

Assume nothing

BY LORRAINE DUCHALARD
STREET ROOTS VENDOR

Imagine how you may have reacted if this had happened to you. A long time ago I was at the airport waiting for my flight to Nevada. Across the way I noticed a kiosk selling shortbread cookies. I bought a box, put them in my travel bag and searched for an available seat so I could sit down and eat them. Finally, I notice a seat next to a gentleman. I reached down into my bag and pulled out the box of cookies. As I did this I noticed the guy watching me very intensely. He stared hard at me and my box of cookies, as I brought the cookies to my mouth. Then suddenly he took a cookie from my box and ate it!

I was more than a little surprised at this, I was at a loss for words. Not only did he eat one cookie but he alternated with me. For every one cookie I ate, he took one. Now I am going crazy. I think, what the hell?! What a crazy greedy creep. He's got some nerve! I start to imagine words I might use to describe this guy and the situation to my family and friends. Meanwhile we both keep eating the cookies down to the final cookie. The guy reaches down and takes the last cookie. But then he does something weird; he breaks it in half and gives me half. After the cookies are gone the man gets up and leaves. I start thinking, "did this really happen?"

I'm sitting in my seat dumbfounded and still a bit hungry so I go buy another box of cookies and go back to my seat. I begin to open the new box of cookies when I glance down into my bag. Sitting there in my bag is my original box of cookies still unopened. Only then did I realize that when I reached down earlier, I had reached into the other man's bag and grabbed his box of cookies by mistake!

Now I thought different about this man. Was he what I'd thought before or was he generous, tolerant and kind? I had experienced a profound paradigm shift. I was seeing things a bit differently.

Sometimes in life we need to change our point of view. Things may not be what they seem. It has been said: assumptions are the termites of relationships.

I am vendor Lorraine Duchalard please assume nothing when it comes to me. You may be very wrong, my friend. I sell at the 33rd and Belmont Zupan's in the evenings only because I go to school four days a week in the daytime trying to earn my associates degree. This is why you don't see me at times.

Thanks, Tom with Adidas, for warming a small part of our community!

— Matt Jackson
Street Roots vendor

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Loving Portland through Jenni's eyes

BY KAISA MCCROW
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Jenni, a petite woman with short hair and an endearing smile, describes her post selling Street Roots outside of the Zupan's on Belmont and 33rd as the location for the happiest shoppers in Portland. This seems to delight her, and she describes the area as a "super neighborhood," where everyone is smiling and with beautiful children and dogs, carrying flowers and enjoying life. In Jenni's Portland, people seem to be happy, the forests are beautiful, and there is space for any kind of person to find peace and home. Jenni moved here two years ago from

VENDOR PROFILE Jenni

Michigan with her best friend and traveling partner Justin. They had already been close for years when together they decided to sell everything that they owned and venture west. They say it took 5-6 months of saving money, a lot of soul-searching and one-way Amtrak tickets to get both of them to leave behind the only home either of them knew for Oregon.

Jenni described Michigan as a much harsher place to live. She experienced more violence there and recalls getting held up at gun point, on her birthday no less. The dangerous environment, coupled with a bad economy and a desire for adventure, led her and Justin through the mountains on a two-day train trip with the few things left that they owned. It was a beautiful way to travel and Jenni describes the trip as gorgeous, barring the less than inspiring scenery in North Dakota. Traveling in March at the end of winter, the pair began to feel panicked as they approached Oregon with the scenery around them still covered in snow. They began to rethink their little tent and lack of winter gear, sprouting final seeds of doubt and cold feet after nearly half a year of preparation. The image of arriving in a city blanketed by snow, with no home or possessions was nerve-wracking and scary. To their happy relief, they pulled into Portland's downtown train station to greet an unseasonably nice, 65-degree day, just the greeting they needed to start over in this new city.

Quickly, they were at home. "The sky looks bigger here. I know the sky is the same size anywhere you go, but it just seems bigger here. I don't know why. Do you know why?" She leans over to Justin during our conversation. Neither has an answer, only that they are sure of this



PHOTO BY KAISA MCCROW

perception. Jenni is as sure of the impossibly large sky as she is about the magic of the forests and mountains that surround her in Portland; it is what makes her love it here. They camped in Forest Park for their first few months here, hiking in and out of the forest nearly half an hour each day to go to work. Now they share a space in a van that Justin purchased this fall, but Jenni's connection to the forest has not lessened. She is still enthralled. "I can't even explain how it [the forest] makes me feel. It's like a drug. Your head is all tingly. You fall in love with it, kind of the way you fall in love with a person."

This love affair with nature is what makes Jenni want to work with plants someday. She paints landscapes when she can get a hold of painting materials and she would like to become a botanist, and can see herself working for the forest service or a nursery. Already, those smiling Zupan's patrons enlist her help in picking out the picturesque bouquets that she sees them carrying around all the time. She is there to sell papers, but she says it is the interactions with people that really make her Street Roots spot a fantastic place. Although it is hard work being on your feet all day selling papers, Jenni feels that the positive energy that she receives from people is part of what helps her to forget the more depressing sides of homelessness.

The reality is that homelessness has created many barriers for her. She has lived through hard times in Michigan, and although Portland has been an opportunity to start over, it hasn't all come easy. She has struggled to stay positive at times, talking about how easy it is to be beaten down by the negative energy that she has encountered from other people on the street who have given up. She is reflective about a period where she found herself

drinking too heavily, and she was glad Justin was there to make sure she stayed on her feet. Despite the help she received from homeless services in Portland, she says it was too much to spend all of her time around that intense environment, and that the impact on her was heavy. Getting the van was a major step for her and Justin, offering them solace and privacy that was much needed to stay sane.

This last September Jenni's backpack was stolen, with many of her possessions, including her identification, taken with it. The repercussions of this loss are one of the biggest barriers in her daily life. It's impossible to even sell used books to Powell's without an ID, and Jenni realized finding a job was nearly impossible as well. Now, she's wading through the logistics of procuring a new birth certificate. Each step is time consuming and difficult, made harder by the limited resources that she is already working with. Until she can get a card verifying her identity, Jenni is cut off from avenues to attain employment or housing. It's a waiting game.

What Jenni does have and value in her life are things that cannot be stolen. She now has family and community in Portland, and she is constantly surprised and delighted by people. "There is more of a community of homeless people here. I've had homeless men in rags offering me change," she explains, appreciating that people with so little are so willing to give. She has Street Roots, which she has excelled at. She has Justin, her rock. She has the wonders of the city, the forests and the mountains as her home, and a rare ability to appreciate beauty all around her. And she has her humble dreams for her future, "I'm very minimalist. All I want is a dog and a tiny house in the forest." She smiles and adds, "I know that is attainable."

VENDOR WORK ADS

Cassidy Morse: Looking for work. Will do most anything, light and heavy. \$10 an hour, four hour minimum. Please call 503-224-5398 or Street Roots at 503-228-5657.

Pete Marshall W. and Julie W.: Pleasant mannered and experienced at labor. Odd jobs. Yard work speciality. Repairing household losses. Pay back huge debts. Leave call back

number and detailed message: 503-946-3959, or Street Roots, 503-228-5657.

Vincent Bartlett: Laborer for hire, any type of work — painting, yardwork, moving, handyman, light or heavy. Honest and dependable. Call Street Roots at 503-228-5657 and leave message for Vincent.

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