



Broke.

A new film by
Rosie Dransfeld



Alberta Motion Picture Industry Association

May 2, 2009

Award for Best Documentary

Hot Docs International Documentary Festival, Toronto

May 4, 2009

Official Selection Canadian Spectrum

Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival

Nominated for best documentary

RDMI, Montreal

Global Visions Film Festival, Edmonton

Calgary International Film Festival

Broke.

Canada, 2009. RT: 77'13"

Have you ever been broke? Not just penniless but so chronically broke that nobody will lend you money anymore, neither banks nor friends or family? That's when you become desperate enough to do business at a pawnshop, the bank of the poor.

For the down-and-out residents of Edmonton's grim and unforgiving inner city, pawnbroker **David Woolfson** is one of these bankers of last resort.

A grouchy old Jewish immigrant from South Africa with a mushy heart, Woolfson has been running his business for nearly 16 years. Not that he needs to. It's just that, if he were stuck at home he would go mad. And he truly does enjoy his store's customers - most of them regulars - people full of wit and black humour. Poverty has taught them many survival skills.

One day, **Chris Hoard**, ex-convict and self-described psychopath, shows up and offers his help. Hoard is a hardened and cynical young Native man filled with pain and rage after a childhood of abuse at the hands of an adoptive white family. He begins to spend his days just hanging around the shop. Before long, he finds himself being put to work doing odd jobs - cleaning, shelving and tagging goods - albeit for free. As Woolfson slyly states, "It's a sweet deal for me."

An unlikely friendship develops. The pawnbroker enjoys Hoard's sharp intelligence and witty humour. And Hoard is learning a lot along the way, not just how to run a pawnshop, but about life itself. However, he has his own luggage to carry, and it is wearing him down.

Broke. is a complex, powerful cinéma vérité style account of the day to day life in a pawnshop. The documentary gives us an intimate glimpse into a world most of us do not have to know and many of us refuse to acknowledge. Although often funny and surprising, the film bluntly points to the hardships and desperation of the marginalized. As the pawnbroker states: "You don't see it in your rarefied living conditions, you don't see how the poor people live, unless you come here. Tragic some of it."

Broke. was filmed entirely in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Produced, directed and written by **Rosie Dransfeld**, Broke. is produced by ID: Productions Inc., in association with TVO, Knowledge: and SCN. The director of photography was **Sergio Olivares**, the editor was **Scott Parker** and **Louis Sedmak** and **Van Wilmott** composed the music. The documentary was produced with the participation of the Canadian Television Fund: License Fee Program, Telefilm Canada: Equity Investment Program, with the participation of The Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit and produced with the assistance of the Alberta Film Development Program Of the Alberta Government.

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Broke. – About the Production

Recently we have born witness to the collapse of money markets, an almost constant weekly decline in the Dow Jones Average and around the world we are on a steady watch as once-secure investments depreciate to the point where many people are alarmed for their own financial security.

There is an old story often told of how you can cheer up someone by pointing out another person less fortunate than he or she is, saying, “Look – it could be worse; you could be that person!” Of course, you could then go to the person you just pointed out and do the exact same thing and point out another person less fortunate than they are. Eventually however, at some point you would discover someone who was so desolate and in such dire need that you couldn’t find anyone in a worse predicament.

In all likelihood this is a person who visits a pawnshop.

“The poor are not treated as equal citizens, but rather dealt with as a dysfunctional entity.” These are the words of documentary filmmaker Rosie Dransfeld, and they speak to the Edmonton-based director’s fearlessness of opening the door to worlds we know about, but that many would rather not face.

Through her films Dransfeld tells the stories of ordinary people stuck in the lunacy of everyday life, and in her latest feature-length documentary, *Broke.*, she invites us to take a glimpse into a world inhabited by those who many normally ignore and turn away from. You are invited to enter a world many choose not to acknowledge.

The scene for the film is set in A-1 Trading, one of Edmonton’s inner city pawnshops. Owner David Woolfson is a banker of last resort—the only option many of his customers have.

Filmed in *cinéma vérité* style over the course of four weeks, *Broke.* observes one pawnbroker’s day-to-day encounters with his customers and his unlikely companionship with the man who offers his help for free - an ex-convict and self-proclaimed psychopath, Chris Hoard.

But *Broke.* is not just a casual observation of the different people who regularly frequent A-1Trading. Out of the over eighty hours of captured footage Dransfeld has been able to extract unique stories from the lives of Woolfson’s customers. Individual dramas abound, and are told in a way that enables us to better understand the nature of what unfolds in the universe of the pawnshop, where the pawnbroker is king.

