

# Slate of new SA Films

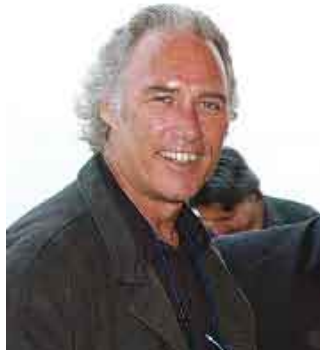
True South African stories are being sought by Cape Town-based ZenHQ for a slate of local films, the first three of which will be released in 2010.

The *True Films* initiative is the brainchild of producer Chris Roland, who has worked on films such as *Stander* and *Hotel Rwanda*, both of which were based on true stories.

Says Roland: "I love films about true stories and the research process involved in writing the scripts. We're looking for intriguing, unusual stories or ones with great

dramatic impact that will cross international borders. The *True Films* initiative is being launched in a controlled way as we don't want to be inundated with story ideas jotted down on napkins. What we want is quality, completed scripts. There is no restriction on genre although it would be nice to have different genres in the slate. Submission criteria can be found on ZenHQ's website ([www.zen-hq.com](http://www.zen-hq.com))."

Roland's strategy in releasing the first three films in 2010 is to capitalise on the focus that will fall on South Africa in its hosting of the FIFA World Cup. He is considering co-producing with another local company but is hesitant to take on an international partner. "You often end up having to incorporate



TRUTH SEEKER – Chris Roland

elements that you don't want in international co-productions. There are quite a few South African directors whom I'd like to involve in *True Films*. All of them have a sound reputation internationally."

The first project has already been selected – *Beyond The Light Barrier*, based on the life story of the late Elizabeth Klarer, who claimed to have lived on another planet and given birth to a child. Roland himself is penning the script. "Elizabeth was a fascinating character, right from childhood. However, there is a lot of misinformation out there, such as that Elizabeth ran a UFO project in South Africa for the UK. We've not found any evidence of that in our research."

Roland's script won't be based on the quasi-autobiography on Elizabeth Klarer (optioned by ZenHQ) per se as half of the book is set on the alien planet. The film will leave the audience to decide for itself whether her

claims are true or not as it's not the focus of the story. Elizabeth's son David Klarer is consultant on the film and Roland has access to the unpublished manuscript she was working on before she died.

Plans are to schedule the first three films in the slate for back-to-back production in 2008/9, capped at a total budget of R45m and utilising the same crew for all three films. International leads may be cast to scrutinise financing.

ZenHQ will handle distribution as well as production. "That will give us total control over the marketing and release of the films. When we were doing *Stander*, I was disappointed with the way the film was marketed in the US," notes Roland. 📺

## Botswana TV opts for OmniBus

Botswana's state broadcaster Botswana Television (BTV) has chosen the OmniBus Colossus as a key part of its multi-channel strategy for increased competitiveness in a future deregulated broadcasting market.

Since its launch in 2000, BTV has delivered national coverage on free-to-air and satellite services, with the OmniBus Columbus. BTV's new Colossus system is a key component of a new server-based platform, and provides enhanced OmniBus G3 ingest and scalable multi-channel playout capabilities.

Columbus will continue to be used for news production and playout, with OmniBus adding advanced MOS integration in order to provide greater connectivity to the ApENPS newsroom. BTV will take advantage of the recent innovations in the OmniBus OPUS content management suite, including integration to the latest Quantel server and editing platform.

"BTV has built a state-of-the-art broadcasting operation to provide a high-quality service to its viewers in a rapidly developing market," said Jim Kirkland, pre-sales manager, OmniBus Systems. 📺

# Tribute to TB children

World Tuberculosis (TB) Day is on 24 March and Jill Kruger, a social anthropologist and documentary filmmaker, and South African director of UNESCO's Growing up in Cities programme, has created a documentary, *Phila Impilo – Live Life*, to highlight the issues of children suffering from this disease. This film came out of a workshop designed by Kruger for 23 young TB patients aged six to 13, who are confined to hospital.

"By 2005, we knew that about 15% of TB cases in developing countries were found in children younger than 15 years old," Kruger says. "The World Health Organisation Regional Committee for Africa also declared TB an emergency on the African continent as it is the leading cause of death among HIV positive people.

"As a social anthropologist, I explore children's responses to their environments. Generally we assume those environments are suburbs and local malls. We forget that chronic illness puts thousands of South African children into hospital for weeks, months and even years at a time. So I designed this workshop to allow the children to explore their ideas and feelings about illness, treatment and care. They were very keen to take part as they wanted to share their thoughts with 'government' and 'everyone else.'"



HIGHLIGHTING ISSUES – Jill Kruger and Bob Daniels, Chatsworth Welfare

The documentary was made at King George V's hospital in Durban with the hospital's official approval. "Fitting workshop activities into the children's daily schedules would have been impossible but senior hospital staff, and especially Doctor Sheila Bamber, were immensely helpful in clarifying routines and medical treatment and rustling up a place to work," Kruger says.

Monde Magida, a graduate from the Durban University of Technology (DUT) did the filming. The DUT's Department

of Video Technology provided support through to primary edit. Oxfam (JOHAP) and the Atlantic Philanthropies financed the final edit and DVD reproductions.

Kruger explains that they used a wide range of activities in the workshops, including liberating sock puppets the children used to express their views. "I took great care while editing the film to script out many scenes portraying children, while leaving in others where puppets 'spoke'. These puppets are a popular expressive medium used for adults and children.

"Informed consent forms for all children were signed and everyone was keen for their children to be on screen but it was possible to present the factual and emotive essence of the film without the children being constantly present."

A 64 page booklet of further insights from the children, financed by Oxfam, will be published in June 2008 to accompany the DVD. The children's insights will be presented to the medical and nursing professions countrywide.

The documentary explores children's reactions to their illness, their loss of parents in many cases, and their need for emotional contact with loved ones. One moving moment occurs when the children draw pictures and letters for parents who have died. These are pegged onto a washing line and, as they blow in the wind, the children listen to a carer telling them that their messages are being sent to their loved ones.

Kruger herself was moved by the courage of the children she dealt with.

"I was touched by the children's faith in healing and their commitment to life, as well as their vigour whenever they were not feverish and confined to bed," she says. "And, although they sometimes quarrelled, genuine concern and care for each other tended to prevail." 📺