

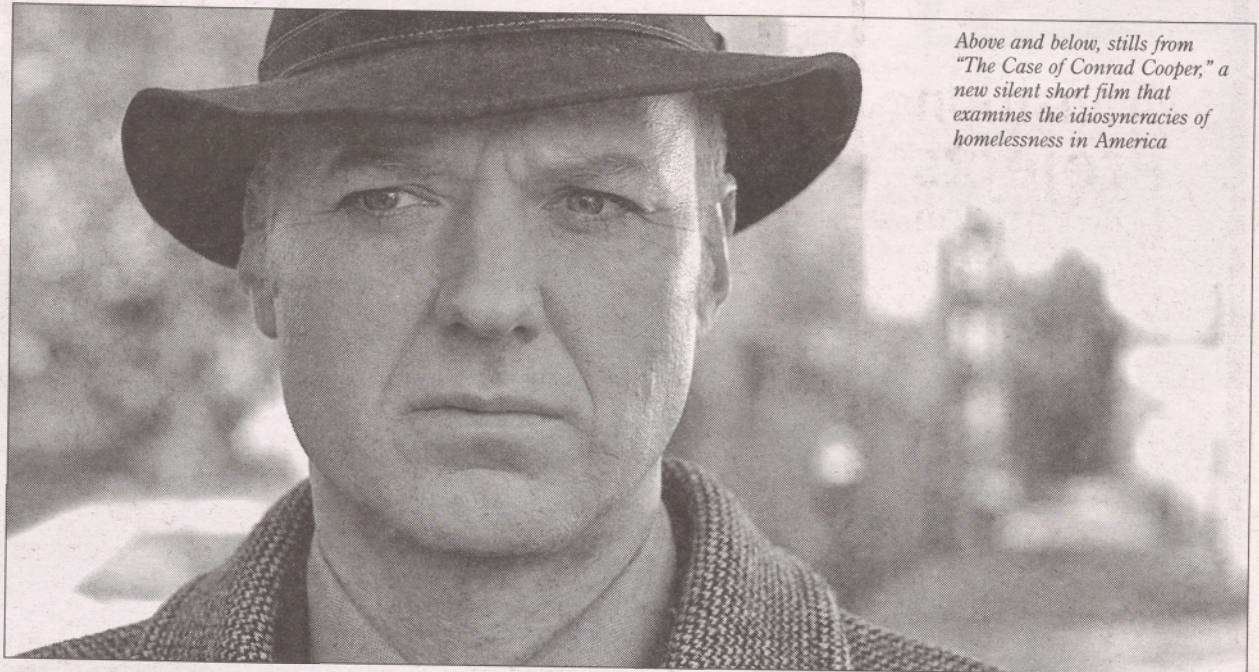
## For the RECORD

A compilation of facts, large and small, about our community

- Number of breweries in Portland: 53
- Number of barrels of beer Oregon breweries brewed in 2012: 1.3 million
- Number of signatures on the online petition asking the U.S. government to deport Justin Bieber: 261,412
- Percentage of children from the ages of 2-5 in 2009 and 2010 considered overweight: 26
- Percent of U.S. teenagers who reported experiencing "extreme stress" during the school year: 27
- Average student debt among the 60 percent of college students graduated in 2012 with student loans: \$26,500
- Percentage of Americans who owned their own house in 2012: 63.9
- Percentage of Americans age 5 and older who spoke a language other than English at home in 2012: 21
- Percentage of American Indians and Alaska Natives living in poverty in 2012: 29.1
- Percentage of the population living in poverty in 2012: 15.9
- Number of female veterans in the U.S. in 2012: 1.6 million
- Percentage of Oregon's Millennial generation population (people aged 16-30) who volunteer: 27.9
- Percentage of U.S. energy that comes from renewable sources: 13
- Oregon high school graduation rate in 2010: 76.3

Percentage of American households who lacked access to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members in 2012: 14.5

Water Footprint Network; Oregon Brewer's Guild; [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov); American University; College Board; U.S. Census Bureau; Corporation for National and Community Service; International Energy Agency; Institute of Education Sciences; United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service



Above and below, stills from "The Case of Conrad Cooper," a new silent short film that examines the idiosyncracies of homelessness in America

## Film illuminates middle-class homelessness

*"The Case of Conrad Cooper", a short-film set in L.A., focuses on the growing number of people who have lost their homes and now live out of their car*

BY BIRGIT RUMPEL  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Is it possible to imagine a "beautiful" film about homelessness? When it comes to films about this particular topic, we are only really familiar with reports or documentaries, perhaps with blurred faces, even filmed with a hidden camera. The imagery in them shows the superficial aspects of a reality, as nobody wants to see them. As a result, viewers change the channel or turn the television off; the public is desensitized to it rather than moved by it. An extraordinary film project, which is being presented at international festivals this month, shows that it doesn't have to be like that: it's called "The Case of Conrad Cooper."

