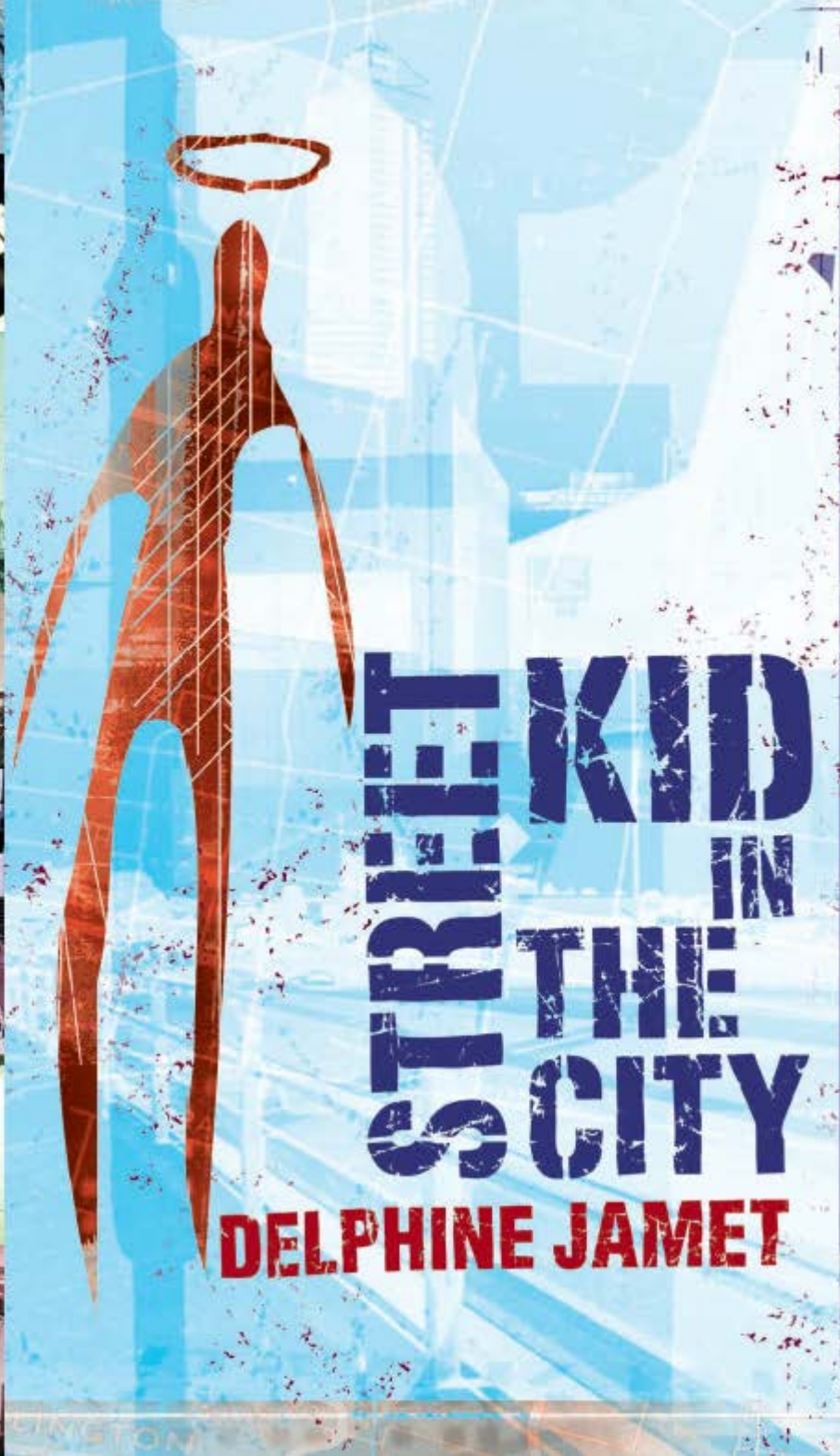


STREETKID IN THE CITY

DELPHINE JAMET

ALLEN & UNWIN



**STREETKID
IN
THE
CITY**

DELPHINE JAMET

WILMINGTON



Set in Perth, this book contains stories about streetkids, streeties, drugs, police, violence, detention centres and being a teen, as told to the author.

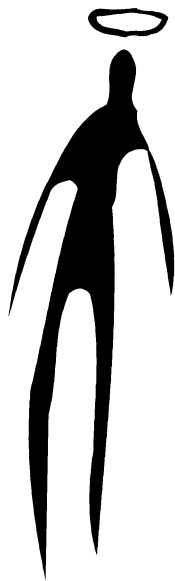
Author's note

The stories in this book are based on what people have told me and claim really happened. All names have been changed.

D.J.

**STREET
KID
IN THE
CITY**

DELPHINE JAMET



ALLEN & UNWIN


First published in 2001

Copyright © Delphine Jamet, 2001

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher. *The Australian Copyright Act 1968* (the Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or 10% of this book, whichever is the greater, to be photocopied by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that the educational institution (or body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act.

Allen & Unwin
83 Alexander Street
Crows Nest NSW 2065
Australia
Phone: (61 2) 8425 0100
Fax: (61 2) 9906 2218
Email: info@allenandunwin.com
Web: www.allenandunwin.com

Cover and text design by

...oid  **ph:** (+613) 9510 4522
fax: (+613) 9533 6981
email: stuff@oid.com.au
www.oid.com.au

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Jamet, Delphine.
Streetkid in the city.

ISBN 1 86508 503 0.

1. Street children - Western Australia - Perth. 2. Street children - Western Australia - Perth - Diaries. 3. Street children - Western Australia - Perth - Interviews. I.
Title.

