



in my own words

Introduction

In Our Own Words features work made by people at The Brick, during a series of workshops with artists Ciara Leeming and Amy Cecilia Leigh. Participants used photography and collage to explore the heritage of King Street and their own relationship with the town. The Brick supports people in the Wigan borough who have experienced homelessness or poverty. This work was funded by Streets Apart.

In association with:

From The Brick:

We are grateful to be part of this project and very pleased that people experiencing tough times and being supported by us with their transitions were given the opportunity to contribute. People who we walk alongside often tell us they feel unheard, so to be included has enabled individuals to explore their creativity and express their experiences in their own way and this is empowering for people.



- Kev

I'M 39

YEARS

OLD

I'VE LIVED

THE LIFE

BUT IT'S

BEEEN

A HARD LIFE



I'm 39 years old. I've lived the life but it's been a hard life. I never went to school and then, because I didn't go to school, I hung out with older people. When I was in school my behaviour wasn't great.

Growing up, my grandparents used to always tell me things but I didn't want to listen.

When I was 10 I was running with 14 year olds, and because I was smaller they used me for stealing things. They were telling me to get my mum's medication from the cupboards. And because I was with these people who used drugs, I started doing the same thing.

To start with it was just cannabis but it led onto other things. I realised I needed money for drugs and stole – not from shops, I've never shoplifted in my life – no, I stole whatever people left in their cars.

The first time I got into trouble with the police was when I was 11. My first offence was criminal damage on council property – I got a community based order. My second was attempted murder – I stabbed someone who had been bullying me for a long time. My relationship with my family broke down because of the drugs.

My drug use worsened when I was about 21. My relationship with my family broke down and I was living on the streets and from that point I was in the cycle of committing crime, going to prison and repeating. I think I've been to prison about 15 times now, maybe more. My longest sentence was four and a half years, and I did the full amount. But when I got released I was still homeless. My problems were still there. I had to go back to living the life, The only thing I knew. Yeah. And that was people who used drugs and everything else. I ended up back in prison.

I stay clean in prison. You go to prison to get off drugs, not to start, although you can get anything you want in prison. I struggled with Spice because as soon as I got introduced to it, I found it shut everything off. It shuts your brain off, all the stuff you're going through. It takes that away, and then when you do come around you feel better.

I WAS MENTALLY SICK OF IT

**My relationship with
my family broke down
because of the drugs.**

You don't feel anything, all the bad stuff disappears.

I've been getting these moments of wanting to change my ways for the past 10 years now. I was tired of it, as I'm sure most people are. I was mentally sick of it and needed to come off it, to get me looking better. But I struggled to make progress because I had nothing and was still on the streets. I would commit a crime and end up back in prison. It's a vicious cycle, always ending up back at square one.

People coming out onto the streets are going to end up straight back in crime because they need to survive.

You need a roof over your head in order to start moving forwards. Eventually I got introduced to the Brick and found somewhere to live through them. But then I ended up back in prison.

What was different this time was that I needed to change. I was told about the ABEN [A Bed for Every Night] scheme and moved from there to a hotel. Then I found out you could volunteer with the Brick. Actually, the person who told me that told me you could make money out of it by stealing items. As soon as I came down here though I knew I wouldn't want to steal from them, they're a charity which just wants to put a roof over people's heads and feed them.

One of the things which has made a difference is that I've kept myself busy. Basically, I've swapped a 24-hour drug habit for a job. Having an addiction is like having a job - it's not easy, you always have something to do, you're constantly thinking ahead, how you're going to get what you need that day.

Now I'm early in the morning and I'm normally one of the last ones to leave. Being at the Brick makes me feel better. I want to be helpful and do what they need.

When I had Covid at Christmas and had to take time off, I hated it. I was thinking what I could do to get rid of that feeling of boredom... I know I'm going to be in recovery for the rest of my life but I've come to the point now where I know 100 per cent that I will never go back to that life that I had before, because why the hell would I?

