



LE SECRET DE CHANDA (LIFE, ABOVE ALL) is an April, 2014 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library in the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania.

South Africa 2010 color 106 minutes subtitled live action feature drama in Sepedi
Blu-ray / DVD Combo Pack Bavaria Film International / Sony Pictures Classics /
Dreamer Joint Venture / Enigma Pictures / Senator Filmproduktion / Niama Film
Producers: Daniela Ramin, Greig Buckle , Thomas Reisser, Dan Schlanger, Oliver Stoltz

16 of a possible 20 points

**** of a possible *****

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) indicates a juvenile performer

Points

2 Direction: Oliver Schmitz*

1 Editing: Dirk Grau

1 Cinematography: Bernhard Jasper

2 Lighting*

2 Written by: Dennis Foon* and Oliver Schmitz, based on the novel CHANDA'S SECRETS by Allan Stratton

2 Music: Ali Askin, Ian Osrin

2 Art Direction: Christiane Rothe*, Tracy Perkins*

1 Sound: Sebastian Morsch (Supervising Sound Editor), Ivan Milborrow (Sound Mixer)

2 Acting

1 Creativity

16 total points

Cast: Khomotso Manyaka, age 13 (j)* (Chanda, a girl, half-sister to Soly and Iris),
Lerato Mvelase* (Lillian, Chanda's mother), Harriet Manamela (Mrs. Tafa, a neighbor),
Keabaka Makanyane, age 13 (j)* (Esther, Chanda's best friend),
Tinah Mnumzana (Aunt Lizbet), Aubrey Poolo (Jonah, Chanda's drunken stepfather),
Masaseka Mathebe (j)* (Iris, Jonah's daughter), Thato Kgaladi (j) (Soly, Jonah's son),
Kgomotso Ditshweni (Dudu, Jonah's mistress), Rami Chuene (Auntie Ruth),

Tshepo Emmanuel Nonyane (Mr. Lesole), Johanna Refilwe Sihlangu (Mrs. Lesole), Vusi Muzi Given Nyathi (Mr. Nylo), Patrick Shai (Dr. Charles Chilume), Nelson Motloung (Mr. Chauke), Ernest Mokoena (Sipho Mandla), Mary Twala (Mrs. Gulubane), Themba Ndaba (Mr. Selalame), Bhefika Isaac Nyathi (Auntie Ruth's boyfriend), Foxy Riet* (Nurse Nkosi), Mongezi Motaung (Jacob), Xolile Gama (Mr. Kamwendo), Martha Maphaka (Granny Thela), Alain Morel (Hector), Sarah Alphane (Receptionist), Charlotte Mphake* (a hooker), Solly Moeng (Police Officer), Oupa Mashiloane (Fireman), Xolile Gama (Mr. Kamwendo)

Set in the township of Elandsdoorn in South Africa, *LE SECRET DE CHANDA* is an emotionally wrenching film concerning the AIDS epidemic and its impact on a rural black community still fettered by superstition.

A mother of four children is emotionally paralyzed when her youngest dies rather mysteriously. Though a protective neighbor launches a cover rumor the child died of complications from influenza, twelve-year-old Chanda knows better. It falls on her shoulders to purchase a coffin for the deceased baby. This task is made problematic by stepfather Jonah, who's helped himself to otherwise allocated family funds in order to drink away sorrow in a neighborhood dive. This pathetic nominal family head is too far inebriated to resist when Chanda accosts him to recover the missing cash. Party girl and local whore Dudu attempts to cow the stepdaughter into abandoning her quest. To no avail. Chanda is determined, responsible, pitiless. Once she perceives an obligation, she sets out to execute it. No matter what obstacles are set in her path.

Returning home with mission accomplished, Chanda's confronted with a mother so devastated by loss of a child she cannot attend to even the most basic needs of surviving offspring. Adult assistance should be forthcoming. But only a dominating neighbor, played with impassioned fury by Harriet Manamela (or by Harriet Lenabe: sources are contradictory), proffers any counsel or intervention. This overbearing control freak cannot resist attempting to channel Chanda's life into socially safe passages. Soon Mrs. Tafa becomes embroiled in a personality conflict with an independent operator quite capable of directing her own activities. Chanda feels no need whatsoever for a second mother and seeks vainly an informed mentor. Neither teacher nor preacher reaches out with comfort, much less a helpful hand. Indeed, the only guidance her instructor provides is a suggestion to take a few days off school. Which might sink any chance the girl may have to pass looming examinations with sufficiently high achievement to qualify for a scholarship. It seems adults in town care. But not enough. They're rather too busy looking out for their own immediate families to explore adequately needs of adjacent ones.

When soused Jonah returns home and is understandably denied permission to enter, three females ally, forming a defense to protect Solly and Iris. These two half-siblings of Chanda's are not apprised of their sister's passing, though Solly is too young to comprehend it anyway. Neither recognizes any guardianship authority of Chanda over them. She's perceived as a bossy, persecuting bully, someone dragged into their family from Mother's previous marriage to a stranger they never knew. Iris is especially defiant, certain a sober Jonah will emerge to take his

two children away to a better, safer future. She will heed Mrs. Tafa, a proper elder, but not wannabe fosterer Chanda, only four or five years senior to herself and not yet even a full teenager.

Though a repentant Jonah emerges the next day, it's clear from his indictment of Lillian, Chanda's mother, as the murderess of young Sarah that he is utterly incapable of facing the truth. Which is that he has contracted AIDS himself, possibly through his relations with Duda, the township tramp. And is himself guilty of passing the disease along to his progeny through marital intercourse.

