

THE BIRDMAN

An old aviator fights to stay in the air

A documentary project by
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Duration: 60'
Format HD: 1080p

TREATMENT

1. TOPIC

Nicolae "Mami" Mihaiță is a living legend among the Romanian aviators. At the age of 78, he is the oldest Romanian pilot who is still flying.

He saw a plane for the first time when it crashed in front of his house during World War II. His first flight was at the age of 16. At 17 he was already a licenced pilot.

60 years of activity made him not only the pilot with the longest flying career in the whole history of Romanian aviation, but also the leader of all possible sport-aviation hierarchies.

Many of the Romanian comercial and military pilots were his students. Some of them are already retired now but Mami still trains and flies. Everybody wonders where all his endurance comes from.

But there is a flip side of the coin. Doctor Virgil Baloescu, the head of the Aeronautical Medical Center, knows about his weakened vision abilities. Since there is no legal age limit in aviation, he is the one who is entitled to prevent Mami from flying any more. They know each other since 30 years ago and share a lot of memories. But it's not about friendship any more.

Moreover, he carries on with a burden since 26 years ago when his son Luci had a glider accident which put him to in a weehlchair.

Now, at the age of 78, he intends to win for the 10th time the title of National Champion of the Distance Gliding competition, at Craiova airfield, between 10th - 25th of June.

Whether he wins or not, it will be a new record for aviation and one more armistice in his battle with time.

2. THE CHARACTER

Mami is a passionate man. This is the reason why many of his students got inspired to become professional pilots. Watching him speaking about aviation makes anybody eager to taste flying.

His charisma emerges from a life that was not always full of beautiful takeoffs and pleasure flights. Hard landings came across, too. He witnessed war, the dreary 50s, the more liberal 70s and the gloomy 80s. And finally the post-communist era.

All these years his life was blended with flying and aviation in an inseparable way. He went through several dangerous situations, some of them very critical. Nevertheless he got out of every trouble alive.

His deepest descent in life had been Luci's glider accident. His son crashed during a gliding training camp and ended up in a wheelchair for 26 years now. Day by day, the view of Luci immobilized and the certitude that he will never inherit his art or skill is probably the reason why Mami continues flying with such an obstination, as if on top of his passion there is a mandate from Luci to fly for him too.

Mami has always been exceptionally preoccupied with nature and the principles that rule it and, most of all, with his "partners" with whom he shares the sky: birds and bees, clouds and winds.

Mami is a truly crafted artist of flying. Apart from his celebrated talent at the controls of airplanes or gliders, he is a good mechanic. He improved the performances of his beloved airplane "Rebel" through many innovations.

Now, at the age of 78, he lives the most tragical part of his life. His eyesight is weak. But he does not admit he is marginally fit for flying and tries to convince everyone, including doctors and authorities, that he can compensate his diminished sight with experience.

Wherever you may travel with him, he has many captivating stories. About life, about birds, about interesting people. He is a charismatic storyteller.

3. THE STORY

Tagline:

The film presents the story of an old aviator who fights to stay in the air.

Main plot:

Documenting Mami's journey to the next National Gliding Championship.

Secondary plots:

1. Documenting his flounder to obtain the needed medical certificates.

2. His delicate relation with Luci.
3. His ambition to continuously nurse new pilots.
4. Discovering how he manages to keep up with the stream of all his challenging technical projects.
5. The management of his “fanclub” on Facebook and the friendship with the woman who stepped out from the crowd.

Story outline:

Winter is too long for Mami. His only connections with aviation are the medical check ups, which are more and more difficult to pass during the last years. From time to time he goes to the airfield to wipe the snow out of the airplane.

Throughout the winter he has too many time to put his imagination to work and it ends up with many crazy ideas. He transforms himself into an aeronautical engineer. We see him manufacturing parts for his beloved “Rebel”, the ultralight plane he shares with his friend and financial supporter Victor Mavrodineanu, on a lathe at his buddy’s garage in the neighbourhood. Several years ago, after a small unpleasant accident, Mami completely rebuilt the plane in a barn from a remote Moldavian village, with the help of a friend who worked in a plane factory. And the “Rebel” was born again.

We will listen to him telling about his current big project: to perform a 1000 km flight without refuelling. This might be done, in his opinion, by putting an small engine on a glider and transform it into an airplane.

