



## Blood Brother Discussion Guide

Director: Steve Hoover

Year: 2013

Time: 92 min

**You might know this director from:**  
BLOOD BROTHER is the first feature-length documentary from this director.

### FILM SUMMARY

India, a land frozen in time, years behind the rest of the world. A place where running water is an unreality for many, where children die of diarrhea every day, where secondary schooling is a privilege afforded only the urban wealthy. India, the place where Rocky Braat, an American college graduate, found himself and his future.

BLOOD BROTHER is a raw, open-hearted tale of transformation. The transformation of Rocky, who went from being a graphic designer in urban America to a caretaker of AIDS orphans in rural India. A transformation of the children who went from being abandoned in their illness to being loved, uplifted, and empowered by Rocky's devotion. And finally a transformation of director Steve Hoover, who went from being a music video maker to a director of a powerfully moving feature-length documentary on the incredible journey of his best friend.

The struggle of everyday life can be felt in the sometimes shaky camerawork. The heat, the colors, the smells, the sounds, the joy, the sadness all bleed through the camera as Steve substantiates Rocky's journey from urban Pennsylvania to rural India. Within the walls and on the grounds of the Arias Home of Hope, Rocky works his everyday magic. In his rustic home, he leads a commonplace Indian existence. At the deathbed of a young child, the power of one heart is put into action with the most guttingly gorgeous results.

With love as the greatest tool at his disposal, Rocky transforms the children he encounters from orphaned AIDS victims into shining lights, hope beams, waves lapping into the future. If American stories have happy endings and Indian stories end on the sadder side, BLOOD BROTHER is a marriage of the two. For these children do have AIDS. And these children have been orphaned. But these children have Rocky Braat, a kid from Pittsburgh who sees not their sores but their spirits, from whom they receive the greatest heart in which to call home.

## FILM THEMES

The gifts of love, security, laughter, and support that Rocky brings the HIV-positive orphans at the Arias Home change their lives. In the process, he resets his own compass and leads life in a whole new way.

### FAMILY

“There’s freedom in not being close to anyone.” Dark words from Rocky Braat, who spent his formative years in-between homes, never certain where trust was located, constantly seeking approval and never quite receiving enough. Something seemed to click within Rocky when he met the Indian orphans, a reflection of sorts, a voice within him whispering, “These children understand you. These children are you.” The conventional notion of family doesn’t serve everyone, and rather than living a life of misery, forever on the hunt for what the majority has, Rocky found the family he never had. By escaping the hurt he felt from his relatives in Pittsburgh, he created a healthy, loving, meaningful family for himself, the bonds of which proved to be stronger than blood.

### LOVE

“Love is making someone who is sad feel happy,” stated Anitha. The sadness the orphans knew was overwhelming, often unbearable for such youngsters. The transformation that overcomes these children at the mere sight of Rocky serves as a solid definition of love. By doing away with distance, by disposing of fear, by offering up his full heart and wide-open arms to these otherwise sad, sick children, he demonstrated the powerful capacity of love to transform even the most hopeless, dark existence into a movement of light and possibility. As a bold testimony to the power of this human emotion, Rocky nursed Surya out of the hands of death and offered proof that there is nothing love cannot conquer.

### MARRIAGE = HOME

“Can I marry India?” When considering marrying Nimmy, Rocky understood that he was not only choosing to unite himself with a woman but also with her country. This American boy, raised in a world of running water, fully-tanked cars, pest-free houses, and clean hospitals, did not take the idea of marrying an Indian girl lightly. Although he had been abandoned in the past, he had no intention of repeating the mistakes he’d been shown, and a marriage to Nimmy meant a life with India. Saying “I Do” to this woman was saying, “India, I now call you home, and it is with you I intend to stay, through thick and thin.”

### CHILDREN, THE UNBEATABLE

Disease can strike anyone. When it does, our coping mechanisms are put to the test. Some people crumple; others ride the wave; and still others use the suffering as a chance to transform. Despite the sores, the illnesses, the daily cocktail of medication, the pain of living with AIDS, these children smiled, laughed, ran, played, joked. They lived life while they had it before them. Empowered by their sense of now and nothing more, their inability to intellectualize their way out of the present tense, children are unbeatable. With access to the eternal source of hope and joy within each of us, children survive the most unthinkable.

