

PRISONER OF HER PAST

A Documentary by Howard Reich and Gordon Quinn, Kartemquin Films, USA, 2010, 57 min

Prisoner of Her Past explores a topic virtually untouched in popular culture and scientific literature: The delayed effects of childhood trauma. Through the story of Sonia Reich, the film shows how a woman who leads a seemingly normal life suddenly can succumb to the terrors of the past.

On a frigid February evening in 2001, a 69-year-old who stood less than 5 feet tall packed her clothes into two shopping bags, put on her coat, locked the door to her Chicago-area home and fled. Someone was trying to kill her, she told the police officers who found her and the doctors who evaluated her in a hospital. It would take a year until Sonia's son, Chicago Tribune jazz critic Howard Reich, received the correct diagnosis: late-onset Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Prisoner of Her Past traces Howard's journey to understand his mother's little-known condition and his Herculean efforts to find out what happened to her in the terrible childhood she never discussed. During his investigation, Howard locates relatives he did not know existed. He learns that 12,000 Jews from his mother's hometown in easternmost Poland were executed, his mother among less than 100 who escaped. And he understands, for the first time, his mother's heroism as a child facing terrible events and as a widow reliving her tormented past.

But Howard also finds psychiatrists in New Orleans helping traumatized children who survived Hurricane Katrina, so they will not re-experience their childhood terrors as his mother now does.

