



“BEYOND HATRED”

By Olivier Meyrou

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Filmmaker’s Statement

Story and Context

There was something symbolic in the story of François Chenu. The first time I read about him in the paper, it struck me that François was born in Charleville Mézières, that he was gay and that he died young. He reminded me of Arthur Rimbaud, who was born in the same city and died around the same age. Symbolically, François’ death could have been Rimbaud’s death had Rimbaud stayed around.

And then I met with François’ family. That was the second shock. This family was so extraordinary in their way of dealing with their grieving process that I felt I had to refocus the project and describe their long road toward recovering from their loss.

Beyond Hatred starts 700 days after the death of François and just a few months before the trial of his three murderers. The film tries to describe the next step, as family members regain control over their lives.

It shows the Chenu family during the second phase of the grieving process. François’ family is still in vivid pain and feels powerless. After the murder of François, they understand they have lost control over their own lives. At one point I think they wanted revenge, but that didn’t last long. The family lost their son because of hatred; they didn’t want to lose their values as well.

François died because he was gay. These three young skinheads killed him because they were full of hatred and violence. The Chenu family never believed “an eye for an eye” would make the world a better place. Asking for revenge would have meant responding on the same level. They just wanted the young men to go on trial and they felt the need — even though it was painful — to apply their beliefs to this tragedy. Overall, they wanted the violence to stop, and they wanted to replace it with something positive. They held out their hands to their son’s killers. This message is universal.

Their friends’ reactions were severe: Most of them wanted the three young men who killed François to die, even though death the penalty doesn’t exist in Europe. François’ family didn’t share this “gut feeling” and lost a few friends over their differences.

The Chenus disturbed people with their reactions, or rather, they disturbed people by failing to react in the way that was expected of them. Cry. Ask for revenge. And remain silent after that. François’ family chose life. They wanted to rejoin the community and make a statement based on the values they believed in.

I met with the Chenus last week, almost seven years after the death of François. It was a long and lonely road for them. But they finally made it and François is still very much with them.

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The Form

We decided to shoot **Beyond Hatred** on super 16. Other aesthetic choices came from observation. Usually, the people you portray give you the necessary signals; as a filmmaker you just need to adapt to their rhythms.

Choices were basic. I didn't want photos of François Chenu, because it is a film about the absence of François Chenu, and I wanted to make the story as universal as possible.

The overall rhythm needed to suggest that recovery is endless.

For the murder scene, I insisted on showing its banality. I didn't want to make a show of the victim's death. I did the opposite. With the park sequence, I tried to stop the film. I didn't want his death to be entertaining.

I wanted to describe the time of grief. When everything seems slow. When all kinds of thoughts go through your mind. When you are powerless to master the images that go through your head. We only shot 17 hours of film.

The film shows a path. It doesn't pretend to be exhaustive. It is a point of view.

— **Olivier Meyrou, Director/Writer**
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