



E-Team Discussion Guide

Directors: Katy Chevigny, Ross Kauffman

Year: 2014

Time: 88 min

You might know these directors from:

Katy Chevigny:

Election Day (2007)

Deadline (2004)

Ross Kauffman:

Born Into Brothels: Calcutta's Red Light Kids (2004)

FILM SUMMARY

War and all its related jobs - from soldiers, rebel armies, aid workers, war correspondents, and human rights investigators - makes for compelling storytelling material. What sets E-TEAM apart from the average documentary is not its depiction of the incomprehensible risks taken by the Human Rights Watch Emergencies Team, but rather the completely believable lives they conduct simultaneously.

With a shared passion for human rights, co-directors Katy Chevigny and Ross Kauffman had dinner with a few members of the Human Rights Watch E-Team at a Manhattan restaurant. What they took away from that dinner was not a handful of gory stories but rather a conviction that they had scouted the characters they needed to tell a definitive tale of some of the indispensable risk takers living amongst us in our Western world.

Over the course of four years of filming - strictly solo when it came to field investigations - the E-TEAM crew allowed real people to come forward and tell their stories. Asked to tread as lightly as possible when filming in war zones, Chevigny and Kauffman captured the blood, guts, and trauma of the civilians caught in the line of fire, allowing the camera to record whatever came its way. Back in the homes of Anna and Ole in Paris, Fred in Berlin, and Peter in rural Switzerland, they let the camera absorb the peace of civilized days, marital reality, and the quiet streets of Western life. E-TEAM is what happens when peace and war intersect on a single screen.

Rather than dissecting the ins-and-outs of human rights investigations or addressing injustices taking place globally, E-TEAM gets up close and personal with four individuals who make it their business to make the intolerable tolerable, stepping out of their safety zone and battling against "incredibly powerful forces," as described by Abrahams. A tale of the ordinary meeting the extraordinary, E-TEAM is anything but commonplace.

FILM THEMES

“War is always bad,” states Anna Neistat. Balancing the everyday tasks of peacetime life with the suffering of those in war is a toiling line of work, but essential if good is ever to prevail over all the bad.

EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION

With backgrounds in law, journalism, and academics, human rights investigators know that in order to bring about any lasting change a fortified case must be created around concrete evidence. These are not aid workers bringing supplies to the stranded or patching up wounds of the war weary. The work of an investigator involves conducting countless interviews, cross-checking stories, and corroborating evidence collected on the ground. In the words of Fred Abrahams, “We do not start with an end result, a conclusion, or an aim and then search for the facts that will lead us to that conclusion. We start with research in the field that leads us up to the end.” All in it is an effort to collect unbiased and fair data, document violations, and lessen the suffering of those affected by war.

EMERGENCY MEASURES

Desperate times call for desperate measures. Although a human rights investigator is not there to provide immediate hands-on help, it would be impossible to witness the injustices, hear the true tales of immense suffering, and view first-hand the events transpiring without being driven to action. And as wars intensify and crimes escalate, a contemporary human rights worker becomes a sort of criminal investigator rather than a passive collector of evidence, acting in the now to bring about real change for the communities in dire need of help. By working on the ground and coming into invaluable contact with those that they are setting out to aid, a human rights investigator raises the alarm call that moves international governments to act in the here and now.

ALL IN A DAY’S WORK

E-TEAM does not merely provide an eagle-eye view of the working life of a human rights worker. Co-directors Chevigny and Kauffman felt that by telling a character led tale - where real people living everyday lives with children to raise, relationships to manage, and bills to pay - would pack more of a punch than delivering an film focused purely on the issues. By granting us all-areas access to the lives of Ole, Anna, Peter, and Fred, E-TEAM places us in the line of duty, enabling us to comprehend the humanity at stake and the personal risks taken by as they set out to make the world a better place for us all.

PERSEVERING DESPITE THE ODDS

With multiple forces against human rights workers, including corrupt governments, disbelieving judicial systems, and the trials of everyday life it would be easy to understand if any of them threw in the towel and signed up for a non-threatening day job. What impact can a single investigator make in a war-torn nation, with chemical weapons decimating entire communities? Yet that one win out of many losses, that one life saved makes all the difference. By remaining in touch with the events and people on ground level, giving up is not an option.

“There are hundreds of people dying every day. What do we do? How do we prevent that? What can we say that will stop that?”

Carroll Bogert, Human Rights Watch

“Nothing compares to being on the ground, the level of investigation you can conduct.”

Anna Neistat

“We’re not going to stop any war. It’s about making the war a bit more tolerable for the people stuck in it.”

Fred Abrahams

FILM FACTS:

- E-TEAM was met with critical acclaim, bagging many awards, including a Cinematography Award at Sundance, a F:ACT Award at CPH: DOX, as well as Anna Neistat winning The Unforgettables at the Cinema Eyes Honor Awards. The film also received a number of award nominations, including the Sundance Grand Jury Prize.
- James Foley, a cinematographer who filmed parts of E-TEAM in Libya, was abducted in Syria in 2012, and in 2014 became the first American citizen to be killed by ISIL.
- Anna Neistat was raised in Moscow, her mother a university professor and her father a sculptor. While studying history and literature at university, she worked on a radio show and did a piece on a political dissident, sparking her interest in human rights and legal issues. Intending to work as a law enforcer, she instead got a job at Human Rights Watch at the age of 25. In 2014, she left HRW for a job as the Senior Director of Research at Amnesty International.
- Co-directors Chevigny and Kauffman met in 2004 at Sundance, and with a shared passion in human rights issues, they spent 4 years filming E-TEAM, for them a character-driven movie more than an issues-based documentary. They were only allowed to have one person on the field with the investigators at any given time.
- Chevigny and Kauffman are considering creating a TV series out of the concept behind E-TEAM.
- Human Rights Watch first began in 1978, under the name Helsinki Watch, to aid citizen groups in the Soviet Bloc. Americas Watch formed in 1981, followed by Asia Watch (1985), Africa Watch (1988), and Middle East Watch (1989), creating The Watch Committees. The overall group name Human Rights Watch was adopted in 1988. As a non-governmental, non-profit organization, HRW is funded by private individuals and foundations. Around 400 lawyers, journalists, advocates, and academics work at HRW, reporting on abuses in 90 countries globally.
- Syria, a country in Western Asia, borders Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, and Israel, and has a population of around 18 million. The Syrian Civil War began in 2011, as protests were held against the government of Bashar al-Assad, who first assumed power in 2000. More than 200,000 Syrians have been killed and 11 million displaced in the civil war, which was ongoing as of 2015.
- The Libyan Uprising began in early 2011, with protests arising over the rule of Muammar Gaddafi, who came into power in 1969. As of 2015, war continues to wage in Libya, as rival organizations fight to take over control of the country.
- Anna and Ole named their newborn son Ari.
- In 1997, Human Rights Watch shared in a Nobel Peace Prize for helping found the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Consider** becoming a member of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange, which monitors global censorship founded by the [Human Rights Watch](#).
2. **Support** the oldest international human rights federation - [The International Federation for Human Rights](#) - that brings together 178 human rights organizations across the globe.
3. **Spread** the word! The members of the E-Team have extremely active Twitter feeds that share breaking human rights news and that often include calls to action. By simply sharing and retweeting the information from these social media feeds, you can help to frame the world's crises in human rights terms.
4. **Contribute** to the efforts of [Amnesty International](#). Anna Neistat, one of the human rights campaigners featured in E-TEAM, joined Amnesty International in late 2014 as the Senior Director of Research.

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.