Why would I swap my mental health for that and put myself back to where I was a year ago? I wouldn't do that in a million years.

I'm completely different now, even though I speak the same as I did then. I don't think I have depression any more. I am still going through all this so can only tell it up to this point, but I feel there's a lot more to come. I know I can't get any happier than what I am now, because I'm pleased with what I've done. I'm making new friends and reconnecting with family. I think they're seeing me as Kev now, not just Kev the drug user. I know they're pleased to see me changing.

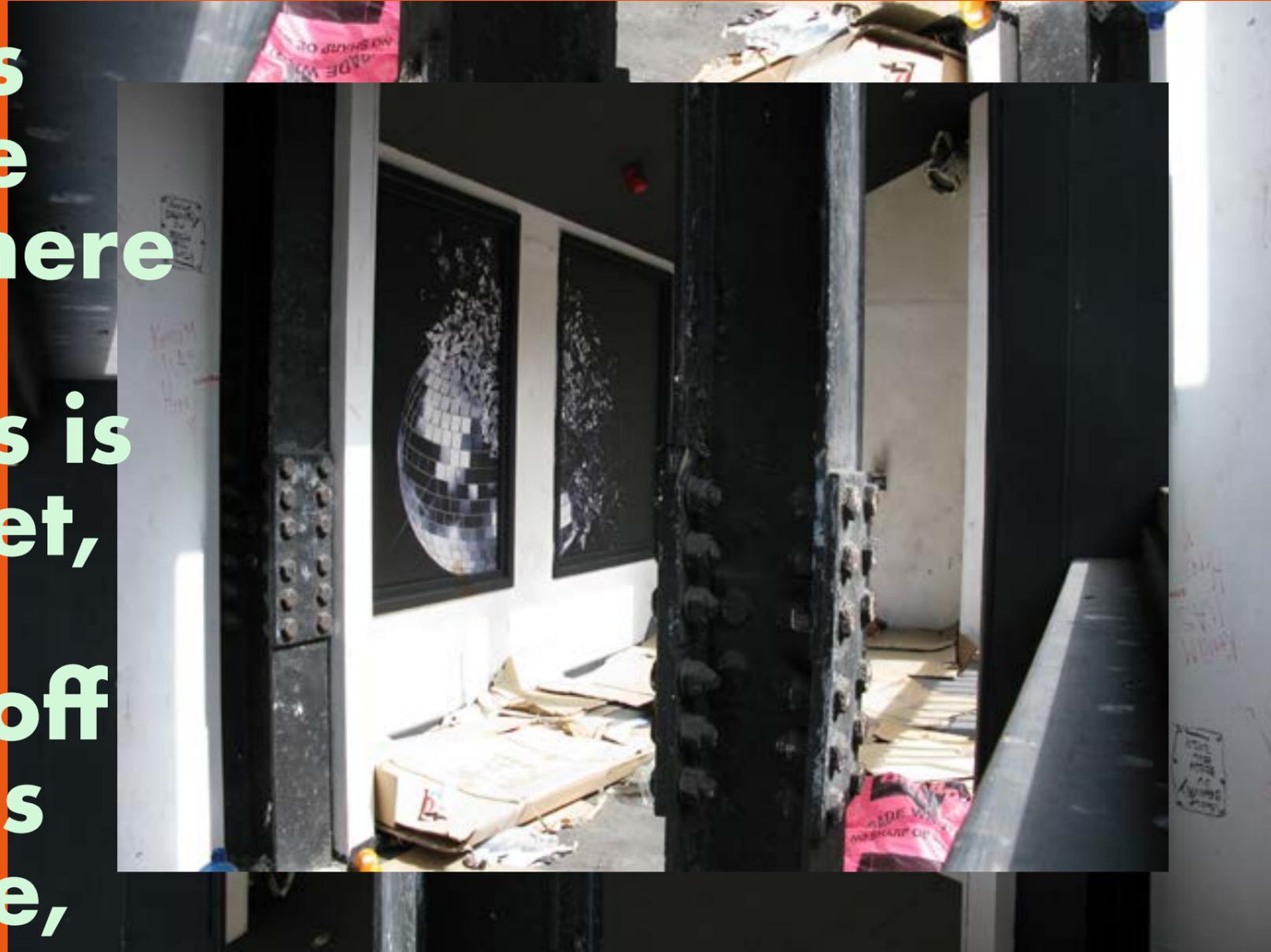
You don't
feel anything
all the
bad stuff
disappears