One sunny morning in a U.S. suburb: a typical newspaper boy on his bicycle, an elderly lady in her dressing gown enjoying a coffee on the veranda. We see a close-up of somebody getting ready for the day; he scrapes off shaving foam, adjusts his tie, pockets some change and then finally glances at a solid gold pocket watch. Occasionally the camera pans over to a traditional family photograph. He carefully prepares a clarinet for playing. Only in the final, scrutinizing look in the shaving mirror do we see his face, before he goes out onto the street with his hat, coat and smart briefcase. This is Conrad Cooper.

In my mental cinema screen, he's an office worker on his way to work. But why the clarinet? Does he actually take it with him? He ambles through the streets, pauses briefly on a park bench, later sits down in a sidewalk café, and continues to wander through the streets once more. Something is strange. Silent encounters with passers-by, exchanged glances. Why is he wandering through the town so aimlessly when he's got to go to work. Hasn't he? Slowly I realize - he doesn't have a job at all anymore. He just acts as though he does to keep up appearances. Perhaps he's keeping it secret from his family.

Spoiler: The answer only comes at the end of the 15-minute short film. Conrad Cooper, whose daily routine we come to know in the film, is one of a growing number of homeless people who live in a car or trailer. This phenomenon caught the attention of the German producer of the

film, Mike Fuhrmann, when he was staying in Los Angeles in 2012 and he hasn't let go of it since. During a workshop for screenwriters he spoke about the topic with colleagues, and from this the idea emerged to make the invisible homeless visible.

Fuhrmann knew that, in addition to the clearly visible homeless people in the vast city on the Pacific, there were also a significant number of homeless people who wouldn't be recognized on the street. People who can no longer afford upkeep on their house or apartment don't live on the street at first, but instead live in their car. Many of them are not even unemployed; rather, they go to work every day, always trying to avoid their situation being revealed. "These are the effects of the financial and housing crisis in the United States, which long ago started effecting the middle classes," says Fuhrmann. "Almost everybody I had anything to do with in the U.S. either knew people in this situation or had gone through such a time themselves at some point. This raises the question of where the middle class goes once it has disappeared."

Fuhrmann and his fellow campaigners have devoted themselves fully to this issue, and have spoken to those affected and consulted initiatives that support homeless people. Through intensive networking, a core team of filmmakers became a complete, international film crew. Everybody involved works for the project on a volunteer basis, motivated by the enthusiasm. Nevertheless, production costs were incurred, of course, and the originally planned budget of \$10,000 did not last long. "But we didn't want to move away from our concept of making an artistically ambitious film that didn't look low-budget," explained Fuhrmann. This is clear from the perfect color coordination of sets, costumes and scenery, as well as the large number of carefully chosen details that you wouldn't normally expect in a short film. So far, 80% of the \$35,000 required in the end has been raised through private investors and fundraising via the internet.

The film was shot in October 2013 in Long Beach, Calif., and the post-editing, the final cut and the music are being finished off at the moment. It is a silent movie, in which glances, facial expressions and gestures replace dialogue, and the soundtrack



heightens emotions. "That is part of our idea. It means that the story works all over the world; after all, it is a global problem," says Fuhrmann, with conviction.

The film created a stir even during shooting. Two radio stations reported on it, which led to affected people frequently coming to the set to tell their stories. "That was very striking, particularly the story of a woman whose husband was murdered, whereupon she, pregnant, and with two small children, had to move out of the house. For weeks she lived with her children in the car and by night she would write about her desperation, from her soul and eventually she found a publisher for her story. With the proceeds she founded an initiative to support homeless women in Los Angeles," recounts Fuhrmann, still very moved.

In addition to the film, ideas emerged for other artistic projects to be carried out under the newly founded Make Art Make A Difference label, such as photo exhibitions, street art projects or a graphic novel. "My dream would be a road show through Europe with live music and campaigning," muses Fuhrmann.

Translated by Laura Jones. Street News Service

Have a favorite vendor? Let us know. We like to hear about the team's work, and we'll pass along the good word!