

little dog BIG BITE films



Produced and Directed by Phil Lawrence

Running Time: 72:00 / Color / 16x9 / Not Rated

Editor: Charlie Gerszewski
Original Music: Dave Salmela
Executive Producer: Melody Gilbert

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Numb Synopsis

- Logline:

After years of living with side effects, a suburban dad puts his life on the line as he attempts to break free from the physical and psychological grip of the most prescribed drug in the United States - Antidepressants.

- Short Synopsis:

What would happen if you decided to stop taking antidepressants? This film documents the drastic effects on the filmmaker's physical and psychological well-being after giving up his medications in his quest to stop feeling "numb." It also reveals the impact his journey had on his family as well as revealing startling information about antidepressants that the pharmaceutical industry doesn't want you to know.

- Long Synopsis:

The documentary begins as filmmaker and suburban dad Phil Lawrence cracks open his pill box and cuts his antidepressant Paxil in half. Under a doctor's guidance, Phil is weaning himself off the drug and is looking forward to getting back to the day when he can feel emotion instead of feeling numb. He tells his kids what he's doing and his wife is supportive but skeptical. Over the next few weeks, Lawrence continues to cut back, but withdrawal symptoms emerge. The first is a slight headache and constant ringing in his head. Later the symptoms get more severe. He can't sleep and he sleeps too much. He struggles with wild emotional swings filled with rage and thoughts of violence. Phil's relationship with his wife and family becomes strained as he continues to spiral out of control. He attempts to find alternatives to his discomfort through diet and exercise, but the withdrawal symptoms are too severe. His wife thinks she may have lost the man she loved. Phil is moody and exhausted. He can't even muster the energy to play with his kids on Christmas day. While going through withdrawal, Phil decides to find out how and why he got addicted to antidepressants. He interviews experts all over the country who confirm that the drug companies knew years ago that antidepressants were addictive. He goes to hearings on Capitol Hill where dozens of people testify that their loved ones lost control under the spell of antidepressants. He also uncovers documents that confirm what Phil suspected: the drug companies hid the facts from the public. When we see Phil on day 120, he's suicidal and terrified. Phil always wanted to feel emotion and now he feels it too much. You cheer for him to keep going and at the same time you secretly hope he gives up. It's painful and riveting to watch a man's life unravel on video. But it is also incredibly compelling because so many of us know someone whose life has been touched by antidepressants and we understand the dilemma. In the end, Phil makes a haunting decision as he realizes that he's trapped in a physical and psychological dependence on the most prescribed drug in the United States.

Bios:

Phil Lawrence: Producer/Director

“Numb” is Phil Lawrence’s first feature-length documentary. Phil is owner and founder of The Creative Edge, a Minnesota-based film and video production company. Phil’s work as a writer, producer, director and editor spans nearly 18 years and during that time he has worked with a wide range of broadcast, corporate and non-profit clients. Phil holds a BA in journalism from the University of Tulsa.

Melody Gilbert: Executive Producer

Melody Gilbert is a documentary filmmaker who has directed and produced for more than 20 years. She has made 4 feature documentaries (*Urban Explorers*, *A Life Without Pain*, *Whole & Married at the Mall*). All have screened at major film festivals & on TV worldwide, including the Sundance Channel.

Charlie Gerszewski: Editor

Charlie Gerszewski edits documentaries, commercials and music videos. Currently he works as an editor at Channel Z, a post-production company in Minneapolis. He was the editor for *Urban Explorers: Into the Darkness*, *A Life Without Pain* and *Whole*.

David Salmela: Composer

David Salmela is the music director and composer for the Electric Arc Radio Show. He has played in bands (such as **Work of Saws**) and composed music for a variety of plays, commercials and other performances. David just completed a full score for an award winning feature-length documentary entitled “**Urban Explorers - Into the Darkness**” directed by Melody Gilbert. David is also the founder of **Creative Electric Studios**.

Director's Statement

When I realized that I was approaching my 10th anniversary of taking the popular antidepressant Paxil, I knew it was time for me to reassess what it meant to be me. I was struggling to accept the way my emotions had become so numb over the years. I wasn't sure if it was me, or if it was the drug, but I needed to find out what I was like without Paxil.

In the beginning my plan was simple: stop taking the pills and see what happens. After a quick search on the Internet, I discovered that withdrawal from these drugs can be difficult and even dangerous. My first reaction was anger. I felt betrayed. No one ever told me that I would have a problem stopping the drug or that there were risks involved. I felt trapped.

Eventually I found a doctor who told me that I could wean myself off Paxil. Within a month, I was standing in my bathroom cutting my first pill in half. I had no idea where I was headed but I knew I needed to go there.

In the beginning, making **Numb** was incredibly exciting because I was embarking on a journey that I had no idea how it would turn out. You can see in the film how enthusiastic I am as I start taking fewer pills. But, as the days go by, the impact of the withdrawal is brutally obvious. As I look back now, it's frightening how fast my mental and physical state deteriorates. I kept thinking that there was no way that I was going to let other people see me in this condition. But I kept the camera rolling, mostly because it was only way I could deal with what was happening to me. I knew I needed to record my experience so others could learn from it.

