desks and how often the teacher was absent. He found it exciting when classes were cancelled in the afternoon and the children shovelled sand on the river instead. The teacher then sold this to supplement his salary. He still considers the freedom that he and his siblings had to stroll through nature with the children of the village as a great privilege. “I grew up in rural Africa, similar to Chewe,” says Thomas of himself.

After a few years in Switzerland, the Furrers, now a family of eight, moved to Africa again, this time to Zimbabwe. From 1992 to 1995, Thomas attended the international school in Harare. After graduating from high school and completing an apprenticeship as a carpenter in Switzerland, he studied environmental engineering at the ZHAW in Wädenswil (CH).



In the end, love brought him back to Africa: "I actually didn't imagine getting married and living in Zambia. That only happened when I met Gladys."

Adding to his love for Gladys, there was his love for life in Africa, which is rooted in his childhood. This unique combination of competence, perseverance, capital and the joy of simple life seems to be the ideal prerequisite for someone who wants to make a lasting positive change in the remote area of Zambia, where the local chief asked the Furrer family for support.



## TECHNICAL & PRODUCTION DETAILS

<b>Shooting format</b>	HD
<b>Final format</b>	DCP
<b>Sound</b>	5.1 Surround Sound
<b>Length</b>	88 minutes
<b>Language</b>	Englisch, Bemba, Swiss German
<b>Subtitles</b>	Englisch, German, French
<b>Shooting period</b>	November 2014 until September 2019
<b>Locations</b>	Zambia: Chewe, Kasama und Lusaka
<b>Finalization</b>	May 2020
<b>Production companies</b>	CG Productions GmbH, Oberägeri (CH) Lucky Film GmbH, Zurich
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## PROTAGONISTS & CREW



### Protagonists

Gladys Shonga  
Thomas Furrer-Shonga  
Zoey Furrer-Shonga

Chief Chola Fimaka  
Charles Mubanga  
Margret Kaoma Mubanga  
Olivia Ande  
Grace Mulenga  
Shadrick Ng'onga

The people of Chewe

### Crew

Director, Writer  
Director of Photography  
Sound Operator

Cornelia Gantner  
Laurent Stoop  
Corsin Bader  
Emmanuel M. Kaluba

On Site Prod. Assistant	Emmanuel M. Kaluba Margareta Hofmann
Editor	Fabian Kaiser
Music Composer & Prod.	Michael Sauter
Producers	Cornelia Gantner Martin Schilt
Production Consultant	Kurt Schaad
Production Manager	Sandra Gisler
Logistics Manager	Nina Hodel
Sound Design & Sound Mix	Tom Wenger, Tonstudios Z
Visuals Designer	Don Zinzell
Digital Postprod. Manager	Nicole Allemann, Cinegrell
Colorist	Timo Inderfurth, Cinegrell
VFX Artist	Ursula Deiss, Cinegrell
Assistant Editor	Hae-Sup Sin
Bemba Translations	Lindsay Nkhata Pünchera
Transcriptions	Suzanne Landis Benjamin Cardullo Victor Ban
Subtitles	Cinetyt
Trailer Production	John Piedot, Silk Factory Martin Wrench, Silk Factory

## 2<sup>nd</sup> PRODUCTION UNIT

2 <sup>nd</sup> Unit Drone Pilot	Dominik Müller
2 <sup>nd</sup> Unit Cinematographer	Gabriela Betschart
2 <sup>nd</sup> Unit On Site Assistant	Mwape Simunji