

REAY, from page 4

look "homeless."

Mark Reay: I call it my "well-dressed man" disguise. We're very aware of the people we see on the street or on the subway, but a lot of homelessness is hidden. How many people are couch-surfing or staying in a hostel? I know a woman who sleeps in her car. Being a tall, healthy, white male gives me a lot more breaks. People aren't suspicious when I'm crawling about on a rooftop at 2 o'clock in the morning.

S.M.: How did you end up in a situation where sleeping on a roof was your best option?

M.R.: Perhaps my mistake was to narrow down my career path to modeling, acting and photography — three professions that have a highly improbable success rate. But in today's economy, with so much insecurity and a lack of affordable housing, so many people are living paycheck to paycheck. You could be a lawyer or an accountant or a salesperson in a store, and in two or three months you might very well be in the situation I found myself in.

S.M.: Lots of people face the choice of following their dreams or taking a job that will make them a living.

M.R.: Right. I have no idea how I could make a living in a cheaper area. My family lives in the countryside, and there's absolutely no need for a model, an actor or a photographer out there. I am prepared to make sacrifices in order to be in the city I love.

S.M.: Is the money and glamour of the fashion world just a myth?

M.R.: I managed to achieve one of my goals and live in Europe for eight years. Even if it was hand-to-mouth, it was still a wonderful experience to learn about art, pick up languages and eat good food. When I was in Milan, there was a guy who had to sneak out of the apartments the models lived in because he couldn't even afford that. He started sleeping in Parco Sempione. The next thing you know, he landed a \$30,000 Scotch ad, which answered a lot of his problems.

S.M.: The way you look and dress projects a certain image. Is that something you picked up from your modeling days?

M.R.: My modeling background taught me a sense of style. When I started, I was not fashionable, except for being a devotee of the English punk and New Wave scene. Just a side note, I was backstage with Bono one time. I thought I would love to talk to him but had nothing to say, then I looked down and I was wearing a 15-year-old Buzzcocks T-shirt. I went up to him and said: "Hey, remember them?" He said: "Oh man, I remember telling the band when we were young, 'Let's send it to the moon like the Buzzcocks do!'" Getting back to your question, in the acting world, I realized my type is ironically a successful, powerful person because that is the opinion people have when they see me on the street.

S.M.: Yes, the wealthy silver fox?



PHOTOS COURTESY SCHATZI PRODUCTIONS/FILMHAUS FILMS

"I'm prepared to make sacrifices in order to be in the city I love," Mark Reay says.



Mark Reay, at "home," living a rooftop in New York City.

M.R.: If you saw me on the beach in a bathing suit, most people would probably think that guy has a nice job — I bet his life is really interesting and good. My life is really interesting and good, but not financially so.

S.M.: It reinforces the idea that it is never wise to judge a book by its cover.

M.R.: Right, categorizing. Everyone's life story is interesting if told properly. Speaking of books, there are two I found myself connecting to that you may know — Henry Miller's "Tropic of Cancer" and George Orwell's "Down and Out in London and Paris." I see how they struggled in their artistic endeavour. Not that I'm comparing myself to these great artists; my pursuits aren't anywhere near as lofty.

S.M.: "Down and Out" shows that times change but issues such as homelessness remain the same.

M.R.: It's like that old joke: What do you call a musician without a girlfriend? Homeless. Even when economic times are great, there are people who are pursuing their passion and are not finding artistic success.

S.M.: Crime and addiction often accompany homelessness. How did you avoid that?

M.R.: There's also mental illness. Depression is sometimes a good sign. If you're depressed, it might be a message — hey, maybe I need to change my lifestyle. At one point, I felt very bleak towards the world and my existence: Why don't I have a career, why am I not supporting myself, why am I not even having a regular sex life? I started getting angry and detached. Then one day, I said to myself: Mark, you have felt lost since the minute you stepped out of university. You've had trouble having romance — just give up on that being in your future. Within a few months, I became calm and much more content. It's definitely not a recipe for success, but it was a recipe for survival.

A lot of advice is about how to live your dreams, but a lot of people struggle just to make it through day-to-day life. That's how I felt. And I live by that philosophy even now. I really don't expect good things to happen to me; I just expect things to happen to me.

S.M.: You've appeared in many films, but now there's a documentary all about you.

'Homme Less'

"Homme Less," a documentary about Mark Reay's life in New York City, premiered in August in New York. Learn more about the film at homme-less.com.

M.R.: In movie-speak, it's a story about a man who has a lust for life but is lost in life, a struggle to live in the city he loves and a struggle to live with himself.

S.M.: How have things changed since making "Homme Less"?

M.R.: Today, my net worth is \$20. I had to borrow a razor at the YMCA last night for an interview today. People say go out and buy one, it costs a buck or two, but generally you can't buy one; you have to buy a pack. That could be lunch or dinner for me.

S.M.: But you are not living on a roof anymore, are you?

M.R.: No, but to tell you the truth, I wish I still had that option. I liked keeping money in my pocket rather than my landlord's. People living on the street are so vulnerable. I was safe. No one was going to beat me up, urinate on me, set me on fire. I always felt secure — other than climbing out on a ledge, of course. It's awkward seeing someone on the street asking for money. I want to help, but I'm just as broke. I'm a great believer in the best way to aid homeless people is through organizations rather than through direct donations.

S.M.: Do you still feel lost in life?

M.R.: After making the film, I have to say I'm reinvigorated in terms of pursuing my work. I'm not lost anymore. I can see a few faint signs leading towards home.

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