



## Trailblazing Women: Jo Wilding



# TRAILBLAZERS: World War One's Inspirational Women

**Location:** Brighton and Hove

**Occupation:** Barrister and Human Rights Activist

### Why are they a Trailblazer?

Jo Wilding is a practising barrister at Garden Court Chamber in London, specialising in immigration, asylum and unlawful detention. In 2001 she went to Iraq after hearing about the devastating effects of the sanctions on the country. She took medical supplies and reported back on what she had seen in the poorly-equipped hospitals. She returned to Falluja, Iraq, in 2003 on the eve of the invasion of the country with money she had raised to help and the intention of giving a voice to the ordinary Iraqis trapped in the crossfire of the war-torn city. The blog she wrote during her seven months stay described what things were really like in the city and was read by thousands worldwide. Her book 'Don't Shoot the Clowns: Taking a Circus to the Children of Iraq', published in 2006, tells the story of how she started to perform as a clown in squatter camps, orphanages, schools, and on the street as a way of bringing some light into the local children's lives. In 2005 Jo was one of the 1,000 women worldwide nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. She is now a part-time law lecturer at the University of Brighton, also delivering in-house training or training tailored to the needs of solicitors or other organisations.

### What impact have they made on their community?

In Falluja during the Invasion of Iraq Jo's blog gave a window to the world on what was really happening in the city from the point of view of the ordinary Iraqis who were having to live through it. For most people Jo's blog was the only account of the conflict to depict daily life and the problems the residents were facing.

### What connections are there between Jo and the Trailblazers of World War One?

During her stay in Falluja helping the Iraqis caught in the war, Jo Wilding was briefly kidnapped. She put her life in danger because she wanted to tell the world what was really happening in the conflict. Many Suffragettes put

their lives in danger by being prepared to go to prison and on hunger strike for fighting for their cause. Constance Lytton (1869 – 1923) was imprisoned four times. Also an activist for prison reform and birth control, Constance rejected her upper-class background to give her time to work for the WSPU. In January 1910, imprisoned for throwing rocks at an MP's car, she pretended to be a working class seamstress so she wouldn't get any privileges for being an aristocrat. During this stay she endured hard labour and the dangerous practice of force-feeding eight times. After her release, though very weak, she wrote about her experience for The Times and Votes for Women and went on to give lectures. It's thought that the publicity she brought to the brutal act of force-feeding and the outrage this caused, helped to end it.

### How do they inspire your class to be Trailblazers of the future?

Initially Jo was doubtful whether her clown performances would make a difference. She worried that, against the backdrop of the war-torn city and the huge disruption of the bombing raids, her attempts would be seen as condescending. She was pleased to see that her performances made children smile and helped to bring light into their lives, even for a short moment. Jo's daring to do something different and untested, to follow her gut reaction, is very inspiring.



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