



**HATE CRIME** Actor

# Seth Peterson

**& The Movie with A Message**

*By Kim Campbell*

**HATE CRIME** tells the story of Robbie and Trey, an ordinary, middle class, church-going gay couple living peacefully in a quiet neighborhood. After an unexpected conflict arises in the form of hostile and homophobic new neighbor Chris, the son of a fundamentalist preacher, Trey is blindsided by a brutal attack. He winds up at the hospital, fighting for his life. Chris becomes the prime suspect, but he has a solid alibi. After Robbie himself becomes a suspect, his quest for justice takes him outside the realm of the authorities, igniting a series of unexpected consequences and revelations.

In 2005, *Hate Crime* achieved enormous success on the independent film festival circuit in both the U.S. and abroad. Written and directed by Tommy Stovall, the film won 10 major

festival awards, including Audience Awards for Best Feature at the Sedona International Film Festival and Out Takes Dallas. *Hate Crime*, shot on location in Dallas, Texas, made its theatrical debut in March 2006.

The talented and versatile Seth Peterson portrays Robbie, one half of the doomed couple. Television viewers will know Seth from his breakthrough role on NBC's long-running drama, *Providence*. The show ran for five seasons and was the winner of The People's Choice, TV Guide and Emmy Awards. Since then Seth has graced both small and large screens in a variety of roles. With the DVD release of *Hate Crime* approaching (Nov. 14), Seth let us in on the experience of shooting this provocative thriller and the views he walked away with.

**Did you hesitate at all in taking on this role—not because this would be the first gay character you would play—but because the subject matter was so dark?**

Well, you know, there's always something scary about doing something you've never done before, but...it was a message that I really liked—sometimes people have to fight back. Even if, in the context of this movie, I wouldn't necessarily go there myself... [Laughs]...in real life, but it's kind of a metaphor to say, 'You know what? Enough is enough.' And in that context, I really liked the project. I thought it was really timely and a big challenge.

**Was there a scene in particular that stands out in your memory as being too intense or hard to shoot?**

Well...there were a lot of scenes like that in the movie. It was a heavy and intense situation, but I really liked the fact that the character was kind of rigid and then everything just completely unfolds. His world collapses. One of the scenes that was really tough for me to shoot was the scene where I call my mother to tell her that Trey is dead. That was really a tough one. I think that was the first time that [my] character's armor—it got cracked. He had pretty much stayed really composed and together. Everything was going to work out in his mind. Normally I play characters that are 'what you see is what you get,' people that wear their emotions on their sleeve. This character is really the same type up to that point when he breaks down and he realizes that everything is not going to be okay. And that's kind of where it turns. After that...well, after that every scene [laughs] was in that same direction. There were a lot of tough scenes to shoot.

**I bet that was draining. Were you able to leave it behind at the end of the day or did you carry it with you the whole shoot?**

It was a pretty intense shoot for a month straight. We [basically] worked every day and they were good sized days. And I wasn't at home...so I really didn't have anybody to share what was going on during the shoot. I had to carry it with me the whole time. It was a little bit of a strain; I ended up having to stay in that place, but I think that kind of pressure worked well for the piece. I think it worked out really well, actually. It was a couple weeks after the shoot was over when I finally started to let it go. It was really a relief. [Laughs]

**For over a year now this movie has been generating buzz. The film really has some legs on it! Are you still feeling that energy?**

You know, I try to stay out of that. That really isn't my forte. I did the actual film and then after that, well, if there was anything I could do to help the momentum, that's great, but I try to stay out of the results and the buzz or hearsay. I just try to do my part and if there is anything I can do to help people find out about this movie, then I'm really happy to do that—because I *really am* proud of it. I think it's really got a lot to say; it's really powerful. And I think the most important thing about it is, whether anybody particularly feels it's the right or the wrong message, it's a message that gets people talking about this issue—the issue of equal rights—and that to me was important.