**Having an addiction
is like a
job**



1
The white building in this picture used to be the police station, but now it's the Premier Inn. The big red brick building is the courts. So this is where I spent a lot of my time – I'd be committing crime, then into the police station, followed by court and prison. When I got released, it would all repeat.

2
I ended up homeless and this is one of the places where I used to sleep. This is King Street, and it's guarded off by railings at the side, making it quite a safe area.



I wouldn't sleep there when King Street was busy at the weekends, I'd find somewhere quieter. There were other people who made money by begging but I've never begged. I would just disappear while they were begging and do my thing. It's about five years now since I've slept in that spot I'd say. There was an eviction from that spot a few years back. The last place I slept rough was near Pure, which is near the top of King Street.



3

This is just a picture of King Street, looking down. I lived on this street and also that white building at the bottom is the job centre, where I had to sign on. And the police station and courts are further down. So it's all in this area. A lot of rough sleepers will spend time in this area - if they sit there at night, people might feel sorry for them and give them a pizza.

4

**This is the job centre,
Brocol House. Even
when I was sleeping
rough I was signing
on. I used my mum's
address but if you're
classed as NFA [no
fixed abode] you are
required to sign on
every day.**



5

I've taken a picture of the train station because that's where I used to go to the toilet when I was homeless, and it's where I'd go for a wash. The staff were okay with it, as long as you behaved and didn't use the toilets for injecting or anything, they allowed us to use the facilities



6

This is Wallpaper Supplies in the image, but just behind this building is where I would go if I needed food. This was the Brick, and they would give us something we could eat there and then. They'd be able to give snack packs and things, tins of tuna, bread. You could make tuna butties and things. That used to be the drop in centre, where you could go for a shower in the morning. It was open on a Tuesday and a Thursday from 7am. That's what we had to do because there was no accommodation then but now we've got emergency accommodation.



7
This is just a picture of the train station but from a different angle. The entrance to King Street is off the edge of the image.

