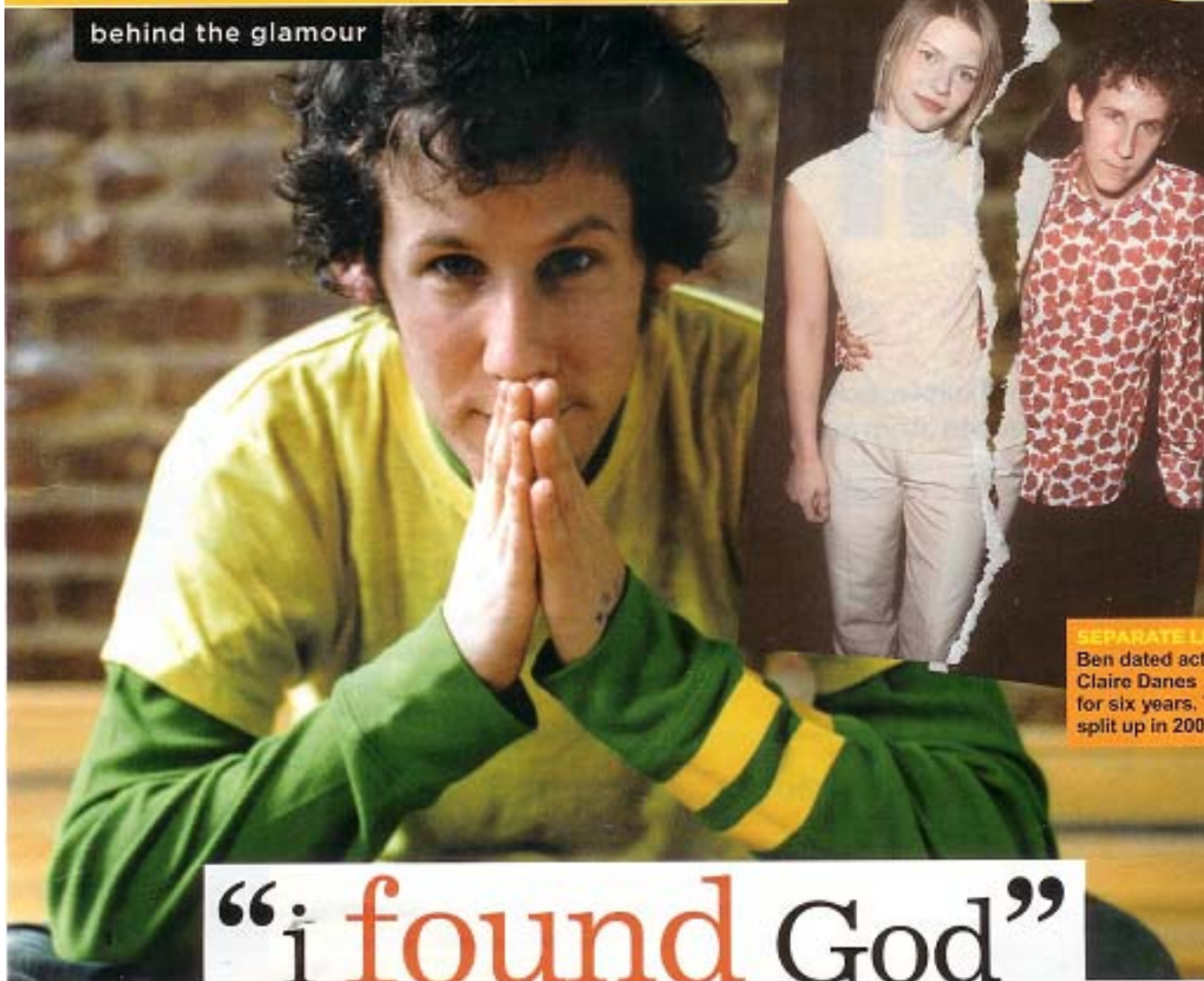


behind the glamour



SEPARATE LIVES
Ben dated act
Claire Danes
for six years,
split up in 200

“i found God”

Indie rocker Ben Lee, 26, lost everything important to him before he could live the kind of life he really wanted. AS TOLD TO holly eagleson

I'm kind of scared of what I'm about to say to you. I've never talked to a magazine before about my spirituality, so I'm nervous that maybe you'll think I'm crazy. Even so, I want to do this because, like a lot of you, I've been through dark times and I've felt alone and abandoned, but I finally found something that can bring me joy for the rest of my life, no matter what.

