



TRANSITION HOUSE - A PLACE FOR HOPE

*"THE SHADOW WHISPERS, YOU NEED
MONEY AND YOU NEED IT FAST."*

SILENCING THE SHADOW

HOW THE VOICE OF HOPE IS SAVING
OKANAGAN SEX WORKERS

BY: SHANNON LINDEN

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The shadow whispers, you need money and you need it fast.

She knows it'll beat her down to nothingness, keep her coming back like a skeletal dog, begging for scraps from a cruel master, but she listens.

Your rent is due. Your kids are hungry. You need your fix. Where are you going make a thousand bucks, huh? You're damaged goods. But you're good at this.

She used to be a little girl with big dreams.

The shadow screams now: *Surrender your body to the insatiable appetite of the man with the money. Step into his car, his hotel room, behind a dumpster—it doesn't matter. You can't make this kind of cash serving up always-fresh Tim Horton's but you're stale anyway. You can only sell yourself.*

She listens. And obeys.

Ah, but the price you'll pay, the shadow taunts.

Not a sex worker out there aspired to her life. Hooking was hardly her plan but neither was

growing up sexually assaulted, numbingly neglected, or emotionally abused.

Endless kinds of trauma can destroy a woman's self worth, leading to the drug addiction that lands her on the streets, but even girls with healthy childhoods can heed the shadow's call.

Meet Kelowna's Angie Lohr.

A sales representative with Quantum Graphics (where this magazine is printed), she grew up in Winnipeg, in a loving, Christian home. *"My parents were German immigrants," she says. "I was taught work ethic. We had big family dinners."*

College educated, Lohr went into marketing, got married. Life was good until the husband she dearly loved was repeatedly hospitalized for mental illness. When the marriage ended, Lohr began a downward spiral.

Never a big drinker, she was 28-years old when one evening, surrounded by friends, she accepted an offer to get high. She knew the source, thought she was

safe. Later she would learn she was freebasing cocaine—now known as smoking crack.

One night led to a decade of addiction, petty crime to pay for her habit, and eventually prostitution.

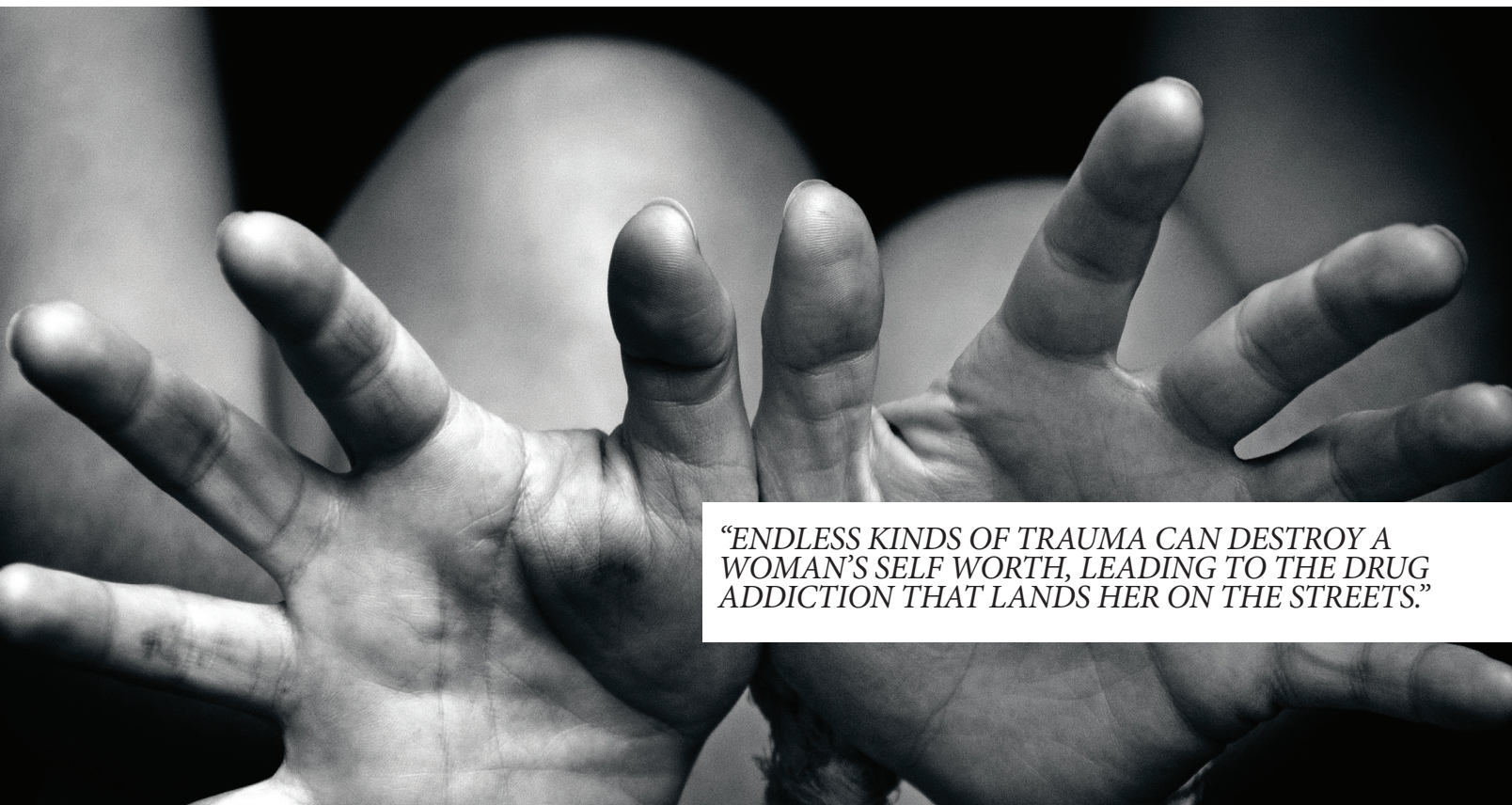
"The more addicted you become, the more criminals you get involved with, the more risks you take," she says.

