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BIG BROTHER

SOAKING UP SPIRITUALITY, HARDSHIP AND HOPE IN INDIA IS A RITE OF PASSAGE FOR MANY TRAVELLERS INTENT ON FINDING THEMSELVES. But when Rocky Braat ended up there in 2008, he found a lot more than he had bargained for. Visiting a refuge in Chennai for orphans living with HIV/AIDS, the 30-year-old was immediately drawn to the children he met. He encouraged his friend Steve Hoover to visit, and together they made the documentary *Blood Brother*.

Rocky first landed in Chennai, a city with a population of more than four million on India's east coast, the way most people do – as a tourist. The difference being that while most backpackers drift through and move on to other cities or simply go home and return to their normal lives, Rocky never left. Living in a bare, rat-filled, cement hut, he became an amateur dentist, cook and brother to a group of children living with HIV/AIDS. "Rocky Anna" they called him - 'Brother Rocky' in Tamil.

A trained graphic designer with a promising career ahead of him, Rocky's decision to uproot his comfortable life in the US and relocate to India permanently was a decision that puzzled his friends and family. Steve Hoover, a film director by trade and close friend of Rocky's from their student days at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, was equally inspired and bamboozled by his friend's decision to move. "Rocky always told me about his experiences [in India]," Steve reflects. "He would often encourage me to come visit and bring a camera to film things." When Steve did eventually make the trip to India to visit Rocky earlier this year, he too was captivated by Chennai and the children Rocky helped care for at the hostel. Seeing the children firsthand, Steve understood the root of his friend's fascination. "Once I saw that and realised the impact it had on me, I felt it was important [to tell the story]," he says.

With equipment in hand, Steve decided to embark on an ambitious documentary project. Filming life in Chennai for around 40 days, he produced the footage for his new film, *Blood Brother*.

Although more accustomed to directing commercials and music videos, Steve found adapting to the documentary format refreshing. "I felt much less pressure," he says. "I was able to tell the truth and simply document life. I didn't have to worry about making anyone or anything look cool, so it was relieving." The stresses came instead from other sources. "Shooting in a foreign land was difficult because I wanted to look at everything and just experience it as opposed to focus on the story," Steve explains. "There were times that I just didn't want to film, but I knew I needed to."

Being separated by a viewfinder from his film subjects, who were at times clearly in need or in pain, was also a challenge for Steve. "It created a bit of a distance that I didn't care for. I wanted to be more involved. Thankfully I was often able to set the camera down."

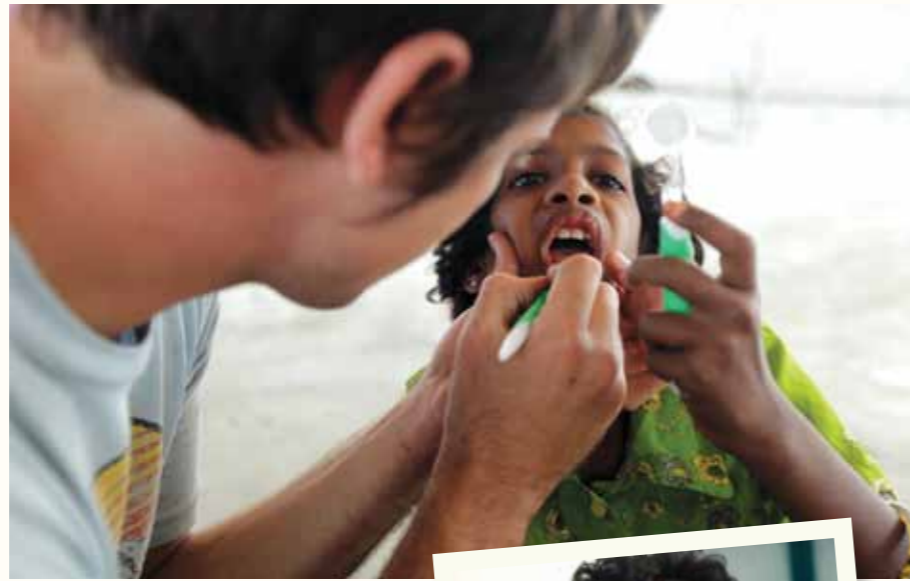
Steve appears in the film, which he also narrates, but insists that he had no desire to impact how the story played out. "I didn't really influence the narrative," he says. "Life seemed to play out in a narrative structure, it was almost strange. Everything happened without manipulation and out of my control."

"[Filming *Blood Brother*] has affected my attitude towards being honest with my trade. It has given me a new respect for the power of filmmaking," he says. "I've been moved by films and videos before, but I saw things happen while being there that I never experienced before. The idea of being moved took on new meaning for me."

Though very private about his experiences in India and preferring to let the film speak for itself, Rocky is candid in the film's trailer. "I hate being close to people," he says. "There's freedom in not being close to anyone because you don't get hurt."

Still living in Chennai today with the wife he married last year, Rocky, with the help of Steve, plans to use the money raised from *Blood Brother* to further invest in the children's hostel, with additional goals of developing a permaculture program and, in the longer term, building a home for teens with HIV/AIDS across the road from the current refuge. The orphanage cannot hold kids beyond the age of 15 - but their HIV status leads to exclusion from education and work in a country where both can be hard to come by at the best of times. This new home, Steve hopes, will give them somewhere to go. "Rocky is doing something really special and it's inspiring when you see it."

bloodbrotherfilm.com



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