Shooting the production in such a short time frame allowed Dransfeld to focus on several of the same characters. By capturing the same individuals time and time again, she provides the opportunity for the viewers to familiarize themselves with each character’s personal situation.

Broke. captures the complexity of friendship and human connection, poverty and desperation. It's a microcosm into the exploration of what the filmmaker calls, "The forced banking choice of the poor."

"I am appalled by how the poor are too often stigmatized as losers," says Dransfeld. "Poverty really leaves people with no choices. It's a vicious circle."

Broke. allows us to experience this world of poverty, hardship, addiction and desperation.

Surprisingly there are often humorous moments that surface from the desolation.

The documentary is also a film that, in light of our current economic recession, is a "Relevant depiction of what many more people are susceptible to experiencing today," says Dransfeld.

The inspiration for Broke. came from Dransfeld's brief, yet deeply affecting encounter with a young Aboriginal man who walked his dogs in the same River Valley park where Dransfeld walked hers. "Most people in the park avoided him, since he looked like a 'bum', one of these hopeless addicts, surrounded by a bunch of vicious dogs," she explains.

But when their dogs started to play together, she and the man began to talk. During their conversations, he explained how his dogs were the best things to ever happen to him, and how he was giving up drugs so that he could be a better person for them.

Unfortunately, when Dransfeld saw the man again a few months later, he was intoxicated and without his dogs. He told her he was forced to vacate his home because he couldn't afford the 40 percent rent hike. Without having a home for them, the man was also forced to give up his dogs, and in doing so may have lost his motivation to stay clean.

His situation resonated with Dransfeld as a relevant topic worth exploring.

"I never saw him again, but his story stayed with me. I became more sensitized around poverty issues, talked to many people on the streets, in the shelters. I learned about the rather frustrating fight for affordable housing," she says. "And so when I started thinking about making a film about poverty, I asked myself, *where would I go if I were broke?*"

From this, Dransfeld developed the idea of the pawnshop setting, the last refuge for the poor and the desperate: the bank of last resort.

Out of the 60-plus pawnshops located in Alberta's capital city of Edmonton, Dransfeld chose A-1 Trading to set the scene for the film because of David Woolfson, the 76-year-old owner who runs the store.

"I run a legitimate business," says Woolfson. "I help people who are desperate. And I make money off them, sure I do! My wife is not happy about the business. She says I'm making money from the poor...where else are they going to get money? It's their friendly pawnbroker they come to!"

Dransfeld and her team were deeply affected by the making of the film. For many of them, this was a first time encounter with poverty and its effects. For the entire production team who captured the footage in the pawnshop - Dransfeld and her cinematographer and sound

recorder – they found themselves torn between liking and disliking Woolfson as he went about his daily business which constantly had him dealing with the poorest people of the city.

Cinematographer Sergio Olivares put in over eighty hours going out on his own to capture the perfect shots of the pawnshop's inner city environment. His tireless dedication helped produce a powerful visual landscape.

Editor Scott Parker's ability to dig into all of the raw footage and pull from it something both poignant and relevant was exceptional. "I don't think he ever had to work so hard with any of my material before," says Dransfeld. "It was one of the most difficult films to edit, because we had the camera rolling the entire time, just trying to observe the world of the pawnshop."

Together, musical creators Louis Sedmark and Van Wilmott spent many hours composing, playing and recording all original music for the film. "I was truly touched the first time I heard what they created," explains Dransfeld. "It was beautiful and fitting."

"This film has been an amazing team effort," she adds. "A very satisfying creative process."

Broke. – About the Filmmaker

ROSIE DRANSFELD – Director, writer, producer

In a body of work that includes more than 300 short films and numerous documentaries, German-born producer/filmmaker/writer Rosie Dransfeld searches for 'the truth behind the curtain,' "My stories invite the viewer to take another look at reality, balancing on a thin line between laughter and tears."

Her satirical take on life is deeply rooted. Dransfeld grew up in Oerrel, a small town situated in the midst of Germany's biggest military base. French, British and American soldiers were camping in front of her parents' house all year around.

Every morning she had to rush through their camps on her way to school, overwhelmed by the stink of their boots. When she didn't get to the main street before 7:30am she had to wait for the never-ending row of tanks to roll by, and she was late for school, again. "I lived in a surreal, totally absurd world back then. No wonder I acquired a taste for satire after so many years."