**Absolutely! I'm glad so many more people are going to have the opportunity to see it now. What is your take on detractors of hate crime statutes; like people who argue that any crime is a hate crime or that hate crime statutes garner special treatment...?**

If you're committing a crime against someone based on their color, their race, their sexuality—they all fall under the same category—and it

is a hate crime, as far as I'm concerned. I think that there needs to be something done. There needs to be legislation; people need to be...protected. Regardless of somebody's opinion on what that's going to mean, how much work it would take or how much money that's going to entail. Special treatment? It should be. People *should* be treated specially. There are all kinds of [laws] and organizations that help victims of violent crimes. There are people that help battered children and battered mothers. Nobody is saying we shouldn't help those people specifically. Why should it be any different than something like this, ya know? If a victim has been targeted because of another person's ignorance or fear... There isn't any reason why they shouldn't be blanketed with protections just like anybody else in this country.

**Well, that response was much better than how I worded that question. [Laughs] But that's a very good point. Do you think this film will have any impact on people's perceptions?**

Well, it's definitely getting people's attention and people are talking. With that alone, I think this is going to be a great tool, not to mention that there are people who are victims of this particular kind of crime and there isn't an outlet for them to really vent. There are not a whole lot of people who want to listen. There are not a lot of people who are willing to help. And they get to take a look at this situation and kind of vent their own anger and their own fears about the situation that they've been through in different ways. It's a movie that has a big message and the message, I think, could be interpreted in so many different ways. I've heard people that have said, 'I was the victim of a hate crime and seeing this movie was really amazing for me. I could get to vent out some of that anger that I had been feeling and live out the fantasy of getting revenge.' And it helped that person in that way. And I've heard another person say, 'I'm a gay man and I came to see this movie to be able to feel there's some justice that could be done. I was expecting to feel good when it happened and when I saw it, it made me feel ill.' And that's another

great viewpoint. It's like, that's the way you *should* feel. That's the way I see it...but we need to get people to notice. There are some states that are protecting people and there are some states that aren't. Let's get everybody on board, let's be consistent, ya know? Let's be consistent and fair—to everyone...I think that when you see the film, when it gets to that point when somebody has to do something that horrible, it should feel that way to you. You should feel...ugly. Because that's not a good place to go to. [Laughs]

**Yeah, definitely.**

You know what I mean? If that's what it takes, then something is really wrong in our society. And that's what this message is for me. It's 'What's it going to take?' Is it going to take this in order to get justice; in order to get equal treatment for everybody? And if that *is* the way it is, then that's the way it's going to happen because, eventually, people *are* going to fight back. Let's not have to take it to that place, because it's not a good place to go to.

**That is a very powerful message. I recently read a survey finding 54% of LGBT people said that concern about being the victim of a hate crime would be a reason for a person to not come out. I thought...in 2006...well, that surprised me.**

It is surprising. Until I started this movie, I didn't have a lot of information—all of it was surprising. The more you find out, the more amazed you become at how serious the issue is and how many people it does affect. I think there are a lot of people that really just don't know.

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**So would you say that this role changed you in any way? It certainly sounds like you were getting educated along the way.**

Oh, totally. I really had no idea what was going on as far as legislation; how many people were victims; what was occurring as far as the people perpetrating the crimes and what their punishments were. There was so much and this was an issue that just never crossed my mind to pay any attention to. I'm grateful to have been a part of the project because it really helped me understand a lot more about what's going on in this country. For me, it was the civil rights movement...and it's still going on. I kind of thought that was handled. [Laughs]. I mean, I saw the footage and I was really proud of our society as a whole, that we've really handled this humongous situation and...got it together. Then all of a sudden I realized, "We really haven't gotten it yet." There are so many frontiers still left to cover. And the issue hasn't changed—it's still the same, it's still human rights. Being a part of this really helped open my eyes.

