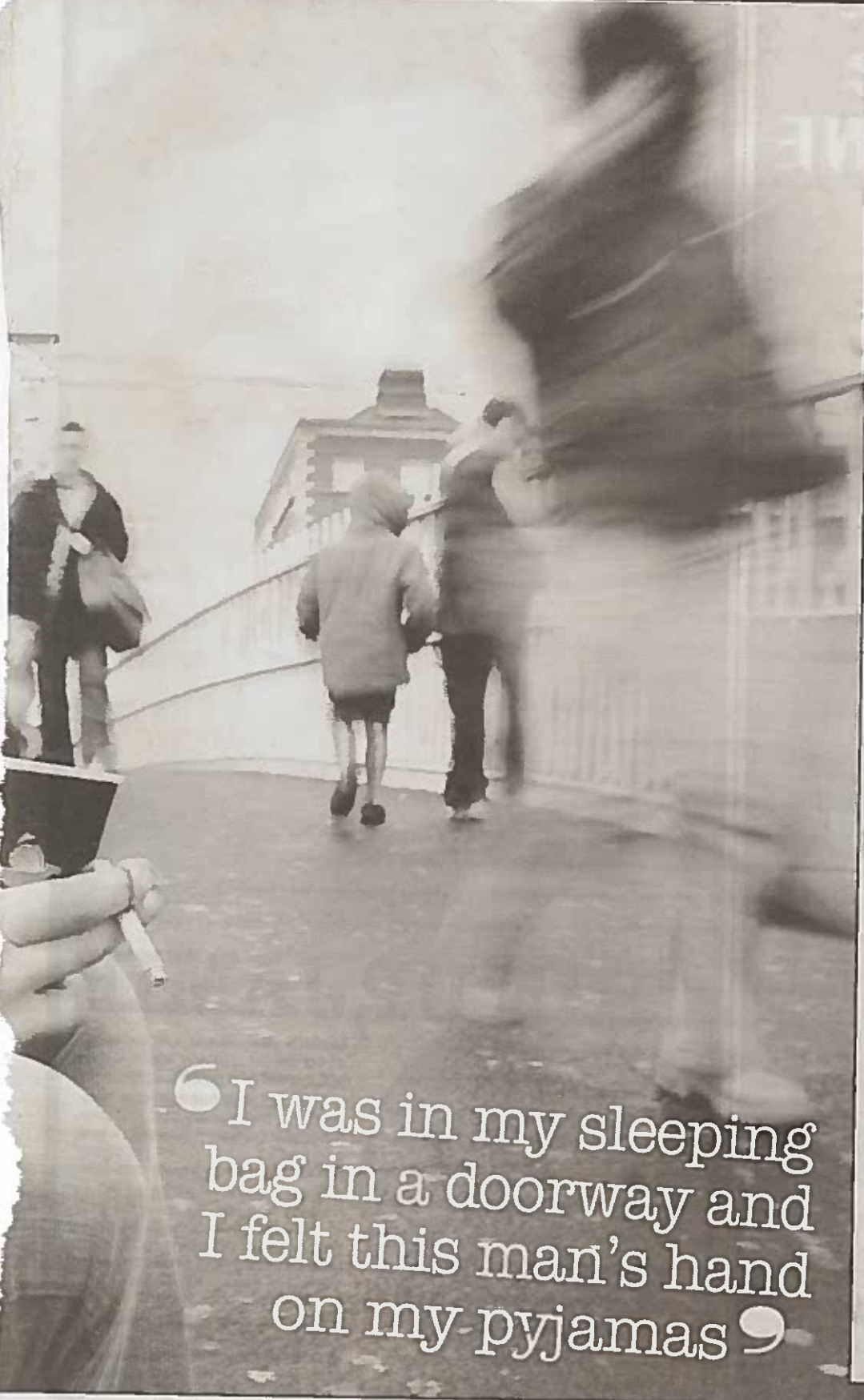


living on the street people keep stuff. It's hard to turn down but give up so I can see my children

PLIGHT OF IRELAND'S HOMELESS POPULATION



“I was in my sleeping bag in a doorway and I felt this man's hand on my pyjamas”

FOR Jackie Murphy the Celtic Tiger is something that passes her by every day on the street.