362.76099411

Printed in Australia by Australian Print Group,
Maryborough, Victoria

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



She's sitting on the edge of the bench, shivering with cold, as you walk up William Street, past Hungry Jack's. Her clothes are thin and lined with dirt. She rubs the tiredness from her eyes and scans the crowd. This will be the only vision many will have of her, as they mind their own business and head out, maybe for dinner at a posh CBD restaurant. For this girl, her next meal is unknown, and when she eats, she will eat as much as she can. She is one of hundreds who line the streets each day.

Some people think there is not much you can do to help, and many don't even bother. There will always be others to take her place on that bench. You might think it is easy to live on the streets, but those who have broken through the barriers of homelessness know it can be a challenge just to stay alive and sane.



chApTeR

01

OPEN UP!

COLD HOMES: THE ONLY ONE THEY KNOW

02

THE YOUNG ONES

03

CRIME SQUAD

04

BUSTED

05

THIS LIFE WE KNOW

READ THIS!
CALL 'EM UP





CHAPTER 01 ON THE STREETS	8
CHAPTER 02 JUVENILES	36
CHAPTER 03 POLICE, RAILWAY POLICE, SECURITY GUARDS	54
CHAPTER 04 CRIME	76
CHAPTER 05 LIFE ISSUES	96
RECOMMENDED READS	112
CONTACTS	114

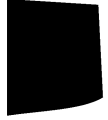
CHAPTER 01

**COLD HOMES:
THE ONLY ONE
THEY KNOW
ON THE STREETS**





The streets of the city are usually pretty cool at night. As the sun goes down and the last commuters head home, the dampness starts to sink in. Out of the shadows the streeties emerge, trying to avoid the attention of passersby. During the day, very few stand out, preferring to stay unnoticed until night falls.



This scene is nothing new, a constant – probably since big buildings were made and money flowed into rich hands. It is an honour to befriend those on the streets, most of whom live their lives quietly in tortoiseshell oblivion. Sometimes this is the only way to survive.



THE STREETS OF PERTH

A lot of people think the city streets are dangerous at night, but I have never encountered any major problems. Maybe I'm lucky, being in the right place at the right time, but the majority of conflicts occur in the presence of gangs who patrol the streets on a Friday or Saturday night. The cops usually move around in heavy numbers then. If you sleep in Forrest Chase or Murray Street Mall, you'll only last maybe two hours at the most before you'll end up in the lockups. Most streeties are in the next mall, with three to eleven sleeping there each night. A heater grill blasts out second-hand hot air from a shaft between two stores. This is excellent in winter but sweatingly hot in summer. Besides the security guards, police rarely patrol there after dark. They are well aware of those sleeping there but rousing them seems too much trouble when everyone knows they'll soon be back there again.

Some people think streeties should get off the streets. Some complain that it makes their visits to the city an unpleasant experience. Well, where else are they supposed

to go? You have a home, they don't. Most streeties sleep in back alleys, behind buildings, and in squats near the foreshore. Most of them just drink but don't do drugs, so they're not really a hassle to law enforcers. Some drink metho and sniff paint or tolvane.

Ask a streetie if he or she would actually want to stay in a house and many would probably say no. The luxuries of a house are very pleasant. Nice bathroom, kitchen, your own bed, carpet, hot water, etc. But living on the streets is not as bad as people make out. Sure it gets cold in the winter, and you get soaked if you don't take shelter when it rains. But there is a good side. The freedom cannot be compensated for in any way. There are no worries. You know you'll get some food, and maybe some cash. It's not too hard; you've just got to try. The cardboard is free and someone always has a couple of spare blankets.

There are food vans in case you get hungry. The Red Cross food van comes at 7pm past Fast Eddy's on Murray Street. The van is basically for anyone, since the food will be thrown out if nobody collects it. Hot soup sprinkled with salt and the occasional luxury of fresh white bread to dip in. Is there anything better? We've got what we need and nothing more.



Some of the streeties I know are professional car thieves, stealing car radios and doing the odd house break-in to support themselves, to buy clothes, eat and have the money for a cone or speed.

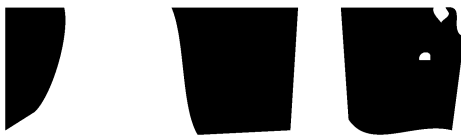
I met three guys on the street. Graham, Anthony and Mason. Graham and Mason were brothers and Anthony was said to be the same, making them more or less inseparable. Graham was the chubby, tough-on-the-surface guy with a

good heart. He would give people money if he didn't need it, lived for the moment and loved his cones. Anthony was a bit of a dickhead. He didn't care too much about people, especially tough nuts who wouldn't give him dough when they were asked for a donation. He just wanted to live the way he wanted to without having to miss out on anything, or going without food, and he did a good job of it too.

One time, up St Georges Terrace outside the Concert Hall, a young European male around the age of twenty walked past, wearing Adidas or Nike clothing (I don't remember). The fact that he wore this type of label seemed a pretty good reason to prey on him. Anthony got about fifty cents but then noticed that he had a lot more money and managed to scam all eight dollars. But that wasn't good enough for Anthony – he wanted the guy's clothes as well, since they looked pretty new. But the cops rolled up at 2am (which is pretty ironic as they must have been the only cops on patrol in the entire city of Perth and Northbridge for the previous three hours).

As the oldest, Mason felt it was his duty to defend and protect his brothers whilst scamming money to share out between the three of them. (Anthony was more likely to keep the money for himself.) He would give his warmest clothes to the boys, while he suffered the cold winds of the early morning wearing only a thin Adidas parachute jacket. They were definitely streetwise, carrying knives to protect themselves from other gangs, and were good graffiti taggers. They weren't locals but they got to know the back streets and all the good hideouts the minute they came to the city.