After working for the well-established satirical magazine Extra Dry, she focused on feature stories and documentaries as a TV-journalist, director/producer/writer and host for 6 years at NDR Hamburg, a subsidiary of ARD, one of the largest public TV stations in Europe.

In 1997, she made her award-winning documentary "Im Keller der Hauptstadt," about the forbidden world of bunkers, tunnels and caves under Berlin.

After moving to Canada, she has written, directed and produced documentaries for the CBC and CBC Newsworld. "Beaverman," an National Film Board of Canada production and "Mothers of Courage," co-produced with the NFB, aired on CBC Newsworld's "The Lens" in 2002 and 2003. Another CBC production, "Crash Course Alberta," was part of the documentary series that won a Gemini Award in 2003.

Since then Dransfeld has produced two documentaries for German television (ARD). And for Life Network, she was the writer for "X-Weighted," a 13-part documentary series, the follow up of the Gemini Award winning series. "Taking it Off."

In 2006 Dransfeld wrote, directed and produced "Bosses," a one-hour documentary, and in 2007 she did the same for the feature "The Dogwalker," another NFB co-production, which, in 2008, won two Alberta Film and Television Awards for best documentary and best director.

After the completion of Broke., in association with TVO and Knowledge, Dransfeld is in development with the documentary series "Home Movies – Changing Times" for OMNI Television.

In her free time, Dransfeld is serving on the boards of DOC National and the Alberta chapter, where she concentrates on lobbying.

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Broke. – About the Pawnbroker

DAVID WOOLFSON – Owner and operator of A-1 Trading

David Woolfson was born in Zimbabwe and started working in sales at the age of 16, after his father passed away. In his early 20's, Woolfson married Anne, his wife of 50 years. Shortly after they married, the couple moved to South Africa where they had four children.

While living in South Africa, Woolfson ran various hardware stores, and along the way decided to open his own pawnshop in Johannesburg.

Once their children were grown, three of them immigrated to Canada. The couple followed suit shortly afterwards and settled in Edmonton, Alberta where they still reside today.

Woolfson opened A-1 Trading shortly after his arrival in Canada, and has been running the shop for nearly 16 years. "There's no other pawnbroker like me in the country, as far as I'm concerned," he proudly exclaims in the film. Woolfson also says that the moment he stops working he'll "Die from boredom."

Broke. – About pawnshops

Pawnshops and pawnbroking have been around for thousands of years. The basic idea behind any pawnshop is to loan people money. For those who are uninformed as to how this type of business operates, here is a brief primer -

1) A person brings in something they own and give it to the pawnbroker as collateral for a loan. This act is referred to as pawning.

2) The pawnbroker loans the person an amount of money against that collateral. Most often the cash he offers is nowhere near the actual value of the item being pawned. A receipt ticket is given to the person who then has usually 30 days (at A-1 Trading it is 60 days) to bring the ticket back with repayment for the loan. The repayment includes a hefty interest charge. When the repayment is made the collateral is returned.

3) If the loan is not repaid in the allotted time (30 or 60 days) then the pawnbroker keeps the collateral and puts it up for sale in his pawnshop, usually for much more than the amount of money he initially loaned to the owner who brought the collateral in.

That is how pawnshops operate and this is where the poor go to pawn often valuable and sentimental items that see them get only a fraction of their actual worth in return. But if they are in need of money and cannot acquire some cash any other way this is often the last resort for many.

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Broke. – The Credits

Writer, Director, Producer **ROSIE DRANSFELD**
Commissioning Editor, TVO **JANE JANKOVIC**
Director of Photography **SERGIO OLIVARES**
Editor **SCOTT PARKER, PICTURE ENGINE**
Music Composition **LOUIS SEDMAK**
..... **VAN WILMOTT**
Sound Design **BLACKMAN PRODUCTIONS**
Production Manager **ROSIE DRANSFELD**
Additional Camera **MIKE OUELLETTE**
Still Photographer **DUSTIN DELF, Laughing Dog Photography**
Sound Recordists **CAREY OPPER**
..... **AHLEY CHUGG**
..... **PHILIP DRANSFELD**
Production Assistant **ELIANE VIENS-SYNNOTT**
..... **PHILIP DRANSFELD**
Video Post Production **PRESTO! DIGITAL COLOURGRADE**
On-line Editor **JOE OWENS**
Independent Production Officer, TVO **LINDA FONG**
With our thanks to **DAVID WOOLFSON**
..... **AND ALL THE GREAT PEOPLE AT A1 TRADING**

A Broke Films Production
Produced in association with TVO and Knowledge: and SCN

Shot on location in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

ID: Productions Inc.

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