



## A Chronology of Suffering

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Our faces, as they change over time, document our stories more compellingly than our words ever can. We've seen that most eloquently in [Michael Apted's](#) compelling "Seven Up!" TV documentary series, which has been following the lives of the same British schoolchildren from the age of 7 into adulthood. And we see it again in "Refusenik," Laura Bialis's dutifully told documentary about the long-term suffering of Jews who tried to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

Although the film is informative and earnest in its recitation of history and its interviews with many of the people involved, its most compelling narrative comes from the evolving faces of the "refuseniks" themselves.

It is fascinating to learn about dissidents such as Anatoly (Natan) Sharansky, Vladimir and Maria Slepak, and Ephraim Kholmyansky, who weathered extensive harassment, abuse and heartbreak for having the temerity to request emigration visas to the state of Israel. And it's shocking, even now, to revisit the Soviet Union's brutally insidious repression of its Jewish citizens, which included bogus charges of espionage, false diagnoses of psychological illnesses to justify putting people into psychiatric facilities, years of imprisonment in hard-labor camps and even execution.

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But what affects us most is watching the dissidents age over time as they continue to hope for freedom. There's the young, resolute Sharansky in the late 1970s, determined to reunite with his young wife, Avital, who is lucky enough to get her exit visa. And there he is, 12 years later, balder, more haggard, but still brimming with romance, when he finally alights from the plane in Jerusalem, with a still-new love affair to continue. Those authentically magic moments reach us in ways no narration or talking head ever could.

### -- [Desson Thomson](#)

*Refusenik Unrated*, 107 minutes Contains harrowing accounts of government repression and abuse. In English, Russian and Hebrew with subtitles. At Landmark's E Street Cinema.

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