One cold night, they built a fire at the foot of some steps on Platform 1 at the railway station, which soon grew to a good size as there were lots of dead leaves and twigs about. The railway police had finished their shift and watched as they walked by, not caring in the least. It would have been so



good if we'd had some marshmallows, although that would have been a very funny sight. We were forced to leave the fire and bolt when some cops raced down the stairs in our direction. The fire soon died out as the winds picked up.

The train station is a good place to stay, as there aren't many cameras in the quiet spots, the walls are an efficient wind barrier, nobody is there to harass you, and cops or security guards very rarely patrol there after 12.30am on weekdays. I know most of the cleaners, who often spare me several minutes of their shift. The last train runs at twelve so the best time is between 12.45 and 4.30am. It's always quiet and pretty awesome being able to sleep under the stars.

SYD

Syd is in a wheelchair. He's my mate (29). A car accident when he was nine left him in the chair, and then he was kicked out of home, as his parents didn't want the responsibility of looking after him. He's one of the strongest people you'll ever meet, although he always seems sad. You can tell that the love he missed out on would have had a big impact on his life. He can walk but it takes a long time to get anywhere. His left arm is thin and weak, but his right arm could break your bones. His legs are thin as well and his speech is slurred, but his mind is quick. He's everyone's friend and has no enemies. It's probably safer that way.

He found a \$50 note the other day and a bunch of coins. He gave me ten and refused to let me knock it back, telling me to get something to eat or I'd be sorry. He knows I will pay it back though. He enjoys his cones like everyone else. He's no different from any of us and wherever we go, he goes. Wherever we sleep, he sleeps. He's just another one of us. But he has a good reputation. He gives more than he can afford to (maybe because he believes you should help people

when they need it so you can rely on them to help **you** when you need it). It's like an investment. Almost every day, he'll play the ticket games at Timezone – since he is so good at them – and then he'll come out with a huge bag of Minties, Fantaes and Sherbies. He shares most of them, but they don't seem to last long. Everything he owns, he carries around with him in a backpack on his wheelchair. Another reputation he has is for sick jokes. A lot of the time, I am the only female in our group, with Syd churning out these sick sex jokes. He seems to really miss his sex life – although I am not sure he ever had one. He never misses out on anything else though.

KATON

Katon is a cute 29-year-old. One glance at him, and you would think he's Greek or from some exotic place. But he's not. He's a Kiwi, and he's here to stay. He's sexy and gorgeous and could be a model, but frankly I don't think he gives a rat's arse about his looks. He just wants to live his life. He's shy but never fails to fork out one of his famous smiles. You'd think he had everything in the world to make him happy. But he's got nothing other than the clothes he wears, and us. 'Us' is probably the most important thing you can have on the streets. It's the spirit of survival and hope that gets us through each day. We can go days without food if we have each other. If someone has money, and others don't, we share it.

Katon was recently arrested for walking on the roof of the Perth railway station. He was so stoned that the last thing he remembers was walking out of Timezone in Murray Street Mall for a cigarette and then being arrested on the fourth floor of the car park next to the station. But he and the cops have no idea how he even got up there. It's not easy, especially as the roof is pretty high up. Apparently the cops came out after several people had stopped to watch him, and this was around peak hour. No cameras saw how he did it,

so it will remain a mystery. When he was arrested, he had a \$12.60 Timezone power card, sunnies, reading glasses and \$110 taken from his wallet. If the cops took them, then he'll never get them back. And if he dropped them, that's the end of that as well. But the funny thing is, only certain things were missing from his wallet.

Smart coppers, I reckon.

As his mate, I try to give him all the support he needs. Help him try and get a job as a cook, help him get his own place and basically restart his life. He was a chef for four years in New Zealand, but now that he's over here that means nothing and he has to begin all over again, as a kitchen hand. With a loan from Centrelink, we could have got him some excellent quality black jeans from Man to Man, and a white shirt from the op shop. A shave and maybe a haircut, a shower and he'd be ready to start his life again. I don't know if his family in NZ know he's living on the streets or not. He was living in Armadale, but said things didn't work out. I think the people he was with were a bunch of druggies and he didn't want to get involved. His brother's wife put a Missing Persons notice in the newspaper, but he cleared it the day it was published.

We went over to Centrelink and found about three position vacants for a cook. He also found an awesome vacancy at the bar for the AFL games. That would be such a good job. See the footy games for free. Now that's what I call a cool job.

But he's headed off to Adelaide now, leaving us all behind because he needed a change of scenery. He has never been there before but thought he could straighten his life out there. Nobody was trying to stop him from going. Rumour had it that he returned after a week and a half, staying in the suburbs. He's back now.

Everyone is planning to head off to different states eventually.



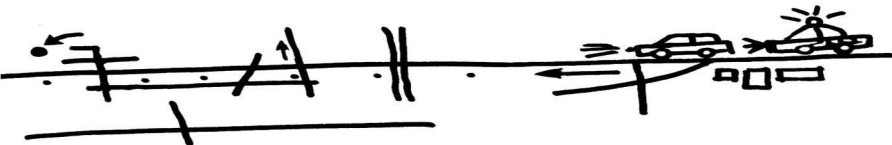
Look on the streets when people have finished their work. Heading home with all the other commuters, faces tiredly lined with wrinkles, stressed out, heading home to eat, sleep – and then it's back to work. And the only fun they have beside physical action with their partner is the weekend, when they get to vacuum, sweep and wash the house or their clothes. How fun! Think of it – by the time you make enough money to achieve your goals, you'll be too tired to enjoy your life.



