

## WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD

Since last May I have been on an incredible journey, it has taken me along a route that I have never been on before, seeing first hand how a young woman copes with life as a heroin user, and prostitute.

When I first met Lou during May 2007, it was the first time I had spoken to someone who was living and working on the streets of Ipswich. I was not sure what to expect, and what my reaction might be! We had arranged to meet at a café in Ipswich. Lou arrived, with a couple of friends; one had previously been a street worker, the other - a best friend, drug user, and prostitute...

I asked Lou if she was happy for me to produce a documentary about her, to help her make a fresh start. I said, "it's not going to be easy, and it will not happen overnight". I had set out in my mind a number of objectives, but how could I achieve this single-handed. Accommodation was at the top of my list as Lou was living in an electricity cupboard on the streets. Drugs were also a major concern. I had not realised how difficult this would be to tackle and I needed somehow to get a better understanding of how drugs can take such a hold, with a force so strong as to drive a young woman on to the streets.

People's perceptions of Lou seemed judgmental, and yet I discovered that Lou had potential that had gone unnoticed.... She is a young woman, with an interest in art and history; we have spent many an afternoon visiting art galleries, enjoying afternoon tea sitting in the sun; these interests just run alongside her world on the streets, most nights.

I have often asked myself the question; is it really possible to know Lou? We live in very different worlds, but this has not stopped me from learning about her life, the streets she works, and her colourful use of words! The people she knows who have always accepted me, and my questions. It is a compliment to Lou that she has been able to survive for 8 years, experiencing overdoses, prison, heroin, and her children being taken away from her.

During the Summer months when I was helping Lou to try and make some changes to her life, she started to have a structure to her day, and I started to notice a change in her appearance, her speech, her visits to the streets became less.

Lou now has a flat of her own, furniture provided by local companies, who were just happy to help, a local health club where she can spend some leisure time whenever she wants to. Lou also has a place open for her at a centre for graphics and IT courses – although Lou has not turned up for the course, they are happy for her to go at any time.

A New Year has dawned, and I wonder if she is coping with her new found independence of having her own flat, keeping up with the bills, - are drugs still forcing her on to the dangerous streets – that are her world? Does she seem lost again, has her expression changed from the brighter person who started to emerge? Only Lou knows the answer!

I have not seen Lou since October - I have tried to keep in touch, but she wants to get on with her life, as any young woman does.

It is now January 2008, and the trial for the murders of Lou's friends is about to begin. The journalists will be out in force again; watching out for Lou, with cash ready and waiting.

My final thoughts are that I feel it has been a privilege that Lou has let me be part of her world, and I hope that I have shown her that there is another life out there, that it is possible to change, and maybe one day when she has left drugs behind her, she can give up the streets, and have what she said she wanted, a more normal life... I hope so...

Since *'Where Angels Fear' to Tread* was broadcast, Lou tried to cope with life in her new flat. She was later arrested during a Police undercover drugs operation and sentenced to a period of time in prison.

Lou has now moved to another area and we have met for coffee and continued our conversation as if we had always kept in touch. I have not had any contact since so I hope that everything is going well for her.

Written by Frances Harper in January 2008  
*'WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD' was broadcast on BBC East*