



**DYNASTY'S
CATHERINE OXENBERG**

TRYING TO SAVE MY DAUGHTER

The former TV star says her daughter has been 'brainwashed,' and she's now waging a desperate battle to get her back

By **JOHNNY DODD**
and **LIZ McNEIL**

A MOTHER'S FIGHT

"The more I learned, the darker and darker it seemed that this group was," says Oxenberg (in Brooklyn on Oct. 21). Inset: Oxenberg (right) with India in 2008.

HAIR & MAKEUP: DAVID TIBOLLA/CHANEL LES BEIGES/EXCLUSIVE ARTISTS; INSET: COURTESY CATHERINE OXENBERG

For the past several years, Catherine Oxenberg had been unable to shake the feeling that something wasn't quite right with her oldest daughter, India. Ever since the 26-year-old had become more deeply involved in a controversial self-improvement program called Nxivm (pronounced NEX-i-um), "she seemed distant and burdened," says Oxenberg, "like there was nobody home." Her fears were confirmed last April after a meeting with her friend Bonnie Piesse, 34, who'd

recently left Nxivm herself. "You need to save your daughter," Piesse told her. "You need to save India." By the time Piesse had finished detailing India's role in what Oxenberg calls a "secret sisterhood" within Nxivm, the former *Dynasty* actress says she felt "sick to [her] stomach" and desperate to free her daughter.

For nearly 20 years, an estimated 16,000 people have paid as much as \$3,400 for an executive-coaching workshop offered by the Albany, N.Y.-based organization, whose leader, Keith Raniere, 57, is known as Vanguard to his followers. With locations in New York, San Francisco and Mexico, the group claims to take people on a journey of personal discovery and development. But insiders who have left Nxivm—scores of them in recent months—paint a much darker picture of life among the group's hardcore believers. "It was the most painful, traumatic moment of my life," says Sarah



'I'M SCARED FOR MY DAUGHTER'

1. Oxenberg (in 1984) starred in the ABC hit prime-time soap opera *Dynasty* for two seasons. 2. The actress was 29 when her first child—India—was born in 1991. 3. "In my opinion she's in both psychological and physical danger," says Oxenberg (with her daughter in 1992).
4. India (in 1995) spent a year in college before dropping out and eventually finding her way to Nxivm.
5. "Everybody loves her," says Oxenberg of India (center with sisters Celeste, left, and Maya, right). "She's always had this sweet, ethereal quality."

Edmondson, 40, who, after being recruited for Nxivm's secret sisterhood, was branded last March below her hip with what she later found out were Raniere's initials, shortly before fleeing the group.

This past May, after Oxenberg, 56, confronted her daughter about Nxivm, India stopped communicating with her. Now the mother to five daughters has turned to the media: "I'm helpless. I've lost my child and will do whatever I can to get her back."

A longtime fan of personal growth books and seminars, Oxenberg—who has never lived with India's father (he declined to comment for this story)—knew nothing about the group when she and her daughter drove to Venice, Calif., to attend a Nxivm meeting in 2011 at the urging of a friend. She says she initially found the group "weird and creepy," but India, who Oxenberg calls "the sweetest, most nonconfrontational, easiest child of all my children," was intrigued—so Oxenberg reluctantly signed up for more classes. "I thought, 'Okay, this is an opportunity to bond with my 20-year-old daughter,'" she says.

Over the next few years, she says, India threw herself into the organization, attending more and more of the expensive classes, recruiting friends and eventually emptying her

bank account of her inheritance. Oxenberg, who resisted confronting India despite her fears, says, "It was like, 'Oh God, she's getting more and more enmeshed in this.'"

She would hardly be the first. "The generalization is that people get into these groups because they want to improve themselves and help others," says Steven Hassan, founder and director of the Freedom of Mind Resource Center. "But this is a group that preys on people. They get them in, they indoctrinate them, and then they send them out to recruit more people, kind of like cancer cells."

Edmondson says she met women in the sisterhood in which Oxenberg says India is a member. They told her they weren't allowed to eat more than 800 calories per day. Piesse, who last saw India in the days before she left Nxivm in January 2017, says, "India was in a bad situation. One time she told me that she wasn't going to eat for three days [out of] penance to try and correct her behavior."

Not long after talking to Piesse in April, Oxenberg reached out to India, who'd moved from L.A. to Albany in 2016, and invited her home for her birthday. Before hanging up, Oxenberg says her daughter told her, "Mom, my hair has been falling out, and I haven't had a period in a year. Maybe I should see a doctor?" When she arrived home later in May, an alarmed Oxenberg says she confronted her "superskinny" daughter, begging her to get help. She says India dismissed her concerns, told her she was "acting silly" and flew back to Albany the next day.

On Oct. 19 India posted a message on her Facebook page: "I'm absolutely fine, great actually. I would never put myself or the people I love into any danger." Nxivm did not respond to numerous inter-

'I SAW A BIG PERSONALITY CHANGE. SHE WASN'T PRESENT ANYMORE'

—CATHERINE OXENBERG



COUNTERCLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ABC PHOTOS; ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; VIVIANE VENTURA/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK; RON GALLELL/WIREIMAGE; CATHERINE OXENBERG; PATRICK DODD/SON; COURTESY CATHERINE OXENBERG



NXIVM FOUNDER

Prior to Nxivm, Raniere (left) founded a discount-buying club that he later shut down after 23 states and two federal agencies launched investigations into allegations that it was a pyramid scheme. Raniere admitted to no wrongdoing but agreed to pay a monetary settlement.

view requests and calls from *People*. In response to a recent *New York Times* article about the organization and India, Nxivm issued a statement calling the story "a criminal product of criminal minds." Recent allegations about the group have prompted the New York State Governor's Counsel to launch a review into the matter.

In the meantime Oxenberg fears what the future might hold for her daughter—making her all the more determined to keep fighting until India leaves the group. "I understand how incredibly easy it is to mess with somebody's mind to the point that you can get them to do almost anything," she says. "It's terrifying."

With reporting by **Jeff Truesdell**