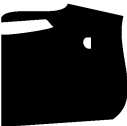


The government supports streeties financially, but money means nothing when the streets are your home, and all you have is spent on food and drugs. There's nothing else you need. Clothes will just get dirty or stolen. You have to throw your old ones out, since you can't carry much around or leave things unattended. There's no way around it, you're going to lose them if you have too many clothes.

CALEM

Calem (21) will be studying technology at a local university within the next few weeks. He is sharing a place in East Perth with a mate, but prefers to live on the streets during the night, returning home every couple of days. Brought up by a good family, he was transferred for unknown reasons to a foster family who treated him well. By the time he was fifteen, he had an extensive criminal record which included general thefts, car theft, shoplifting, and drugs.





He was jailed for five years in South Australia for smashing a guy, but he came to Perth to start fresh and make a good name for himself. It wasn't long till he was back on the coke and speed. When he's straight, he's a good bloke, loves a bit of fun, rollerblading and basically running amok. He doesn't drink much, likes a good fight and LOVES his labels, particularly Nike, constantly bragging about his large collection at home – the majority most probably freshly 'lifted'. When he fights, he hits hard and no one comes back for more. When he argues – you just don't mess with him. Everyone knows to leave him alone when he's in one of his rages. He thinks he's the king of the streets, since everyone knows him and he knows everyone.

A police officer came up to me one Friday night. I know him quite well after several run-ins. Off-duty at the time, Rob is your regular smart-arse cop who likes to make sure people know he's right, even when he's wrong. This blond-haired Aussie won't listen to you even if you cut him off, making him SO stubborn. Apparently he had seen me on the cameras, but I hadn't done anything wrong at the time. I was making a phone-call with my phonecard – but, once again, I was under suspicion. (He said he would check the cameras again and so far hasn't returned!) I was just around a phone-box, taking my time. Put two and two together, and it's an easy assumption that I was picking the phone. Calem told Rob to bugger off, since he was off shift, but Rob told Calem he was a copper 24 hours a day. So Calem and Rob began to argue, and Rob started to warn Calem to shut up. But dear Calem was just getting warmed up! Rob was telling Calem he was a copper and knew a lot more than Calem did, but Calem stated he was a university student and that Rob shouldn't mess with him. Furthermore, would he like to fight about it? Rob started to back off. Calem took this as an advantage. 'Just because I'm black, doesn't mean I gotta give a fuck about what the fuck you're saying, white boy. Just because I'm black, doesn't mean I ain't smart.

And I bet I'm smarter than you. So why don't you get on your way, white boy, and you better not hang around here no more, otherwise you'll be sorry. Got that?' (Calem often brings his race in to win an argument, especially if it is against a white person.)

Rob walked off looking like an angry little boy. Only Calem could get away with saying that to a copper. And all this was to stick up for me...



DANNY

Danny is in his early thirties. Although he hasn't lived on the streets much in the last few years, he has an interesting story to tell. So interesting – it is the type you would find in the pages of an adventure book. Well, almost. Circus travelling is pretty cool.

Born in Melbourne, Danny came to Perth at the age of fifteen, after running away from home because he could not connect with his mum. His dad died when he was seven, and his entire family was in the east. So he lived the life of crime on the streets, doing about twenty B & Es (Break and Entering), but was only busted for one. He spent two and a half days for that in the East Perth lockups and got off. Although he never fought, he drank every couple of weeks, and when he drank, he drank as much as he could. A group called Jesus People Inc. took him under their wing and let him stay in the Mt Lawley Perth City Mission housing. (Soon after that Jesus People Inc. closed down when it was discovered that the director had allegedly stolen a government grant. Danny saw him five years ago at a posh restaurant, smiling and looking happy and wealthy.)

Danny returned home and was accepted by his mother but didn't go back to school. He moved to the country for three years until he was eighteen, when his mother kicked him out of home again. So he took up a job at the local supermarket and joined a community gardening

program called YouthForce – doing odd jobs at a cheap rate subsidised by the government. He hitchhiked to Albany one day, met up with a girl and ended up having a child with her. They lived together for nine months before they split up and now Danny has no contact with his 13-year-old daughter.

Then the adventure of a lifetime started for Danny. He joined the circus. People think circus life is thrilling and fun, but it is a lot of hard work. His jobs were driving trucks, pitching tents and running the sideshow dodgem cars. The circus moved from Albany through to Kununurra, which took between eight and nine months. The pay was \$200 a week, excluding meals, but he spent it all straight away and slept in the back of the truck, happy and content with the way his life was going.

The best parts were probably his social life, as he associated with heaps of girls. Since they sometimes stopped for several nights, there were plenty of parties on the way. You may have seen the Lennon Brothers as they constantly tour and come to Perth about once a year, but they are based in Sydney or Queensland – Danny wasn't too sure. When he was in Kununurra, he'd saved up enough money for a bus to Perth to see his mum. He had only seen her once while travelling with the circus. He rejoined Lennon Brothers when he was 20. Danny met his wife-to-be in a James Street nightclub and they married on Friday 13 December, 1990. (Now he doesn't see his 5-year-old son as it is too painful when he has to leave him behind. He also has another son, aged three, and both share a new father since their mum has remarried.)

Gradually everything fell apart. Danny broke up with his wife, fell into debt and ended up going into Graylands for three months after a serious breakdown. It took months to find out what was actually wrong with him. He tried to seek help from everyone around him and several support groups. He went to mental clinics, and rang up for men's meetings. He was told to try the lone

fathers support groups and finally went to the admission ward at the Sir Charles Gardner Hospital. But no one could help him there, so he lost it and was told to go to the outpatients ward. He started to throw chairs around and smashed a window, before collapsing in a nervous heap from exhaustion. He was put into a wheelchair, with a needle into his hand and then woke up in a hospital bed in a locked-up ward. The room looked like a glorified version of prison, with blankets, sheets, pillows, pretty tiles on the wall and a toilet in the corner.

