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One Adoptee Goes From Happy Childhood to Identity Crisis in POV’s
“Off and Running,” Tuesday, Sept. 7, 2010, on PBS

African-American Athlete and Daughter of Jewish Lesbian Parents Risks a Promising Future
To Find Her Place in Society

A Co-production of ITVS in Association with American Documentary/POV
And the Diverse Voices Project

“Packs an emotional wallop.” — Joe Neumaier, New York Daily News

Off and Running is an American coming-of-age story. But it is one shaped by the new realities of an increasingly diverse American population, especially as those realities affect family life. Brooklyn teen Avery Klein-Cloud is the African-American adoptive daughter of white Jewish lesbians. Her siblings, also adopted, are an older black and Puerto Rican boy and a young Korean-American boy. Avery has grown up loved, supported and happy. Off and Running opens with the popular high school track star in her junior year, looking forward to college and a successful life.

But the outside world, with its deep concerns about race and identity, begins to intrude upon this happy family. Avery's upbringing in a Jewish household and her distance from black culture were not issues for her during childhood, but as she approaches adulthood, she grows more troubled by her ignorance of her own roots. With the support of her parents, she decides to learn about her past by writing to her birth mother. The result is a crisis whose depth takes Avery, her parents and the filmmakers by surprise — a crisis that threatens to sweep away the teen’s promising future.

Nicole Opper’s Off and Running has its national broadcast premiere on Tuesday, Sept. 7, 2010, at 10 p.m. on PBS during the 23rd season of POV (Point of View). The film will be shown with two StoryCorps short animations. Off and Running is one of the three-part POV Adoption Stories, which include Wo Ai Ni (I Love You) Mommy on Aug. 31 and In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee on Sept. 14. POV continues its regular schedule on Tuesdays through Sept. 21 and concludes with a special on Tuesday, Oct. 5. (Check local listings.) American television’s longest-running independent documentary series, POV is the recipient of a Special Emmy for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking.

As a little girl, Avery was the only black child in Hebrew school. In high school, her black friends, including her boyfriend, also a track star, often tease her about how little she knows about African-American culture. It’s all in good fun and Avery, in turn, likes to tell her friends about Jewish culture and her family's diversity. But at some point during her junior year, Avery's distance from black life begins to eat at her. Her parents, Tova and Travis, support her efforts to contact her birth mother through the agency that handled her adoption, though they caution her that she may not get the answer she wants — or any answer at all. After three anxious months, a reply comes from Avery’s birth mother, Kay, in Austin, Texas. It’s a kind enough letter that asks for Avery’s forgiveness for giving her up and informs her that she has three brothers, a sister and a nephew. There is no indication, however, that Kay wants a relationship with Avery.
The effect on Avery is intense. The lack of connection she has always felt around other African-American culture becomes an issue of paramount importance. The question “Who am I and where did I come from?” obsesses her. Avery has numerous conversations with Tova and Travis about her doubts and questions. But no amount of love and understanding seems to help Avery or ease her turmoil. In fact, tensions in the household, and Avery’s anger, only increase. For Avery, “growing into my own person” means creating a complementary black identity. She begins to remodel herself with a new hairstyle, interests and circle of friends, but she sees no role for Tova and Travis in this effort.

The family member she remains closest to is her older brother, Rafi. As a mixed-race adoptee, he can understand and sympathize with Avery’s dilemmas and questions. Yet Rafi provides a dramatic counterpoint to Avery’s turmoil — and disproves the idea that cross-racial adoptees inevitably face identity crises. Rafi doesn’t share Avery’s angst. His birth mother, a crack addict, left his biological younger brother brain-damaged, and Rafi feels unambiguously lucky and grateful for the life he has been given by Tova and Travis. In fact, he wants to become a neurosurgeon so he can put his good fortune to work helping people like his brain-damaged brother.

Despite these differences, Rafi is Avery’s chief — and sometimes only — emotional support in the family. And when he leaves for college, Avery feels more alienated and confused than ever, and Off and Running takes a drastic turn. To the distress of Tova and Travis, Avery stops coming home. She stays at friends’ houses, begins skipping school and track practice and even misses her parents’ wedding in Massachusetts. In a very short time, this highly promising teenager has entered a downward spiral that seems poised to take away her future.

Only Avery’s boyfriend, Prince, is confident that she will regain her balance and the disciplined sports focus they previously shared. As dramatically chronicled in Off and Running, a changed and wiser Avery does ultimately rally to graduate, win a bronze medal at the state track championships and earn a scholarship to college in Delaware. She also realizes, in a roundabout way that no one could have predicted, that Tova and Travis — for all that they could not tell her about her African-American roots — nonetheless have given her the strength, determination and independence to meet her identity crisis and become, indeed, her own person.

