Student provides homeless a voice

HOLLYWOOD NORTH |

Something to Eat will show this weekend at Firehall Centre

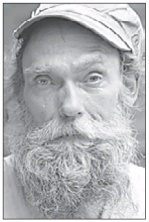
BY RANDY SHORE
VANCOUVER SUN

No one chooses to be homeless, but some do choose to sleep outdoors, particularly when the alternative is assault, robbery, rape or murder in one of the Downtown Eastside's notorious single resident rooms.

If you haven't given much thought to what it would be like to fall so far that you can't get up on your own, you can catch up in a hurry by watching the new mini-doc Something to Eat, a Place to Sleep & Someone who Gives a Damn.

This spare little production by marketing exec-turned-Langara film student Les Merson and corporate photographer Ken Villeneuve turns statistics into real people. They laugh and cry and they tell their stories.

Among the most deadly hazards of life on the street are the middle class drunks, who are known to attack the homeless with baseball bats, slash them with knives or set them on fire with lighter fluid as they sleep.



From Something to Eat

"It's why you rarely see anybody in the street who zips up their sleeping bag," explains housing advocate Judy Graves. "It's because they need to be able to escape."

A self-described Kitsilano yuppie, Merson at 52 took action to change his family's values by changing his career path.

"My kids were coming home and calling homeless people the bogeyman and they were afraid of them," Merson said. "I wanted to change that."

Merson makes copies of the DVD available free to schools, governments and community organizations in a kind of one-man campaign to change people's perception about homelessness. He has given away 350 copies to date.

"I'm not sure that people really understand who homeless people are and what their issues are," Merson said. "I really wanted to give a voice to the homeless."

Something to Eat will screen this weekend as part of the Canada International Film Festival. All the films are showing at the Firehall Arts Centre, 280 East Cordova.

Other highlights:

■ A Line in the Sand is director Jeffrey Chernov's story of a homeless man living rough in New York City. Sunday, 11:05 a.m.

■ In Vivid Detail is Canadian filmmaker Dara Bratt's short film about a man who suffers from a rare condition that makes him incapable of recognizing faces and his struggle to maintain a romantic relationship. Sunday, 4:50 p.m.

For full festival information go to www.canadafilmfestival.com

rshore@vancouversun.com