In Graylands, they keep you pretty drugged out. After a week he was moved to an unlocked ward. There he actually felt like a patient. A psychiatrist and psychologist were in attendance and there were four separate wards. The days consisted of waking up, having breakfast, a smoke, occupational therapy, lunch, playing pool games, guitar or piano, having tea, watching TV and then retreating to bed, with lights out at eleven. He continued this routine day in, day out for the following three months, and saw a psychiatrist for thirty minutes a day. When he finally went to the discharge ward, he was told there was nothing wrong with him and that he was irresponsible for wasting their time. Feeling pissed off, he left, never to return again.

He stayed at a friend's house for a couple of months and saw one of his kids once in a while before returning to Melbourne, spending six months with Silvers Grand Magic Circus. When he received his exciting tax return of \$3500, he took a train to the city with only the clothes he was wearing and cigarettes in his pocket. Now back in Perth, he has moved to a hostel after spending one month on the streets, and is getting on with his life, taking each day as it comes.

These are just some of my mates on the street. They'll accept you no matter who you are, or how old you are. And we get on well.

CARLOS

Carlos and his 3-year-old son were sitting on a bench outside the railway station. As I passed him, he pulled me over. The child looked hungry, very tired and dirty, with his nose running a mile a minute. Carlos asked me if I knew where they could stay for the night. He had three other children but the mother of this boy had decided he was not allowed to stay at home. They had been staying at several hostels around the city, but now they wanted something different. Carlos had \$150 and was prepared to stay at a motel for the night, and wanted to know if I'd come with him.

He was prepared to pay for the most expensive motel – for a moment of physical pleasure – while his young son was going tired, hungry and dirty, wearing thin clothes and no shoes. If he really cared about his son, he would buy him some food and shoes.

THE MEN

There are two types of men in your average city. The good old chum who likes to have fun, a beer with his mates down the pub, who likes to party a little and then go home for work the next day. And there are the ones who would just love a good head job any day, anywhere, any time. They live in a dream world where they think they can score easily. Of course I've met both types. Most of them won't offer you money. Just a place to stay for the night and then you're on your way and they don't give a shit about you as long as you know how to give a guy a good time. They won't give you another thought. It's sad but true. This is how a lot of female streeties survive. The money they earn from each night pays for food and sometimes their drug habits. Drugs are usually the answer to temporary boredom, as there is not much to do to pass the night away. It's best to sleep during the day and be awake at night. No one's gonna hassle you during the day, but during the night, you've just got to watch yourself, or the cops'll drag you down to hell.

THE GOOD GUYS

Angelo is Mexican and has such an awesome accent. He is almost thirty and has been living in Australia for the past three years. His only daughter, Ailya, is almost four, but he had been banished from seeing her after a fight with her grandmother resulted in him being erased from Ailya's birth certificate. He says it hurts so much since he has so much love for Ailya, and her birth was one of the most amazing things he has ever experienced in his entire life.

He had been going out with Ailya's mother for two and a half years when they decided she should stop taking the pill. A week later, she was pregnant and they became engaged. This was eventually called off, thanks to the grandmother once again. Now a window cleaner for businesses around Northbridge and the city, he wants to try singing (his passion) in Latin American clubs and restaurants.

There are several reasons why he is such a great guy. Besides his lady-killer sexy good looks, he is one of the most genuine men around. He thinks sex is so unimportant and that love is just magic when it is discovered the right way. This is pretty rare to hear from a guy on the streets of Perth, as I have found out. Angelo loves to talk and exaggerate his knowledge and experience. He says lying next to a woman is 'the greatest, most precious feeling in this world and nothing could be better'. His last relationship was three years ago, so he is not really interested in dating for now, but wouldn't mind eventually settling down, getting married and maybe having a child that won't be taken away from him like Ailya was. A lot of men are just interested in making love and, as Angelo says, 'when they try and chat up a chick they have sex written on their foreheads'. But for him, women friends are more important than hanging on to a girlfriend.

A lot of streeties are too proud to accept money or food from you, as they need to be independent, even if it means scrounging the bins for bottles and cans to sell. But many would give almost anything for a good hot meal. My streetie mates will usually accept any money or food I give them because they know me and because I don't give just because I feel sorry for them.

FOOD VANS

In the mornings, streeties come from near and far to the two locations where the Salvation Army Food Van stops: Wellington Square at 8.30am and the Supreme Court Gardens near the foreshore at 9.10am. I spoke to Shirley who runs the service single-handedly.

I got there five minutes after she'd started to serve food, and there was a long queue of about twenty people, which stayed steady for about ten minutes. If you're early, you get a cup of soup (today's was asparagus), a hot Mrs Mac's Beef Pie, two ham and cheese sandwiches, a peanut-butter or vegemite roll and a small Daily Fresh orange juice. Stocks run out pretty fast.

People of all types, young and old, come to get something to eat, from streeties to people who live in hostels and sometimes travellers. Some are dressed pretty well while others have holey, stained clothes. But whoever they are, they all deserve to eat. Shirley estimated she'd served about one hundred people that day. When the food van first started, she was feeding only one or two.

Shirley is one of the greatest people around. She cares so much and seems to really enjoy what she does. She does the



food van shift voluntarily seven days a week. But she cops a lot of unnecessary abuse from grumpy old people who don't know any better. One traveller went up to her and asked where the nearest showers were. Some were closed, and one cost four dollars, so Shirley gave her four dollars as she could tell the traveller didn't have that much money on her. Some people would hesitate, but not Shirley. The food van is not the only thing she gives her time to. She collects donations on the Forrest Chase overpass near the railway station twice a week for five hours a day. She has been doing this for a long time. Shirley has a sharp tongue and doesn't like any trouble, but she is a very likeable person. Just make sure you get on her good side.

