



Documenting Unusual Lives: Liberty In Restraint

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We see images of kink everywhere nowadays. Be it our lifestyle publications to the assimilation of the imagery in popular culture (think of the print advertisements for movies like Hostel or the Saw series). At the same time, as often as we see the photographs and the artwork, we forget that there is a person behind the camera. Someone had to set up the studio, find models and assistants, in some cases, come up with a concept, and then start snapping the shutter. Then even if you have the preconception that there is a hand on the camera, what about the person holding it? What makes him shoot that shot?

"Liberty in Restraint," directed by Michael Ney, quests to get into the mind of Australian fetish photographer, Noel Graydon. Following his creative arc from aspiring commercial photographer to fetish practitioner, Graydon is a man who couldn't just try an activity as much as he had to immerse himself. Even his candid admission to once being a heroin addict (as he puts it, because he wanted to see what the whole drug culture was all about), he brings this same aesthetic to his kinky photography. He recognized the fetish world as having overlaps in "the psychology of sex and the psychology of addiction."

Soon he has a crew of similarly-minded associates who draw him into the Australian Fetish Community. Many of these folk add commentary to the film, including his bondage rope enthusiast/mentor Mistress Felina (who Graydon praises for her "beauty in rope") and Puck, who is credited in the film as "our guide to SM." The various men and women who allow themselves to be filmed and interviewed all comment about the natural nature of their D/s relationships. As is typical in these kind of documentaries, the surprise to most vanilla viewers will be not that the participants are freakish or outrageous, but just how typical they seem to be. Depictions and descriptions of bloodsport, mummification, hot wax, rope bondage, fire play, club officers and organizers pepper the film with their observations and philosophies.

There is the usual common ground about respect and trust, but also interspersed with Noel's fascination with the "why."

This documentary, then, is following Graydon's journey. He becomes so engrossed in his new world that he even becomes Master Venom and enters the arena of the Pro-Dom. He gets a full-back tattoo and allows himself to endure a ritual cutting. The deeper Graydon goes, the more intense the participants he attracts become. (I must admit, the session with 'needle boy' even had me cringing.) "Liberty In Restraint" doubles as your travelogue to kinky Sydney, as historical points of Australian kink are expounded on. While Graydon himself considers photography voyeuristic, he doesn't consider himself a voyeur...and the film often leaves you in the voyeur's seat. Graydon's photography is the focus of the documentary, and his various pieces and their executions/explanations are what move "Liberty" forward. Even his relapse into drug addiction shows his journey, as the ones who help him kick are members of his new community, along with his family.

That individualism among the community comes through in the interviews. A trip to the DV8 play party provides a great chunk of the psychology of fetish participants, and also is the segment of the more explicit play. The most shocking session is the final photo shoot, titled "Suffer the Little Children," where Graydon works his anger at the Australian Catholic arch-Bishop's 2002 child sex scandals, where the Arch Bishop accused the gay community as being "more hazardous than smoking" while covering for pedophiles in the church. Graydon's offense at the hypocrisy is laid out when he states "I feel perfectly comfortable to leave my child with any of my queer friends, but there's no way I'd leave her with a catholic priest."

Surrounding a trio of rubber and gas-mask clad individuals in a crucifixion tableau with a variety of kinky iconic characters. There are Nuns with gasmasks, a leather cop, a 'crown of thorns' designed with forehead piercings, a priest, a bishop and Graydon's infant daughter in very nervy portrait. As the climactic moment of Liberty in Restraint, it's a stunner.

At the same time, Graydon also shows himself as a family man who cares for his wife and baby, even as he recognizes his 'alternative family.'

The film closes with Graydon conceding that his immense talent as a fetish photographer has to take second seat to his family, but he (along with his subjects and the interviewees) give insight into just what fetish brings to their lives. Sadly, "Liberty In Restraint" also serves as a memoriam to Graydon, who tragically died in 2007 of a heart-attack. One of the extra scenes is of Graydon in New York City in 2004, when a short-cut of the film as a work-in-progress was to be shown to an audience at the Cinekink Festival. Highly Recommended.

"Liberty In Restraint," directed by Michael Ney, Produced by Sensory Image and Frontier Films. 90 minutes, includes a photo gallery of Noel Graydon's work, 6 deleted scenes and 5 extra interviews. This film contains high levels of adult themes, adult activity and references.

But isn't that what you're looking for anyway?