

## INTRODUCTION:

**1973:** (Age 18): My husband disappeared when our child was born (mainly) because we had **nowhere** to live. **The Local Authority labelled me 'intentionally homeless'** when my ("wealthy," acrimoniously divorced), parents refused to pay for a room in a Bed & Breakfast hotel, provided by the council's Homeless Families Unit.

For the next **15 years**, my child and I, were forced to move more than **250 times** from **inadequate, temporary, private** accommodation in **3 UK cities**. I was **unable** to find and **secure decent housing** as **subsequent Local Authority investigations** into my circumstances always concluded I was 'intentionally homeless' because of that **incorrect** label.

**1988:** I was **still homeless**. I was walking the streets and almost dead, when a squatter, who I did not know, kindly offered me a room in a big, semi-derelict house in Stamford Hill, north London, used as the local squatter's HQ. The floor-boards were rotten, there was a large pile of rubble and soot on the floor where a fireplace had once been. There was no electricity. But **this** was preferable to being outside and **unsheltered in the middle of winter**. I **gratefully** accepted the very kind offer. There was a (**clean!**) mattress on the floor. I wanted to just collapse and die, but not in **the gutter**.

When I opened my eyes again, 5, maybe 6 days later, it was twilight - the room had a weird orange glow due to the street light. I was surprised to see a small group of squatters huddled cross-legged on the floor on the other side of the room; they were just quietly chatting. To be polite (even though I am shy), I got up and went to sit with them. I smoke roll-ups, so when I looked down, I wasn't surprised to see **I was holding a 'Lucky Strike' match box in my hand**. But there was **only one match left!**

Not wanting to waste this (precious) match, to help overcome my embarrassment, **I stared at the box for ages, then I started carefully taking it apart, and putting it back together again, using different configurations**.

Pictures formed in my mind. I was trained in **fashion design** (I specialised in **Trend-forecasting**), so I realised I was **visualising** something. I sat very still and concentrated - until clear images came. I studied those images. And then I started **laughing**.

The squatters quickly turned their eyes towards me as if I had gone crazy. I told them what I had just been thinking about. They listened attentively to my explanation concerning how **life could be one day** (see: **Project it**). When I finished speaking, they just looked enquiringly at each other, and then they each indicated their **approval**, by nodding their head!

**"Do it for people like us,"** one of them said. **"Nobody is going to rescue us..."**

Our eyes met. Their faces spoke a thousand words... They were young (aged approx. 18 – 20 years), yet they looked worldly-**wise** and so... **beautiful**. I looked at our dirty jeans - our **holey** jumpers, the skin on their arms- smeared with grime...

I did not know any of these kids, but **something** happened to me in that room... Call it **love**, or empathy. I don't know exactly what **it** was, but I was over-whelmed by the **deepest** emotion I have ever felt! **I made a solemn oath**. I told them I would do everything I could, to help people like them.

A few weeks later, I received news that a chance meeting with a solicitor a few months previously, had enabled me to **overcome** my 'intentionally homeless' **label**.

**1989:** My child and I were "re-housed." We moved into a flat, in London...but I did not feel any joy or contentment. My experience of being **Homeless** for **over 15 years** had hurt me too deeply to allow me to 'just forget it.'

I had made a **commitment to those who are still suffering**, and I fully intend to **honour it**.