Everyone has something to say about her:

- I come here every day, and she is such a nice person.
- Lovely lady. . . beautiful. If it wasn't for her, we would all be starving. She has a great personality and puts up with all types of people.
- A mother to everyone.
- She's doing something she believes in, helping people on the streets, looking after everyone. She has such a big heart and really cares. We'll never get another lady like her, she doesn't even get petrol, she does it all by herself. She feeds everyone and everyone has so much respect for her. The people who live in the high-rise buildings think they can't help streeties. They're just a bunch of robots.
(David)

Then the streeties went on to say other stuff.



David: Their life is so technical (people). Red light – stop, clock – get up, they live by instructions. Living on the streets – it's freedom. Turn on a light – it goes on and off. It costs you. You get the sunlight for free (here). They turn the key in a door, watch TV, hear the songs on the radio – ALWAYS the same songs on the radio.



Ter: Disgusting. Australia has lost its dignity.

David: They are arseholes living in it. They have no respect, the young things have no respect for their elders, they just sit on a bus all day.

Ter: Stupid.



Adam: By the year 2002, if you come and sit in a park, you've gotta pay for it.

Ter: Australia has lost its dignity, because young people like you are fucked.

David: Take young people to a cattle station and let them earn their keep. Dad took me down and said, 'You're staying here for twelve months,' he said. Too much bullshit in politics, where the prime minister upsets himself, arguing all the time, flying from country to country but when a bloke wants to fly from A to B, the government won't help him. The government's going broke, that's why they have the GST now. I've seen a bloke arguing over four cans of beer. He went to hospital, had a fight and in the morning, he asked himself, 'What was all that for?'

Ter: I'm drinking with the blackfellas in Townsville, when this guy gets hit on the head with a flagon. He died in my arms, about twenty years ago.

Adam: A mate died in my arms too (wife).

David: Can't stop everywhere, because you gotta have money. I walked barefoot from Coolangatta (Queensland) and I threw my swag away. Took me two and a half days. So hot, but I always carried water with me. Four people stopped to pick me up when I had my swag. They said,

'Where do you want to go?' but I told them to piss off. Didn't want to go anywhere – that's what it is like on the streets.

They're smoking bongos and it is very early in the morning. They're enjoying their beer, some quite tipsy or just swearing a lot. One beer can is now empty, and they've pulled out a lighter for a bong. The goonie bag's almost empty now as well.

David: Canberra – the toilets are for the junkies. You walk in, they cut you. Stuffed up in the classrooms as well. Abusing and swearing at each other. They go to court and get a fine. The only reason why there is no money for the homeless people is because the politicians are always flying around the country. The way they're going is wrong. They just argue at each other. By rights – they should have a mobile doctor unit when that van pulls up (food van). Check the blood pressure, a lot of crook people – that's why they're all homeless, otherwise it costs \$67 to see a doctor, \$400 for the ambulance if they collapse in the park. (A mobile doctor is currently being discussed.) The blood pressure should be checked and the heart. A lot of the people drink mozza (methylated spirits), so they become dehydrated. They really need to examine you from head to toe, because you wouldn't know if you were sick or not. Maybe once a month would be good.

Ter: Here, write this down:

The loneliness of the arvo, the rain that falls from the sky, reminds me of the days and nights that I haven't spent with you and I do wonder why? P.S. When I look into your eyes, your love is there for me, the more I go inside, the more there is to see.

Terrance Paul Mullin (Remember he's pretty pissed and stoned.)



Adam: My mate died in my arms. My ex of twelve years. She's lovely, we had some good times. Loved her all the time, died in my arms. Twelve years. Lovely person.

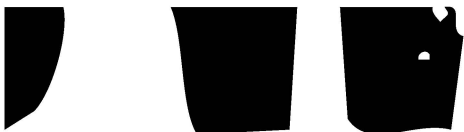
David talked about the outback:

The City vs The Country Here in the city, everyone is run by computers. I'm going to go back to the bush one day as a stockman. I hate the city. You can't walk here, you can't do this, can't do that. I've spent thirteen years in the bush. Here – you can't do what you want. I'm not used to this society. The crowds – you can walk, but they mob you. The bush – it's more comfortable, there's fresh air. Friends, my mother and father are all there. There's freedom and you don't have to put up with pollution. In the year 2002 we will have nothing, but there is so much freedom in the country.

Accommodation There is no house I would like to live in, in the suburbs. Just the scrub up north, maybe Darwin. I'm born and bred in Humpty Doo (a cattle farm).

Travel If you want to see Australia, you don't need money. Just watch what you pick, and who you talk to. Talk to the Noongars. They will feed you, clothe you, give you a bed and give you their backbone 'cause they know the land. Doesn't matter if you give birth to a son, or a daughter, if you are born in Australia, doesn't matter where you are born, you belong to the land.

Food Ask for an Aussie seven-course meal at a cattle station. You get a pie and a six-pack – which will cost you about \$4.50. In the city, if you want that, it'll cost you about \$10 for a six-pack and \$2.70 for a pie. They've got no respect here for the bush people. People come here from miles around just to do their shopping.



By the time you come in, the petrol is all gone and that's all you can afford.

The best meat around is the crocodile. I've been eating it for years and I eat emu. Crocodile tastes like chicken. You respect the land, the land respects you. What you waste – you won't have anything the next day, throw away – you pay the consequences. Don't get greedy. It's like the soup van. Don't eat too much and don't go overboard.



