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| Program Title | Erasing Hate |
| Program Subject(s) | Race Relations; Tattoos; Hate Crimes |
| Year Produced | 2012 |
| Directed by | Bill Brummel |
| Produced by | Bill Brummel |
| Distributed by | Scorpion TV, 3a, 140 Grays Inn Road, London, WC1X 8AX |
| Reviewed by | Timothy Hackman, University of Maryland |
| Running Time | 59 minutes |
| Color or B&W | Color |
| Awards Received | Festival Winner, Best Film, The Hope and Freedom Film Festival (Long Beach, CA) |
| Audience Level: | General Adult |
| Review: | |

Bryon Widner was a teenager in 1991 when, looking for a sense of belonging that he could not find with his own dysfunctional family, he first became involved with white supremacist “skinhead” groups. “My crews were my family,” he says, recalling gangs like the Soldiers of the New Reich, Outlaw Hammerskins, Hoosier State Skinheads, and Vinlanders Social Club. For over a decade, Widner, talked the talk – most notably the “14 Words” of the white supremacist creed (“We must secure the existence of our race and a future for white children”) – and walked the walk by recruiting new members across multiple states, by assaulting African Americans at random, and by covering most of his body, including his neck and face, with tattoos signifying his racist beliefs and his “willingness to kill for the white race.” His commitment began to waver in 2005, however, when he met future wife Julie at a white power music festival; as the two grew closer and formed a family of their own with Julie’s daughters and a son on the way, they became increasingly disillusioned with the movement in which they both had been enthusiastic participants. Finally in 2007, after sixteen years of hate and violence, Bryon broke his ties with the skinheads for good, moving from Indiana to Tennessee, escaping death threats and hoping to start a new life with Julie and their growing family.

Starting over turned out to be difficult, however. With his face and body bearing tattoos of a swastika, an Iron Cross, SS double lightning bolts, a bloody straight razor, the words “Thug Reich,” insignia of various hate groups, and more, Bryon found it impossible to find steady work or to truly put his past behind him. In desperation, he reached out to the Alabama-based Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors hate and extremist groups across the country and which had profiled Bryon during his days as a neo-Nazi; remarkably, the group agreed to pay the full cost of laser tattoo removal treatments for Bryon.

Erasing Hate follows Bryon and his family as he undergoes the excruciating process of erasing the symbols of hate from his flesh. Director Bill Brummel elegantly weaves Bryon’s story through interviews, photographs, video footage, and a few reenactment scenes, while documenting the tattoo removal procedures and their aftermath. By sharing his story and suffering, Bryon says, he hopes to positively influence others who might be tempted by white supremacist groups and atone for his past: “If I could prevent one other kid from making the same mistakes I did, if I can prevent one other family from

having to go through...the same crap that I put my family through, maybe I can redeem myself and maybe it'll be worth it.”

The repeated, occasionally gruesome, footage of Bryon’s suffering is emotionally affecting indeed. This reviewer’s respect for Bryon’s commitment grew with each painful session, and with each lingering shot of his swollen, scabbed-over face, neck, and hands. Dr. Bruce Shack of the Vanderbilt University Medical Center initially estimates it will take eight to twelve sessions to remove Bryon’s tattoos, but, due to their sheer number and their placement on sensitive areas, it ends up requiring twenty-five sessions over a period of eighteen months to fully remove them. By the day of the final treatment, when Julie tearfully thanks the Southern Poverty Law Center and the medical center doctors and nurses, the viewer feels the full emotional weight of Bryon’s incredible journey. The film ends here rather abruptly; a sentence or two of postscript on Bryon and Julie’s life since the film would have been more satisfying.

Simply but professionally made, *Erasing Hate* is a valuable look into the world of extremist hate groups through the experience of one man. Bryon’s emotional and physical transformation from neo-Nazi “true believer” to loving family man is moving and educational. Recommended as a teaching and discussion tool for courses on sociology, racism, and related topics.

Reviewer Rating Recommended