The well-heeled crowd pass by the mother of two daily as she squats on Dublin's Ha'penny Bridge. Some throw her money. Others pretend not to see her.

The 29-year-old walked out of her mother's house in Smithfield, North Inner City Dublin, when she was 17.

Jackie just looks like anyone else and not look like a drug addict until she showed us her teeth, which are mostly black.

She said she is trying to give up heroin and methadone but is finding it a struggle.

She added: “That's the methadone and neglect. I'm giving it up because I want to see my kids again.”

“When you're on the street people keep offering you stuff. It's hard to turn it down when you're an addict. But I'm trying.”

Jackie has had a traumatic time since she left home. She added: “My boyfriend

was living with me in my mother's house. She saw him hitting me and told him to leave. I just followed him.

“I stayed with him because I was hooked on heroin - he introduced me to drugs.”

“We lived in hostels until Focus Ireland got us a place. But he kept beating me - he used to hit me when I had the baby in my arms.”

“I told my social worker but it backfired on me because they got my baby taken off me.”

“I just walked out and left him there. I've been homeless since then.”

“My first child is six years old now and still with a foster family.”

“I met another boyfriend and had a baby with him but that baby is two-and-a-half and in care too because we can't look after a child on the streets.”

Like many homeless women, Jackie relies on her boyfriend for protection. This time, she's sure she's found a good man.

She added: “He saved me the other night. I was in my sleeping bag in the doorway of Brown Thomas and I felt this man's hand on my pyjamas - I always sleep in my pyjamas because I like to save my clothes for walking around.”

“That man could have done anything to me, only my boyfriend was there and told him to leave me alone.”

But she had no protection from the needle-prick she got in a hostel on Wednesday night.

Jackie said: “I reached down under the bed to get my fags, and I felt something sharp in my finger. It was a syringe.”

“They told me the sheets were clean but this syringe was sticking out of the sheet. The blood was hard so it must have been there for ages.”

“When I told the woman who runs the hostel, she tried to pretend there was no

By GERALDINE COMISKEY

needle. They went up to get it and hide it, but I had it.

“I did the right thing - I handed it in to the hospital when I was getting tested. I won't know for six months if I have HIV or not.”

Jackie stopped chatting to us to help a woman about her own age carry a child's buggy up the Ha'penny Bridge.

She is still in touch with her mother but added: “I can't live at home because I'm a drug addict.”

“She would have lost the house if I had stayed, especially with the abusive boyfriend I had at the time.”

ALAN is so terrified of being recognised by the foster family he left in his teens that he does not want his surname published.

He had lived with the family since he was seven or eight years old and vaguely remembers his mother

visiting when he was a boy.

But the 24-year-old said some members of the foster family abused him.

He added: “I felt very uncomfortable with them. There was no way I could stay in that house.”

He did not want to say exactly what the problems were, but added: “I'm better off on the streets. Definitely.”

But life has been tough for Alan since he left the foster family.

Earlier this week, he was attacked for no reason as he sheltered in the doorway of Brown Thomas.

He added: “Some guys were coming out of a nightclub and they just started hitting and kicking me.”

“I don't know why they did it. I was in my sleeping bag trying to sleep.”

Alan has a broken leg which aches when it rains. He met his girlfriend in a squat and they have a toddler, who is in care.

Alan is addicted to heroin and vodka. He would like to give both up but points out: “I need something to help me sleep at night. It's hard to sleep when you're cold and it's raining like this.”

He said some people are rude to him, adding: “They say, ‘What are you doing there begging? Why don't you get a job?’”

“But I can't get a job because I've no address. You can't give a homeless hostel as your address.”

He is grateful to the passersby to drop coins or notes in his plastic cup as he sits on the Ha'penny Bridge.

Alan added: “I don't always spend it on drugs. Sometimes I buy soup. I'm trying to get off the drugs.”

“Do people really think this is a rich country? Could have fooled me.”

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“People say to me ‘Why don't you get a job?’”

LIVING ROUGH: Alan in Dublin