



## 'Look at me'

## 'I am not invisible'



PHOTO BY LEAH NASH

Melissa Walsh is 30 years old and a Street Roots vendor. Diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, a high-functioning form of autism, Melissa moved from Spokane in July with her husband Sean after they lost their home to foreclosure.

*Melissa Walsh is a Street Roots vendor. She is 30 and married. She used to have a home. This is her story.*

BY LEAH NASH  
CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER AND WRITER

"All these people pass me by and avoid my eyes. I want to tap them on the shoulder and say, 'Look at me; I am not invisible.'"

This was my introduction to Melissa Walsh, Street Roots vendor. And so to tell her story, I began by listening. I listen to her cry - I listen to her argue with her caseworkers, and I listen to her talk excitedly about her next knitting project.

I begin to follow her: to the food bank, to urgent care, to the mental health unit to visit her husband. Her days are not easy, and sometimes just following along is a burden that I find difficult to bear.

Now three months later, I look at Melissa and the images I have created and think, "There but for the grace of God go I." For in this modern-day Great Depression she really could be any of us.

By photographing her everyday moments, these little slices of life, my goal was to tell her story as best I could and to help give a voice to people who are sometimes not heard. Enjoy.

SEE PHOTO ESSAY, PAGES 7-9



PHOTO BY LEAH NASH

Melissa and her husband married five weeks after meeting. She thinks their relationship has survived the hard times because, "Neither of us can bring ourselves to give up on anything. That is our greatest weakness and our greatest strength. We will not quit."



No joke. Your support matters now more than ever!

Give to Street Roots this year at [www.streetroots.org](http://www.streetroots.org) or at [www.wweek.com/giveguide/](http://www.wweek.com/giveguide/). See pg. 16 for more details.

GIVE!GUIDE2009

BROUGHT TO YOU BY WII