“I wasn’t prepared for the complete meltdown that Avery had halfway through our filming together,” says director Opper. “But we made a pact. We had started this project together and we would finish it together. I began inviting her 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.”

Off and Running is a co-production of the Independent Television Service (ITVS) association with American Documentary | POV and the Diverse Voices Project, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. It is a selected project of Tribeca All Access, with support from the Foundation for Jewish Culture and the National Black Programming Consortium.

About the Filmmaker:
Nicole Opper (Director/Producer)
Nicole Opper’s filmmaking credits include producing the Emmy-nominated “The Killer Within” (Toronto International Film Festival, Discovery Channel), “Sacco and Vanzetti” (Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, Winner of Best Historical Film by the American Historical Society) and the here! network’s five-part documentary series LSS. She was selected for Filmmaker magazine’s annual list of “25 New Faces of Independent Film” in 2009 and for Heeb magazine’s list of “100 Jews You Need To Know About” in 2008.

Off and Running was an Audience Favorite Finalist at the 2009 Tribeca Film Festival, winner of the Jury Award for Outstanding Documentary at Outfest, Best Documentary at the Milan International Women’s Film Festival, Best Documentary at Philadelphia QFest, winner of the SILVERDOCS Writers Guild of America (WGA) Award for Best Documentary Screenplay and winner of the Audience Award at the Ann Arbor Film Festival.
Opper holds a bachelor of fine arts degree in film production from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts and is pursuing a master’s degree in media, culture and communication at New York University’s school of education. A Brooklyn resident, she is currently a Fulbright Fellow in Mexico, where she is in production on “The Ipo Boys” (working title), a documentary about an innovative group home for abandoned youth.

**Credits:**
Director/Co-producer: Nicole Opper  
Co-producers: Sharese Bullock, Jacob Okada  
Executive Producers: Macky Alston, Sandra Itkoff  
Cinematographer: Jacob Okada  
Editor: Cheree Dillon  
Original Music: Daniel Bernard Roumain

Running Time: 86:46

**POV Series Credits:**
Executive Producer: Simon Kilmurry  
Vice President: Cynthia López

**Awards & Festivals:**
- Top 10 Audience Favorite, Tribeca Film Festival, 2009
- WGA Documentary Screenplay Award, AFI-Discovery Channel SILVERDOCS Documentary Festival, 2009
- Best Documentary, Milan International Women’s Film Festival, 2009
- Jury Prize, Best Documentary, Outfest, 2009
- Jury Award for Best Documentary, Philadelphia QFest, 2009
- Audience Award, Ann Arbor Film Festival, 2009
- Urbanworld Film Festival, 2009
- Seattle Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, 2009
- DocFest, 2009
- Boston Jewish Film Festival, 2009
- Denver Jewish Film Festival, 2010
- San Diego Jewish Film Festival, 2010

(For a complete list of festivals, go to [www.offandrunningthefilm.com](http://www.offandrunningthefilm.com).)

**StoryCorps short animations “The Human Voice” and “The Icing on the Cake”:**
Since 2003, StoryCorps has been recording and preserving the voices of everyday people, one conversation at a time, and sharing one of these stories each week on NPR. Now, the StoryCorps team brings its Peabody Award-winning storytelling to public television in collaboration with POV with new animated shorts featuring some of the projects best-loved radio stories. Airing on Sept. 7:

- **The Human Voice** – The great oral historian Studs Terkel was an inspiration to StoryCorps and he was also an early participant in the project. He speaks out about what has been lost in modern life and where he sees hope for our future.

- **The Icing on the Cake** – Blanca Alvarez and her husband risked crossing the border to immigrate to the United States, and then struggled to make ends meet. They hoped to shelter their children from these harsh realities, but Blanca’s daughter Connie reveals how much children can really see of their parents’ lives — and the inspiration they draw from their struggles.

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Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series Independent Lens on PBS. ITVS was created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television. More information about ITVS can be obtained at www.itvs.org. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people.

Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 23rd season on PBS, the award-winning POV series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today’s best independent documentary filmmakers. Airing June through September, with primetime specials during the year, POV has brought more than 300 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide and has a Webby Award-winning online series, POV’s Borders. Since 1988, POV has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)
POV's award-winning Web department produces special features for every POV presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. POV Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, POVS Borders. In addition, the POV Blog is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The POV website, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

POV Community Engagement and Education
POV works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, POV offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, POV’s Youth Views works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training so they may use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

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American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.org)
American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.