**“Other people can’t turn off their suffering or medicate their suffering with money. When you put those same standards on yourself, it forces your heart to change.”**

Rocky Braat

**“A sense of madness comes with loving things that can come and go, things that fragile and unstable, especially when you lose people you planned on loving a long time.”**

Rocky Braat

## FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. What one word would describe how you felt at the end of watching BLOOD BROTHER?
2. Have you ever been to India? If not, would you like to travel there?
3. What did you think about the fact that Rocky's best friend was filming him? What kind of spin, positive or negative, did it put on the film? Can the fact that Steve and Rocky are such close friends be witnessed in the footage?
4. Do you have any personal experience of HIV/AIDS?
5. Do you feel you have been properly educated on HIV/AIDS? Was AIDS education offered at your school?
6. Do you think you would be as open and intimate physically with the orphans as Rocky is? Would their having AIDS affect the way you handled them?
7. How much do you know about Indian culture? Are you interested in learning more?
8. Have you ever stepped out of your comfort zone in a way similar to Rocky? If not, do you have any desire to? How do you think you would personally benefit from such an experience?
9. Are you an orphan yourself or know anyone who is? Do you think there certain characteristics shared by orphans?
10. Rocky says at one point in the film: American stories have happy endings. Most Indian stories end sadly. Why do you think this is?

## NOTES:

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## FILM FACTS:

- BLOOD BROTHER has been granted numerous awards, including both the Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award at Sundance, the Humanitas Award from the International Documentary Association, and Best Documentary at the Milano International Film Festival Awards. It was also nominated for Most Valuable Documentary of the Year at the Cinema For Peace Awards.
- Since the release of the film the filmmakers have worked with the production company, Animal, to raise over \$300,000 (as of 2015) for the kids and created several jobs for those aging out of the orphanage. They constructed a vocational training center for those leaving the orphanage system, in order to transition them into independent adulthood with practical skills for the Indian workforce. All filmmaker profit from Blood Brother has been donated to Rocky's efforts to help the children in the film.
- The orphanage featured in the film - the Arias Home of Hope - is located 62 miles outside of Chennai, a city with a population of 9 million that is otherwise known as "the Detroit of India." The orphanage can accommodate up to 50 residents at any one time and was opened in 2001.
- The first case of HIV in India was diagnosed in 1986 amongst female sex workers in Chennai.
- 30% of the world's poorest live in India. 85% of rural villages do not have a secondary school, and 50% of Indians do not have proper shelter.
- India received its independence from the U.K. in 1947 and became a republic in 1950. It is the second most-populous country in the world (behind China), with a population of 1.2 billion, and the world's most populous democracy. Bordered by Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, and Bangladesh, in addition to the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and the Bay of Bengal, India is the seventh-largest country in terms of geographical area. Hindi and English are the two official languages, while 22 other languages are officially recognized. Despite being one of the fastest-growing economies, India faces many socio-economic problems: 30% of Indian children under the age of 5 are underweight and 50% of them suffer from malnutrition.
- The word orphan, from the Greek "orphanos," is defined as a child whose parents have died or have abandoned him/her permanently. Famous orphans include Nelson Mandela, Marilyn Monroe, Ray Charles, Edgar Allan Poe, Eleanor Roosevelt, Malcolm X, and Babe Ruth.
- In 2013, 35 million people worldwide were living with HIV. 2.1 million of them were living in India and 140,000 of those were children.
- BLOOD BROTHER was director Steve Hoover and producer Danny Yourd's first film. Their second film - Gennadiy - concerns one man's mission to rescue badly abused street children in Ukraine.
- Director Hoover initially made music videos.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Consider** supporting Rocky Braat's mission in particular by giving donating to his [LIGHT organization](#), which helps fund the orphanage featured in the film.
2. **Support** [Orphan's Lifeline International](#) that offers a wealth of possibilities to help orphans in India and across the globe.
3. **Step** out of your comfort zone at least once a day to expand your head and heart horizons. Start small, by taking a different way home or greeting a stranger on the street.
4. **Donate** to [World's Children](#), an organization that works with orphans in India, many of whom are living with HIV/AIDS.

## We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

**Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.**