8
I'm trying to be a bit
artistic here!



9
This is Wigan Town Hall.
I spent some time living
on the steps during
lockdown but the offices
weren't open.



10
I volunteered
for the Brick
and now
work there
in a paid
position as
well. They've
helped me
become what
I am now.





Images taken on/near King Street by CF



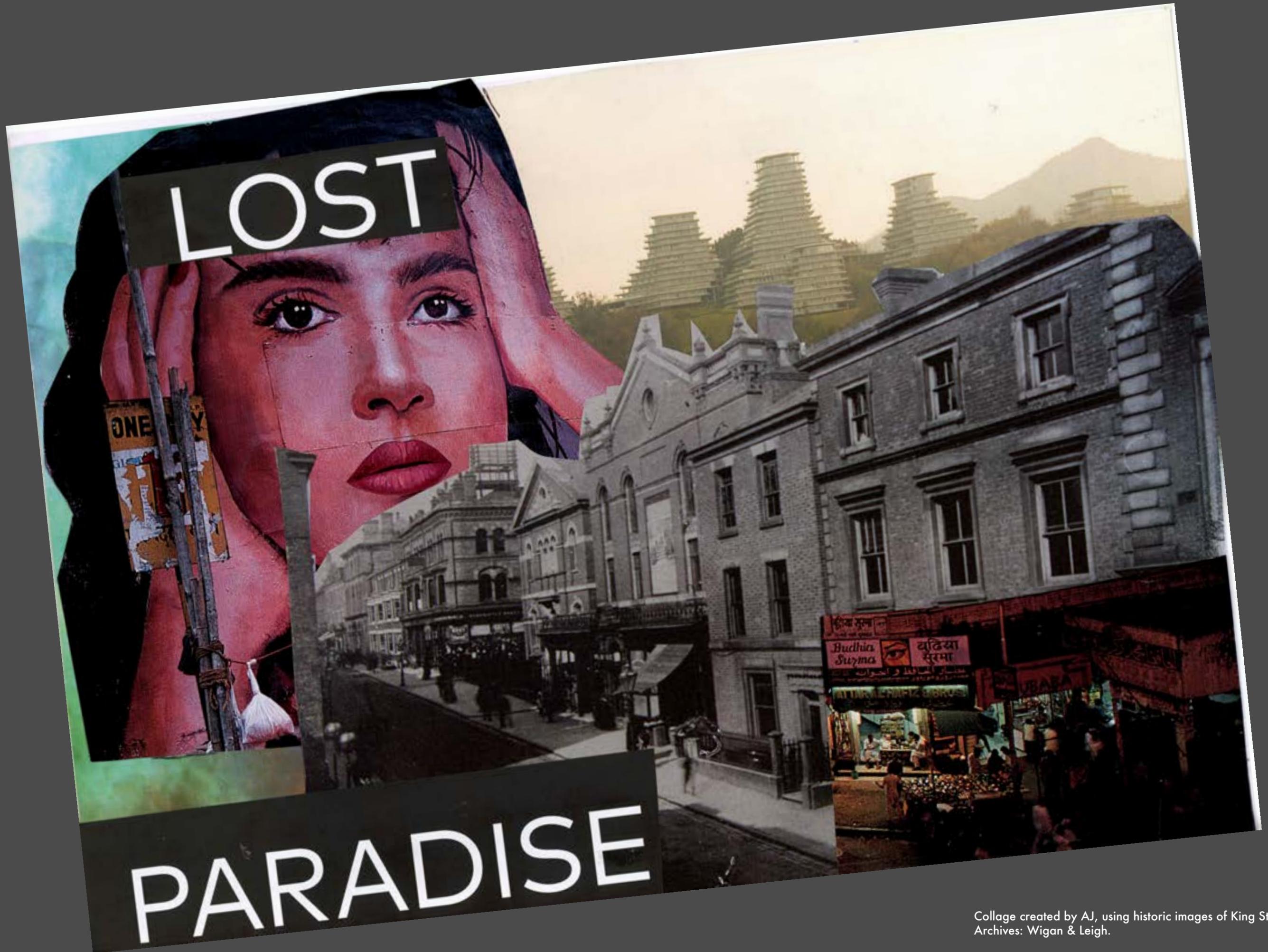




AJ



Collage created by AJ, using historic images of King Street.
Archives: Wigan & Leigh.



LOST

PARADISE

Collage created by AJ, using historic images of King Street. Archives: Wigan & Leigh.

Ciara says: "When I was looking for historic images of King Street, a few oddities caught my eye. Among the streetscapes and aerial photographs filed away in boxes at Wigan and Leigh Archives, were a handful of old police mugshots - which had been found when the old police courts on King Street were demolished. We don't know when they date from and are not using their subjects' names or faces due to this lack of context. But the images are visually interesting and I wanted to share them. Their presence among the King Street records chimed with some of the issues raised during this project - particularly for Kev, who tells his story in this zine."



King Street, Wigan, 1892
Archives: Wigan & Leigh.



Court Cinema, King Street, Wigan, 1973
Archives: Wigan & Leigh.



3. LIVING IN IBIZA

THAT MOMENT IN THE CAR WAS THE START OF ME BEING INTERESTED IN PHOTOGRAPHY AND IN CAPTURING COLOUR. THIS BECAME MY WAY OF DEALING WITH THE PAIN I WAS GOING THROUGH.

