



## THE BIRTH OF IMMI PICTURES

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The story of IMMI Pictures begins in a hotel room in London. Heriberto Schoeffer, a successful Argentine Banker, was channel surfing one evening in the mid-1980s when he chanced upon a BBC production that planted a seed in his life. So forcefully struck by the powerful influence film can have on people and society, he decided then and there to re-direct his professional career to the field of filmed entertainment.

“What I saw was an extremely well produced film about a subject I know a lot about,” he recalls. “In maddeningly subtle ways it was distorted, almost sinister,” he says. “I experienced something like a vision to get into the film business, not to criticize others, but to offer audiences and alternative choice.” Thus was borne his dream, as he puts it, “to build a studio and change the world.”

First he had to convince his wife and three children to uproot a tranquil life in Buenos Aires and resettle a world away in Los Angeles. Once they agreed, it was friends and relatives who objected, calling him crazy and irresponsible. In the fall of 1992 a determined Mr. Schoeffer moved with his family for good. While he learned about the industry and made valuable contacts in the Hollywood community, financial straits almost sent the family back to Argentina, where lucrative job offers beckoned. “We had bought the plane tickets and were just about packed and ready to go when the phone rang,” he remembers. An American donor stepped forward who offered to invest in his company if he wouldn’t quit. “It was the happiest day of my life when I met him,” Mr. Schoeffer says. “He too saw the need for films that uplift and reward audiences with hope.”

Soon after, Mr. Schoeffer met a producer who sold him the screenplay of *Delivering Milo*. The story of the unborn child touched a nerve. “All my life I’ve been saying it is not our free decision to be born,” Mr. Schoeffer says. “Here was a screenplay that explored the concept of one freely choosing to be born,” he continues. “The film raises the question ‘What would make someone want to be born?’ At the last moment is his mother’s love that convinces him. It’s a powerful fable of love and hope, the kind of film I want to produce and distribute.”

That investment led Mr. Schoeffer to hire a small team of people to develop his company, which he named IMMI Pictures. In the meantime, there was a film to shoot. That meant hiring a director and cast. Nick Castle (*Dennis the Menace*) agreed to direct and soon after Albert



Finney and Bridget Fonda signed on. Both found the story refreshing and important. "When I read the script it affected me and I cried," says Ms. Fonda. To her, the story strikes a balance between the themes of hope and fear-something she says she struggles with her own life. "It's the thing that most people are trying to balance in their lives," she adds.

Once completed, the film was shipped off to the Motion Picture Association of America, which rates each movie. In a highly unusual step, one of the directors of the MPAA personally called Mr. Schoeffler and told him: "You need to succeed to make more movies like this! It is a breathe of fresh air"

With its initial success, Mr. Schoeffler wants to take the company to the next level and has prepared an aggressive business plan that will position IMMI Pictures as a serious competitor both in the film production and distribution businesses. "Our research and projections show that there is a profitable market for the kind of movie we want to make," he says. "A sizeable audience is looking for something else."

He provides other industry research showing that G and PG films generate more profit than R-rated movies, especially owing to TV and home video revenues. And while big budget movies may generate more revenue than lower budget films, he says, the lower budget films like the ones IMMI plans to produce or purchase tend to be more profitable. Sums up Mr. Schoeffler: "We want to capture a large underdeveloped market, use our independent status to minimize budgets and overhead while maximizing profits, and reduce risk over a portfolio of film projects."

Mr. Schoeffler has come a long way toward fulfilling his dream since that evening in his London hotel room. Like the young protagonist in his first film, now that he's had a taste of the real thing, he's determined more than ever to bring his dream to life and is looking for partners who share his dream.