A few years ago, when Shirley was working the breakfast run at the first stop, when everyone had gone, she went over to the pump equipment box. (The streeties have now taken it over and leave their blankets in there.) A small (gorgeous) girl, aged about four, was inside, huddled with the blankets, sleeping and occasionally whimpering. She had been there all night and now she was all by herself. So Shirley took her away in her car. Apparently, in the years that followed, she kept moving around, living with different people, but now she lives with her grandmother.

Some people want to be helped. Others don't. The Salvation Army offers psychiatric and drug treatment. After completing the courses, some people make it, but others go back to how they were. Two years ago, there was a girl about my age – about seventeen or so. She would always go to Shirley, wanting a hug. Shirley would never turn her away even if she was filthy – and sometimes that meant that Shirley would be left with black all over her clothes. A lot of the time it would wash out, so Shirley didn't care. It made the girl happy and that's what mattered. One day, the girl was carted off in an ambulance and brought to detox. The nurse knew where she'd come from and called her parents, who lived down south.


The parents chained her to her bed and locked the door. She hated her parents so much that she would scream and yell.

One day, years later, Shirley was collecting money when a girl came up to her and yelled out, 'Ta da, remember me?' It turned out to be the girl. She was looking great – happy, clean, well dressed, was holding down a job and living with her parents. She wanted to see her old friends again, but Shirley gave her some advice. 'Don't go. Go back home. Come back when you're stronger, otherwise you might finish up like you were before. Give it more time.' So she went home.

I spoke to several of the people who came to eat.

One had lived on the streets for two months and had been living in the city squats. After living in Broome for over ten years and then in Adelaide, he left his family behind to come here. He is a printer by trade and would love to get off the streets and do something useful with his life. He hasn't slept in a bed for two and a half years, washes his clothes in the toilet and goes to Tramby's (where you can get a shower and a shave for 30c) every day. His three kids (23, 16 and 13) live with their grandmother in Adelaide after his girlfriend died several months back. The two boys are starting to drift into trouble.

Danny has been coming to the food van for six months, earns the dole, and has pulled himself off the streets. He now lives in a city hostel where he is on a community support program seeing a counsellor every three weeks to get his life back on track. As he is not sure what he wants to do with his life, he doesn't know what type of job he wants to aim for. But for the moment, this program will help get him out of his 'black hole'. **See his biography at the beginning of this chapter.**



An Aboriginal lady has been coming to the food van for the past three or four years and has lived on the streets since she was about ten. She is in her early forties now. She says the soup is very nice and she looks forward to it every day. She goes to the Miralex Centre just about every night. Her daughter is twenty-four, pregnant with her fourth child, and is trying to keep in touch with her. The daughter's Italian husband is very violent so she doesn't like to go near him, but now (as she had stated that it was too expensive to call her daughter) she has no excuse as she owns a phonecard.

STREET ENTERTAINMENT

BUSKERS

Fridays and Saturdays, Northbridge is the place to be. Money is so easy to make, especially if you are a girl, just by scamming. Fifty cents from ten people is enough to buy you a meal at Maccas and there are a lot of generous people out there. Drugs are fairly easy to score, provided you aren't strapped for cash. I hang around the buskers, so I meet lots of generous people. The buskers are like family to me: Roxy, Solomon, Afro and Bashir (brother of Afro).

Roxy

Roxy sits separately, trying to earn enough to support her family by reading palms and gypsy Tarot cards. She has two teenage sons and is bringing them up as a single mother on a pension. Some people laugh in her face and are so selfish and negative towards her practices (most of them followers of Jesus Christ). She will be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life. She completed these questions for me.

What do you think you would be doing and where would you be if your accident hadn't happened?

I think I probably would have been murdered and would be in Karrakatta (cemetery).

What has been the hardest aspect to cope with?

Physical pain (phantom pains) and access to places.

What is it like, waking up each morning knowing that you are confined to a wheelchair?

Sometimes I forget and go to step out of bed.

How many members of your family have the psychic gifts you have?

Quite a lot. One side of the family is 'fey' - which means psychic or 'knowing' - and on the other side there is a dash of Spanish gypsy.

What exactly do the readings involve?

A lot of bullshit that you are better off not knowing about. Your psychic abilities provide a certain degree. Palm-reading and Tarot, however, are mystic sciences so a lot can be learned. It's important to be clear and peaceful in the heart and mind, and open to people. There is a lot of superstition involving this sort of work and it wasn't long ago that witches were burned. And that's why I say it is bullshit because there is a lot of hurt in it. People who belong to magical groups go after you. I know of two separate groups who claim responsibility for using the magic to try and kill me, or part of me, and that's why they say I've lost my legs. It really is crazy, isn't it?

What would you most have liked to accomplish in your life?

To be a nurse and go to India and Africa.



When and how often does busking get depressing?

I only do it one or two nights a week so that's how I deal with it. If I'm tired or depressed I don't go.

Whose support did you miss the most?

My ex (husband). I was really let down by him and also by my girlfriend (one of my best).

How do people treat you?

They think I'm pitiful and that pisses me off when I'm doing something pretty cheap compared to psychic lines at \$3 a minute.

What has kept you strong all these years?

My children.

Were there times when you just wanted to give up on life?

I haven't wanted to be alive since I was fifteen years old.

What advice would you give to people in the same situation as you who feel like giving up?

You can look around and always find someone who is worse off than you. Count your blessings. But, seriously, it's a thesis of a question.



Solomon

Everyone loves Solomon. He has a crazy attitude that is just so fun. He never goes without a smile and loves making people happy. Everyone knows him and respects him. He really cares about people and if he thinks they haven't been eating properly, or are going without food or money, he shares anything he has and refuses to be paid back. Nicknamed Sexy Legs by Afro, he IS one of



the best drummers ever to play on James Street. He plays for the people because he gets love and respect. Earning money is like icing on top of a cake. Sometimes he drums when he's really depressed.

