

BLOOD BROTHER

A Documentary Feature Directed by Steve Hoover



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SYNOPSIS

Rocky Braat, a young man from a fractured family and a troubled past, went traveling through India without a plan. Then he met a group of HIV positive children living in an orphanage -- a meeting that changed everything for him.

Rocky left his life, friends, and career in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to live with the kids. Steve Hoover, his best friend and filmmaker, was unsettled and intrigued by this drastic action. In an effort to find out what compelled Rocky to give up every source of stability in his life, Hoover decided to trace Rocky's story, following him to India.

He witnessed Rocky and the kids endure disease, abject poverty, and death. But, strangest of all, in the midst of these troubles, he also saw their deep joy. And he came to understand why Rocky had given up everything he had to experience it.

'Blood Brother' is a story of friendship. It's a story of a life, stripped down to its essence. Most of all, it is a story about love, enduring in the face of death.

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I made BLOOD BROTHER simply to tell the story of my best friend, Rocky Braat. As a boy, his mom was a drug addict with abusive boyfriends and his father was a mystery to him until the age of seven. We met in Pittsburgh while attending art school, and quickly became friends and roommates.

Rocky had dreams of becoming a successful graphic designer, until one summer when he made an impromptu trip to India. He met a group of HIV/AIDS orphans while there and, to everyone's surprise, decided to leave behind all he had accomplished in order to give them what he felt they deserved.

We stayed in touch and I heard incredible things. As Rocky wrestled with visa issues I made a decision to finally go and see him. What I found him doing would strike a resounding chord in my heart and change me for good.

I've known Rocky Braat a long time. He's my best friend. We went to design school together, launched our careers together. There's nothing about him that is especially out of the ordinary.

So when he told me he was moving to India, it didn't make sense to me, at least not right away. This was the same guy who, during hot summers at the house we shared in Pittsburgh, would lie immobilized in his underwear in front of our only fan—he couldn't stand heat.

But I did know that Rocky never really felt at home here: not when he lived with his mother, not when he moved in with his dad, not in design school. While working for a national magazine, he looked around and saw that most of the people he knew, including myself, seemed to be content to rise in their respective fields, getting ahead— but he wasn't.

So he quit his job and went traveling. On a whim, with time to kill in Chennai, India, he went to visit an AIDS orphanage. He thought he would get sad for the kids there, cry for them, and then he would leave.

And that's what happened: he met them, cried for them, cried for how it would feel to be so young, to be abandoned by your own family, to be dying, and to know that none of it was your fault. Mostly he cried because despite all this, they still found joy in living.

After a month, he got on a train to Northern India. Some of the kids were angry with him; they sulked, and hung back. Others openly begged him to stay, crying and pulling at his hand—'You coming back, Rocky Anna?'

On the long ride north, he couldn't stop thinking about them. After only a week in Rajasthan, one week as a tourist in blue and gold cities, he got on another train: this time, he was headed south.

He spent the rest of his summer at the orphanage. When he had to leave again, he promised the children that he would return in one year, and he did. The thing is, he had come to need them as much as they needed him. He had found home.

Years have passed since then. Rocky endures a daily diet of rice, a rat infested hut, visa problems. He suffers with the children. He counts out the pills for them in the morning. He is an amateur dentist, clown, teacher, friend and father to the children. They call him 'Rocky Anna,' which means 'brother' in Tamil. They may be the only children he ever has.

I was inspired to tell his story because I know him. I know he isn't a saint or a miracle worker, but every day he fights his own nature and the forces arrayed against him, and I think that maybe this story could inspire others, as well.

The funding of this film is quite unique. It was all supported through donations. This means we have no debt and no one to pay back for the film, allowing any/all of the proceeds from the film to be used to help support the orphanage and the children with HIV in India, as well as supporting Rocky and his continuing efforts.

The funding we raised covered the necessities of the entire production. On top of that, virtually everyone up to this point has worked for free - donating his or her time, talents and expertise towards the project. Because of this, we're set up to donate all of the profits. When this all blows over, Rocky will still be in India and we want this to somehow support him for a long time. We have no personal interest for financial gain in this project. We just want Rocky to continue to do his much needed work and hopefully inspire others to join in. Currently, we have partnered with several very influential non-profits in order to help with some of our goals – the RED HOT ORGANIZATION and ACT V: The End of AIDS.

Most important is the establishment of LIGHT (Living to Inspire Global Healing Today) - a 501c3 accredited non-profit organization created in response to Rocky Braat and the film as a way to directly help and support Rocky, the kids and other orphanages. Together we hope to help change their lives. Information can be found at www.givethelight.org or our website www.bloodbrotherfilm.com

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PRODUCTION TEAM BIOS

STEVE HOOVER (DIRECTOR/EDITOR/WRITER) Steve Hoover has been directing commercials and music videos for the past six years. His work has been shown on virtually every media outlet, and has amassed over 100 million Youtube views. Steve is a director at Animal, a production and VFX house in Pittsburgh, PA. This is his first feature film.

DANNY YOURD (PRODUCER) The long time creative partner of Steve Hoover: together they have created many successful music videos and commercial campaigns.

