

Arts

Like many people in Victoria, Bruce Saunders has regular encounters with our city's street-involved population. As the man behind the Movie Monday screening series, he sees a lot of homeless people come through his doors—and as a gardener downtown, he sees a lot of them hanging out on the streets.

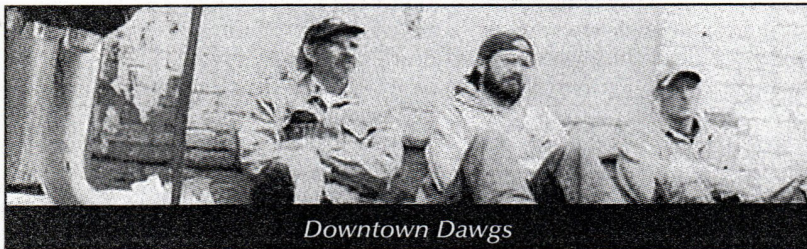
"It makes me really curious to know what is happening with people and what the solutions might be," he says. "It's all around us and nobody seems to be able to get a grasp on it. Either you ignore it completely or you throw up your hands. So it's interesting to see what other communities' experiences are."

And his Homeless Films and Forums event this weekend will do just that, with films from cities like New York, Santa Monica and Toronto covering topics like tent cities, wet housing and homeless soccer. Several of the filmmakers—as well as people who work with the homeless, such as the City of Vancouver's tenant assistant program coordinator, Judy Graves—will be available for post-screening discussions, whether in person or via telephone.

Saunders says he was a bit surprised to see just how many films there were to choose from.

Lens on the Street

It's raining *Cats* and *Dawgs* at Movie Monday's Homeless Films and Forums



Downtown Dawgs

"When you start looking on the internet and you start connecting with filmmakers and people start submitting films, you realize how many there are," he says.

Also surprising is the diversity of the films. The weekend starts with a screening of *Cats of Mirikitani*, a film about an elderly Japanese man on the streets of New York City who ekes out a living selling his art. The filmmaker decides to take him in and get him off the streets and, in the process, learns about the man's amazing history. Saunders says it was a film that Judy Graves recommended to him, and Graves has nothing but the utmost praise for the doc.

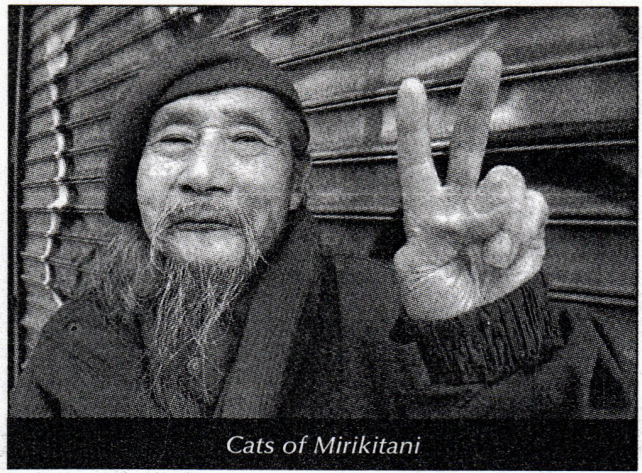
"I don't think anyone would want to go through their whole life without seeing this movie, it is that good," she says. A pretty strong statement, given Graves' work with Vancouver's street community. "It is so personal and the documentary maker really shared herself in this. You can feel the strain and the annoyance of having this guy in her house, but she follows right through on it anyway."

Graves says it's this one-on-one approach that is going to get results when dealing with homelessness—and she should know. Graves works directly on the streets to get people housed, often within 24 hours.

"Not everybody is going to be taking people home, but certainly the friendly involvement, I believe, is the only way out of the street," she says.

Graves is also a member of Vancouver

Homeless Films and Forums
Saturday-Monday, January 24-26
Eric Martin Pavillion, 1900-block Fort
By Donation • moviemonday.ca



Cats of Mirikitani

mayor Gregor Robertson's new Homeless Emergency Action Team, which she describes as a "post-advocacy" group that is focused on action. She says the 13-member task force was able to get four shelters set up and occupied in under a month.

"For homeless people, that's the only thing that really works for them," she says of the action approach. "You can't realistically put them on wait lists, because homeless people, god bless them, but they aren't going to be home when you come back to find them. So you just do it."

Cats of Mirikitani is just one of the films Graves will be discussing over the course of the weekend. It's her second visit to Movie Monday, and Saunders says her perspective is an important one.

"She can just lay down statements that people really have to believe, because she's out there behind dumpsters talking to people all of the time," he says.

Another film that will be screening is *Downtown Dawgs*, a documentary about a team's journey to the Homeless World Cup of soccer, which has been happening since 2003. Saunders says the film is both entertaining and inspirational.

"It gives insight into how people rise to the occasion if they are given the chance," he says. "I rose to the occasion myself when I was offered the theatre and I've been doing it for 15 years. A lot of people

just need a chance like that."

Of particular interest to many in Victoria is the program on tent cities, a hot-button topic in Mile Zero as of late. The Sunday event is more of a discussion than a screening, with a short film being shown followed by a presentation by photographer Pete Rockwell and tent-city advocate Chris Johnson, plus a look at Portland's Tent City Toolkit as well as other examples.

"[Johnson] is looking at ways to do a process like this that will be temporary and it will work for the people who want to stay in that kind of accommodation, but it will also work for the community," says Saunders. "I don't know if they will be able to achieve that, but it will be really interesting to hear what they have to say about how people can possibly get their heads around the idea of having a tent city happen."

But not only is the wide range of films and topics important, the diversity within the audience is vital as well.

"Bruce uniquely shows his movies to a very diverse audience and there is lots of room for discussion afterwards," Graves says. "People who wouldn't normally be listening to each other actually get to hear each other and share experiences."

Let's hope the shared experiences leads to some viable solutions.

—Amanda Farrell