

EXPLODING THE MYTH

d.. Rick Maden, sc. Stan Shibinsky, Stephen Dewar, Dennis Winchar, ph. Fritz Spiess, Les George, Paul Van Derlinden, Harold Ortonburger, ed. Richard Unruh, sd. Richard Unruh, tech. advisor Henry Botchford, m. Corlynn and Miles Ramsay composed theme song, "Give Me a Chance," exec. p. Stan Shibinsky, p. Harve Sherman, exec. prog. dir. Henry Botchford, p.c. Bob Schulz Productions Inc., col. 35mm, (year) 1978, running time 28 minutes, 50 seconds.

There is a myth that anyone who is different, whose looks and behaviour deviate from ours, who belongs to any group that cannot clearly be labeled as *us*, immediately becomes *them*, and loses title to status as a human being.

That myth is exploded with the force of a missile, in *Exploding the Myth*, a fine little film produced by Harve Sherman and directed by Rick Maden, both of Bob Schulz Productions. *Them* in this case are the mentally retarded, and in making that statement, I myself have phrased another myth: that retardation is mental. It is not. Retardation is a learning handicap. The damage is done to the brain, a physical entity, not to the mind. Retardation is not mental illness.

Eight such myths in all are exploded as the film exposes an issue society, for the most part, would prefer to avoid. The myths are that retarded people are 1) dangerous 2) should always be segregated 3) that institutions are the best place for them 4) that they should not mix with normal children 5) that they will always be dependent 6) that group homes bring property values down 7) that they are strictly limited in their scope and 8) that only normal people should have full rights. The beauty of the film's crafting lies in its confrontation of each myth, and its direct annihilation of that myth. This is the myth — not true — this is the fact.

Perhaps the hardest thing for "normal" people to accept about retardation is its direct assault on the idea of man as intellectual animal. Our brain is our



Todd Smith, age 7, appears in *Exploding The Myth*

proudest possession and the one thing which holds us above all other animals. Retarded people are an embarrassing reminder that this symbol of superiority is in fact at the mercy of nature's whims. Any number of tiny flaws before delivery of a child and — wham — intelligence is wiped out.

The film's uniqueness is that it brings retarded people actively into the picture. They are interviewed and offer opinions on themselves and their social conditions with astounding clarity and insight. They are not viewed as distant entities, and social workers and caretakers don't stand around shrugging their shoulders and sighing, "What can we do with them?" They participate and offer suggestions, and they make perfectly good sense. They are treated as individuals with a handicap no different than handicaps of any sort. They take longer to learn, and they don't learn as much — that's all that's wrong with them.

They have a lower IQ of course, but within that IQ is the same range of abilities, talents, hopes, dreams as anyone with a higher IQ, and when they are encouraged for their abilities instead of put down for their weaknesses, their achievements are remarkable. For in-

stance, the Famous People Players, a Las Vegas professional puppet show, is manned by retarded people. Also there is the case of the Pocock Family of Toronto and their daughter Teresa. The Pococks were told that Teresa was so severely retarded she would never be able to speak. They decided to keep her, work with her, and now she is fluent in both English and French and can read and write legibly and articulately.

Bob Schulz Productions is mostly a commercial advertising production house, and some might say that there is still much evidence of this in the film. The final scene of teary-eyed, slow-motion running and jumping through parks, while a theme is belted out in the background, is a trite too cloying and sentimental. Also, in many ways, the film has a certain commercial flavour in that its message is hammered home and its points doubly underlined. But then explosions were never meant to be subtle. And sometimes that is what is needed to get through the caked-on layers of human prejudice.

The film works. It awakens. Perhaps the selling of awareness should be no different than the selling of any product.

Krystyna Hunt