

CITY REGION

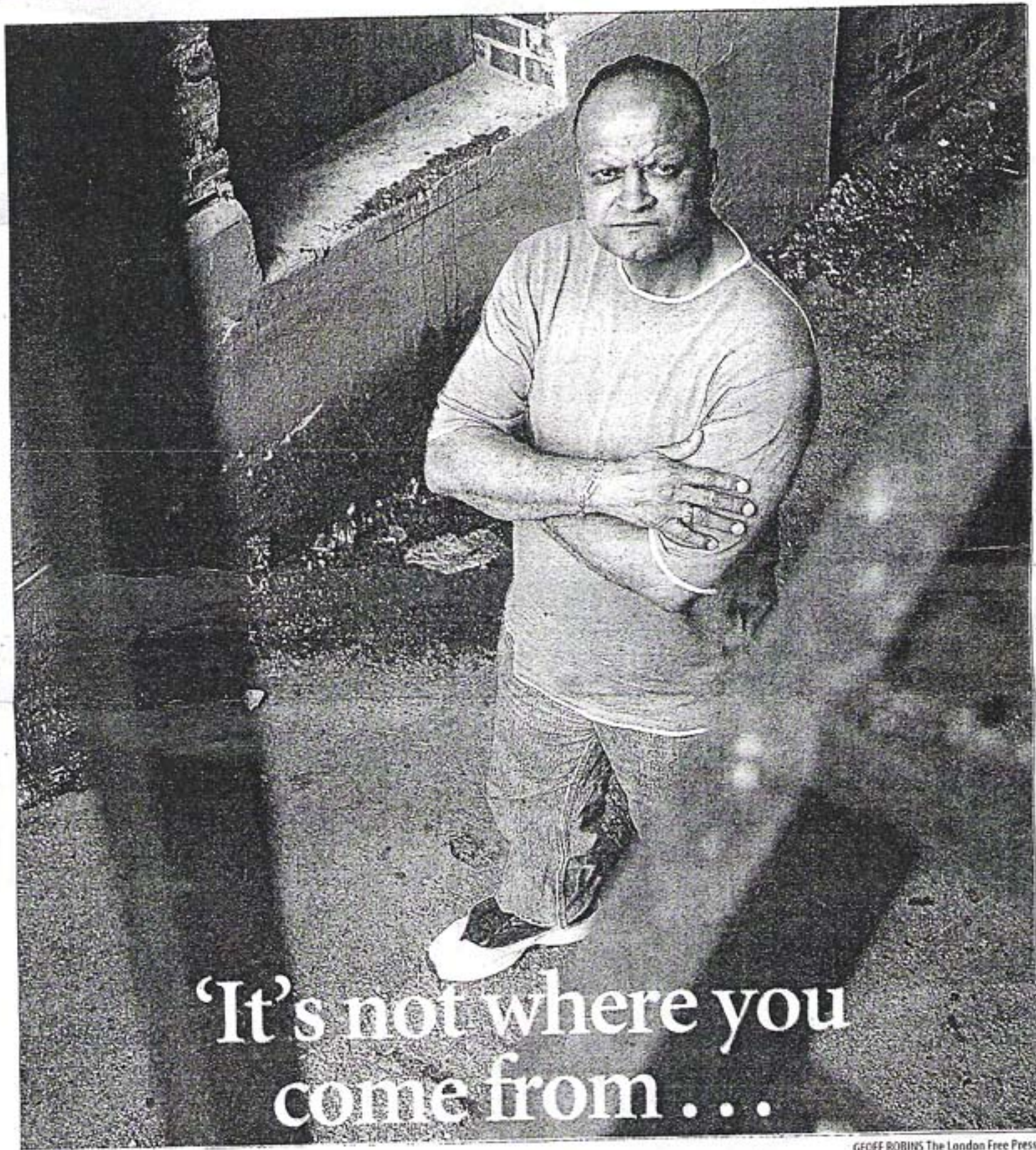
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Lovely landscapes
Puck Merkie went from teaching
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London's first Italian festival wraps
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'It's not where you
come from ...

Geoff Robins The London Free Press

it's where you are going'

Spider Jones, former Golden Glove Champion, recalls with regret his time spent running with Detroit gangs. Now he wants to help turn kids around.

BY JENNIFER MCGREGOR
Free Press Reporter

Spider Jones knows something about gang life, having spent some hard time living it from age 12 until someone showed him life needn't be defined by jail, violence and power.

"Part of my life I was full of bitterness and anger," said Jones, who was born in Windsor but spent his gang years in Detroit. "At times like a volcano, or like a bomb with the wick burning away, getting ready to explode."

The broadcaster and three-time former Golden Glove Champion was inducted into the Canadian Boxing Hall of Fame in 1996.

A Grade 5 dropout, he returned



Jones stopped in London last week on his way to visit his mother in Windsor.

His visit comes on the heels of reports of gang activity in London, mostly at public housing complexes, such as the July 3 beating of two men who were swarmed by a gang of youths wearing blue kimbombas. Last Tuesday, city police arrest-

ing bats, batons and knives and looking for a man at an Empire Street townhouse complex.

It's the kind of activity Jones is all too familiar with.

"Once gang violence starts spreading, it's like cancer," he said. "Politicians will tell you one thing, the police department another, but the truth is what you see happening."

Jones first went to jail when he was 15, but made regular visits for assault and theft until he was 25.

Now, in his mid-50s, he works tirelessly with youth, travelling to schools and detention centres, sharing his story.

"If I've got a shot to turn somebody's life around," Jones said, "I'm not going to waste it."

He's trying to show kids the hell

history, they're more likely to listen.

He does it because he wants to give back to the community.

Jones points out kids turn to gang life for different reasons. Some because it's the only place where they feel they belong. For others, it's racial. Still others are drawn in by the image of gang life glorified in popular culture.

"My heroes coming up were pimps, loan sharks and hustlers," he said. "Those guys had the money, drove the nice cars and had the beautiful women on each arm."

But there's little glory in his memories. Every day, Jones regrets the way he lived and the people he hurt in his gang days.