Growing up in Sydney, Australia, I went to a Jewish school. I was the kind of kid who irritated the rabbi with questions like, “How do you know the prophet wasn't just schizophrenic when he said God talked to him?”

I was passionate about learning, but I was frustrated. Religion always felt like it was a set of rules you had to follow, but spirituality seemed like it was about experiencing feelings. And if all those people in religious texts had these life-changing experiences with God, I didn't just want to read about it—I wanted to live it myself. I wanted to be *in* the book.

LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

When I was 14, I started making music and playing live shows. All of a sudden my music exploded commercially in Australia. I started touring the United States when I was 15, and I liked it so

much that I decided to move to New York City when I was 18. Around the same time, I met a girl, actress Claire Danes, and we connected right away. Being in a long-term relationship with her became my haven from the music scene, which felt like a big competition for glamour and wealth. We helped each other grow up because we faced a lot of the same pressures—being so young and trying to make it in an adult world. Everyone in music was older, and there were lots of drugs around. A friend even died from a heroin overdose when I was 21. I knew I didn't want to live a life where I'd lose friends. **turn**

behind the glamour



POWER OF MUSIC
 "No one there knows I'm a professional singer, but people in the village come out to say, 'Sing English!'"



like that, so I tried to just focus on touring and making albums. But I still wasn't happy. I was trying so hard to prove myself to the critics that I lost the joy of making the music that inspired me in the first place.

Then, when I was 22, my dad died, and everything in my life became unstable. Though my friends were there for me, only one had lost a parent, so they didn't understand why I felt so sad. I wanted to feel a deeper connection to something—God or whatever you call it—that could give hope and meaning to my loss.

As I got more serious about my spirituality, Claire and I started to grow apart. I felt I couldn't look to her to give me strength anymore—I had to find it inside me. I even had a dream where a voice said, "God is separating you, go willingly." I woke up and I was like, Wow, it really does have to end. After being together for six years, Claire and I had to go our separate ways.

STARTING A NEW PATH

One day, in June 2003, I heard from a friend about an Indian spiritual teacher called Nāṭayani Amma, who was in New York. My friend and I decided to check him out, and when we got there, Amma was doing a prayer and chanting ceremony to send positive energy into the world. Immediately, I had a feeling Amma could help me find what I'd been looking for spiritually after my dad's death and my breakup with Claire. I asked him how to go through life without suffering so much loss.

“ Claire and I had to go our separate ways. ”

He said, "Nothing's permanent in this world, but the one thing you can rely on is your spiritual connection to God."

Even though I was excited about his teachings, I still didn't know where I was going. To make matters worse, I didn't even have anywhere to make music. After my first label went bankrupt, I left my second one because we didn't see eye to eye. So I was scared I'd never have a girlfriend again, and that people wouldn't be interested in my music. It was like staring off a huge cliff—and there was just a big void below.

I wanted to understand Amma's philosophy better, so a few months later, I went to his temple in Tamil Nadu, India, where 20 of us studied and did service projects, like helping the people in the village get crutches and hearing aids. I'd always thought service was an obligation, but once I started giving, I was filled with a sense of joy that was totally addictive. I realized that feeling was actually me getting closer to God. The more I gave away of my heart, the bigger the feeling got.

THE TRANSFORMATION

When I got back, something inside me changed. I didn't feel like a victim of the bad things that had happened, so opportunities started to open up to me. I found money to make a new record on my own. I even felt better about my breakup with Claire—we're still really close today. And now my friends and my family tell me I actually look better because I smile so much!

Now I know the real way for me to connect with God is to help others. You don't have to give away crutches with Amma to get that joy and peace—I also get it by sharing my music. We all have a gift to give—and it doesn't have to be one that changes the world. If you open your heart to others, the world will change you from the inside. ☺

AWAKE
 IS THE NEW
 SLEEP

waking up

WHAT'S NEXT FOR BEN
 After releasing his latest CD, *Awake Is the New Sleep*, in February, Ben is hitting the road with Har Mar Superstar through April. Check out ben-lee.com for details about Ben's current headlining tour.