

“I will be getting everyone I know to watch this wonderful movie. It’s a reminder of our humanity and the great work that one person can do to change another person’s life. Just brilliant.”

Abraham Verghese, author of *Cutting for Stone*



Z Prod Films Presents

# ZEMENE

A film by Melissa Donovan

**ZEMENE** is a feature documentary about a young Ethiopian girl, Zemenework (Zemene), who from an early age was afflicted by a rare form of Kyphosis, a curving of the spine causing hunchback and spinal cord compression. Living in a remote village with this disease, Zemene faced potentially life threatening illnesses. Set in the beautiful countryside of Ethiopia, the film shows how a brave but malnourished Zemene travels to the city of Gondar. It’s there that she crosses paths with Dr. Rick Hodes, an internist specializing in spinal conditions, whose life’s work compels him to help people in need.



[www.zemenefilm.com](http://www.zemenefilm.com)

[www.facebook.com/zemenethefilm](https://www.facebook.com/zemenethefilm)

Melissa Donovan / [Melissa@zemenefilm.com](mailto:Melissa@zemenefilm.com) / 917-723-6364

# ZEMENE



## SYNOPSIS

**ZEMENE** is a full-length documentary that follows a spirited 10-year old Ethiopian girl, Zemenework (Zemene), as she fights to keep hope alive and survive her life-threatening condition of Kyphosis, a severe curvature of the spine. Set in the beautiful countryside of Ethiopia, the film starts in Zemene's small rural village of Belessa. From there we learn how she travels to the city of Gondar, where she has a chance encounter with a doctor that will change her life forever.

Zemene is a shy and malnourished girl who has a slim chance at a healthy life. She was orphaned at a young age due to her mother's untimely death and her father's abandonment, leaving her aging grandparents to raise her. Her childhood was tinged with mockery and bullying from the other children. With no health care in her village, Zemene's kind uncle decides to take her to the city of Gondar where she is turned down at the hospital for any medical attention that could save her.

By complete chance or fate, Zemene's need for help is unexpectedly met when she crosses paths with Dr. Rick Hodes as she walks past a coffee shop he frequents. Dr. Hodes, a medical internist specializing in spinal conditions, invites Zemene and her uncle to Ethiopia's capital city of Addis Ababa. Here Dr. Hodes provides the support and resources she needs to gain physical strength and an education. Once Zemene becomes a surgical candidate, Dr. Hodes arranges for his colleague, Dr. Oheneba Boachie-Adjei, a distinguished worldwide spinal specialist, to perform surgery on her spine. Zemene is sent to Dr. Boachie's clinic in Ghana for the operation.

Five years after her journey began, Zemene, a much healthier, radiant young woman returns to her home to retrace the steps of her past. On this journey she realizes she stands between two worlds: her rural village where young women have few choices, and her life in the city where dreams are attainable through education. We watch Zemene's determination to connect these two worlds by continuing her studies with the belief that she will make a difference. **ZEMENE** movingly depicts how individuals offering help to children in need has a ripple effect, transforming not only individual lives, but communities as well.

# ZEMENE



## DIRECTORS STATEMENT

In 2007, I was a cinematographer working on a short film project in Ethiopia. Dr. Rick Hodes, was one of the subjects of that film. While walking on a street in the city of Gondar, he bumped into a young Ethiopian girl, named Zemene. It was obvious that she was malnourished but also had a severe curve to her back. Zemene and her uncle made the 9hr trip to Gondar, by foot and bus, so that she could be examined at a hospital there. After waiting 3 days to be seen by a doctor, she was told that her condition was too severe and that there was nothing anyone could do for her. They had lost hope and had started their journey back to their village when Dr. Rick spotted them on the street. In Ethiopia, there is a patient/doctor ratio of 33,000 to 1, making this random encounter with a doctor that specializes in spinal deformities, nothing less than miraculous.

