

A full-page background image of an older man with white hair, wearing a black headband, a blue long-sleeved shirt, and black shorts. He is in a starting crouch on a paved track, with his hands on the ground and his body low to the ground. In the background, there is a chain-link fence, a suspension bridge, and some trees under a clear sky.

A feature-length documentary  
by YURIY GAVRILENKO,  
DMITRIY ROZIN

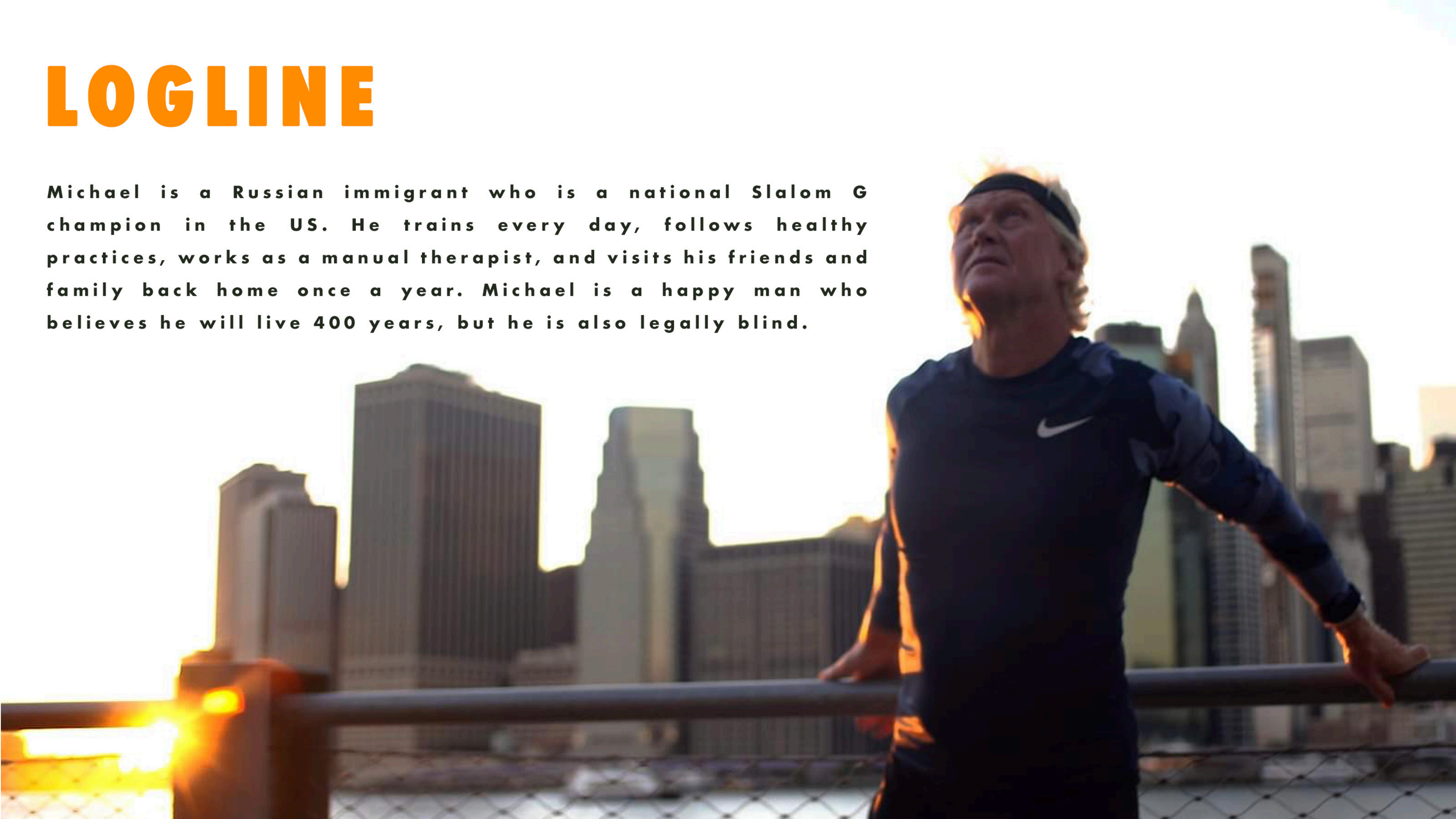
# WATCH OVER ME

**A story of a happy man who  
believes he will live 400 years...**



# LOGLINE

Michael is a Russian immigrant who is a national Slalom G champion in the US. He trains every day, follows healthy practices, works as a manual therapist, and visits his friends and family back home once a year. Michael is a happy man who believes he will live 400 years, but he is also legally blind.



# PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project aims to tell the story of a man, who managed to achieve incredible inner success through a lifelong taming of his disability. The idea of the project arose as one of the authors of the project visited a manual therapist whose life story seemed like a great premise for a documentary. There was a short TV report in New York on Michael as well as a number of articles in the press in recent years. Further research resulted in an invaluable contribution to Michael's story made by his family and friends: spouse, children, relatives, trainers, guides, and sports aficionados. While they take part in the narrative. A more recent change of the political climate added yet another edge to the storyline: the protagonist is forced to accept two conflicting states, the US and Russia, as his home.



# TOPICS

- The formation of Michael as an athlete on the way to tame his disability. Preparation for the Paralympic Games, his ultimate goal in sports.
- Immigration to the US. Michael's success story in new realities. Participation and victory in two New York marathons. Regular sports training and participation in competitions (alpine skiing).
- His activity as a manual therapist, spiritual and educational activities. Participation in the public organizations for the disabled. Everyday life of the disabled in two countries.



