

# Two Years on the Street

By Sarah Murphy

Andrée Cazabon spent two years on the street, and now she has a story to tell. Still young, she bares the marks of shame, frustration and despair of a former street youth, but has a lightness of heart and an aura of hope unlike most.

Cazabon has left the street, rid herself of drugs, and reunited with her family. She is now a director and has released a documentary with the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) on life on the streets. Through Laurent and Cathy, two Montreal street youths, Cazabon not only paints a portrait of the street, but also a portrait of addiction, of survival and of pain: the street is a prison without bars and offers little hope of escape for the captive.

In *No Quick Fix*, Cazabon pays careful attention to the parents of these youths, almost all of which are left to the sidelines to scour the streets in search of their drowning children. In his daughter's film, Cazabon's father re-reads letters written to his child while she haunted the urban sidewalks and allées, these letters speak eloquently of his grief.

Cazabon said the film was never meant to be therapy as she had already been through that and has been clean for twelve years. She said *No Quick Fix* was an opportunity to make a documentary with a professional crew. Working with the NFB was an incredible experience, she added. And making films, said Cazabon, is pretty amazing.

"It would have cost me a lot less personally to get a good therapist if I had needed that," she said. "That was the last thing I wanted to do...make a heavy film."

When making a documentary such as this one, explained



Cazabon, where you are literally chasing after participants, Cathy and Laurent for example, and where you have so much to learn, you do not want to add to your worries. Even the crew found the project demanding, probably one of the most difficult projects they had worked on, due to the heaviness of the subject matter. After a day of shooting most probably felt like they needed therapy, Cazabon said.

"So it was not so much a therapeutic journey, as much as it was that we felt like we had to witness what the parents [of these street youths] go through," she said. "It seems like it's never been done before."

It took months to find participants, explained Cazabon, who went through the normal routes—casting and auditions—to find them for her project. However, Cazabon was forced to go back on the street where she interacted with street kids who in turn helped her find participants. Cathy and Laurent were two of them and when other participants did not show up for the shooting of the documentary, both agreed to step in

and tell their story and that of their parents.

But how does Cazabon reach out to her audience, how does she convince them that something must be done to bring an end to this problem? Too many of us refuse to acknowledge that drugs are a problem on the streets of our community. Cazabon said when asked, students at a local high school had told her how easy it was to buy cocaine and heroin on the Island.

Prince Edward Island is not immune to the reality of street youths.

"I met kids here that were street kids," said Cazabon, "and of course they are not going to be street kids here in PEI, but they were street kids on the streets of Halifax, on the streets of Montreal." It is that reality, that people have a hard time believing, she said.

Nonetheless, Cazabon has a positive outlook on the Island's situation.

"What I did see in PEI that really impressed me, was even though there is a lot of taboo around this [issue of drugs], and a lot of

'not in my back yard' type of mentality, I still saw a genuine interest in doing something about this," she said. "I think that's really admirable because a lot of communities when they get out of denial, or they start looking at the issue, say 'this is so overwhelming, what can we do?', sort of throw in the towel before you even try. What I see in PEI, from the youth and the professionals, is 'ok, what can we do?'"

One solution, suggests Cazabon, is going to the provincial health officials for help.

"If these kids were diabetic, and 10 years later we still had this problem, would we find it acceptable? No," answered Cazabon. "So I think this is how we have to see this, as a health problem, not an individual problem."

"It is happening systematically all over," she explained, "across barriers, social barriers, family barriers. 'It's happening to all kinds of kids, just like diabetes is happening.'"

Cazabon strives for change. "I think there is a huge taboo with drugs and youth, and what I try to do with the film is advocate for ade-