

Damaged lives



Between 2004 and 2006, **Adrian Clarke**, a former duty solicitor at King's Cross police station, photographed and interviewed a network of people in the North East linked to Gary Crooks, an ex-drug dealer, gangster and armed robber. The result, *Gary's Friends*, provides a bulletin from a Britain which lies beyond the usual comfort zone, one filled with poverty, prejudice, drug abuse, violence and neglect.

Gary's Friends is a collection of portraits of people affected by drug addiction and alcoholism in the villages around Durham, and in Middlesbrough.

"I have no particular view about people who take drugs," insists Adrian. "I didn't come up here to take pictures of needles in people's arms, flat on the floor, mothers in destitution. This is not a project about suffering. 'The major problem now is you can get a gram of cocaine around here for fifteen to twenty pounds, and people who should go home after eight pints are stoned on cocaine and drinking fifteen. The violence is completely mindless. Whereas, in the late eighties and early nineties, you had ecstasy and the people at nightclubs who would normally fight, started dancing.

"It's a very particular experience people have had in these villages," reflects the book's photographer and interviewer Adrian Clarke, an ex-lawyer who specialised in cases of miscarriages of justice. "If you go to London or Manchester, though there might be just as much deprivation, you are not going to find someone who knows what it is to have suffered in a County Durham village. There's a feeling of loss and need to go to the pub with people who have a shared experience. I've talked to people who've been perfectly capable of getting good jobs, making money elsewhere, and they've come back to be in drug-ridden families in sad villages."

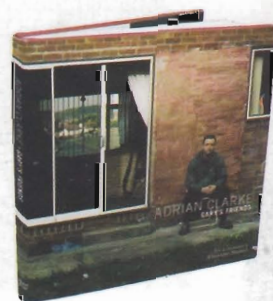
Alexander Masters

Extracted from *Gary's Friends* by Adrian Clarke, published by The West Pier Press at £30.

For further information or to purchase a copy:

www.garysfriends.net;
01325 245 555.

If you mention you are a Druglink reader, you are entitled to a 20% discount



Man with dalmatian, Horden, 2005

Mona Whyte

I've been through some bad things with Alan and I blame them all on drugs.

One time Marie, Alan's girlfriend, came to the house and told me that Alan was in a state and that she thought he was going to hurt himself. I went over with my husband, Jim. We found a trail of blood up the stairs which we followed and we found Alan lying with blood all over his neck. We thought he'd



Mona Whyte and her son Alan Davies, Middlesbrough, 2006

slit his throat but, in fact, he'd slashed his face with a razor blade all the way across his cheek from his eye to his jaw.

Alan died and was brought back to life many times over the years. Once he was found collapsed in a doorway of MFI in the industrial park

Another time, Alan came in raving so badly that he made me upset and so Jim told him to leave. But then I got worried and so I went out looking for him and I found him nearby. He told me that he wanted to die and I could see that he was desperate and that he couldn't help himself. Right in front of me he smashed his head through a shop window. The glass cut his face and he had to go to hospital. It wasn't that he wanted to die but he was like a caged animal: he had nowhere to turn so he turned on himself.

Alan died and was brought back to life many times over the years. Once he was found collapsed in a doorway of MFI in the industrial park. It was five in the morning and cold. He had to be resuscitated. One time it took the hospital staff more than three hours to revive him. Several times he went to St. Luke's, the psychiatric unit, and asked to be admitted but he was told they couldn't help him so he ended up on the streets. I

couldn't look after him. He wanted me to have him back home but I couldn't cope. He used to sit on the wall outside the house waiting for me to do something for him. He was six and a half stone; he was dying like an animal.

I wouldn't have known one drug from another but I found out he was on heroin because once when I went round to his house I saw through a window someone injecting him in the arm, though by then he had already changed and become argumentative and difficult to

live with. Alan was a heroin addict for many years. I think most people assumed he would die from it because not many addicts last that long – either they die or they stop. His father died from his drinking and I could see that it was out of Alan's control, like it was with his dad.

But Alan found a way out, though it is a mystery to me what it was that changed. It was as though he had to go through the years of misery, as though he had something to pay for. By then there were some things that couldn't be put right. He took heroin with his wife, Mandy, for ten or eleven years and those were the years during which my grandson, Stephen, grew up. Heroin was all Stephen knew, so when he ended up using it with his father and his stepmother it was no great surprise, which is not to say that it was any easier for me to bear.

From the age of eleven Stephen lived with me on and off though he would go back to his mum's sometimes. He wasn't at school much; he hung out with his dad. He's in prison now serving a six-year sentence. I worry about him just like I worried about Alan. He rings me every so often from prison and I want him home, but in a way it feels safer having him in prison so that he's not on the street corner and I don't have to decide whether it's better to leave him out or have him home. He has another two years to do. He'll be 29 when he comes out.