**Did you feel the other cast members were on the same page, as far as the message and meaning behind the film?**

Well, I definitely think there's no other way to look at it. If you take a look at the film, it's written by a first time writer, who's also directing and funding the film with his own money and the budget was rather small, so I don't really see any other incentive than the message that was contained in the script. You take a big chance working with somebody who's never done [a film] before; you never know what's going to happen. Making a movie is a really overwhelming experience for anybody—let alone for somebody who's never tried to make one before. I was incredibly excited and relieved at the quality of actors who participated in the project. It really says a lot about the project; that people wanted to get onboard knowing the risks and possibilities of what could happen with somebody who's never been confronted with trying to make a film before. I was really impressed when I got on the set with [director] Tommy Stovall. He was really composed. He knew exactly what he wanted and he let the actors do their job.

**So you think we'll be seeing more from Tommy in the future.**

I'm sure you will. I know that he's writing another movie. I think there might be a few different projects he was getting involved in. I think he was going to write a comedy, as a matter of fact, which would be great. I love to see people do one thing then turn around and do something completely different. That's what this was for me, I was on *Providence* and it was all fluffy and funny and...puppy dogs.

**[Laughs] I was going to ask you if you took a different approach with this role in comparison to your work on TV, if it was different in any way...**

As far as I was concerned the character...well, I really based him a lot on Tommy himself after I met with him and saw the kind of person that he was. The sexuality was a non-issue, as far as the way he just went about his day. This character is just another middle class, working stiff. There are not many things out of the ordinary with this person. You wouldn't be able to pick him out of the crowd; he's just one of the



many. [Robbie and Trey] were just your boring everyday couple. You'd never point to them and say, "These guys are really incredible, different people who would stand out or do something incredibly amazing. There just like any other couple; like me and my wife [laughs] she's about to shoot me a look right now..."

**[Both laugh]**

But they're just everyday people. And that's the thing I thought about this character—he's just an everyday guy...he's a tax attorney.

**He's a regular guy who ends up being pushed to his limits... The character ended up being so layered; that's something I found really interesting.**

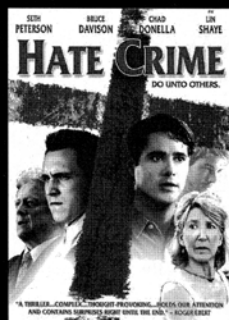
That's the thing that I love; when you've got just an ordinary person and put them in an extraordinary circumstance, *what* is going to happen? The only thing different about him is that he's so repressed, as far as his sexuality was concerned. He didn't want anybody to know about it; wanted to keep everything quiet; live in this little white picket fence world. Situations occur that make that impossible and this everyday guy is thrown into this whirlwind and...now what happens? That's the interesting thing to look at. In our society, the majority of people are the same exact way; just people living their lives. When something like this happens, you never know what's going to occur. And if nobody is there to help you, now you're in uncharted territory where you have no idea what you can do. You can't get help; you're really left on your own to create your own solution...and that's where things get kind of crazy. As people we [laughs], we sometimes don't come up with the best possible solutions.

**I'll say. Well, you did a fantastic job on this and I look forward to seeing more of your work in the future. Are you working on any new projects?**

I'm staying busy doing theatre here locally in Los Angeles and having a lot of fun. I'm doing TV here and there—I have a part on *CSI* that is coming up in the next few weeks. I have an interesting episode of *The Shield* coming out in the new season where I play a gay man who murders someone, oddly enough.

**I love it—how fun!**

Yeah, that one's really a stretch. [Laughs] ■



## Hate Crime on DVD

*Hate Crime*, the "suspense thriller with a social conscience," is testament to the power of love and the destructive nature of radical religion-based prejudice, *Hate Crime* is a film by Tommy Stovall, shot entirely on location in Dallas, Texas. Seth Peterson (*Providence*) stars as Robbie, with Bruce Davison (*X-Men 1 & 2*, *Longtime Companion*), Giancarlo Esposito (*Homicide: Life on the Street*), Cindy Pickett (*Ferris Bueller's Day Off*), Chad Donella (*Final Destination*), Susan Blakely (*The Towering Inferno*), and Lin Shaye (*There's Something About Mary*) rounding out the all-star cast. DVD Bonus Features include: The Making of..., Project Hate Crime, PSA, San Francisco, Hate Violence survivors' testimonials, "Jesus By 45" music video, director's commentary, theatrical trailer and deleted scenes.