# TOPICS

- **Michael's family, the secret of family happiness. Raising children in a mixed disability/no disability environment. Michael's immediate environment (both sports and people with disabilities, as well as people with no such problems).**
- **Planning a trip to Russia to meet the first school love (from a boarding school): our hero accidentally found her online after many years. This comes as the conflict between US and Russia evolves.**
- **Proving the statement that people with disabilities live full, rich lives and heal the society.**



# TARGET AUDIENCE

**Children (ages 3 to 16) - formation of a positive role model in the process of personal growth and formation of character.**

**Youth (from 17 to 35 years old) - development of tolerance and humanistic principles of perception of reality. Finding ways of own adaptation in society.**

**Adult audience (36-60 years old) - encouragement to participate in activities to support the ideas of adaptation of people with disabilities, as well as educating the younger generation.**

**The older generation (60+ years) - maintaining their own fortitude and vitality on the example of the protagonist of the film.**

**This project is also aimed to inspire any discriminated social groups to overcome their everyday struggles.**





# OBJECTIVES

- Affirming the idea of no boundaries for fortitude, perseverance, and true character.
- Exploration of the steps toward complete inclusion.
- Unification of cultures, overcoming political and social differences by addressing the humanistic nature of relations between people.



# OBJECTIVES

- Emphasize the importance of the protagonist's personal efforts in developing methods for self-healing, as well as searching for the key to a healthy life for all mankind.
- Promote organizations for the disabled and involvement of the general public in the support of this activity.



A woman with blonde hair, wearing a bright red jacket and a black headband, is looking upwards with a smile. She is standing next to a large, dark, textured stone sphere. In the background, a body of water and a city skyline with a prominent golden spire are visible under a cloudy sky.

