

# A day at the movies

*Street Roots vendors and their pets gather for a screening of "A Street Cat Named Bob," a story that resonates with people on the streets with four-legged companions of their own*

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Pets are always welcome at the Street Roots vendor office, but on this particular Wednesday at the close of business, the animals are taking over. There's a floofy black feline by the name of Mr. Beauregard wandering as far as his red leash will let him – much to the growling consternation of Dude, another black cat who is cocooned inside a blanket on a lap. Nearby, a dog named J.J. lolls on the floor, curious but unperturbed by the meows. Less impressed by all of this activity is Ms. Holly Jolly Hanesy – "Ms H" for short – who chooses to keep her elegantly grey-furred self inside the red wagon-mounted carrier she shares with her more adventurous brother (who also goes by "Mr. B").

The occasion is a Netflix screening of the British film "A Street Cat Named Bob," which is based on the true story of James Bowen, a former vendor of the U.K. street newspaper The Big Issue, and Bob, who, well – is a cat. A pretty special cat, mind you: the full title of Bowen's best-selling

memoir about busking, homelessness, addiction and recovery was "A Street Cat Named Bob: And How He Saved My Life." The little ginger fellow even plays himself, assisted by a half-dozen formally trained cats, while James is played by Luke Treadaway, who is also formally trained (he's best-known for his roles in the National Theatre productions of War Horse and The

Curious Incident of the Dog in Night-Time). Our animal menagerie gathered around a computer monitor with their humans, all of whom are Street Roots vendors. Mr. B and Ms. H are kept in food and litter by Loretta Shirley Horn and her husband, Andy; the lap that Dude calls home belongs to Mistie Shaw, and J.J. can be found selling papers in the Pearl District with Rick Phillips.

A Street Cat Named Bob is a predictably feel-good movie that still has a bit of grit in its depiction of drugs, poverty, the street and social services. James is just coming out of homelessness and into subsidized housing and a methadone program when he meets the ragged, injured Bob, who turns up in his flat one night. "One night," is also how long James swears the cat will stay, much to the amusement of the vendors watching the film.

"It always starts with one night!" Loretta said.

She and Andy were occasionally crashing at Loretta's sister's in California when they came upon an abandoned black cat who turned out to be pregnant. Mr. B and Ms. H were two of the kittens, and they spent the first months of their lives as van cats. "Have you ever seen that shirt that said, 'who rescued whom?'" said Loretta. "That was us."

The bond between James and Bob will be recognizable to any animal lover. One of the first things James has to do is take Bob to the vet, where he's immediately faced with the choice of either paying for his own food or paying for the cat's care. Whatever one's job or housing situation, everyone with a pet can relate to that. In James' case, he has nothing but a £20 note that his estranged father slipped him on the street. It goes to kitty antibiotics.

"It's kind of cool that he's like, 'Oh, it's not my cat, it's not my cat,' and then he's like paying all these bills for the cat," said Mistie. "I wish more people were like that. I think a lot of people find a stray cat or a

Rick, who lost his previous canine companion, Randy, in 2015. "He worked here too." (See the July 3, 2015 issue of Street Roots).

Rick originally got Randy for emotional support after both his parents died, and credits Randy and J.J. with keeping his life stable. "I've lived in the same apartment for 12 years now," he said. "[Before], I'd only last two years. The dog keeps me out of trouble. If I were to go to jail or anything, I'd lose him."

J.J. never barks, but he wants to be around his person 24 hours a day, and also wants constant petting, which Street Roots readers around Powell's and Whole Foods are happy to provide.

"He's part of the neighborhood," said Rick. "If they're having a bad day, it changes their day. People look forward to seeing him. I know some of my sales are more than they should be. They give me extra money: 'This is for JJ!' They buy him treats all the time."

This phenomenon is also on display in "A Street Cat Named Bob." When James began

See MOVIE, page 5

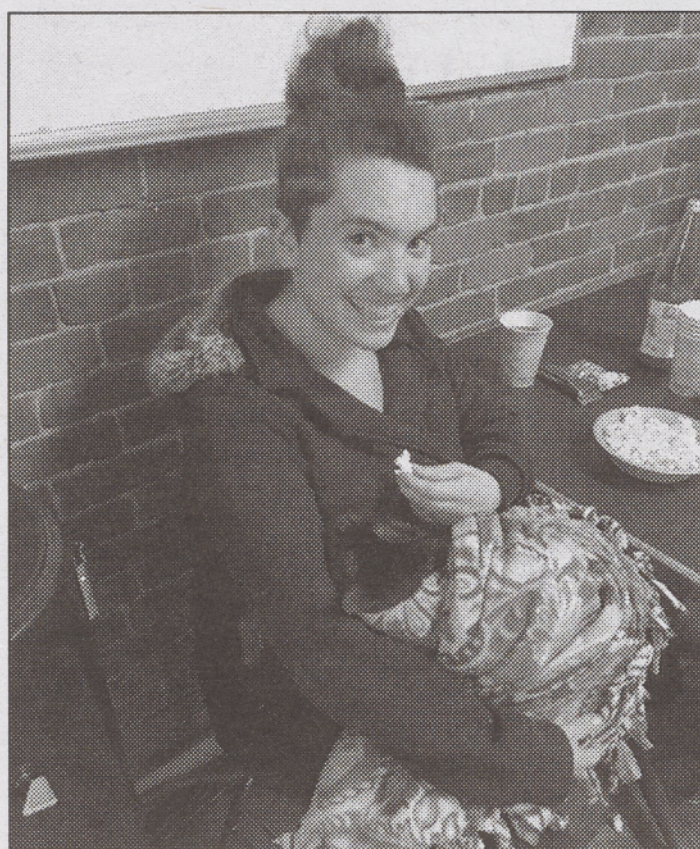


PHOTO BY COLE MERKEL

*Mistie Shaw and her cat Dude snack popcorn before the movie, which was shown in the Street Roots office.*



*J.J., a second chance dog from California, was rescued by Street Roots vendor Rick Phillips, who credits J.J. with keeping his life stable.*