



bigsoniamovie



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**TRT | 93 mins. | Nov. 2016 festival premiere**

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## AWARDS | FESTIVALS

*(for a full list of festivals please visit [www.bigsonia.com](http://www.bigsonia.com))*

- Grand Jury Prize: Best Documentary**, Barcelona International Film Festival, 2017
- Best Film / Audience Award**, Cleveland International Film Festival, 2017
- Best Documentary**, Wilbur Award for Religious Communicators, 2017
- Best Documentary**, Napa Film Festival, 2016
- Audience Award**, Napa Film Festival, 2016
- Best Heartland Documentary**, Kansas City Film Festival, 2017
- AARP Movies For GrownUps** Nominee, 2017
- Best Documentary / Audience Award**, Monadnock International Film Festival, 2017
- Audience Award**, Seattle Jewish Film Festival, 2017
- Audience Award**, Philadelphia Jewish Film Festival, 2017
- Audience Award**, Mendocino Film Festival, 2017
- Shanghai International Film Festival** (only US-made doc in competition), 2017
- Best Local Film**, Movie Trip Cinema (Kansas City), 2017

### Short SYNOPSIS

“National treasure”, local celebrity, Holocaust Survivor – Sonia (89) has just been served an eviction notice for the last (and most popular) shop left in a dying suburban mall. Following Sonia on the motivational speaker circuit to schools and prisons - even as she navigates her own struggles - BIG SONIA explores what it means to be a survivor and how trauma is passed down through generations. Will you let your trauma define you? Or will your past make you stronger?

### Long SYNOPSIS

For years, Sonia Warshawski (89) has been an inspirational public speaker at schools and prisons, where her stories of surviving the Holocaust as a teenager have inspired countless people who once felt their own traumas would leave them broken forever. But when Sonia is served an eviction notice for her iconic tailor shop (in a dead mall), she's confronted with an agonizing decision: either open up a new shop, or retire. Ironically, Sonia's shop is the last open business in an otherwise desolate Kansas City mall, but it contains enough color and liveliness to make up for the entire empty complex. For a woman who admits she stays busy “to keep the dark parts away”, facing retirement dredges up fears she'd long forgot she had, and her horrific past resurfaces. BIG SONIA explores what it means to be a survivor and how intergenerational trauma affects families and generations. Will you let your trauma define you? Or will your past make you stronger?

# BIG LITTLE TEAM

## **LEAH WARSHAWSKI | CO-DIRECTOR / PRODUCER**

Leah Warshawski (Producer, Co-Director) specializes in producing/directing documentary-style features, television shows, commercials, and branded content in remote parts of the world. She has a BA in Japanese language from the University of Hawaii and her first feature film FINDING HILLYWOOD (2013) won six awards including the Critic's Award (Sebastopol Documentary Festival) and the

Audience Award (Napa Film Festival), and screened at more than 65 film festivals. Before developing FINDING HILLYWOOD, Leah worked in Hawaii in the marine department for major features and shows on the water including LOST and HAWAII. She is currently co-ep for a feature documentary about the "personhood" movement in America called PERSONHOOD (2018), and she consults with filmmakers about outreach, marketing and hybrid distribution plans. In addition, Leah co-founded "rwandafilm.org", a "LinkedIn" for Rwandan filmmakers and a tool to help grow the film economy in East Africa. This site is supported by a number of international partners including Bpeace (Business Council for Peace) and The Academy of Motion Pictures. *Leah is also Sonia's granddaughter.*



## **TODD SOLIDAY | CO-DIRECTOR / DP / POST SUPERVISOR / EDITOR**

Todd Soliday (Co-Director, DP, Editor) has directed, shot, edited and posted feature films, corporate brand films (Starbucks, Microsoft, T-Mobile, etc), and music documentaries for major networks and companies. Avid snowboarder, mountain biker, vintage collector,

adventure-seeker, and world traveler, Todd's true passion is documentary storytelling. Recent projects include OUT OF LUCK (2015 feature doc), THE BREACH (2014 feature doc), FINDING HILLYWOOD (2013 feature doc), PLATINUM: THE MT. BAKER LEGENDARY BANKED SLALOM (2007 feature doc) and VOYAGE: ALONE ACROSS THE ATLANTIC (2006 series and pilot). For samples of his work please visit [www.toddsoliday.com](http://www.toddsoliday.com).



