



The
True
Courage
of Erin
Brockovich

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Erin was worried. Did PG&E want to hide something?

Were the people of Hinkley safe?

Erin Brockovich is one of Julia Roberts's best movies. It follows the life of a smart, young American woman with no husband and three young children. The movie has everything that a successful story needs: lots of action, strong people, and a happy ending. But most surprising of all, Erin's story is true.

Erin was in trouble. She had no money, no job, no husband, and three young children. Life is difficult when you are a single mother. But Erin loved her young family, and she wanted to make their lives happy and comfortable. Day after day she read the local newspapers and called for jobs. But every phone call and every interview was unsuccessful. It was time to try something new.

Erin visited her lawyer, Ed Massry. "I'm smart, I'm hardworking, and I'll do anything," she told him. "Please, give me a job!" It was a strange way to find a job. But Erin did what she had to do. She wanted to be a good person and a good mother.

Erin was not like the other office workers. She did not always speak politely, she did not wear dark suits, and she gave her opinions fearlessly. She worked hard, organizing papers into piles and boxes every day. But the work was too boring for a smart woman like Erin. Soon she started reading some of the letters and lawyers' papers to make her days more interesting.

Erin was a careful worker and she wanted to do her job well. One day she found some people's health papers in the same box as their house papers. This was unusual. "Why are these together?" she thought. "Maybe there's a mistake." She started looking at the big box of papers one page at a time. It seemed that a large electricity company, Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), wanted to buy hundreds of houses in the small town of Hinkley, close to their electricity station. But why? More importantly, why were the homeowners' health papers in the same boxes? It was a mystery.

Erin could not sleep that night. She was worried. Did PG&E want to hide something? Were the people of Hinkley safe? Erin was already a busy woman with her own problems. She had little time to worry about other people. But deep inside, Erin felt that something was wrong. Could she solve the mystery? She needed more information. The next day she spoke to her boss, Ed. With his help, Erin started looking more closely at the papers.

Erin discovered more and more strange papers in the Hinkley box. She realized that there was a serious problem. She loved her family and she wanted to spend more time with them. She wanted to see her children grow up. But people in Hinkley were very sick, and only Erin knew about it. She wanted to help. So she bravely decided to solve the Hinkley mystery alone.

Erin visited people in Hinkley and spoke to them about PG&E, their houses, and their health. She wanted to find the true story.

Erin was not a lawyer. She was friendly and interesting and the people of Hinkley liked talking to her. They told her that PG&E was a good company. It made their water safe, it paid for their hospital tests, and it offered good jobs. But Erin was not so sure. Erin always got what she wanted. Now she needed help and information. She was working alone, but this did not stop her. She called and visited scientists, doctors, and lawyers. She talked to anyone who could help her. And every day she worked hard. At last, she got the piece of information that she really needed: PG&E was poisoning the water near Hinkley!

PG&E is one of the biggest companies in the US, and people liked and trusted it. But Erin realized that the company told lies. The water was safe, they said-but they were poisoning it. Erin was not important, famous, or rich. She was not even a lawyer. But she decided to fight against PG&E for the people of Hinkley. She knew that she had to help in every possible way.

How many people were poisoned in Hinkley? Was anyone in danger? Erin returned to the town to find out. People knew Erin now. They trusted her and they talked honestly about their health problems. Hundreds of people in Hinkley had terrible illnesses, and some were dying. As Erin listened to the great problems and worries in these people's lives, she became very angry. PG&E knew that it was killing people. It was expensive to clean the water from its electricity station. So the dirty water ran into Hinkley's river and drinking water. Now the company wanted to buy the houses and keep the secret. It was not worried about the people who became sick. It was worried about possible payments to those people.

Money was a big problem for Ed Massry, too at this time. Erin's work was important. He knew that. But lawyers only get paid when they win. It was almost impossible for a small local law office to win against PG&E. Ed was afraid. But he was a brave man, too. He trusted Erin, and Erin's courage and hard work carried them through the most difficult times. From start to finish, Erin's work for the people of Hinkley took more than five years. During that long and difficult time, Erin and Ed made a great team.

As Erin talked to different Hinkley people, her name and face became famous in the town. She had to be careful, though-she did not want PG&E to know about her work. As more people told their stories, Erin got the necessary information. She worked longer and longer hours. She still had a family to look after, too. Her body and mind were tired. But she knew that quick action was important.

Finally, it was time to fight PG&E. Erin and Ed sent 634 notices for lawsuits from their small office to the large, expensive offices of PG&E. It was brave-but was it crazy? PG&E was a dangerous enemy. Was this the end for Ed's company?

When PG&E received the notices for the lawsuits, its lawyers immediately realized the danger. The sick people of Hinkley wanted a lot of money from the company. More lawyers were brought in on both sides. The lawsuits were too big for Erin and Ed alone. But Erin continued to work on them. The Hinkley people were her friends now. She truly loved them, and she knew more about their lives and problems than anyone. So Erin, Ed, and the lawyers from other companies worked together to do their best for the people of Hinkley.

After months of hard work, important lawyers in expensive clothes filled a small courtroom. PG&E bosses sat quietly in their chairs, trying not to look worried. Erin was nervous and excited. She thought about her friends in Hinkley, and she remembered the long years behind her. As the judge spoke his final words, she listened silently.

PG&E had to pay \$333 million to the people of Hinkley. It was the largest amount of money for this type of lawsuit in the history of the United States! This also gave hope to other ordinary people and small law offices. And when PG&E stopped poisoning the water at Hinkley, hundreds of people's lives were saved.

After their fight against PG&E, Erin and Ed had enough money to stop working forever. But today Erin is still working for Ed's office. She is not a lawyer-she always liked to do things her own way, and she has not changed.

She says that she is proud of the movie. But her health, her family, and the people of Hinkley are more important. Today she works for other ordinary people who are fighting against big companies. Her courage and hard work continue to help people and save lives.

- THE END -

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