Jane Hornby

My mum and dad split up when I was 19: my mum waited until our Yvonne was sixteen and then she got out. My dad cried a lot and so I tried to look after him but I couldn't do much really.

I moved to a flat in Hemlington where there was lots of heroin around and I got involved with a lad who used it. I didn't realise you could get addicted if you just smoked it rather than injecting it. He used to go off to prison and I would stop using but only until he came back.

When he got a four-year sentence I took my chance and left him. I bought methadone on the street; then I was on a script for a while and then I stopped that as well. I moved and started a new relationship and we had Liam.

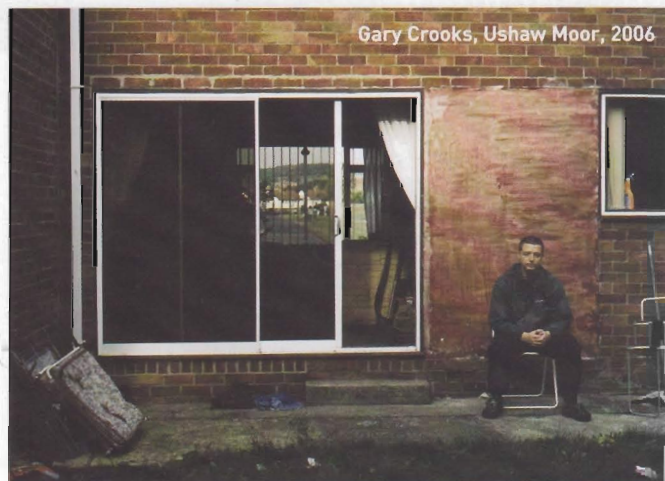
Six months later I was pregnant again and fifteen months later I had two children under one and a half to look after. Neither of them slept much. Richard, my boyfriend, wasn't working and he wanted looking after as well. At the same time my dad had both his knees replaced and I was doing his shopping and helping him at work. I felt like a slave and I was depressed, sleep-deprived and miserable. I couldn't see what was the point of it all. I used to sit on the back step of the house and cry and cry for no reason. I don't know if it was postnatal depression or what.



I started going to Redcar for the day out with my friend Jane. I took some heroin with her. It was the only time I had a laugh. The heroin helped me cope. I'm not sure I could have kept going otherwise, or that is how it felt at the time.

That was two years ago. I've used on and off since then and I continue to struggle with it. I'm on a methadone script as well now. It may be that if there'd been some support for me with the children then I'd have stayed clean but I can't be sure.

Gary Crooks



My great great uncle was the footballer Sammy Crooks. He was capped twenty six times for England. My uncle's cousin, Alan Crooks, was mayor of Durham and his father, Bob, was chairman of the County Council. But ours was the less successful branch of the family. My granddad, who was a miner at Bearpark colliery, turned into a bit of a lunatic after he fell down the colliery lift shaft. He was a big drinker. He made my dad collect coal from the slag heap and chop logs to fund his drinking.

My dad was a miner for a while but mostly he worked on building sites. I was frightened of him. He would hit me with a belt. My mum had some kind of a collapse when my dad left –

I think she lost hope: she took to drinking and she gave up trying to create a home so I was left to run things. There were me and my sister, Beverley, and, sometimes, my three cousins as well. There was nothing for us: no food, no money, nothing.

We stole food to eat. I worked out I could throw a hook through the back window of the Co-op and lift food out. I nicked coal as well and we used to take from the school food deliveries and I stole books.

When I was 11 my mum got together with Alan. He was a miner at the colliery at Esh. He used to drink and then he got violent and then at other times he got depressed. He tried to hang himself in our house: he pulled the bed to the bedroom window and put a rope round his neck and jumped out; we found him with bubbles coming out of his mouth and mum had to cut him down. On New Year's Eve he slit his wrists in front of me, my sister and a friend of ours. I bandaged them up for him. He isn't with my mum any more but I still see him occasionally. He's still a drinker.

I first got into trouble when I was 12: I broke into some disused houses and I nicked the copper piping and the boilers and sold them for scrap. I was fined 18 pounds. I didn't think I was doing anything wrong because I needed the money for food for me and my sister. That was how it started but by the time I was fourteen I was making good money from crime. I used to do the work for the older lads. I burgled houses and nicked car stereos. 1990 was a bad year for me. I was fifteen. By then I was doing armed robberies and all sorts and, at the same time, I was drinking and taking speed and acid.

I want to live a life now that makes sense to me. I know I'm lucky – many, perhaps most, of my friends from childhood are either in prison, in psychiatric units or dead.