



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMES BOWEN/A STREET CAT NAMED BOB



PHOTO BY COLE MERKEL

Above, Bob, the street cat, accompanies his partner James Bowen busking in England. At right, Street Roots vendor Loretta, with Mr. B and Ms. H, her kittens.

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selling The Big Issue, customers would gravitate to Bob, as much for photos (with cameras not smartphones, it was 2007) as to buy a paper. In the movie, this initially backfires on James, after a well-wisher insists on giving him money for a paper near another vendor's "patch" (at Street Roots, it's called "turf"). This gets James and Bob suspended for a month.

As the movie plays, Dude continues to hiss whenever Mr. B attempts to touch him, but it turns out his real nemesis is onscreen. Every time Bob meows in the movie, Dude lets out a fearsome noise, perhaps because he can't see or smell this mysterious other creature.

"You know you're yowling at a cat on the TV?" Mistie teased.

Mistie suffers from hip dysplasia and is often in a motorized wheelchair or using a walker. Just as Bob spent most of his time selling papers from James' neck and shoulders, Dude stays close to her. "He loves riding on my chest," she said. When she's moving around town in the wheelchair, he gets strapped in on her lap.

Over the course of the film, Mistie and Loretta also exchange cat-on-a-leash tips, while Mistie wonders how James was able to get Bob to embrace a certain sartorial touch that would be just as appropriate in Portland as it is in London.

"I don't know how he got his cat to wear scarves!" she said. "I've tried."

Mistie and her husband are still going through what James, did, battling to get drug-free, sheltered and employed. Like James and Bob in the movie, Mistie and Dude have also experienced judgmental pushback.

"They're like, 'well, do you think it's good to have him out here?,' and I'm like, 'what do you mean by that?,'" Mistie said.

"And they're like, 'well, you're homeless.' So? He wouldn't rather be anywhere besides my lap.

"I feel like the houseless people treat their pets with more respect than anybody who has a house," Mistie continues. "People that live on the street spend damn near 24/7 with their pets. People who have a house, have a job, have so much stuff going on in their life, they maybe spend nine to 12 hours."

Mistie's first dollar selling papers always goes to Dude, and he knows it. "First sale, he's looking at me like, 'OK, are we going to go get that food now?,'" she said. They also rely on pet food banks like Pixie Project. The Sunday Potluck in the Park at O'Bryant Square provides feline

vittles.

Before the movie ends, Rick correctly predicts the final act: he figures that James gets clean, gets discovered, and then makes up with his family. The "discovery" comes via an article in The Big Issue and a meeting with some literary agents. Then, in the film's climactic reconciliation scene, James' father (played by Buffy the Vampire Slayer's Anthony Head) refers to Bob as "my grandson."

"Sweet," Mistie said, while Loretta chuckles softly. She and Andy are not on speaking terms with one of their grown children, so it's a moment that hits home.

In real life, Bowen has used his moment in the spotlight to promote the work of nonprofits, including street papers, for the work they did to support his recovery.

"What Bob the Cat did for James, he gave him hope, and family – a connection," Loretta said. "And I think that's what our cats have done for us. They have as much rescued us. They've given us a sense of joy. We're a team."

"It's the best thing," said Rick of animal companionship. "They need loving. I need loving. So it works out."



PHOTO BY DIMITRI KOUTSOMYTIS

**James Bowen, the real-life vendor from "A Street Cat Named Bob" says the movie doesn't dwell on the darkest times of his life, but focuses on the impact that support – from a cat or otherwise – can have.**

**"Children and teens see this kind of social problems, like drug addiction and homelessness, in the real world. The story of Bob and me is a way to explain to these youngsters how such situations arise."**

**This has also influenced how the film ends.**

**"We chose to focus on change," said Bowen. "That change is possible, even when it looks quite hopeless. All you need is someone who believes in you and supports you. Who helps you back on your feet and does not lose faith in you when you stumble along the way.**

**"And I'm not only talking about Bob. If it weren't for voluntary organizations, street papers and hostels for the homeless, I would probably have died before even meeting Bob. The change that took place back then was that, instead of just existing, just surviving, I really had a life. That is why I devote much of my time to charitable causes. I want to give back to all those organizations and people who contributed to me being here today."**

— EVEN SKYRUD  
EXCERPTED FROM STREET ROOTS' SISTER  
PAPER EQUAL OSLO IN NORWAY.