During this time, I started interviewing a wide variety of experts with knowledge about the pharmaceutical industry. Even on the days when the symptoms of withdrawal were overwhelming, I pushed myself. During one interview, I was sweating profusely and the ringing in my ears wouldn't stop, but I couldn't stop. I had to find out why so many Americans are addicted to antidepressants

Post-production was a long, difficult process. Watching all the tapes and editing them was painful, as I had to re-live the awful experience again and again. But I also knew that I couldn't keep what I learned and experienced to myself.

In the end, **Numb** took a great toll on me. It challenged my relationships, depleted my savings and threatened me physically and mentally. But I couldn't be more proud of this film. As tough as the subject matter it is, and as difficult as it is to talk about, that's exactly what we need to do. It's only through knowledge and understanding that we will discover the truth about antidepressants, as depressing as that is.

Interview with filmmaker Phil Lawrence (prior to making the film)

What are you trying to accomplish?

On a personal note, I have taken Paxil for 10 years and I am ready to see what kind of person I am without the drug in my system.

Big picture, I want people to get a glimpse of what it's like to live under the influence of SSRIs, specifically Paxil. It's not always a pretty picture like the commercials show...there can be a dark side – and I think people need to be aware that the decision to start taking these drugs should not be taken lightly.

I am also concerned about the safety of SSRIs. They (the government) just warned Doctors about the increased risks of suicidal thoughts in children prescribed to SSRIs – that scares me. 30 million people in the US alone are taking Antidepressants – that scares me. The fact that I'm one of them – scares me even more.

Are you concerned about the withdrawal symptoms associated with quitting Paxil?

To be honest, it scares the hell out of me. I plan on working with a number of physicians and therapist to ensure the process is as safe and comfortable as possible for my family and me.

Why do you want to chronicle this process?

There are a lot of people in my same situation (I mean A LOT!) so my goal is to document my experiences, good or bad, and let people see first hand, what the consequences can be when taking (and quitting) an SSRI like Paxil.

Are you against Antidepressants?

Not at all. Ten years ago, I would have said that taking Paxil was the best thing I had ever done. At the time, I felt like Paxil gave me my life back, but now, I'm not sure if it gave me back my life or simply substituted it with a watered down version. I know Anti-Depressants have been around for a long time and have been an integral part in allowing a number of people live somewhat normal lives. I am most concerned with the use of SSRIs and the range of conditions for which they are prescribed.

Are you out to bash drug companies?

Not necessarily, but I intend on honestly exploring the alarming amount of prescriptions written for SSRIs. If the drug companies have some responsibility for that...we'll just have to see what happens.

What about the government and the FDA?

Same thing. I intend to explore the process by which SSRIs made it to the market and how well they were studied before being introduced to the public. I am also interested in the decision to let drug companies advertise directly to consumers – I wonder who this benefits more, the public or the drug companies.

Do you think SSRIs should be taken off the market?

No. I believe that there are many situations and circumstances where SSRIs are appropriate and effective.

If you need to, will you take another anti-depressant after quitting Paxil?

Humm. At this point, I would probably first choose to explore other options, but worst case scenario, I would say, yes (but after a ton of research!)

Interview with filmmaker Phil Lawrence (after making the film)

What were you trying to accomplish?

When I started making the film, my primary goal was to stop taking Paxil. I was living in a fog and I thought that the antidepressant was causing it. I knew it would be an interesting journey so I propped up my camera and went to work.

How were the withdrawal symptoms associated with quitting Paxil?

Brutal. It felt like the core of my human spirit was being ripped out of me everyday. I'm really lucky, in a sense, I was somewhat aware of the changes that I was going through. I can't even imagine what it would be like if you went through this alone – or if a child had to go through it. It is truly a living hell.

Are you against Antidepressants?

In a lot of ways, Yes. I think they are incredibly powerful and incredibly dangerous to be prescribed so freely. Do they have value for some people? Absolutely. But no matter how depressed or anxiety filled a person is – they need to know all the facts before they agree alter their emotions. I'm also still not convinced that the effects are not long-term. I may never know – and that's hard to live with.

What do you think about drug companies now?

It's all about the almighty dollar. Getting the drug to market is the goal not necessarily safety. It's too bad, because all of the good they do and advances in medicine are wiped away by the drive to make money.

What about the government and the FDA?

Unfortunately the whole system seems to be diseased. It's a tangled web of power and money. Like pharmaceutical companies, all the good things they do are overshadowed by bad decisions that effect the public's well-being.

Do you think antidepressants should be taken off the market?

No. I still believe that there are many situations and circumstances where antidepressants are useful. I would however, like to see an end to the advertising. Promising a better life

through a pill to someone who is desperate is unfair, unethical and in no way a single solution to depression or anxiety.

What did you learn from this project?

The most important thing that I learned from doing this project is that I'm not alone. I never would have guessed how many people there are who are in the same situation and have suffered just like me. It's tragic that there are so many, but I find there is hope in that fact that they are speaking out.

