



Moving to Portland because of its bike-friendly reputation, the Walshes brought only what they could carry on their backs. For the first few months, they lived in a one-bedroom apartment in Beaverton, but the \$535 rent proved too high and they were forced to leave.

## In Melissa's own words

I would like to start out by thanking you guys, my readers, and patrons of the paper. Without you, my continued survival would be compromised. I've written this because people have asked me when and if I would be in the paper. I have chosen to self-publish in order to add "extra value" and make the papers uniquely mine.

This time, I am publishing my story so you can get to know me.

My name is Melissa Walsh. I have been homeless off and on since moving to Portland in July. I used to have a house, but my husband's uncontrolled seizures led to job loss, which in turn led to foreclosure. We are currently seeking help for him at the

Outside In Clinic. The doctors over there are working hard to try and help. I am disabled with Asperger's Syndrome, a high-functioning form of autism.

There are a lot of misconceptions about being a paper vendor. The stereotype is a middle-age drunken guy who is too lazy to do anything else. I am none of the above. I am 30, female, married, a renter, and my husband used to be a nursing aide. The doctors don't allow him to work now. I have an associate's degree, and have tried to find and keep work to no avail.

I have many interests and passions. I am a yoga and tai chi practitioner. I study philosophy, and I'm a semi-professional

knitter and spindler. The leaves are darkening on the trees, and there's a change in the air. The transition to fall has begun already. I look outside my window as I read this, and the cloud cover is blanketing us with hues of grey. I wonder when the seasonal rains will return again, their solemn drops nourishing the earth for the preparation of the harvest.

And all I can think of is wool. Wonderful, luscious and warm, wool has helped many families through the cold months. Wool is sturdy and strong and naturally water-repellent. It is also expensive and the price is out of my reach. And yet I still dream of crafting warm sweaters for my husband and I.

My life is mostly about subsistence, but somehow, I still believe in the power of the ancient tradition of knitting to make it feel a little better. When I knit, I feel more real, more human, somehow. I feel like I am doing something that makes a difference. Knitting is about hope, bringing comfort and warmth in every stitch.

Even though I'm a Street Roots vendor, I still believe in hard work and doing your best. Knitting engenders that. I am about quality, equity and freedom of expression. Knitting allows for that. Cheers to a job well done.

— Melissa Walsh



## PHOTOS BY LEAH NASH

Left: Without a car, Melissa and Sean rely on public transportation and their bicycles. They estimate that their commute to sell papers in downtown Portland is almost three hours one way: one hour by bike, one hour on the Max and 30 minutes on the bus. Here they are transporting food from a local food bank.



Left, below: Melissa takes advantage of Pottluck in the Park, which serves free meals to about 300 to 400 people 52 Sundays per year at O'Bryant Square. With 11.5 percent of people out of work, Oregon currently has the third-highest unemployment rate in the nation.