JOHN POPE (DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY) John is a freelancer cinematographer who has worked on many national ad campaigns and music videos.

TYSON VANSKIVER (EDITOR/WRITER) Tyson is an established editor as well as a valuable asset to the production process having worked on national campaigns and features..

PHINEHAS HODGES (WRITER) Phinehas is a freelance writer working out of Pittsburgh, PA. His work has appeared in many commercials, publications and online outlets. He is also the director of 'Speaking of...' a reading series on Pittsburgh's North Side.

KRIS BOBAN (TITLE ANIMATION) Kris is an animator at Animal. His body of work includes national commercial campaigns as well as working on the first season of *Yo Gabba Gabba*.

ALLAN STALLARD (COLOR GRADING) Allan is a Scratch/Flame artist from Animal. He is an expert in color grading and compositing.

ANIMAL (PRODUCTION COMPANY) Animal is a production and visual effects studio, creating award-winning work seen across the nation and worldwide for over a decade. BLOOD BROTHER is their first step into feature film production and reflects their commitment to philanthropic endowment and strongly held company values.

DEFACTO SOUND (SOUND DESIGN/MIXING) Defacto Sound has worked on everything from major advertising campaigns to trailers to documentaries and games. They are also an active member of the Cinema Audio Society and the Motion Picture Sound Editors.

FULL CREDITS

DIRECTOR

Steve Hoover

PRODUCER

Danny Yourd

WRITERS

Steve Hoover

Tyson VanSkiver

Phinehas Hodges

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Leigh Blake

John Carlin

Steve Hoover

Kathy Dziubek

Michael Killen

Jim Kreitzburg

CINEMATOGRAPHER

John Pope

ORIGINAL MUSIC BY

Danny Bracken, Keith Kenniff, Joseph Minadeo, Wytold, A.J. Hochhalter

EDITOR

Steve Hoover

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

Tyson VanSkiver - assistant editor

Claude Lavallee - additional editor

SOUND DEPARTMENT

Dallas Taylor - sound re-recording mixer

Dallas Taylor - supervising sound editor

Ken McGill - sound effects editor

Samson Neslund - dialogue editor

ANIMATION DEPARTMENT

Kristofer Boban - key animator

Bill Breneisen - assistant animator

Kevin Miller - character illustrator

Jon Trueblood - character illustrator

MORE INFO:
CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR ROCKY AND THE CHILDREN OF TAMIL NADU, INDIA

Recent advances in AIDS treatments have made it possible for the orphanage to provide the children with anti retroviral (ART) medications that can extend their lifespans to virtually normal.

Wonderful as this is, it has created a new set of challenges for Rocky and the kids. Now that some are living past the age that the orphanage is allowed (by government mandate) to keep them, the questions arise:

- How are they going to be able to survive on their own when they can only work for a limited time before they are so exhausted they must stop?
- With so much misinformation about HIV and AIDS that, if these kids are 'outed' as being HIV Positive, will they be fired from their jobs?
- What does the future hold for them? When for most of their lives, planning seemed more a futile endeavor, as well as a painful one?

Rocky's answers to these challenges include the following:

- Improved education for the children with emphasis on computer training, which is in a huge boom in India currently (a challenge, as they have been kicked out of schools in the past due to the stigma surrounding HIV).
- Developing halfway houses, where they can live and learn to integrate with the world beyond the orphanage.

During the last trip to India Rocky and Steve went to visit some other hostels that he has connections to. We found a great list of needs that we hope to meet through future funding. These are new goals that we hope to accomplish through Blood Brother.

Construction of a new home for the children of another HIV hostel:

- We went to visit another hostel that is currently in dire straits. The program is on the verge of being shut down, which would leave the HIV positive kids living there without a home. The building they're currently living in is rundown and overpriced. We want to construct an efficient home for the kids and offer it free of rent to the organization that runs the hostel.
- Additionally we want to fund the organization to hire qualified staff, one or two aunties and pay them a good salary to stay in the home and provide the kids with motherly care.
- There are many other needs within this particular home that we can meet. As well as another hostel they visited that has similar needs.

Any proceeds from this film will go to these goals, as well as funding for other

organizations helping children for whom the same issues apply via Arms Around the Child, an organization fighting for children to be happy and whole.

Through the film, we hope to generate and fund these new projects, and then return to India in order to document directly the impact that the supporters of BLOOD BROTHER have had.

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PARTNERS WITH ROCKY

ACT V: The End of AIDS, Red Hot and Arms Around the Child are proud to be associated with "Blood Brother. ACT V is an advocacy organization working to end the AIDS crisis by advocating for more funding from governments and large-scale donors to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria.

Red Hot is an organization that has been fighting AIDS through popular culture for almost a quarter of a century. Arms Around the Child is focused on alleviating the difficulties faced by children living in extreme adversity. Each organization will be working with "Blood Brother" to further these aims and provide funding to organizations including Rocky's, caring for children. Through associating the film with social media campaigns and modern marketing we will change the world one child at a time.