Some of the police and public have racist attitudes to 'black peasants' like the three buskers. To everyone else, they are highly respected, hard workers who just want to have some fun. But several people dish them out because they just don't like that 'kind' busking money from the people of Perth. They pull faces or say something negative out of view but loud enough for everyone around to hear.

Solomon used to busk at the corner of James and Lake Streets but was kicked out from there. The problem was he was so good that it didn't take long for him to draw a massive crowd. Even the cars stopped, which caused traffic jams.

This is what he had to say:

When did you start drumming?

When I was a baby, about twenty years ago (he is about thirty-five).

Where?

Home, in Ghana, Africa.

Why did you start to drum?

It is our culture to drum and we learn naturally, just like you do when you eat, sleep or go to the toilet. Nobody teaches and I didn't exactly teach myself. It is part of growing up.

What type of drum did you start out on?

You should go to South Africa. They have a whole variety.

How passionate are you about drumming?

I do it for the people because some of them, 100 000 a year, go bazookas (with his music).

What makes you happiest?

Contributing to this society. What really makes me angry is that there are 100 000 youths roaming around, when their parents should be looking after them at home.

Interview suspended as he had been drinking and was too furious to answer these questions.



On Saturday night about 10 pm, I was making my way to the buskers when I saw Lempton and Ranton (cops) talking to Afro. They left a bit later, barely even looking up at me. It took all night for Afro to tell me he didn't want me hanging around any more. It was actually Roxy who told me Afro needed his space. Afro just doesn't have the guts to tell me to rack off himself. Apparently the police told him that the more he hung around me, the more trouble he would be in. (The cops think I'm a troublemaker, which is bullshit most of the time.) So I left and went to find Jesse. I went past them a bit later, and Ranton stopped and watched me with a smirk. I saw him again that night, and asked him if he'd talked to Afro about me being trouble, and why. He said he hadn't – he'd just stopped to have a chat. He then continued to tell me I was on a death wish and that every cop in town knew me.

Afro sometimes has a big mouth and doesn't know when to shut up. The problem is, he likes his girls. Especially their arses. I had returned from The Brass Monkey to buy him his JB bourbon and cola when I found that he had made a comment about a girl's arse. But she happened to have a boyfriend with her. The boyfriend wanted to fight Afro (he had two girls hanging off his shoulders). They went through a phase of arguing until Afro had had enough, unstrapped the drum from around his waist, took off his shirt and stood up to fight. Three dark-skinned young people held Afro back, while the girls pulled the boyfriend away – who was yelling out obscenities about Afro's race. We thought that was that – all over. A girl and a guy who'd helped Afro had their photos taken while he played his drum. Then they went on their way.

Minutes later, the cops came around with the boyfriend stating that Afro had pulled a knife on him. Everyone knows Afro would never pull a knife on anyone – especially since he probably doesn't even OWN a knife in the first place. He fights with his fists. The police searched him but couldn't find anything, so they took him down to the cop shop to check his jocks.

But it is true that the police can't take any risks when searching someone for a knife. It is too dangerous and someone always gets stabbed.

STREET SPORTS

Every Wednesday, in Alexander near the Pica and Fuel Cafe, a group of about ten rollerbladers play street hockey in the flat area of the second level. Two bread crates leaning against a bucket or bin are the goals. The bladers vary in ages from 18 to 24. They have a keen interest in rollerblading and while not all of them actually play for a team, they come equipped with their own supplies of pads and hockey sticks. Sometimes there are spare hockey sticks for the people who don't have one or who haven't brought one. The games usually start around 9pm and finish at 10.30 when everyone splits to go their separate ways. After the games, Splatt Matt, Mark and George speed skate around the streets of James Street, while I follow them as their BMX roadie.

Splatt Matt got his name six years ago when he first started rollerblading. His mate, who was awesome on the blades, was always in front. And every time he turned around, Splatt Matt had stacked it. But you can't say Splatt's not good now. Give him a wall, handrail, massive stairs or anything to jump, and he'll give you some death-defying stunts. But the reason he is so good is because he has been skiing since the age of six.

Mark has been blading for a month and a half, graduating from being a casual rollerskater. On his racer skates, he is not as fast as the blades will let him be, but he can do jumps and all sorts of impressive



moves. For most people, after the first month and a half of practice they'd still be stacking it. But Mark can speed skate down the end of Milligan Street towards the Perth Entertainment Centre – which you can't say isn't impressive as it is very steep and ends at a very busy road. Surprisingly, I haven't seen anyone stack it yet, going down.

George has been skating for three years. Occasionally he is still unsteady on his feet and from time to time stacks it. He can do almost any jump, is practising his stairs, and can do some awesome moves. Give him another two years, and there is no doubt he'll turn pro. He stacks it more than anyone else I know because he gives anything a go – the best way to become a good skater.

Ken has just returned to Turkey after eight months in Perth. Now, HE is an awesome skater. He stacks it a lot but has been skating for more than six years. He likes to do 360°s on a 1.5 metre block wall. The other day he did a handrail skid and went flying, landing hard on his bum and went skidding for about five seconds. But he's an extreme dramatist. Seeing there were a lot of people watching him, he started to comically scream, rub his rear, kick his feet, wave his hands and make as much commotion as he could to entertain the crowd. It was funny though. By the time he returns to Perth in three months, it will be interesting to see what new tricks he has up his sleeve. But there is little he can't do, and if you give him a challenge, he'll take it, even if it is death-defying.

Calem used to skate all the time when he was younger, and then took up the blades several years later. After about ten stacks in one afternoon, which included slamming into a metal pole that he never knew existed until he hit it face first, he can skate pretty damn good. He's even trying some jumps and difficult stops. It was his first time on blades for a very long time.

