

• Eye on Fort Macleod •

# Family mystery inspires filmmaker

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THE MACLEOD GAZETTE

When filmmaker Eric Spoeth set out to make a film about the disappearance of his grandfather during World War Two he thought he was simply going to tell his family's story.

Along the way to making the 45-minute docu-drama *Waiting For Waldemar*, Spoeth realized he was on to something with broader appeal.

"It occurred to me there was a story here that was bigger than just my family's story," Spoeth, 36, said.

With immigration in the headlines almost every day, and with most everyone having a story of their own, it became clear to Spoeth his film would resonate with more people than just those in his family.

*Waiting For Waldemar* will be screened at 4:30 p.m. Saturday, April 29 at the Empress Theatre.

Spoeth grew up without his grandfather, but never thought much about the circumstances.

"My parents are both immigrants to Canada and I grew up basically Canadian, not knowing much about my roots," Spoeth said. "It wasn't until I had kids of my own that I began to ask more questions about my grandfather, who I had never met."

As he sought more information Spoeth learned his mother had never asked many questions about her father, and his grandmother had reservations about talking about his disappearance.

"I began to feel this sense of mourning that I didn't know more about this big chapter in our family's history," Spoeth said. "I began by interviewing my mother and

recording our conversations, I realized their story is part of a larger immigration story that over 12-million Germans had experienced in World War Two."

The story Spoeth pieced together is that the family was living in the Ukraine at the time.

When Hitler declared war on Russia, ethnic German people living in the Ukraine were looked upon with suspicion. Spoeth's grandparents and children were forced to leave and headed to Germany.

At one point during the migration, Spoeth's grandfather was separated from his family.

They never heard from him again.

At the end of the war in 1945 prisoners of war were released from Siberia, and their names were read over the radio.

"They would listen by the radio to see if his name would come up and it never did," Spoeth said.

*Waiting For Waldemar*, which was filmed in Alberta, is told through the eyes of two children who never saw their father again.

"For me, that story is about the children's life-long search for their father," said Spoeth, who has directed eight short films and documentaries and who worked on the *Matrix* movies.

The film's cast includes Vance Avery, Lilly Bebernik, Vanessa Villeneuve, Olivia Bebernik, Eric Reinhart, Monique Reinhart, Gabrielle Huellstrung, Angel Laszlo and Vincent Laszlo.

Rick Gustavsen is the film's cinematographer, and the soundtrack is by Steven Rosen.

*Waiting For Waldemar* will be screened in Fort Macleod, Lethbridge,



Flimmmaker Eric Spoeth with cast members on the set of 'Waiting For Waldemar.'

Coaldale and Medicine Hat. Spoeth chose those locations for their large population of ethnic Germans and other immigrants.

Following the movie, Spoeth will hold a question and answer period during which people are invited to talk about their experiences with immigration.

"I'm inviting people of any cultural background who might have an immigration story or a story of displacement."

One outcome of the film is that Spoeth's mother and uncles are talking about their father more, and discovering more insights.

Spoeth has dreams of the film providing the family with more closure, that some information about his grandfather's fate will come to light.

"I still haven't given up," Spoeth said. "Anything is possible. And what an ending to the movie it would be."



The cast of 'Waiting For Waldemar,' to be shown April 29 in Fort Macleod.