

STANDARD DEVIATION

PRODUCTION NOTES

In January of 2007, Chris received an email from an old friend with the subject line reading, "Remember Billy Cottrell?" In the body was a link to the wikipedia article about William Jensen Cottrell, describing his successes in college and the fateful night in August 2003 for which he is now serving a prison term.

Chris remembered Billy instantly- the two were classmates in sixth and ninth grades. Billy, the stereotypical nerd with thick glasses in sixth grade, moved out of town for a couple years. When he returned to Gainesville in ninth grade, Billy was hardly recognizable: the glasses were gone, his jeans were shredded, and the once quiet scholar was now an outlandish rebel. Billy was the Kurt Cobain of Buchholz High School. We knew instantly that this was a story that needed to be told.

It was clear that even in the 6th grade that awkward and nerdy Billy was a bit of a mystery. When Billy briefly returned in the 9th grade as a good looking young, rebel, the question was, "How did he make such an immense transformation?" Even Chris' few experiences with Billy seemed to only reinforce Billy's conflicted persona. In one of our first conversations about starting production Chris wrote:

"I remember in 9th grade when he came back he had torn up jeans with the words 'God is Gay' on them. When someone asked how he knew he replied, 'I had sex with him.'"

The family response to our interest in Billy and the project has been positive from day one. One of the biggest caveats with any potential non-fiction film is the issue of access to your subject and audio/visual materials. Upon meeting Billy's mother, Heidi, for the first time we were greeted with a smile and a giant cardboard box: "This is everything I've got on him since the arrest. Will this be of any help?" Bill, Dustin, and Corey greeted us similarly, and we are forever grateful for their support.

Standard Deviation does not provide any simple explanations to Billy's motivations, as Billy is not a simple person to understand. However, we hope that by examining Billy's life from the perspective of those few people who know him best that we all can come to a better understanding of the relationship between our own intellect and emotions.

In mathematics, standard deviation is used to compare an individual value to the statistical average of a group of values. It is our goal with our film *Standard Deviation* to increase the acceptance of those who tend to stray from the norm. It is only by questioning and testing the boundaries of societal norms that progress is achieved. Individuals like Billy Cottrell are important for giving us perspective on our own lives as well as society as a whole.