Numb Crew Credits

Writer/Director
Phil Lawrence

Producer
Phil Lawrence

Executive Producer
Melody Gilbert

Camera Operators
Bob Seabold
Darren LaZarre
Jim Hense
Dean Von Bank
Ryan Corcoran
Cory Bauer
Phil Lawrence
Pamela Lawrence

Editor
Charlie Gerszewski

Original Music Composer
David Salmela

Offline Editor
Phil Lawrence

Assistant Editor
Ryan Corcoran

Participated in the making of this film:

Dr. Jonathon Leo
Dr. David Antonuccio
Charles Medawar
Dr. Andrew Herxheimer
Dr. Timothy Scott
Dr. Stuart Shipko
Dr. David Healy
Robert Whitaker
Amy Leferink
Gwen Olsen
Dr. Faruk Abuzzahab
Kelly O'Meara
Dr. Chris Foley
Dr. Michael Browne
Deacon Shoenberger
Kim Witczak
Dr. Joseph Glenmullen
Vera Sharav
David Cohen
Kendra Goertzen
Blase Prinsoti
Koby Feldman
Marnie Turpin
Andy Lininger
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Chunyi Lin
Debra Tourek
Tom Wahl
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For more information, please visit
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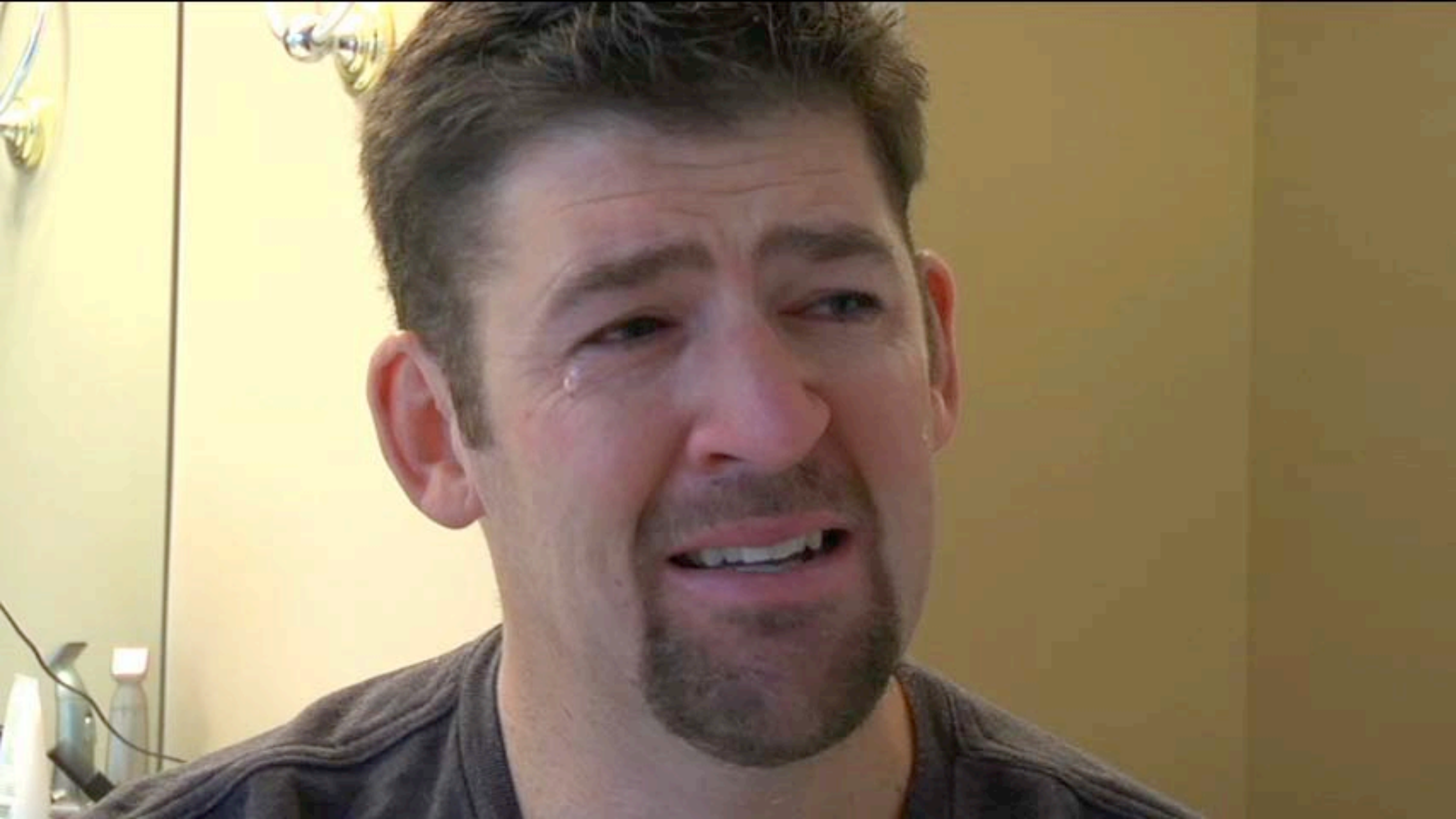














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