

# Who's afraid of Alice Miller?

A film by Daniel Howald



## SALES SHEET - *Who's afraid of Alice Miller?*

Documentary, Switzerland 2020, 101 min. & 52 min.

### Synopsis

Martin is rejected by his cold, uncaring mother and beaten by his father: a childhood without love. It sounds like a case right out of the book "The Drama of the Gifted Child" by world-renowned Swiss psychoanalyst Alice Miller. Except Martin is the son of the children's rights advocate.

After Alice Miller's death, Martin embarks on a journey to finally understand the contradiction between the famous childhood trauma researcher and the destructive mother. He finally discovers what stood between him and his mother: the greatest drama of the 20th century, the Shoah, the annihilation of the Jewish people. As a young Jew, Alice Miller assumed a false identity to survive amidst the Nazis in Warsaw – and was forced to witness all the atrocities. But Alice repressed these traumatic experiences, disassociating herself from them for the rest of her life. The deeper Martin digs into his mother's biography, the clearer it becomes: his own emotional pain is the legacy of something that he himself never experienced.

**Website:** [www.whosafraidofalicemiller.com](http://www.whosafraidofalicemiller.com) (English/German)

**Trailer:** <https://vimeo.com/386558412> (English Subtitles)

**Facebook:** [whosafraidofalicemiller](https://www.facebook.com/whosafraidofalicemiller)



## Technische Informationen

**Written and directed by:** Daniel Howald

**Cinema original Version:** German, Swiss-German, English, Polish, French (german/english/french subtitles), colour, DCP & ProRes, 101 min.

**ISAN:** 0000-0004-8B46-0000-E-0000-0000-W

**TV-Version:** 52 min. (soon available)

**Production:** SwissDok GmbH, SRF Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen

**Producer:** Frank Matter (soapfactory.ch)

**With:** Martin Miller, Irenka Taurek, Cornelia Kazis, Oliver Schubbe, Anja Dodziuk, Katrin Stoll, Martin Sander, Matan Shefi, Elzbieta Janicka, Katharina Thalbach as the voice of Alice Miller

**SwissDok GmbH** is a Swiss Production Company based in Basel. It produces author films with a strong personal style and socially relevant stories. Frank Matter is the producer of „Who is afraid of Alice Miller“. He is the owner of the „soap factory company“ situated in Basel and has received many international prizes in recognition of his work.

## Reactions to the film

*«„Who's afraid of Alice Miller?“ shows impressively how genocide can traumatize the world up to the present“.»*

**Hannes Nüsseler, Die Wochenzeitung - WOZ, 23rd January 2020**

*«Once again Switzerland shows its strength in documentary. I was greatly impressed by „Who's afraid of Alice Miller?“.»*

**Brigitte Häring, Schweizer Radio SRF1, Kulturaktualität, 29th January 2020**

*«The film keeps us constantly on the edge of our seats, but it doesn't gloat over our inevitable indignation. It's an exploration of the human psyche, which asks more questions than it answers.»*

**Giorgia del Don, Cineuropa, 30.1.2020**





## Themes

The main focus of the film is to show the unconscious, and therefore more extreme effects of war trauma on the children of those who were directly involved.

Alice Miller survived the Holocaust. However the film theme ranges from the time of the Holocaust to the situation of present refugees of war in Europe.

The relationship of the protagonist, Martin Miller, to his mother, Alice Miller, is central, as is his relationship to his father, who beat him regularly for years.

The film provides answers to the discrepancy between the child psychologist Alice Miller and the mother Alice Miller. It takes a closer look at the psychological aspects, and uncovers previously unknown facts.

Alice Miller's presence is strongly felt in the film thanks to her original letters and memoirs read by the renowned actress Katharina Thalbach.

The film is a very exciting investigation leading us through Poland, the USA and Berlin. The further it proceeds the more the family story is uncovered and clarified.

Alice Miller's cousin, the charismatic and cheerful Irenka Taurek, herself a Holocaust survivor, is the second protagonist in the film and accompanies Martin Miller on his great journey.

Secondary themes are the present political situation in Poland, a country which would like to be seen solely as a victim of the Second World War, and also the confrontation with religion.



Alice Miller was known worldwide in the 80's. Her books were translated into 30 languages. Apart from Europe she's widely known in the USA.

For the culturally interested audience over 50 Alice Miller and her bestseller „The drama of the gifted child“ are still unforgettable especially in areas of psychology and education.

The film is of special interest for people of the so called second generation, descendants of war traumatized parents, and in general for those who as children were subjected to physical and psychological abuse by their parents.



## Director's Note



Only a few remain among us who experienced the Holocaust firsthand and can bear witness to the unspeakable horror. Soon it will be reduced to a 20th century event, existing only in the pages of history books, where it will slowly recede into the annals of time. Or will it? In reality, that is a great fallacy. War and persecution live on in the descendants of victims and cause great suffering every day, and that is the subject of this film. Severe war trauma lasts longer than one lifetime. It is passed on to the next generations. Although Martin was born in the safety of Switzerland in 1950, the abyss of the Holocaust continues to wreak havoc within him today.

There is more and more evidence to show that the second generation, the descendants of genocide and war crime survivors, display extremely severe trauma symptoms. And this is the case, even though they never even experienced the traumatic events themselves, having been born after the war ended. In psychology, this is known as transgenerational legacy. Parents unconsciously

pass on the fear and suffering caused by persecution to their children. These children grow into adults, never understanding what happened to them, nor being able to put a name to the pain they experience.

The descendants of perpetrators can be affected by this as well. And it will surely affect all the children whose parents are coming to us today as traumatized war refugees. The more these parents disassociate from and repress their own war trauma in order to survive, the more severe this problem becomes.

This film looks at one way of facing this inherited trauma. Martin sets off to discover and explore what his mother went through in the past. By gaining knowledge and developing an awareness of their parents' unspoken experiences, children can understand their own feelings and unearth the root cause which has been shrouded in darkness. Martin was part of the war, even though he'd never experienced war himself. Coming to terms with that context and the knowledge that was kept from him, helps him resolve his transgenerational trauma.





In Martin's story, the historical and the personal are profoundly and uniquely interwoven. He is the emotional heir to his mother, who disassociated from her own war trauma with all her might, and at the same time, saw through and denounced the mechanisms of violence with almost prophetic vision. She was one of the first to openly address the subject of sexual abuse and she actively opposed physical child abuse, even writing letters on the subject to the Pope and to leading politicians. But in her personal life, she was a different person altogether. There, she unconsciously reenacted her repressed trauma. Perceiving her own son as the persecutor, the war continued within her. There were two Alice Millers, and between them was a wall.

This film is an attempt to break down that wall. Martin has the courage to face his childhood trauma. He thus heeds the demands that his mother made in her role as a public figure: to break the vicious cycle of violence. For if we do not, to put it in the words of Alice Miller, "... the devastating consequences of the traumatization of children will take their inevitable toll on society."

