

Fame doesn't furnish answers

When I was younger I thought fame was the ultimate protection against the boogiemani.

Anyone who appeared in the news was lucky — he must have done something right to achieve such notice.

I thought once a face was in a newspaper, a magazine, or on the evening news or a talk show, it could never be forgotten.

Once you made the headlines, I thought, you could never slip into anonymity again. You could never starve to death. People wouldn't let you. They'd notice your absence too much.

The way to cure the streets of starvation and poverty would be to let all the people tell their story, one by one and day by day, in the mighty news, the *Boston Globe*, or the *Taunton Daily Gazette*.

The years went by and I read more and more.

Newsweek told me about the streetpeople, the starving in America, and the unemployed. Real names were often omitted.

Why? I wondered.

If you use your name you could



The Blank Page

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sell your story to *Life Magazine* with a full photo display and make a million!" I wanted to shout at them. "Then there would be movie rights, 'Good Morning America,' and 'Donahue.'"

I read about abused children, serial murderers, and Tina Turner.

That one really threw me.

Tina was a rock superstar, but she was also allegedly abused by her equally famous husband, Ike.

It's one thing for a celebrity to abuse himself or herself with drugs, alcohol, or overwork. It's another thing for that celebrity to be abused and have no one notice.

How could we not know? I ask-

ed. Is nobody safe?

When Tina left her husband, she left her career, her stability — everything.

Sure, her name was still recognized, but fame faded fast.

No one really cared.

She was luckier than most, though. She worked hard, used her connections, and is now more famous than ever.

For some people fame just comes too late.

Mary Lou Arruda would not have been abducted if her name had been Mary Lou Retton.

Can't always help

For other people, a brief appearance in the papers or on the news isn't enough.

To the readers, the subject of the story is often not real. It's just a story. It captures their momentary interest and then they quickly forget about it.

When I worked at a South Shore newspaper, I wrote a few stories about Charlie, an old man who owned two condemned houses.

He lived in one of them.

His town was trying to get him

to restore at least one of the buildings.

The once beautiful house he lived in had been destroyed in a fire almost ten years ago. The stairs had collapsed, the roof was caving in, and he had goats living in and around the wreck.

The house was a fire hazard, and Charlie, a former genius, had books stored everywhere.

Charlie, you see, was supposedly studying for his doctorate in psychology.

My stories did nothing for him.

He still made no attempt to restore his houses, and no one donated large sums of money to help him do it.

Newsweek, Donahue, and "60 Minutes" didn't even pick the story up.

Basically, no one cared.

It was just another article.

Since then I've written stories about families whose homes were destroyed, and men unable to deal with war memories.

I've learned a lot since I've become a working journalist, and I've lost all my answers.