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MOVIES

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The bravery of Iron Curtain activists seen in 'Refuseniks'

By SEAN AXMAKER SPECIAL TO THE P-I

Laura Bialis' well-made portrait of the 30-year movement to free Soviet Jews is an admirable documentary on a civil-rights struggle often forgotten and left to the margins of history.

MOVIE REVIEW REFUSENIK DIRECTOR: Laura Bialis RUNNING TIME: 117 minutes RATING: No rating, no objectionable language or imagery GRADE: B

We've seen portraits of dissidents before. What is revealing here is the heretofore unseen civil-rights movement, small but dedicated, that began in the 1960s behind the Iron Curtain.

Those who petitioned for emigration to Israel were known as "refuseniks." They lost their jobs and were routinely framed for crimes and imprisoned or hidden away in mental hospitals.

media, knowing full well the consequences.

Bialis parallels their efforts with the slow-growing network of communities outside the Iron Curtain dedicated to bringing international attention to their plight.

"Refusenik" suggests (if only by association) that this campaign contributed to the fall of the Iron Curtain, a fair claim. But more importantly, it shows that while one person can make a difference, it takes a community to make change.

Director Laura Bialis will be at both Friday night screenings, taking part in a Q&A at the 7:10 show and introducing the 9:50 show.

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