# PRODUCTION

**We have taken the path of a mixed media production, using all the video techniques available today. We also found photo and video archives of Michael's participation in the championships of the late 1990s and early 2000s.**

**One of the tools that we've yet to employ is POV presentations of how our characters see images, colors and shapes with varying degrees of blur or clarity. We would like to create an array of experimental video bookmarks throughout the film, intertwined with realistic storytelling, interviews and live scenes.**

**We are also in contact with some award-winning animators who will make us a set of "vignettes" to illustrate the story and add transitions between the acts.**

# PRODUCTION

Interviews were filmed in intimate medium and close-up shots in various locations: at home, in a bathhouse, on the streets. Most of them are live scenes where we simply wonder in with the camera. We asked the characters not to narrate as if they were giving an interview, but rather to express their thoughts in the manner of an internal monologue, or a dialogue with the others. This project is definitely based on a naturalistic approach, however, there are taking head interviews that thread through and compliment the narrative.



# PRODUCTION

Sports footage is an integral part of the film. Much of it is quite informative, shot on wide-angle action cameras. However, many of Michael's personal training sessions are filmed from a low angle with urban backdrops to illustrate the protagonist's fortitude.

To film the triathlon competition in July 2021, we hired a group of cameramen to cover the race at different points in the city.

The language of the film is mostly Russian, but we have a few English-speaking characters: the slalom guide, the ski coach, Michael's daughter. There will be a female voice narration in English. The voice should support the film's visual approach to best reflect the character's many facets and underpin his passion and the variety of activities he engages in on the path to his dream of healing and living as long as possible.



# EXPENSES

- International travel as well as local expenses for gas and food.
- Animators, experimental video artist, a composer as well as the voiceover actor will be hired.
- Editing, color correction, sound mixing will consume the main chunk of the needed funding.
- Distribution and submission to festivals of competitive works has become quite an expensive process.
- Team compensation.

Preliminary budget for the remaining production and finishing:  
\$135,000

# TEAM



**Yuriy Gavrilenko** is a New York-based visual artist, book publisher, filmmaker and founder of the Red Shift film festival in New York City. He moved to the States in the mid-90's.

Yuriy directed, produced and shot several documentaries - "New York Tusovka", "20 Cans of Chunky Beef Soup", "Friends My Ass", "Public Figure", "Bass-Baritone", "Lucky Man" - and created Red Shift Film Festival. The festival featured ex-pat filmmakers from all over the world and quickly became an important part of the Manhattan film scene.

Lately, Yuriy has reconnected with his visual talent and produced numerous sculptures and illustration works.



**Dmitriy Rozin** is a director and an editor, living in New York since 1992. His family immigrated to the US as ex-USSR Jewish refugees. Dmitriy holds an MFA in Computer Graphics and Interactive Media and an MFA in Film Directing.

His long track record includes both fiction and non-fiction film, commercial spots for TV and web, industrial promo videos, music videos on many subjects and many languages. Many of those works received acclaimed awards. Dmitriy has also worked internationally, shooting and editing in Western Europe and Asia.

Besides Watch Over Me, Dmitriy is currently in development of several feature films.

# RELATIONSHIPS

Yuriy Gavrilenko and Dmitriy Rozin have been collaborating on documentary projects for years, but there has been a small gap in their work together recently, since Yuriy returned to fine art.

In the winter of 2021 when Yuriy befriended his manual therapist Michael, we realized there was a time for someone to make film of his life. We got in touch with his skiing partner and guide, Richard. We went to their training site, Woodhill Mountain, with them. Collaboration with Adaptive helped enormously with filming the skiing. Everyone was helpful and understanding.

Following that, the flight to St. Petersburg, Russia took place. Michael was visiting his family and we followed him. Working around his schedule, we were warmly received by his family at home for the interview and the exhibit of his manual therapy session.

We also took 3 trips to a bathhouse, where his social activity takes place. Everyone was welcoming and glad to talk about their life, their affiliation with the sports club Achilles, and their friendship with Michael. Some of them were on the board of the club, and still are in contact with the Society of The Blind of St. Petersburg.

We have filmed a full interview with Richard Traum, a businessman and disability activist who founded Achilles in North America.

Needless to say, in the process of our filming, we have become friends with the members of this underrepresented and marginalized community. We hope to finish covering this story in the same friendly and effective manner.



# THANK YOU