I STARTED TO MAKE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL, TAKING PHOTOS AT PENNINGTON FLASH AND ELSEWHERE AND EVENTUALLY I ENDED UP LIVING IN IBIZA, WHERE I TOOK 10,000 PICTURES. WHILE I WAS OVER THERE, IT FELT LIKE I WAS SURROUNDED BY SO MUCH COLOUR. I FOUND EVERYTHING SO BEAUTIFUL. I THINK IT'S A CERTAIN MINDSET, TO FIND BEAUTY WITHIN THE DARKNESS. THIS PHOTO OF IBIZA BAR REMINDS ME OF NEW BEGINNINGS AND OF OTHER OPPORTUNITIES JUST BEYOND THE HORIZON.

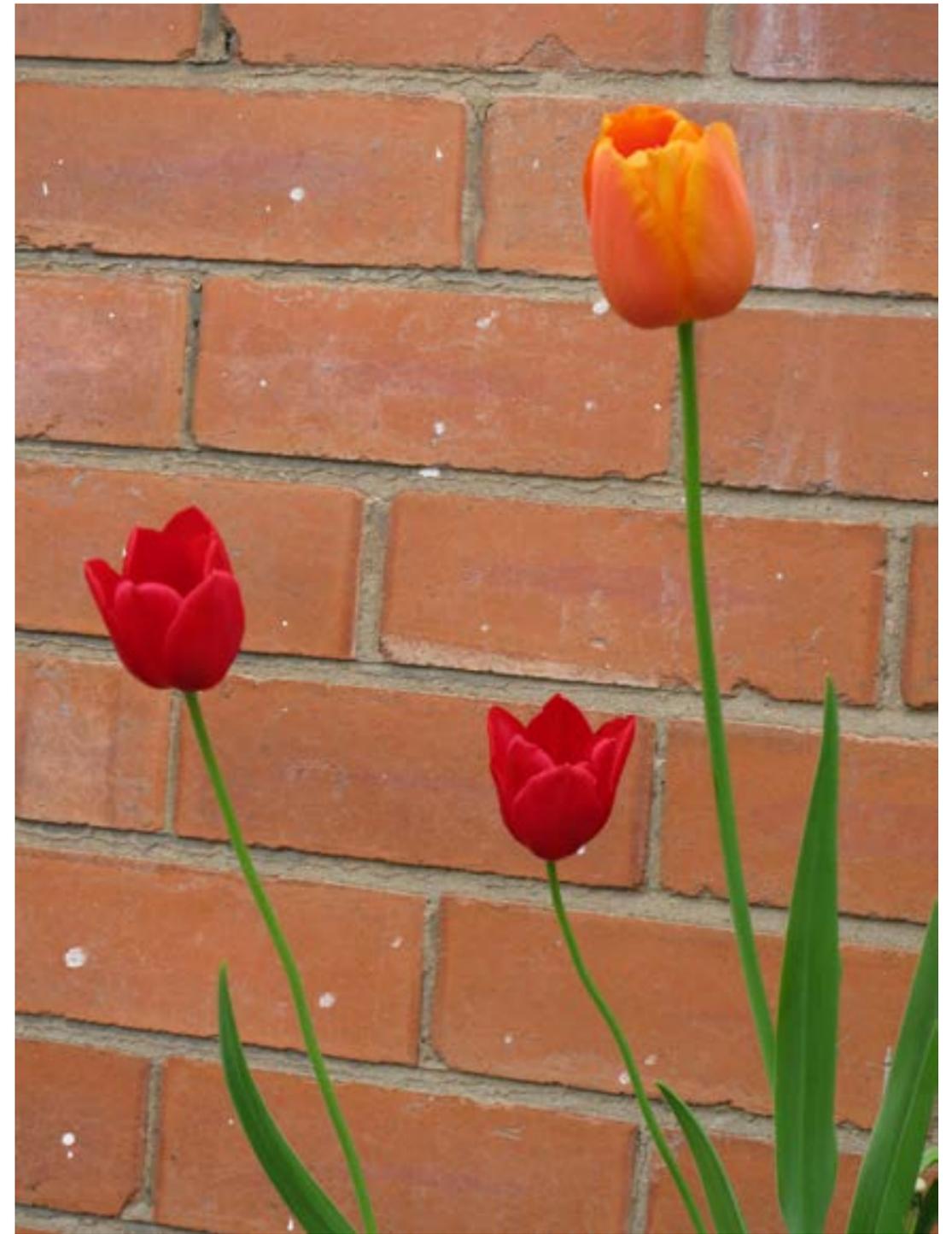


6. BRIGHT & BEAUTIFUL

I think this represents my childhood – nature and colours and looking for that pot of gold under the rainbow and the excitement of not knowing whether or not we would actually find it. No matter what was going on in my life, I would put that problem to one side and think: ‘No, I’m going to look for that pot of gold, or that rainbow.’

