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Broke. – a timely film about financial survival through the bank of last resort – opens at the 2009 Vancouver International Film Festival

**VANCOUVER, SEPTEMBER 2009** – For the down-and-out residents of Edmonton’s grim and unforgiving inner city, the **AI Trading** pawnshop is the bank of the poor. And pawnbroker David Woolfson, a banker of last resort.

“I run a legitimate business. I help people who are desperate and I make money off them. Sure I do,” says Woolfson. “My wife is not happy about the business I’m in. She says I’m making money from the poor.”

**Broke.** the complex, powerful cinéma vérité story of the daily life of an inner city pawn shop – world premiered at Toronto’s 2009 Hot Docs to rave reviews and opens October 8<sup>th</sup> at the 28<sup>th</sup> annual Vancouver International Film Festival.

Liz Braun of the Toronto Sun called **Broke.** one of the highlights of the Canadian Spectrum portion of Hot Docs. Jesse Wentz, CBC Radio movie columnist, says, “*This is a fabulous film. Among the best documentaries I’ve seen this year.*” And IndieWIRE reviewer Basil Tsiokos calls **Broke.** one of the best documentaries to focus on subjects who are often marginalized by society.

At the corner of a busy Edmonton intersection, the pawnshop does a brisk trade. A compulsive spender, Dorothy regularly pawns her jewellery and sewing machine for \$500 credit. Addicted to crack, Davey trades his mother’s porcelain and never buys it back. An elderly woman exchanges her wedding ring for \$60 to buy food. And an unemployed dad pawns his work tools to borrow cash to get by.

“Pawning is when people bring goods in to borrow money on them,” Woolfson explains. “But some of them can’t stay away. It’s a way of life. An expensive way of life. Because paying the interest of a pawnshop is not cheap.”

In these tough economic times, more and more people know what it’s like to wonder how to make ends meet. Called “*an uncompromising and disturbing vérité masterpiece,*” by Hot Docs programmer Lynn Fernie, **Broke.** takes us into the drama of a world – at times darkly funny and surprising – of what it sometimes takes to survive.

Issues of economics and ethnicity intersect and often clash, in this slice-of-life feature portrait of Woolfson, a gruff Jewish immigrant from South Africa with a big heart, his cynical but humorous Aboriginal assistant Chris Hoard and their customers, many of them regulars with wit and self-survival skills.

Dransfeld’s films tell the stories of ordinary people stuck in the lunacy of everyday life. The inspiration for **Broke.** came from Dransfeld’s brief but memorable encounter with a young Aboriginal man who walked his dogs in the same River Valley park where Dransfeld walked hers.

"I learned about his 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?*" Dransfeld visited many pawnbrokers while researching her film, but found her central character in Woolfson, a complex, difficult man with a big heart who would challenge audiences emotionally.

**Broke.** was produced, directed and written by Dransfeld, a German-born producer/filmmaker/writer based in Edmonton who has produced a body of work that includes more than 300 short films and numerous documentaries. Dransfeld searches for 'the truth behind the curtain' in her documentary work.

"My stories invite the viewer to take another look at reality, balancing on a thin line between laughter and tears."

**Broke.** is produced by ID: Productions Inc., in association with TVO, Knowledge: and SCN. Shot by Sergio Olivares, **Broke.** was edited by Scott Parker, with music by Louis Sedmak and Van Wilmott. 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.

**Screenings:**

Thursday, Oct. 8 @ 7 pm

Saturday, Oct. 10 @ 1.30 pm

Venues to be announced: [www.viff.org](http://www.viff.org)

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For more information and to view the film trailer visit: [www.idproductions.ca](http://www.idproductions.ca)



2009 OFFICIAL SELECTION  
**hotdocs**  
OUTSPOKEN. OUTSTANDING.

# 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

**Opening night Gala**

Global Visions Film Festival, Edmonton

**Festival Screenings**

Vancouver International Film Festival, Vancity Theatre Oct 8, Pacific Cinematheque Oct 10

Calgary International Film Festival, Oct. 1, Cineplex

Boston Jewish Film Festival

One World IFF, Prague

Montreal Human Rights Film Festival

RIDM - Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montréal

Rendez Vous with Madness Film Festival, Toronto

Atlanta Jewish Film Festival

Have you ever been broke? Not just penniless but so chronically broke that nobody will lend you money anymore, neither banks, friends nor 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.

"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?"

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 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 - for free.

An unlikely friendship develops. The pawnbroker enjoys Hoard's sharp intelligence and quick wit. And Hoard is learning a lot along the way, not just how to run a pawnshop, but about life itself.

Broke. is a complex, powerful cinéma vérité style account of day to day life in a pawnshop. Although often darkly funny and surprising, this documentary provides an intimate and often uncomfortable look into the world of the most economically 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.

## Making the Documentary

Recently we seen 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 that next person and point out yet 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.**

Dransfeld's films tell the stories of ordinary people stuck in the lunacy of everyday life, and in her latest feature-length documentary, *Broke.*, she invites us into a world inhabited by those who are struggling to find a few dollars for their next meal or rent cheque.

"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."

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.

*Broke.* captures the complexity of humour, 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."

The documentary comes close to home in these economic times and provides an uncomfortable depiction of what many people are susceptible to experiencing today, says Dransfeld.

**The inspiration for *Broke.* came from the filmmaker'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. He explained that his dogs were the best thing to ever happen to him and that 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.

"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 frustrating fight for affordable housing," she says.

***"So when I started thinking about making a film about poverty, I asked myself, where would I go if I were broke?"***

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

“I was searching for a complex character, somebody who would challenge the audience emotionally. Then a friend of mine, Gillian Horwitz, a very active South African Jew, mentioned David Woolfson. I met him ... and was intrigued. What a difficult, complex man. I knew he would be good for this film.”

Dransfeld and her team were deeply affected by the making of the film. 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.”

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

## **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,” a 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.

## **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 uninitiated 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.

## 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**

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