## **ERIC FRITH: STORY PRODUCER**

Eric creates films that have screened at top film festivals including Sundance, Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), South by Southwest (SXSW), Seattle International Film Festival (SIFF) and dozens of other festivals around the world. These projects have received numerous awards and been acquired for distribution, both nationally and internationally, by Miramax, Dream Entertainment, Cinema Management Group, Off the Fence, Independent Lens, American Masters PBS, and Phase 4 Films. Most recently, Eric served as editor on the documentary FINDING HILLYWOOD which premiered at SIFF in 2013, screened at over 50 other film festivals winning two best doc awards and one audience award. He edited director Megan Griffiths' EDEN (2012), which premiered at SXSW won the audience award there, along with 1st runner up for best film at SIFF, and then was distributed by Phase 4 Films. In 2011 Eric both produced and edited A LOT LIKE YOU, which premiered at SIFF, screened at festivals around the world winning 6 best Doc awards. Eric also edited THE HEART OF THE GAME (2005) which premiered at TIFF, was distributed by Miramax, and heralded as "...an Oscar level piece of work" by film critic Richard Roeper. Eric edited and co-wrote SONG OF THE NEW EARTH (2013) and THE BREACH (2014). He also edited DEEP BURIAL starring Dominic Monaghan, Tom Sizemore, and Sarah Habel.

## **Additional CREDITS**

### **CREW** (full bios at [bigsonia.com/crew](http://bigsonia.com/crew))

- **Rachel Ignotofsky** | Graphic Artist - <http://www.rachelignotofskydesign.com>
- **Brad Anthony Laina** | Composer - <http://bradanthonylaina.com>
- **Dawn Norton** | Animator
- **Doug Loviska** | Assistant Editor
- **Dave Stewart** | Graphics
- **Chelsea Mohr** | Production Assistant
- **Gloria Baker Feinstein** | Still Photographer

### **Executive PRODUCERS + ADVISORS**

- **In Association with** True Productions
- **Tom Wright** | Executive Producer
- **Ni'coel Stark** | Co-Executive Producer
- **Claude & Bertina Thau** | Co-Executive Producers
- **Brian Newman (Sub-Genre)** | Distribution Advisor
- **SuEllen Fried** | Education Advisor
- **Lucy Bernholtz** | Fundraising Advisor
- **Jennifer Tavernaro** | Education Advisor
- **Todd Milton** | Education Advisor

### **Finishing Services Provided By:**

- **Skywalker Sound** (Audio + Sound Design)
- **Lightpress** (Color + Mastering)



"Engaging and thoughtful... Key to the strength of *Big Sonia* is its refusal to give in to easy bromides. Its use of animation to illustrate Sonia's memories spins off her own artful drawings in a way that amps the sense of unspeakable horror rather than sugarcoating it. The filmmakers, like Sonia herself, acknowledge the ongoing struggle that's essential to surviving such trauma."

- ***The Hollywood Reporter***

"Such a beautiful documentary... an unexpected and vital exploration... in a time we need it most. I love Sonia!"

- ***Rosie O'Donnell***

"This is not like any Holocaust survivor film you've seen. And if you're like me, you're not likely to forget *Big Sonia* any time soon."

- ***Janice Convoy-Hellmann, Atlanta Jewish Times***

"(The movie) speaks to us here and now because the world hasn't changed, but we still can."

- ***Melinda Henneberger, Kansas City Star***

"Sonia is made up of many opposites and even seeming contradictions. *Big Sonia* is really about choosing how we respond to what is thrown at us."

- ***Michèle Taylor, Vice Chair, DNC National Finance Committee & Member, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council***

"I have seen the film 3 times and never tire and will see it yet even 3 more times if I can. Why? Because it is such a warmhearted portrayal of a woman who after the years of the Holocaust now spreads love and joy to all she meets. I showed the film to 200 public school teachers in June 2017 and they laughed, cried and gave Leah a standing ovation for 5 minutes after seeing the film. Enough said."

- ***Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff, Director, Holocaust Teacher Institute, University of Miami***

"Captivating. Moving. Fresh. Painful. Hopeful. Magic."

- ***Kim Frank, SVPN Magazine***

"...you must know by now how deeply your film's impact is felt. Through laughter at foil scarcity, there is tremendous respect for Sonia. She is resolute to mentor another generation; to reveal that inhumanity can exist in monstrous ways. She becomes our guide to keeping precious bonds within family & community. And always, rejoice that we have life."

- ***Jean McGlothlin, Festival Director, Sebastopol Documentary Festival***