It represents simplicity, colour, nature, and everything bright and beautiful. I believe colours represent your mood.

On the day I became homeless, I was sitting in my car – crying – when I suddenly saw the most amazing sunset. I’d never seen one that vivid and bright. I took a photo and felt this new energy overtaking me. It was so beautiful and overwhelming, and showed me that even though I was in a dark place there was still beauty and positivity. It was like God had sent me a message.





*Out of darkness
you can walk into
something more
beautiful*

6.

A NEW BEGINNING

This photo also reminds me that out of darkness you can walk into something more beautiful - every door is a new beginning. In Ibiza there were so many different doors, all different shapes, sizes and colours, and this one reminds me of that time. I love colour.



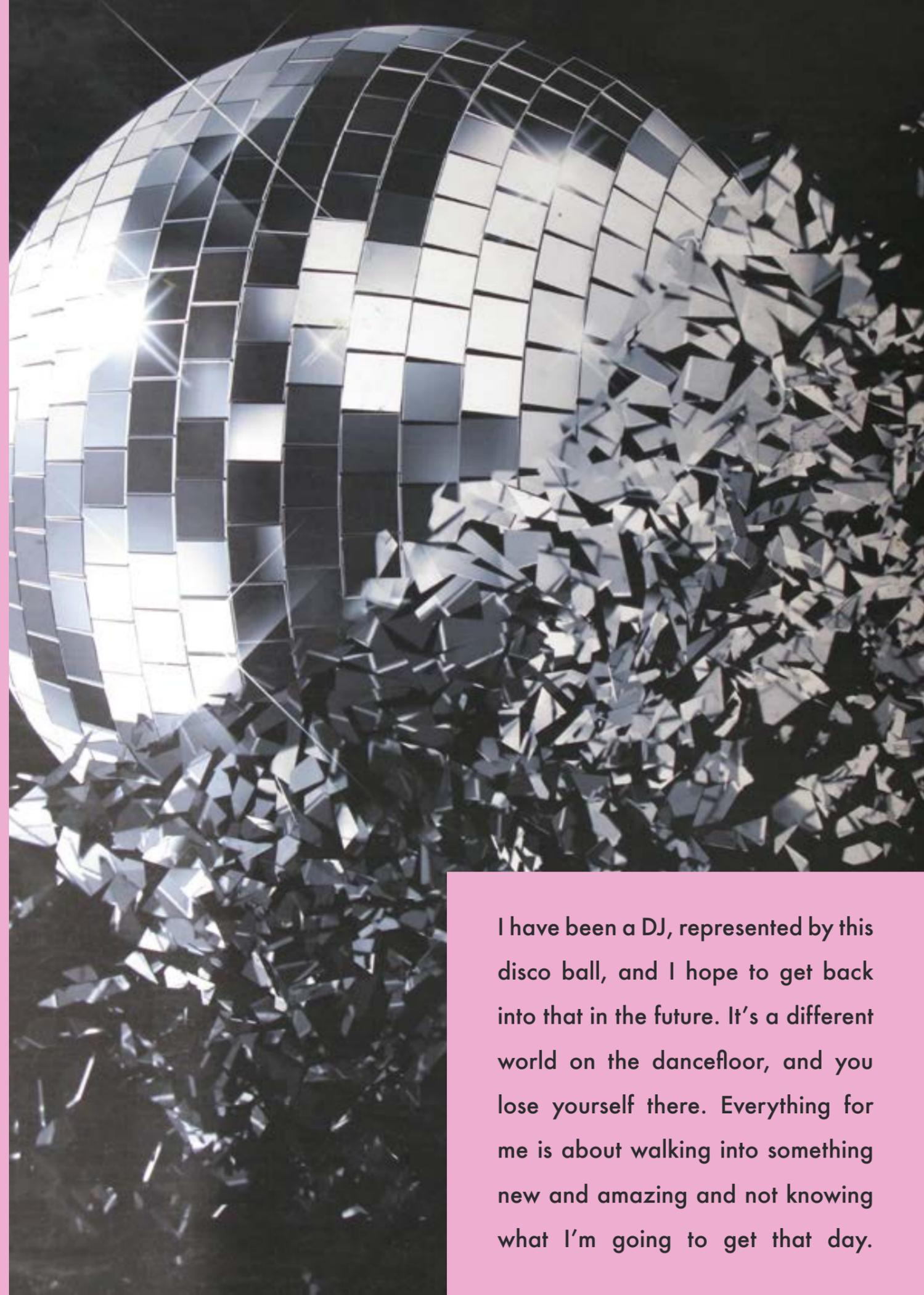
4. I ALSO LOVE MUSIC HISTORY.



