

# UNLISTED: A STORY OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

## Filmmaker's Statement

I never wanted to hide from my dad. But to survive medical school I did just that - I became unlisted in the phone book so that dad could not find me when he was overcome by psychosis.

Severe mental illness tore my family apart, but not for the reasons that make tabloid headlines. Yes, the symptoms of these illnesses can be devastating, but what really tears families apart is their inability to get treatment for their afflicted family member. Some of my earliest memories are of dad shouting outside my classroom or apartment, overcome by severe delusions. These became increasingly upsetting because getting him treatment proved impossible.

As a doctor working in clinics for underserved and homeless people I learned I was not alone in disconnecting from an ill relative. But this only heightened my ambivalence. Then my young son started asking about his grandpa and a part of my heart that felt frozen began to open. Finally, in 2004, I decided to stop hiding.

As I struggled to understand how I would approach our reconnection, I became aware of my growing need to tell my story; a story that while unique in its details is universal in its themes. I knew of films about mental illness that featured devoted caretakers, but I did not know of any that showed the other reality ... family members who are deeply conflicted about deciding not to care for an ill family member.

I also realized that the stories we hear in the media unfortunately only focus on unusual cases of people with schizophrenia, like John Nash (portrayed in *A Beautiful Mind*) or the rare, but terrifying, instances of someone shooting at strangers. My dad, on the other hand, represents the more common, but ignored, face of mental illness; a regular guy who wanted a career and a family, but was constantly stymied by his disordered thought process.

My hope is that after seeing *Unlisted* you will be moved into action. This can be as simple as taking a moment to validate the existence of someone living on the streets. Or the far bigger step, that I've taken in making this film – share the story of how mental illness has affected your families, friends or co-workers. In so doing you will raise awareness about the ubiquity of mental health issues. This is the first step in combating stigma and a critical part of creating more compassionate and effective mental health services.

With great appreciation,

*Delaney Ruston, MD*