Children are our future and children need adults to help them in the journey through life. We are galvanized to do everything possible to ensure as few children suffer the trials of AIDS, poverty and orphan-hood as possible.

YOU CAN HELP

ACT V, Red Hot and Arms Around the child partnered with Blood Brother in response to Rocky Braat's journey as a way to directly help and support Rocky, the kids and other orphanages. Together we hope to help change their lives. Information can be found at www.bloodbrotherfilm.com.

AWARDS

WINNER Sundance 2013 Grand Jury Prize
WINNER Sundance 2013 Audience Award
WINNER Hot Docs 2013 Audience Award
WINNER Heartland Truly Moving Pictures Award Winner
WINNER Thessaloniki Documentary Festival Audience Award, International Section
WINNER Atlanta 2013 Audience Award for Best Feature
WINNER Milano Film Festival Awards Best Documentary
WINNER Gdansk Documentary Festival Audience Award
WINNER Big Sky Documentary Festival Best Feature
WINNER Kansas International Film Festival Audience Award
WINNER Crested Butte Festival Audience Award
WINNER Crested Butte Festival ACT Award
WINNER Thin Line Documentary Festival Audience Award
NOMINEE Cinema for Peace Most Valuable Documentary of the Year
NOMINEE Milano Film Festival Awards Best Editing

QUOTES

"A truly beautiful film about the power of love"
Morgan Spurlock, Super Size Me

"A stirring documentary directed with narrative depth and unguarded heart."
New York Times Critics' Pick

"This film shook us to our very core... It is a delicate character study. Exuberant. Heartbreaking. Transcendent. And profoundly, moving."
Davis Guggenheim, Inconvenient Truth, Waiting for Superman

"Blood Brother is a remarkable film...I suggest you check it out. It is inspiring"
Jeff Bridges, True Grit, Iron Man, The Big Lebowski

"Reveals the vastness of one human heart. A remarkable story."
Rob Epstein, Academy Award Winning Director

"Documentaries don't come any bigger-hearted -- almost from the get-go, is so engaging and joyful that word of mouth could well make it a viable theatrical proposition."
Dennis Harvey, Variety

"An incisive and compassionate documentary that's as much a transformative experience for audiences as it was for the filmmakers. Steve Hoover's film is among those rare, independently produced documentaries that could really go the distance in theatrical and ancillary with dedicated distributor support."
Justin Lowe, The Hollywood Reporter

"It's an incredibly moving and inspiring debut feature, about a young American man who moves to India where he works with kids in need, that we knew nothing about before it was submitted to us. If anyone doubts that their film could ever get into Sundance without any connections, they should think again. This film just rose up among the thousands of submissions. The cream really does rise to the top."

David Courier, Sundance Film Festival Senior Programmer

"Ultimately, Blood Brother is a triumph...There really is something here for everyone — and we wouldn't be surprised if Blood Brother went on to achieve amazing things on big and little screens alike. Keep an eye out; this is one documentary you cannot afford to miss."

Jade Turner, Bring the Noise UK

Blood Brother' is all about the power of giving. Its strength comes from an insiders look not so much into the harsh realities of India's poverty & AIDS but at how the hurt & neglect within one man's life can be turned upside down & around. A film about the importance of family & the transformative power of love, blood ties are one thing but Steve Hoover shows us how real family can come about via unexpected connections & devotion.

John Hillcoat

Director The Road, Lawless

'In this age of hyper self-obsession Blood Brother exudes the awesome dignity of the quietly selfless and reminds us how beautiful, and tragic, the human condition can be. I found it an incredibly moving, humble and brilliant piece of film making.'

Atticus Ross

Composer Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, The Social Network

"Its one of my favorite films that we've had screen. I watched it in October and I honestly thought about it every day since. It just impacted me that much."

Big Sky Documentary Film Festival

Director of Programming, Travis Morss

"With its astonishing story and fantastic editing, Blood Brother is an extraordinary documentary that will shock, inspire and leave you close to tears. Highly recommended."

Jennifer Tate, ViewLondon

"If you see no other film this year, see this one."

Filmuforia

"Life-Affirming Documentary Has High Oscar Hopes"

Shaun Monro, What Culture

"...this emotional journey is utterly life-affirming, humbling and inspiring."

Becky Reed, DIY

"Every now and then, a film comes along that wallops you sideways and makes you rethink your life. Blood Brother is one of them."

Ivan Radford, I-Flicks

“...this is one documentary you cannot afford to miss.”

Jade Turner, Bring the Noise UK

“Rocky has worn us down, our cynicism faded, stiff upper lip softened and faith in human kindness partially restored.”

Matthew Walsh, The Peoples Movies

“It is quite possibly one of the most moving documentaries I have ever seen and one that I won't soon forget.”

Luke Owen, Flickering Myth

“Heart strings will be tugged on.”

Blake Williams, BlogTo

“I am confident this is one of the year's best films...”

Amir Soltani, The Film Experience

“*Blood Brother* is bound to have viewers hooked with its opening scene.”

Cinemablographer

“This doc is as moving as some of the best dramas released this year without the manipulative benefits of plot convenience.”

Daniel Janvier, Toronto Film Scene