Lately, his grand daughter Patricia created a Facebook account for him and soon it became his favorit toy. Among many fans that “added him”, he also met Andrea, a much younger aviation fan, who became closer to him than his wife would appreciate. Apart from flying togheter for fun, they hang out and go for simple things like fishing, seeing movies at cinema and who knows what else.

When it looks like spring is coming, Mami grows impatient. Like the bees he tamed in the hive he keeps near the plane, he has the best of any sunny day to go to Clinceni airfield.

When the flight season is reopened, Mami’s activity suddenly increases. He travels to the airfield by his scooter almost every day. He personally does all the maintenance works for his “Rebel” airplane. As a voluntary flight instructor at the Romanian Airclub, he selects those he would like to train for gliding during the summer. But he also has to do his usual medical check ups and start his own training and prepration in order to be in a good shape for the competitions.

The visits he has to pay to the clinic of Dr. Virgil Baloescu are the unpleasant part of flying. Althought they know each other since 30 years ago, Mami’s eyesight is so bad that Dr. Baloescu could justifiably decide to not extend his medical certificate any more. At his age, he has to do it once in every three months, more frequently than usual. Throughout all the flight season of the year, we are about to witness his fight to convince everyone that he is fit for flight.

On the 1st of May, Mami is going to have his traditional birthday party at Clinceni airfield. As happened many times before, supposedly George Stejea, his former student and rival in several gliding contests may congratulate him, on the Clinceni radio frequency, from the cockpit of his Tarom airliner.

While making his preparation for the competition, Mami has enough time to spend with his son Luci and even bring him, together with the whole family, to the airfield for an airshow or for a flight with his "Rebel" plane.

From time to time, Mami flies to the Danube Delta, his other big love. He has a great pleasure for going fishing and for seeing Delta from above.

As the time passes we notice progress in the way his students learn to fly and we find about Mami's main rivals in the Championship. He tells about his strategy for the competition and he chooses a younger partner to participate with him in the contest.

The National Championship will be held at Craiova airfield in June. We are going to closely follow him and his main two rivals throughout the competition. Unpredicted landings outside the airfield, bets, expectations and jokes will increase the suspense and spice up the story.

Victor Anghel and Ferenz Laszlo seem to be his main challengers for this year although the list of participants may vary unpredictably. This is why we must monitor all the pilots who may have a chance to win.

Mami won for the last time the Championship three year ago, way ahead of his competitors. At the age of 75, it had already been a record. During the 2013 contest, the contrast between the younger highly accessorized pilots with their latest devices and the modest appearance of Mami with only his map and compass on board, will be the source of funny moments about a serious dilemma: Man versus Technology.

It doesn't matter whether Mami is going to win again or not. His joy of being in the air is priceless. It is just a story of how to succeed in being young at any age.

4. STYLE AND VISUAL

The main approach of the documentary is observational but in a way that tries to go beyond the simple registration of facts. The character is going to be filmed in various life situations connected with the story. The involvement of the camera is going to be generally kept to a minimum but if any moment asks for it, it can become meddlesome.

Testimonials of friends, pilots, and competitors in the championship will be cautiously used in the film. Gliders and planes will be equipped with specially mounted small HD cameras in order to have footage from inside and outside. Only Mami's and his main two rivals' gliders are going to be fully equipped with cameras simultaneously.

Specially designed graphic animation is going to be used to represent the status of the competition during the championship.

Air to air footage is also to be used.

The attempt of catching Mami flying in a glider along with a flock of storks is going to be done in a moor area along the Danube.

Cameras to be used: Sony EX1, EX3, PMW 200, GoPro Hero1, 2, 3 or Sony HDR-AS15 HD with special mounts and rigs.

5. PROJECT STATUS

We are currently in the shooting process. As long as the flight season has already started, the course of events is rapidly developing. We started shooting in February and have already documented several of the key aspects of the story. We also began the rough editing process in order to have a good overview of the increasing footage and to better feel the pace of the story.

Mami is Alexandru Mavrodineanu's first flight instructor and a personal friend. Although he could be our grandfather, we have a buddy relationship. This helped him from the beginning of the shooting to feel comfortable in front of the camera, and step by step to ignore it. This allows us to capture some of his genuine nature.