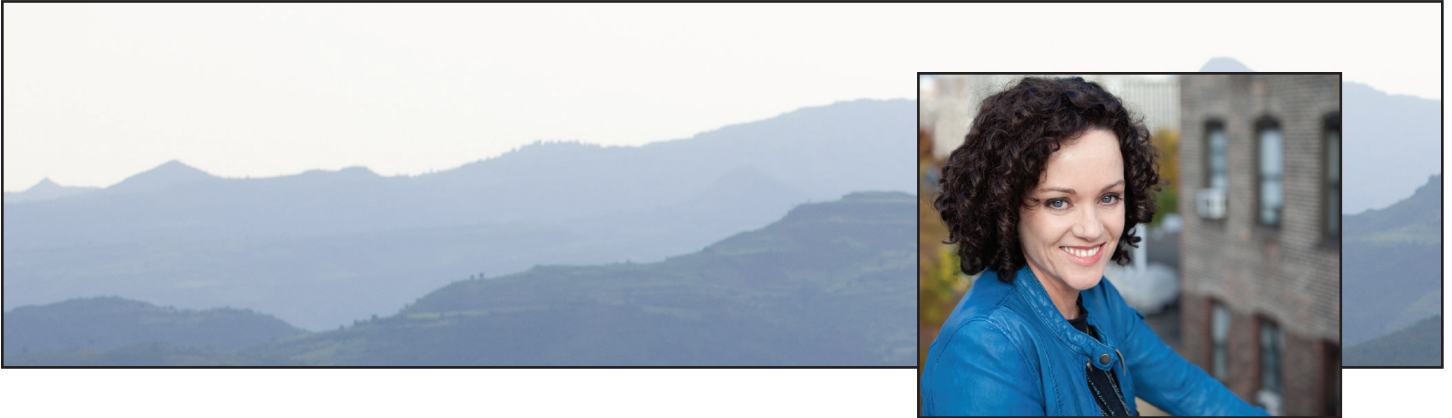
In her fear of the unknown, but with a big beautiful smile on her face, Zemene grabbed my hand and a piece of my heart. From that moment on, as I held the camera with my other hand, I knew this 10 year-old girl had a story to tell. I found in this brave child, a spirit that defied her dire medical condition, multiple childhood losses and hardships. I continued to follow Zemene as she went under Dr. Rick's care. As I filmed their connected paths, I became very aware of the need for health care in Ethiopia and how individuals can truly make a difference. After returning back to the states, my life would never be the same. Zemene has touched my life in so many ways. She inspired me to travel back to Ethiopia, five years later, so I could one day share her story.

Throughout filming, directing and editing of **ZEMENE**, I've found inspiration in the dedicated doctors and individuals who are drawn to children whom others have turned away. I've watched their amazing level of patience and perseverance to help those that are sick while working in a developing country. The importance of connecting with patients and establishing trust enables them to give these children care over the long term, while arranging for international sponsors, visas and surgeons that are needed to do these surgeries. I am humbled and honored to show their work in this documentary.

This chance encounter between Zemene and Dr. Rick was the catalyst for this film. Seeing Zemene's courage as she transforms into a healthy, intelligent young adult, who now has a real chance of accomplishing her dream of becoming a doctor, makes me proud and grateful to be a witness to her story.



# ZEMENE



## THE FILMMAKER

**MELISSA DONOVAN:** DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, CINEMATOGRAPHER

Melissa Donovan has worked in the commercial, independent and documentary world as a cinematographer for over 15 years, having earned a Kodak Cinematography Award and recently having earned Best Cinematography and Best Documentary Awards from various film festivals.

A native of Boston, Melissa started her career as a camera assistant to many well-known filmmakers, including Robert Richardson and Carolyn Chen. She went on to work as a cinematographer and most recently the Director and Cinematographer of her own feature length documentary, *Zemene*, which has won Best Cinematography, Best Editing, and Best Documentary at the 2014 Boston Film Festival, the Interfaith Documentary Award at the 2014 St. Louis International Film Festival, and Best of the Festival at the 2014 Chagrin Documentary Film Festival.

Melissa also served as the Director of Photography on the Peabody Award winning documentary, *Between the Folds*, directed by Vanessa Gould and *An Unreasonable Man*, produced by Henriette Mantel and Steve Skrovan and aired on Independent Lens. Additional credits include Director of Photography on the PBS nationally aired series, *Vine Talk* hosted by Stanley Tucci, including other PBS multi-camera productions, including *Finding Billy Elliot*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Jesus and the Awakening to God-Consciousness* with Deepak Chopra.

In addition, Melissa's commercial campaign credits includes work for Kmart, Stonyfield Yogurt, Herbal Essence, Oxygen Channel and the Cartoon Network. She has also worked as Camera Operator on the feature film *Lift*, directed by DeMane Davis and Khari Streeter and starring Kerry Washington and on commercials for Verizon, Panasonic and Mountain Dew. Other corporate clients include the Harvard Business School Club of New York City, Details Magazine, KPMG, AOL, the Philharmonic, John Hancock and TV Guide.

Melissa lives in New York City, where she continues her work in cinematography. She looks forward to sharing *Zemene* to wider audiences throughout the world as she continues to document and raise greater awareness of social issues, which have traditionally plagued underserved worldwide populations.

To see more of Melissa's work, visit [www.melissadonovanproductions](http://www.melissadonovanproductions)

# ZEMENE



## PRODUCTION STILLS



\* Print-quality downloads of the above stills are available at: [www.zemenefilm.com](http://www.zemenefilm.com)

# ZEMENE

## AWARDS

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