

Remembering Bruce

Bruce Heino, one of Street Roots' original vendors, passed away on July 6 after a long fight with cancer. What follows is a personal letter from one of his customers, who was by his side when he died.

When I moved to Portland, I felt really shaky and isolated. Bruce, my neighborhood Street Roots vendor, was a constant for me. I needed kindness and reliability, and Bruce was always there. The most stable and steady person I knew in Portland turned out to be my Street Roots guy.

Over the past six years, we got to be friends. For five and a half of those years we didn't hang out much. We didn't know or care about how each other voted or the names of our first dogs. We didn't meet up for beers. We didn't talk about TV shows or swap books. We spent about 15 minutes a week together, talking about whatever was going on right then and there — talking about what was in the paper and talking about sports.

Bruce taught me a lot about sports and sports radio. He taught me about Portland etiquette and the way things worked. He introduced me to the Street Roots family and invited me in. He met my family and friends who went grocery shopping with me. He seemed to remember everything I ever told him, everyone he met with me and every issue of the paper I ever bought.

Mostly, he taught me about relationships. He taught me about warmth and welcoming, kindness and empathy. He taught me about just being present and paying attention. He was always there and always kind. He sold me papers.

Sometimes I'd cook him some special homemade food, sometimes I'd give him a good tip. I didn't care what he spent his money on, and he didn't care where my money came from. We were friends.

My other friends might wonder about our relationship and say he was "just" my Street Roots vendor. I knew better. Bruce made a big difference in my life and the lives of

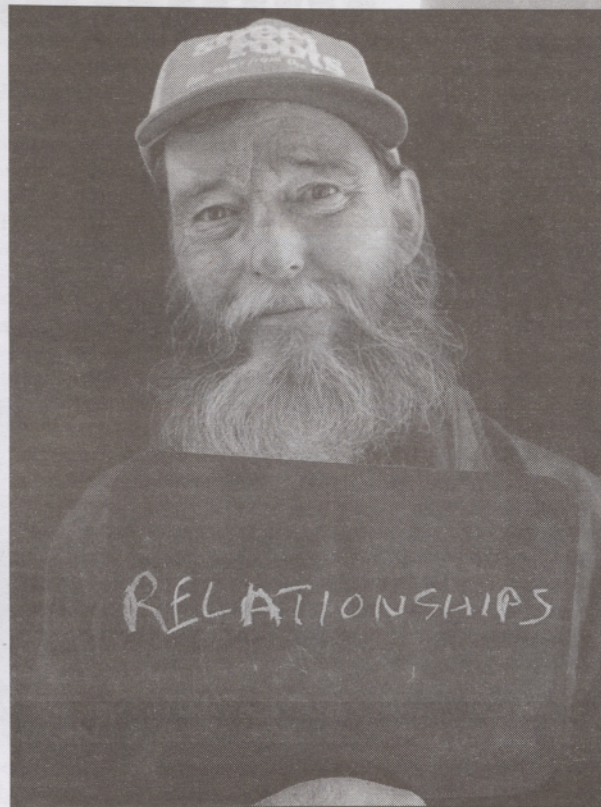


PHOTO BY ISRAEL BAYER

others.

When he got sick and needed a little extra help, he reached out to me. I got to spend a lot more time with him when he was sick. That's when I got to know him a little bit better. I still don't know how he voted or the name of his first dog, but I do know that I miss him.

It's comforting for me to know you all and to be part of the Street Roots family. I wonder how many other vendors make the kind of difference in somebody's life that Bruce made in mine. I'm sure it's a lot.

Thanks for the memories, Bruce, and thank you to Street Roots.

Stacey Heath

Street Roots reader and supporter

Fond memories from readers

"I was so sorry to hear he had lost his battle with cancer and had a challenging life. For years I bought his papers and chatted with him about the headlines, the weather, the latest political silliness. He turned me into a Street Roots supporter and allowed me to see the value of having a job to do and keeping in touch with people."

—Alida Rol

"So sorry to hear about the passing of Bruce. I used to look forward to my Saturday shopping. I learned more about life in talking to Bruce for 15 minutes a weekend than I ever learned in college. What a wonderful, insightful dude."

—M. Nels Johnson

"I knew Bruce back when he used to sell the paper outside Nature's on Division and 30th years and years ago. At the time, I was writing the occasional column and story for the paper and Bruce would often give me feedback and encouragement. I stopped seeing him when he moved to Northeast, but my wife would see him and he'd often tell her to tell me 'hello.' It was a simple thing, but I valued it. RIP, Bruce and thanks for the friendship."

—Pete Lewis

"Fly free, Bruce, your relationships were as important to those that knew you as they were to you."

—Jessica Inman

"I also met Bruce when he was selling outside Natures on Division. He was such a kind person, and I so valued that he would remember me and recognize me. He sold there sometimes with Art, the poet. I saw Bruce a few years ago on the bus, and it was nice to catch up. Thanks, Street Roots, for everything you do always, but especially today for sharing this news and giving us an opportunity to celebrate Bruce's kindness."

—Eliza Elkins Canty-Jones

"He was always such a kind person. Quiet and understated but lovely."

—Maura Cooney

"This breaks my heart. Bruce was so well-versed in community needs and activities. I always enjoyed conversations with him. RIP, Bruce. You will be missed."

—Barbara Patten Cooney

"I also used to buy my paper from Bruce outside of Natures on Division, back in the day. What a kind man and gentle soul."

—Jane Briesemeister Lewis

Street Roots will hold a vigil in Bruce's memory at 9 a.m. Saturday, July 25, at New Seasons on Northeast 33rd Avenue and Killingsworth Street.

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