

# Burned to memory

*Scott Ramsden isn't letting homelessness push him to obscurity. Instead, he's starring in a film that he hopes will shine a new light on the issue.*

BY JOANNE ZUHL  
STAFF WRITER

Scott Ramsden's life was normal for most of his 45 years. He was married once, divorced eight years ago, and is now single. He's lived in Portland 10 years now. Originally from Boston, he's lived all over the U.S. since 1992, traveling coast to coast for work. He originally came to Portland as part of an expansion job at the Willamette Paper Mill in Albany.

And then it all ended.

Ramsden had always had plenty of work, but his last job was seasonal, he says, and as the recession bit down, he couldn't find another one quick enough to pay rent. Eventually, money trickled to a halt, and he had to sell his belongings. He invested in a sleeping bag and pad to survive. He has no family here, he says, and his friends are unable to help. He's been homeless now for five months.

If you see his movie, you'll learn all about it. Ramsden's life, at least this current portion of it, is recorded in an hour-long movie about life as a homeless man. "Homeless in PDX" is no stereotypical representation, but the modern-day story of life without a home in Portland. Without a bathroom. Without a place to work and support oneself. Ramsden sells Street Roots to get by, and he'll gladly pass along a film if you see him out on his turf.

**Joanne Zuhl:** *What made you decide to make a movie, and why put yourself front and center in such a project? It's not a comfortable place for many people who have experienced homelessness.*

**Scott Ramsden:** I literally stumbled across a filmmaker at the Starbucks where I sell my Street Roots and have coffee every morning. After making some chit-chat and whatnot he said he would like to make a movie/documentary about being homeless in Portland and share my story. We spent almost two weeks shooting and four days of editing. Then days and days of burning the movie. I was nervous and unsure at first about the movie and even while we were shooting it had doubts it would amount to much but did it mostly for something to do, have some fun, and wanted to have something to give to my Street Roots customers that was personal and would help them understand.

**J.Z.:** *Who helped you with the movie?*

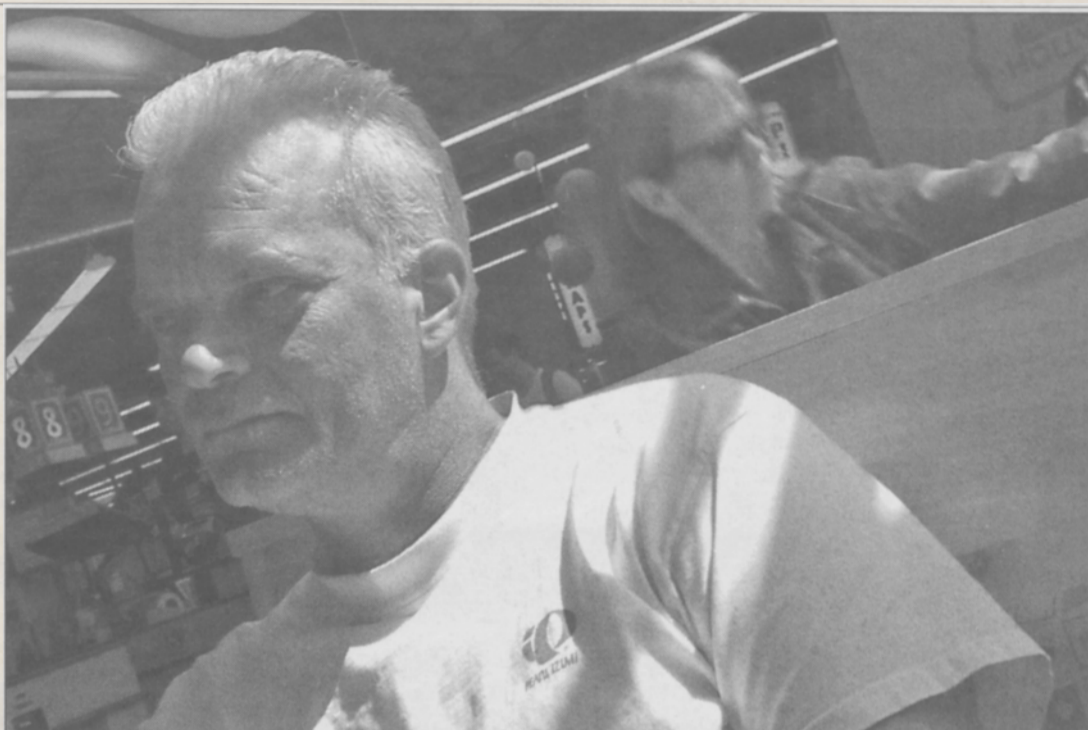


PHOTO BY GARY HULL

**S.R.:** The filmmaker's name is Gary Hull but he goes by "Crash." We both are the writers, producers and directors. We collaborated on everything and shared ideas as we went, it just flowed.

He is the cameraman, and I am the actor, although there isn't much acting in the movie. It is reality-based and all ad-libbed with no script. Crash used his Canon HD Video Camera to shoot (all hand held) and all editing etc. was done on his 17-inch MacBook Pro, and he used iMovie.

**J.Z.:** *You've been selling the movie – what has been the response from customers?*

**S.R.:** The response has been overwhelming and just plain amazing. The main reason we made this movie was to offer it to my Street Roots customers thinking they would like to see what its like to be homeless on a daily basis and get an inside story and personal perspective of the "man behind the paper." I also wanted to increase sales of the paper in general and make better connections with people. Forming relationships would go better and be stronger after they see the movie. And all these things have happened.

When I am selling a paper I say, "Did you hear I made a movie?" And people are amazed. They want to know about it and about 80 percent of them buy it. I decided to offer it as a "donation based" purchase and whatever someone can give me is fine. I feel the message is more important than making a bundle, but for a homeless person surviving on very little, it's hard not to think about money on occasion. That's how we eat and are able to do laundry, pay our cell phone if we have one, etcetera. I have also given the movie to a few people for no cost, because all they had was one dollar for the paper. I believe in good karma and all that.

So far I have sold or given away about 100 copies and have already purchased another 100 discs and sleeves and burned copies because there are plenty of people that will want it.

**J.Z.:** *What do you hope to accomplish with the film?*

**S.R.:** I just wanted Street Roots customers to have a better idea of what my

deal is and get a personal touch from their vendor. I hope they understood a bit more after seeing it and feel better about buying the paper and being a regular supporter.

I also hoped to catch a break of some sort in regard to a regular job, place to stay, or donation by anyone seeing the film. Me and the filmmaker have realized there are other opportunities and decided to dream big. We sent it to Mayor Sam Adams hoping he would watch it and gain some insight and understanding. I also gave a copy to Sisters of the Road Cafe and Street Roots so they could use it in their endeavors.

I sent it to North Face backpacks, Iowa

**"Being homeless is sad and depressing and it's a struggle to make it through any given day with an ounce of happiness. Since making the movie, I have been able to tap into the positive, exciting and creative part of my being, and most sadness has went away."**

Boots, and Colgate-Mennen Speed Stick, letting them know their products are "tough enough for a homeless person." We also entered it into NW Film Festival and have contacted a few places to have a showing here in town.

Our goals and hopes with what can happen with this film are multifaceted and we are trying everything. Ultimately, I just want people to see it and maybe gain an understanding of what it's like to be homeless and all that. And there are so many stories out there. Mine is just one.

**J.Z.:** *What has it done for you?*

**S.R.:** What I can't stop thinking about is how down and out I was practically every day before making this film. Being homeless is sad and depressing, and it's a struggle to make it through any given day with an

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