



P.O.V.'s "IN THE FAMILY"

By Joanna Rudnick

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Filmmaker's Statement

When I found out that I carried the BRCA genetic mutation that drastically increases my odds of getting breast and ovarian cancer, the last thing I wanted to do was talk about it. The thought of telling my closest friends made my stomach turn. So I hid the piece of paper that said, "positive for a deleterious mutation," and did everything possible to forget that I was basically a ticking time bomb.

"They give you the information and then they're like, 'Don't panic. Don't be neurotic. Don't be paranoid.' But your body can go off at anytime, and that pressure starts right away." It's hard to believe that a few years later I would be saying these words on camera.

When I set out to make **In the Family** in late January of 2003, after traveling to the Sundance Film Festival with a documentary that I had co-produced on the war photographer Robert Capa, I had no intention of "starring" in my own movie. I spent months trying to find a young, unmarried woman with the mutation who had not had surgery and was willing to "come out" on camera. I came up empty. This is when I realized that I needed to use my own story to make the film. I was still reluctant, though. I wanted to find someone to fall in love with and was afraid that once I had gone public with my mutation, it would be more difficult to start a new relationship. I was right. I met a guy online who I really liked; before our first kiss, he Googled me and found the mutation. I did the only thing that made sense — I turned the camera on the relationship.

While trying to figure out how to have a relationship and live with this crazy information, I looked to other women for answers: Linda, as she was dying of cancer, teaches me not to mess with life; Martha works tirelessly to keep African-American women in the fight against breast cancer despite trying to battle the disease without health insurance; Olga, a young mother, is so paralyzed by the fear of getting cancer that she can hardly bring herself to test; and the Hanke sisters, three young women who refuse to let different test results tear them apart.

The women were the most important part of the story, but not the entire story. Politics and the business of genetic testing also played a role. I confronted the biotech company that owns the patent on the BRCA genes, and testified in Washington D.C. for legal protection against genetic discrimination.

In the end, it was much easier to disclose that I had a mutation than to remove healthy body parts and sacrifice my dreams of having a family. **In the Family** captures a time when science can tell us how we will likely die, but not what to do about it.

— Joanna Rudnick

