



Bob Carlos Clarke with Scarlett, aged three, at home in Fulham, west London

## IN THE NAME OF MY FATHER

*When photographer Bob Carlos Clarke took his life, his daughter, Scarlett, was just 15. Six years later, she finds his influence on her is greater than ever*

As a child, I knew my dad was unusual. When I looked at other people, I would think, ‘Your parents are so strict and boring.’ My dad was always doing things that other people would have thought were dangerous. When I was three years old I had a mini motorised bike and he taped the accelerator down, so I would have to crash to stop. He would make up games in the garden. He loved practical jokes, and would constantly do things to make me laugh – once I came home from school to find him with a glass vase stuck on his head.

Apparently, Dad never wanted children and when my mum was pregnant he would tease her about what the baby would be

like and make up mean names. But then I was born, and people have told me how happy it made him.

He was a sought-after photographer, whose work had appeared in advertising campaigns for the likes of Agent Provocateur and Pirelli and magazines like *The Sunday Times Magazine* and *Playboy*, though he considered himself an artist.

I didn’t think of him as ‘mad’ or eccentric, but as the years went on it was clear his mental health was deteriorating. I was protected from a lot of it because I was at boarding school during the week, but now I see things weren’t right. He was sleeping in the basement, rather than with

my mum, and when I was at home at weekends we would take him tea in the mornings. My mum would always go into the room first – I know now it’s because she was scared he might have killed himself.

It became a family tradition that we would stop for dinner at a takeaway when Mum and Dad drove me back to school on a Sunday night. One night, when I was 15, my mum went in to get the food while I stayed in the car with Dad. That’s when I realised something was really wrong. I’d never felt awkward with him before, but suddenly I was forcing myself to make conversation. ‘How’s work?’ I began. I never asked him that. He was sitting ➤

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with his feet on the seat, head down, very quiet, which wasn't like him. That night I said to Mum, 'There's something wrong with Dad.' She just said, 'Yes'.

I phoned her the next day, and she told me Dad's doctor had said he should go into The Priory. At the time, I didn't think it was that big a deal. You were always hearing about celebrities going in and out of there.

It was March 2006; he was due to stay for three weeks. I would visit on a Sunday with Mum. He was paranoid – he would say that no one liked him, but later I would

I heard a male and female police officer from the top of the stairs asking my mum, 'What relation are you to Robert Carlos Clarke?' My first thought was that he had been in an accident. I rushed down and saw Mum's face – like she had seen a ghost – and I knew he was dead.

I couldn't react. I don't think I cried. Mum went upstairs with the female officer; I stayed downstairs, asking the man about his job and family. But at the same time, I was thinking, 'The worst thing in the world has happened and I can't deal with that.'

I can feel his influence all the time. I run an online magazine, *PIGMEE*, with my friend Harriet, and I work at Bleach London hair salon. We do a lot of shoots, so that makes me think about how he worked. He taught me a lot about photography, but I was too young to remember it all. I wish he was here to teach me more. I'm also designing a T-shirt collection. Many of them are printed with line drawings taken from erotic photographs that some might think are in a similar vein to my father's. It's as if I can't escape his style. I would love to

talk to him about work. Sometimes I think, 'He would have thought this is stupid,' or 'He would have thought this is cool.' I can hear him say things to me. I don't feel I have to prove anything to anyone because of my name. It is a lot to live up to but that's a good thing.

I feel like I have become an angry person since it happened. You think that you'll never worry about the small things again, but it has magnified everything. People ask if I'm angry with *him* for doing what he did but I can't be, because I know how ill he was. It must have been hell to be in his mind. For a while, I had nightmares – one where he pushed me onto a train track – but I know it wasn't really him. When I start to think about the detail of what happened and its violence, that's when it upsets me the most.

It is a big gap in my life, and I think I try and fill it. At the moment, I'm raising money to make a film about him. I think about Dad all the time. I miss him. But he did it to himself. He didn't want to be a boy from Ireland who got a normal job. He was terrified of being old and I think he was always going to do something like this.

When I hear people moaning about their parents, I think, 'How can you be like that?' but they don't have what I had. I prefer that, even though it ended so dramatically. I am really angry that I can't talk to him. There are times when I feel so sad and days when I can't stop crying, but most of the time I am fuelled by it – it's almost like he has given me his energy, so now I have to carry on. ■

To donate to Scarlett's film, visit [bobcarlosclarke.com](http://bobcarlosclarke.com)

*'I think about him all the TIME. I miss him. But he did it to himself. He was TERRIFIED of being old'*

see him surrounded by a big group of people. He thought someone was trying to kill him, or that a model was suing him.

It scared me. I remember thinking, 'This is someone with so much character, and he's reduced to a small, mad person.' But I still thought he'd get better and everything would go back to normal.

The last time I saw him was in the hospital. Strangely, and I'll never know why, it felt very final. 'Goodbye,' was all he said, standing by a radiator in this long corridor, really far away from me. He looked fairly normal – in his usual clothes – but there was something about his eyes that made him look as if he wasn't really there.

When you're just a teenager you're not tuned in to those instincts – I'd never really thought about death before, and I went back to school looking forward to the next weekend when I would be home for Easter. I knew he'd be coming out of The Priory, too, and I was excited about seeing him.

A week later (the week before he was due to leave The Priory), he discharged himself; at the same time as I got on a train back to London, he threw himself in front of one.

At lunchtime, I was upstairs having a bath and there was a bang on the door.



Clockwise from top: Scarlett now; 1984 artwork by Bob; Bob Carlos Clarke in 2005

Because it was the holidays, I didn't have to go back to school. I started to get letters from friends, but I don't think the loss hit until two years later. I remember being at his funeral, and not crying, and thinking people must think I was cold. You imagine if something like that happens, your life would fall apart, but you do just carry on.

Now, I cry a lot more. I'm sad I didn't get to hang out with him because we would have got on really well. He had a naughty sense of humour, which I would have found funny now but I didn't appreciate when I was young. I know we would have had fights, too – if I had gone out at night, he would have turned up. Something embarrassing like that.