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Beverly kid is making movies

(Opening shot): A young boy who looks remarkably like Opie Taylor is playing catch with his Dad in the back yard of a home in Chicago's Beverly community.

(Cut to 25 years later): On a former leper colony near Okinawa, a Japanese girl is running through a typhoon. She's in obvious emotional distress. As the camera pulls back, a movie crew becomes visible. There, in the middle of the organized chaos, is that Opie character from Beverly, all grown up.

What's he doing? How did he get there? And isn't this the stuff movies are made of?

Ed M. Koziarski, 33, the Opie lookalike, is the co-producer, co-director and co-writer of a feature length movie, "The First Breath of Tengan Rei," showing at the Gene Siskel Film Center, 164 N. State St. in Chicago on Nov. 21, 22 and 24. He shares the writing, producing and directing credits with his wife, Junko Kajino, a native of Nagano, Japan.

I first met Koziarski when he was a toddler. His father, also named Ed, was a colleague of mine at the SouthtownStar, formerly the Daily Southtown, for 30 years. His mother, Rita, is a

The younger Koziarski now is one of the leaders in Chicago's independent film community. Growing up, he spent a lot of time at his grandparents home on the East Side of the city, and those impressions left an indelible mark.

There are scenes in "Tengan Rei" that were shot near the 103rd Street bridge and in Hegewisch. Other Chicago-area locations include Logan Square, Pilsen, Beverly, the East Side and Northwest Indiana.

The movie is about a young Japanese woman who kidnaps the teenage son of a U.S. Marine convicted of raping her when she was a girl.

While she holds the teenager captive, "the two are drawn together despite the scars of the past, as they prepare for a final confrontation" with the teen's father, according to a press kit description.

The cast and crew came from Japan and Chicago. The Okinawa scenes were actually shot on an even smaller island that was once a leper colony.

"While we were shooting the scenes there, a typhoon came up," Koziarski said. "I quickly rewrote the script so that we could write the typhoon into the movie. Fortunately, it wasn't a really big typhoon, so we were able to shoot through it,



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and I think it really is one of the most dramatic moments in the film."

Koziarski attended Metcalfe Elementary School in Beverly through the sixth grade and then, through an accelerated program, attended seventh through ninth grades at Morgan Park High School. From there, he entered the Illinois Math and Science Academy in Aurora, where he graduated.

He met his future wife at Antioch College in Ohio, whose alumni include Rod Serling and Coretta Scott King. Koziarski was a senior film student there.

As I spoke to him on the phone, Koziarski was working by day as second director on "Hannah Free," a movie starring Sharon Gless of "Cagney and Lacey" TV fame, that's shooting in Chicago, while laboring

For the past 10 years, Koziarski and his wife have been striving to put together their projects from scratch. They write the scripts, travel around the world to drum up money for their projects, pull a cast and crew together and then try to find some more cash to keep the project going.

Their first effort was "Home-sick Blues," about a Japanese musician who dreams of singing the blues in the States.

They put enough money together to make a movie short, which was accepted in several festivals and awarded the best film at IFP/Chicago's Flyover Zone Film Festival. But they never were able to find the money to turn it into a full-length feature film.

"We're still working on that," Koziarski said with a laugh.

For the last two years, they've been working on "Tengan Rei."

So how do you drum up the cash to make a movie?

"You start with friends and family," Koziarski said, "and then you ask everyone you know in Chicago and then you reach out across the country. My wife made several trips to Japan, where she was successful in getting a grant."

When asked how much the film cost, Koziarski will only



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say, "We made it for under \$1 million."

But the fight to get the film out to the public is now in front of him. It doesn't have a distributor.

"It's harder for independents now than ever before, so what they do is lease a movie house

and split the profits," he said. "That's what we're doing with the Gene Siskel theater."

General admission tickets for the screenings are \$9 and can be purchased at the film center box office or from Ticketmaster at (312) 575-8000 (www.ticketmaster.com).

"This film is inspired by a true story. I think the struggles of Koziarski and his wife would make an even better movie."

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