



FOR LIFE, LOVE AND COMMUNITY

The 'Hackney Heroine' Pauline Pearce burst on to our TV screens and front pages as she took a fearless stand against the Hackney rioters last summer. Now a local councillor for Liberal Democrats, SLIK meets Pauline at home where she recounts her unusual journey into local politics.

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It's a series of accidents which brings us to where we are today – one spur of the moment decision can change your life forever.

It would be hard to find a greater testimony to this than Pauline Pearce, or the 'Hackney Heroine' as she is now sometimes known.

On the night the riots came to Hackney last summer, 46-year-old grandmother Pauline became a YouTube sensation when she was filmed angrily confronting looters.

"If it happened again I would do it again, because that's me," Pauline smiles, eight months on, sitting in the living room of her Dalston home.

"Any of my friends will tell you – as big and burly as I am, I've always hated fighting and I was always the one trying to break it up."

Pauline's fearless, moral stance captured the national mood, leading her into a media whirlwind, with accolades piling in from all political persuasions.

Backlash followed, with revelations about her past involvement with drugs and gangs.

Now, after years of campaigning within the community, Pauline is Hackney Central's new Liberal Democrat candidate in the coming council bi-election.

"I realise I did land myself in a load of politics with all this," Pauline explains.

"And it just came to the crunch where an opportunity came and I thought: 'you know what – I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna run for council.'"

Pre-riots, Pauline had led a remarkable life, filled with highs and some heartbreaking lows.

Originally from Hitchin, Hertfordshire, Pauline first rose to fame as an internationally-renowned gospel singer.

"Singing was my passion, it was something I thoroughly enjoyed doing," she says. "I had a wonderful life."

Pauline lost everything, however, when she was used as a drugs mule, and served three years in prison for possession of cocaine.

She says: "It's a hard road when you had everything that you could possibly want, you had your husband, you had your children, you had a big home with a massive back garden.

"Then suddenly – bang – the doors are shut, the keys are turned and you're in jail."

Struggling to rebuild her life and make

ends meet after prison, Pauline was sucked into a world of gangs and drug-dealing.

"It was the biggest mistake of my life," she grows emotional – not for the first time during the interview.

She explains how she finally found the strength to leave this world behind and fled to London

"It was a horrible, horrible time."

During her early days in London, Pauline was also treated for breast cancer.

With the encouragement of a friend, she began DJing on community radio.

"It was something which stopped me from sitting around at home being incredibly morbid."

Pauline is now known as Lady P on Conscious Radio, where she is outspoken about gun and knife crime.

"When I first moved to London, only seven or eight years ago, it felt like every day somebody got stabbed or shot."

She eventually set up the campaigning group, 'Do Something For Life', and through this, she has worked tirelessly against violence in Hackney.

Pauline's own son Ronald was stabbed but thankfully survived, and Stephen Lawrence's murder deeply affected her.

"Stephen's story broke my heart – I love his mother because she never gave up fighting for him. "I would love to meet her one day."

Pauline has spent time hanging around London Fields and other Hackney gang-territory, trying to speak to young people.

She tells of children as young as eight, who have confided in her, about their involvement with gangs. Poverty, she argues, plays a major role. Pauline's central message, as a Liberal Democrat councillor, is the importance of community.

Community centres, Pauline is convinced, will save lives by giving young people somewhere to go and a sense of belonging.

Her new journey into local politics is an extension of what she has devoted her life to for some time, but the experience is still novel.

"This is why I wanna get into politics, I wanna know what makes it tick, what makes it flow, what makes it go."

When asked if Hackney's Mayor Jules Pipe has anything to worry about, she laughs: "Who knows... he'd better not relax too much – when I get a bit more of a feel, I might like the flavour for politics."

