

# The road from Hyannis to Mudlick Hollow

## Rory Kennedy reflects on life in Appalachia

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**O**n and off for a year, film maker Rory Kennedy lived in an America that many of us wouldn't believe exists unless we saw it up close.

In her documentary "American Hollow," Kennedy looks at the Bowlings, a family that for seven generations has lived impoverished in a remote corner of the Appalachians, far from America's bounty.

Airing tonight at 8 on HBO, "American Hollow" won awards for best documentary at the Los Angeles and Newport film festivals and was an official selection at Sundance, where it was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize.

Filmed at the Bowling homestead in Mudlick Hollow, a valley in eastern Kentucky, the documentary chronicles a year in the life of Inez Bowling and her 13 children. Girls wash laundry in rainwater collected in buckets. Boys sell pinning



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— Rory Kennedy (left)

found in the woods. Many of the women are physically abused by their mates. All the Bowlings receive welfare.

Kennedy, who postponed her

wedding last summer after her cousin John F. Kennedy Jr.'s fatal plane crash, lived in the Bowling home for months at a stretch.

She found the family while re-

searching subjects for a film she wanted to make about poverty and welfare reform in 1996, the year President Clinton signed legislation overhauling the welfare system.

Despite obvious differences between the privileged and public upbringing she experienced as a daughter of Robert F. and Ethel Kennedy and the unthinkable poverty the Bowling children have known, the 30-year-old film maker said she was struck by similarities.

"I grew up as the youngest child of 11, and there was something familiar about sitting in a room at the Bowling house where a half hour didn't go by without someone wandering in and out," said Kennedy. "For Inez Bowling, her family and children came first, and she wanted to provide as many opportunities as she could for the younger generations."

Spousal abuse is prominent in the film. "It's difficult and rare for women to get out of abusive relationships, but [one woman in "American Hollow"] could, because she had family around her," she said. "That's one of the truths of this film. It shows the importance of family."

In another scene, Kennedy records Clint Bowling's heart-wrenching breakup with a girlfriend — a scene the film maker remembers as difficult to film.

"The family knew they had the power to make us stop shooting if they asked us to, but they never did," she said.