

best BITS



I'M NO CON WOM

The credit crunch forced Corrie's Bev Callard to close her pub last year. Now claims from business partner Ethna Carlin that Bev has ruined her financially have made the Rovers' landlady fight back...



Ethna Carlin says Bev persuaded her to invest £100,000 into her bar just weeks before it was forced to close. 'Bev's ruined me,' she claims

ETHNA CARLIN

What did you think when you read your friend Ethna Carlin's comments saying you had wrecked her life?

I was shocked and upset because we were close friends.

How did you become mates?

She came up and spoke to me in a supermarket in Marbella in 2001. She knew who I was and asked if she could come along to one of the fitness classes I was teaching. I got to know her at the classes. Some of my girlfriends thought she only wanted to hang out with

me because I was on television, but she always seemed nice.

So how did Ethna get involved with your pub?

She knew Jon and I had bought The White Horse in Salford and we'd made a success of it. But we sold it and our house, and put the money into The Gallery, a wine bar/pub in a more affluent area.

How was the pub doing then?

We worked hard to make it a success. We'd bought the lease so we took a big risk, but we went

from making £2500 a week to £13,500 a week, so initially we were doing well. But outgoings were higher as well. Then the smoking ban came in, which hit all pubs really badly. Ethna came to stay when she was having a tough time personally. She thought the pub was fantastic. We said, "It is, but we're struggling."

So how did Ethna come to invest her £100,000 life savings?

Ethna became more involved with the pub. She said, "I feel like I've found a direction for my life,

how about considering me as an investor?" I totally refute her suggestion in the papers that I persuaded her to invest. It wasn't like that. I said to her, "We hope we can make this work, but we don't know. If you invest and it doesn't work out, you're going to lose your money, and so will we." Jon and I put everything we had into it.

What was her reaction when you said that?

She insisted, "It won't fail. It won't." And she wouldn't listen to any

FEATURE: PAUL SIMPER. PHOTOS: ITV; MIRRORPIX; NI SYNDICATION; SPLASH



doubts. We talked about it a lot with her before she finally invested. She went over the books with Jon and she took independent legal advice too.

When did you realise the pub was in trouble?

When the bailiffs turned up one day and tried to take back some of the musical equipment from the piano bar upstairs. It was obvious that financially we were in a hole, so we sat Eth down and showed her what was happening, but she wasn't concerned.

So she didn't appear distressed about the pub going wrong?

No, she didn't. I was. And Jon was too. We warned her, "We're not going to get through this." Every spare penny was going into the pub. My *Coronation Street* wages were being swallowed up. Jon and I didn't take a salary. Ethna did get a salary for

working in the bar, which she was perfectly entitled to.

Ethna claims you said you went bankrupt when the business hit the rocks to avoid having to repay her investment.

No, I never told her that. It would have been easier for us to declare bankruptcy because any debts you've got are then written off. I am still paying out for the pub. I managed to give our wine and spirits supplier, Brian, his last payment just before Christmas. He said, "Thank you so much. You could have just walked away from it." I'm trying to do the honourable thing by everyone, but I'll never get my investment back, nor will Eth. That's why Jon and I are still renting. We've got an apartment in Spain, but we don't own our own home here. Our credit rating is so bad now, I doubt I'd get a mortgage. All you

can do is dust yourself off and start the climb back up. We're just doing what many others are doing.

So you won't be able to repay any of Ethna's investment?

That's like saying I can't pay Jon or myself back. All three of us are in the same boat. If I won the lottery it might be different.

When did you last speak to Ethna?

Last September. We met at The Living Room in Manchester. We had tea together and chatted for about three hours about how we'd dig ourselves out of debt. She didn't ask about her money at all. This all came out of the blue when she sold her story to a Sunday paper.

Have your other friends been supportive at this time?

Yes. People who know both of us have been very supportive. Truly, I have never conned anybody in my life.

Would you run a pub again?

Never. I think it's really sad that the British pub is soon going to be a thing of the past.

Has *Coronation Street* been encouraging?

They've been fantastic. They understand how hard I tried with the pub. Many of the cast came in and gave their support, but the credit crunch did it for us.

What advice would you give to Fiona Phillips, who is reportedly thinking of running a hotel with her husband?

I wish her all the best with it. But I wouldn't consider doing it in the current climate.



Bev and partner Jon put everything into the business

How does it feel to still be running the Rovers in *Corrie*?

It's completely different – with pretend beer and pretend bills!

Are you hoping *Corrie* might win a few awards this year?

The show seems to have been unlucky recently on the awards front. I think we will – we're going to pack a very powerful punch this year.

Could Liz and Lloyd ever get back together?

We are flirting a bit, but there's another man coming into Liz's life, so I'm excited about that. Liz has the ability to bounce back, but she does keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

Is that how you and Liz differ?

I don't know. Hopefully I won't make the same mistakes again. But I do keep making new ones.



Bev found being a landlady in real life (above) far tougher than her on-screen role as queen of *Corrie's Rovers Return* (right)

FACT AND FICTION