At this stage, Lillian doesn't surmise a connection and is completely vulnerable to his slanders. They become another weight for her to bear, one that is too heavy. Chanda fervently wishes her stepfather would just disappear. But when he does, household peace is still evasive, for Iris is imaginatively crafting for little brother an alternative explanation of events.

Jonah is correct about one thing: Lillian's own illness played a role in fatally undermining the stamina and resistance of baby Sarah.

Rejected by Duda, who suddenly shows concerns about his deteriorating physical condition, and in no shape to set out to Johannesburg for the new job he'd promised his spouse to obtain, Jonah is dumped on a sister and her husband. Fearing their worst nightmare is about to invade daytime reality, this couple opts for shortening their guest's residence. One day, they simply bring the emaciated sojourner to Lillian's yard, dumping him out of a cart and telling their in-law to make the best of that situation. Too proud even then to appeal for mercy and forgiveness, Jonah remains outside, spurning shelter from kin he rejected and betrayed.

A later scene shows his eventual fate. Apparently, either a suicidal fall or homicidal push sends him to the bottom of an open well in the township. There he's found unexpectedly by volunteers engaged in rescuing a drunken child from an accidental plunge into its depths.

One saving grace in all this calamity is contrition from Iris, who now has little choice but to accommodate herself to demands of Chanda.

Torn between school pressures, a best friend bent on exploring prostitution possibilities, and relatives who believe Lillian carries a cursed existence, the older girl is overwhelmed. Visitation from a hostile aunt results in an unbreachable chasm between the two. Once the latter leaves after Jonah's funeral, Mrs. Tafa resumes the role of supervising elder. Her suggestions for restoring Lillian's health backfire, leaving Lillian weaker and ever less assured of improvement. Neither traditional tribal spirit appeasement nor visitation to a medical charlatan represent positive steps forward. The so-called doctor who comes highly recommended, according to reports received by Mrs. Tafa, has an office decorated with medical certifications which, upon close inspection by inquisitive Chanda, prove to be only recognitions for outstanding sales of agricultural products.

At last there seems only one expedient adults agree upon: sending Lillian back to her native village for a deathwatch. If no other good results, at least her older children will be exempted from contagion. Lillian consents, ignoring Chanda's pleas to call in a trained doctor or nurse to examine her. Out of sight, out of mind. Or so the township hopes.

Once her mother departs, Chanda should be able to resume neglected studies. Distracting events intervene, however.

Best friend Esther resolves to sell herself to truckers. Only in that way can she hope to earn sufficient funds to send estranged family members. Chanda is unable to dissuade her and unwilling to make an extreme effort to do so because of her own precarious economic situation. With Mother no longer present to sew for neighbors and bring in money, her children are left to the charity of Mrs. Tafa. This is both unfair and unwise, as Chanda clearly perceives. She must find a way to sell something herself. Or die of shame. Perhaps this is the key reason for importuning her guardian concerning use of Mrs. Tafa's phone to call Lillian. It's not just a social chat Chanda needs.

But once she finally succeeds in dialing up her mother's village, the girl is stunned by information Lillian has left it. Her whereabouts are apparently only known to a handful of relatives. None of whom are inclined to enlighten her.

In the meantime, a battered and thoroughly frightened Esther calls upon Chanda for compassion. Callous clients have left the naïve youngster abandoned and presumably infected with AIDS. She has no one left to implore except her confidante. In a profoundly moving act of generosity, one deserted child opens heart and home to another. If she cannot bring treatment to her mother, at least Chanda can nurse her friend.

Yet the puzzle of Lillian's disappearance continues to gnaw at the girl. In only one way can closure occur. She must travel to Mother's village herself and learn the hidden truth.

What Chanda unearths and its consequences can be discovered by watching the film's final act. Does the director's choice of an ending seem acceptable? Is the story credible overall? Please withhold judgment until after screening the complete film.

LE SECRET DE CHANDA won seven SAFTAs, South African Film and Television Awards: Best Feature Film, Best Feature Film Director, Best Feature Film Ensemble, Best Feature Film Writer / Writing Team, Best Feature Film Costume Designer, Best Feature Film Actress (Khomotso Manyaka as Chanda), and Best Feature Film Supporting Actress (Harriet Manamela as Mrs. Tafa). It was warmly received by audiences at the Cannes Film Festival, where it reportedly received a ten-minute standing ovation.

Superior acting performances include notable embodiments by Lerato Mvelase as the afflicted Lillian, Charlotte Mphake as a sneering prostitute, Kaeobaka Makanye's impressively vulnerable Esther, and newcomer Mapaseka Makanye as tart-tongued, bratty Iris. These are in addition to the two cited above by South Africa's film industry professionals.

Art direction unstintingly communicates the full visual simplicity and clutter of township and village life. Interiors assuredly resemble real counterparts. Also commendable is the lighting, which captures heat haze, shadows, and illuminated profiles with fidelity and art.

This film is not suitable for children and teens. Situations depicted are wholly adult. It's an outstanding drama for adults, however, and must be very strongly recommended to discerning viewers. LE SECRET DE CHANDA would make a memorable shared film experience for Mother's Day screening by adult mothers and their grown daughters.

Bonus materials included in the combo pack are a two-minute theatrical trailer, essential subtitles, and, exclusive to the blu-ray edition, THE MAKING OF *LIFE, ABOVE ALL*.