Before long she was using daily but burying her habit in the ground beneath her seemingly stable feet. She held down a job and kept her drug use completely secret. *"I lived on my own," she explains. "My family was very naïve. People thought something wasn't quite right but they didn't really know what."*

After 13 years in an addiction she left Winnipeg for Calgary, determined to make a clean start. *"I thought I could do it without help," she says. "But if you're addicted, you can't just stop. There's detox and then depression sets in. You go through Post Traumatic Stress."*



ANGIE LOHR AT CHAPTERS NEXT TO OKANAGAN WOMAN MAGAZINE



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She started selling herself before that, though. “What’s prostitution?” She gives a wry laugh. “You sleep with dealers for free dope. We single girls thought we were all that. How great is life? It’s such twisted thinking but that’s what happens.”

While Lohr’s story is not unique, the miracle that brought salvation is. “I awoke one day and had a massive spiritual experience,” she says. “A little bit of hope filled me,

that’s all it was. I was using \$1000 a day, smoking, then injecting to get a bigger bang, then suddenly the thought of sticking a needle in my arm made me sick. I’d been missing for six months but I knew if I just got home to Winnipeg, I’ve never use again.”

Clean for twelve years, Lohr doesn’t keep secrets anymore. “I’ve been on CBC so many times,” she laughs, “I’m well out of the closet.”

“Education, just talking about it, is part of the answer. People don’t know about it—and why would they?”

Suggesting movies (like *the Wolf of Wall Street*) glamorize drugs, Lohr knows how quickly addiction leads to desperation. “Why else would women sleep with ten men they don’t know in a day; semen all over their face. That’s not glamorous.”

She doesn’t know why she was saved, chosen even, but she is convinced saving other women is now her calling.

Recipient of the 2012 Courage to Come Back Award in the addictions category (awarded to someone who has overcome obstacles and given back to the community), Angie and her family were treated to a weekend in Vancouver for the gala event.

“RCMP used to arrest me,” she jokes. “Now they nominate me for awards.” (Kelowna constable, Jamie Moffat, put her name forward for the honor).

From walking the streets to strolling the red carpet; from abandoning her family to watching her mom swipe tears of pride in the audience; from losing love to meeting her knight in shining armor—her second husband of seven years, Bill—Angie knows anything is possible.

That’s why she started HOPE: Helping Out People Exploited.

For five years, every night of the year, HOPE volunteers have hit Kelowna streets, handing out care packages that include toothbrushes, condoms, tissues, wipes, and candies to street workers. The ladies love chocolate most. “They’re hungry, they don’t have any money left for treats. They don’t think they deserve them,” Lohr says.

Lohr trains her volunteers (some

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60) and says the ladies are very receptive. "They know who we are. We're not threatening or judgmental, we just meet them where they're at."

"We provide information, where shelters are, where to go for detox. We also Bad Date reports and work with RCMP."

A woman committed to change might even make her way to the House of Hope—a transitional home for women in recovery, run by Lohr and house manager, Kelly Lim. Warm and welcoming, spotlessly clean, the house is supplied by compassionate landlords.

To become a resident, women must enroll in the 12-step Program; get a sponsor, and drug and alcohol counseling through Interior Health. Doctors' visits are mandatory, with Lohr and Lim looking in daily. "We're hard on these girls," Lohr says. "But we've been there. We know what it takes."

Some are on waiting lists for treatment centers. Some are fresh out of detox, awaiting residence in a full-time facility. Some have come back following treatment until they can find jobs, get apartments.

"It's usually about a 6 to 12 month process," Lohr says.

"It's hard to keep them here," she sadly acknowledges. "Once you stop using, all of your issues come to the forefront."

For Lohr, faith keeps her headed in the right direction; the voice of love has silenced the shadow—for good. 🌈

HOPE is non-profit and relies on the generosity—and understanding—of the community. To get involved or for more information go to: www.hope-outreach.com



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