

About Pennhurst

100 years ago, mental illness and developmental disability were widely misunderstood. Psychologists of the day made little effort to distinguish between conditions like autism, down's syndrome, epilepsy and schizophrenia. People suffering from these conditions were categorized as the "feeble minded". It was believed their traits were hereditary, and therefore they represented a risk to the health of society. So large institutions were built to warehouse feeble minded persons and protect society from them. These institutions offered a small degree of training for those who were qualified, but for the most part the residents were sentenced to a life of abuse and neglect - permanently removed from society.

As the field of psychology progressed, large institutions like Pennhurst began coming under scrutiny. In 1968, an NBC reporter named Bill Baldini did a shocking exposé that uncovered the truth about life in institutions like Pennhurst and a period of reform began. By 1987, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Halderman v Pennhurst* to shut Pennhurst down and transfer residents to community living situations where they could live lives more connected to society. The reform born at Pennhurst improved the lives of people with developmental disabilities all across the country and around the world.

About Abuse and Neglect

20 years after *Halderman v Pennhurst*, film maker Marc Reed travelled to Pennhurst to work on *Abuse and Neglect*. For two decades the former institution fell into decay. It had been abandoned. Vandals, scrappers, and the elements had taken their toll. But among the rubble, the story of the former residents could still be found.

"I don't make traditional documentaries" says Reed. "My style is to let the buildings, and the objects contained within do the talking".

In order to bring life to the decrepit old institution, Reed employed time-lapse photography to capture the dynamic effects of light moving through Pennhurst's now-solitary spaces. In this way, Reed gives *time* a leading role.

"By shooting time-lapse footage I hoped to convey the influence of time" says Reed.

"The time residents spent sitting in these wards, the time it took Americans to shift our paradigms, and now time continues to change this place."

"Pennhurst is an important American story and it was almost forgotten" adds Reed. "I hope my film can help keep its memory alive, because it's important not to forget our mistakes".