



## **“OFF AND RUNNING”**

By Nicole Opper

Tuesday, Sept. 7, 2010 on PBS (Check local listings)

### **Filmmaker’s Statement**

I have been teaching filmmaking to young people part-time for the last nine years, and Avery Klein-Cloud was a student in my very first class. Back then, she was an impossible student and I was a terrible teacher, yet she charmed me immediately. I saw a bright, mischievous young woman who had a smile and a warm embrace for everyone who crossed her path, and I wanted to know who she was. I also wondered what it was like for her to be one of the only African-American students at school. Was she proud to be unique, as her brother Rafi had once said he was? Or was she, at such a tender age, pressured to be the ambassador for her race?

My curiosity only grew when I finally met her family — two white Jewish moms and, in addition to Rafi (who is Puerto Rican and black), a younger Korean brother named Zay-Zay. As a gay woman who has always been interested in adoption, I saw myself in this family, and I knew that with so much of America increasingly identifying as multiracial or multicultural, this family’s story was more relevant than ever. Six years later — when I felt up to the task and Avery was old enough to express the nuanced and complex experience that is her life — we began the work of making this film together.

I wasn’t prepared for the complete meltdown that Avery had halfway through our filming together. She moved out of her parents’ house and stopped returning our calls, and I feared for her safety. When I did manage to reconnect with her, we made a pact. We had started this project together and we would finish it together.

I started inviting Avery over to watch and respond to the scenes as we were cutting them. This was her story, and it was important that she feel ownership of the process. When nothing seemed to make sense, we began doing writing exercises to give us both perspective, and much of the resulting material ended up in the film. We were back to the roots of our relationship — as teacher and student — but this time we shared both roles; they were now interchangeable and will remain so, long after this film is out in the world.

Young people are no longer simply consumers of media; they are its creators. And Avery, with incredible honesty and grace, has given us a perfect example of how we can all influence the direction media culture takes tomorrow.

— Nicole Opper, Director