

Russian immigrant's film is revealing

• Local filmmaker's semiautobiographical tale of a boy's escape from Russia and experiences with bullies will screen at Miami Jewish Film Festival.

BY BROOKE PRESCOTT
UMiami News Service

Aleks Rosenberg's 7th birthday was memorable — on that day in 1959, he escaped the Soviet Union with his parents and brother in a freight car.

When he returned 33 years later, a floodgate of memories opened. As he remembered his struggle to immigrate to America, he wrote down each memory. The process led to the script for his first feature film, *Zeiimo*.

Loosely based on Rosenberg's life, *Zeiimo* is the story of a Jewish farm boy who is traumatized when he is thrown into an unfamiliar environment and learns to adapt.

The winner for 2002 Best Feature Film at the WorldFest-Houston International Film Festival and 2002 Best Production at the Made In Miami Film Festival, *Zeiimo* was written, produced and directed by Rosenberg, now 51, whose production company is based in Sunny Isles Beach. It will be screened this week at the Miami Jewish Film Festival.

Festival director Ellen Wedner said she chose to include Rosenberg's film because she was looking for a movie that dealt with a Russian experience. *Zeiimo*, she said, was "everything I wanted it to be."

When he came to America, Rosenberg was sent to a Jewish Orthodox camp in the Catskill Mountains of New York. "Because I was from Russia and my English was not very good, the kids called me a 'commie spy,'" he said.

Based on Rosenberg's experiences in the Catskills, bullying is a major theme throughout *Zeiimo*.

"Bullying is a subject that should be addressed, because you never know how it's going to come out in the end," said Rosenberg, adding that it was his artistic talent that helped him to get through his ordeals.

Rosenberg began drawing at age 6, and studied art theory and discipline in high school in Brooklyn. On a full scholar-



MAKING MOVIE: Director Aleks Rosenberg, above, works on the set of his movie, *Zeiimo*, which will premiere Wednesday during the Miami Jewish Film Festival. Below, Emily Donahoe Eugene Mekinulov appear in a scene.



ship at Pratt Institute, Rosenberg received a bachelor's degree in graphics and film in 1973. As an undergraduate at Pratt he ran seven presses, including a photography press and an offset press, and taught bookmaking and printmaking to graduate students. In 1980 he received his masters of fine arts in film directing from Yale.

Marty Taub, a friend of Rosenberg's since eighth grade, said, "Aleks is someone

who has a burning desire to express himself artistically."

For more than 20 years, Rosenberg has directed and produced corporate films and commercials for clients including People magazine, IBM, DeBeers Diamonds, MTV and Sprint. He has also directed and produced music videos for artists like Aerosmith and Foreigner.

Rosenberg is now president of IVM Productions, which offers services including

film/video production and post-production, 3D animation, DVD/CD-ROM authoring and Web design.

Rosenberg is also an accomplished painter and photographer whose work has been displayed in museums and galleries throughout the United States and Europe.

In 1987, he met and married his wife, Alix Harper Rosenberg. Two years ago they adopted a son from Cambodia. Andre, now 7, inspired Rosen-

IF YOU GO

- **What:** *Zeiimo* will be screened as part of the seventh annual Miami Jewish Film Festival.
- **When:** Screening is at 6 p.m. Wednesday. The film festival runs through Dec. 14 at various locations throughout Miami-Dade.
- **Where:** Sunrise Cinemas at Intracoastal Mall, 3701 NE 163rd St., North Miami Beach. • **For Information:** Visit www.caJB-miami.org/filmfestival. For tickets, call 1-888-585-FILM.

berg to start building a portfolio of illustrations for children that he hopes to one day market independently.

When Rosenberg is not working, his hobbies include deep-sea fishing and construction work. "I like working with my hands," he said.

That work ethic surrounds *Zeiimo*, shot in New York on a shoestring budget (for feature films) of \$220,000, funded mostly by donations.

Rosenberg's favorite scene re-creates his freight-car experience, on a set that was built in the corner of a driving freezer. "It was 95 degrees outside, but 12 degrees inside the freezer," he said. "This was necessary, because I wanted it to look real and to get the right effect."

Rosenberg began writing the script in 1993, and shot it in the summer of 1999. The real challenge, however, did not surface until post-production, when Rosenberg was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Rosenberg, who normally worked 16-18 hour days, cut his time down to 10-hour days and did most of his work in the morning. The project was completed in 2001.

Rosenberg has recovered from the illness, but "I am now more perceptive and keen to the everyday environment. Any day above ground is a good day."

Future projects for Rosenberg include two more features, which are in the developmental stage, but it takes time to raise the money for such projects. "It's a very convoluted process," he said.