Once you walk into a venue, there's the excitement of not knowing how the night is going to go. I think I'm quite an optimistic person, I've been like that since I was young. I was abused when I was six and had quite a traumatic childhood. But I was determined not to let that grind me down, and I created something out of it. I was a champion runner by the time I was eight years of age - I was unbeatable for about eight years. People used to ask me what my mum fed me, and I used to think: 'Rejection'. Every time I was rejected, it pushed me on to something amazing. I think I wanted someone to notice and say well done, but didn't really get that.

3. A DIFFERENT WORLD ON THE DANCE- FLOOR

I've been into music since I was eight years of age, all singing and dancing. I went through a lot of trauma as a kid and I wrapped myself up into music as my way of dealing with that.



I have been a DJ, represented by this disco ball, and I hope to get back into that in the future. It's a different world on the dancefloor, and you lose yourself there. Everything for me is about walking into something new and amazing and not knowing what I'm going to get that day.

2. FROM THE DARKNESS AND INTO THE LIGHT



I grew up in Golborne but spent a lot of time in the Wigan area, growing up. As a child I was surrounded by farms and would often wander off into the fields when I needed an escape. When I was about six, I got a brightly coloured bike as a birthday present. There had been a rainbow and my friend and I spent hours cycling around looking for the pot of gold. We were gone for hours and everyone had been looking for us. This photo represents a few things. It is about me walking into the unknown, not knowing what's around the corner. From the darkness and into the light. I travelled from Golborne to Wigan on the bus a lot and worked at Marble Arch Café when I was 15. I was pretty much the first one in and the last one out and was always asking if they had any overtime. This photo represents Wigan and me growing up.



For me this one is about shattered dreams. There's a bit of colour in there and a bit of darkness, the vertical railings as well – that's me being kept captive I think. And the shatter pattern is like me breaking through. Out of every crisis, any trauma, there's always something amazing – I can always break through it and see that rainbow, that colour at the end, the light at the end of the tunnel.



breaking through the glass

There's always excitement about what could happen next. I was made homeless in 2020, but would say that at the moment, I'm pretty much breaking through the glass and getting on track again. I'm building myself back up again and have lots of plans for the future.



Dawn

1-AM

IN MY



WORDS