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Brutal Esquimalt beating documented in film

[Michael D. Reid](#) / The Victoria Times Colonist

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A documentary about one of the most brutal episodes of gang violence in Victoria makes its world premiere at the Victoria Film Festival tonight.

The Red Jacket, a 24-minute film directed by Angela Bianchi of Toronto, tells the story of Nicholas Chow Johnson, who was beaten senseless on an Esquimalt street in 2001 because he was mistakenly believed to be a member of a street gang. Johnson, who is now 27, remains in a vegetative state in a Toronto rehabilitation centre.

The film looks at the incident and its aftermath through the eyes of Johnson's mother, Grace Chow, Victoria police gang expert Sgt. Barrie Cockle and others affected by the attack. It also features the rap music of Milton Johnson, a young Esquimalt musician whose music Bianchi found on Facebook.

Bianchi, a friend of Grace Chow, said she asked herself one question repeatedly when she was making the film: "What's wrong with these kids?"

Johnson, wearing a new red jacket, was walking down Lampson Street in Esquimalt to visit his girlfriend in the early hours of Oct. 20, 2001, when he encountered members of the street gang the Crips. "Take off the red!" one called out, mistaking Johnson for a member of the rival Blanshard Street Bloods gang, which wore red. Johnson's skull was fractured after he was shoved, punched and kicked by Harry Hiscock and two teenagers. The attack left Johnson paralyzed on one side and blind in one eye, unable to care for himself or recognize or communicate with people.

"Nicholas Johnson was murdered that night," said Ruth Layne, an Esquimalt community activist who spearheaded a \$40,000 fundraising campaign to help pay for his treatment.

Hiscock served five years of his eight-year sentence at William Head. His accomplices were sentenced to two years in custody.

In addition to what Bianchi calls Johnson's "unspeakable isolation," the film also documents the outpouring of community support that followed the attack.

Bianchi said Chow hopes her participation in the film might discourage potential bullies.

Chow has not yet seen the film, Bianchi said. "Her pain is still very fresh."

The Red Jacket screens with the documentary My Son the Pornographer at 7 p.m. at the Odeon, 780 Yates St., tonight.

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