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Short Synopsis

Atomic Mom reveals the intimate story about one of the few female scientists working on the testing of the atom bomb in the early 1950's. After decades of silence - and a crisis of conscience prompted by the probing of her filmmaker daughter, she shares her story and is offered an olive branch by a survivor of the Hiroshima bombing.

Long Synopsis

Atomic Mom is a documentary portrait of Pauline Silvia, one of only a few female scientists working on the testing of the atom bomb in the early 1950's. Pauline's ambition to do cutting-edge research led her to conduct experiments that would haunt her decades later. She is as much a woman of science as she is of faith, and in a late life crisis of conscience Pauline became deeply troubled by her work in the atomic testing program and renewed a commitment to her religious beliefs. For decades, Pauline did not speak about her scientific experiments at the Nevada Test Site, the Naval Radiological Defense Lab in San Francisco, and the UC Berkeley Cyclotron. The scientist has now decided to break this long silence and agreed to share her complex feelings about her work with her daughter, filmmaker M.T. Silvia. The two have embarked on a journey to understand past experience and each other. They travel to the Nevada test site, Rhode Island, California, and to Hiroshima where they meet survivor Emiko Okada and her daughter.

With compassion, wit, and forgiveness, M.T. trains the camera on her mother in an effort to tease out the truth about Pauline's deeply conflicted emotions around her work as a naval biologist—work that included testing with animals. What emerges from this mother-daughter t te- -t te is an understanding of the aspirations, disappointments, the sense of accountability, and achievement of spirited and independent women who came of age in the years just after World War II. It is also an evocative and intimate testament to the bond and love between a mother and daughter.

Through revealing interviews with Japanese survivors, doctors, and historians, *Atomic Mom* reveals the truth regarding the post-war press code in Japan and the censorship of images and information related to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The film also questions what is lost when the drive for scientific innovation runs over basic moral and ethical principals.