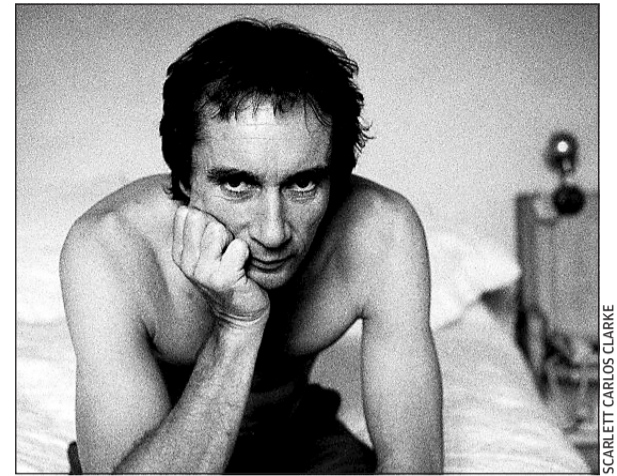


Feature



**Tragedy:** Scarlett Clarke, now 18, says she did not appreciate how mentally fragile her father Bob, pictured above in a photo by his daughter, was. He took his own life in March 2006, aged 56

feel abandoned and betrayed: does she? Endearingly muddled, emotion and logic struggle for the upper hand. "Everyone always says to me, 'You do know how much he loved you, don't you?' but that makes me angry and I think, why the f\*\*\* did he do that then? If I could say anything to him now I think it would be, 'Why so dramatic?' But I know he hated getting older and he hated me growing up, and because I understand what he was like, I think it must have been hard being him."

Today she is impressively self-composed. Her iPod is full of retro music from Fleetwood Mac and the Stranglers but her speech is classic teen-speak, punctuated by "like" and "sort of". One suspects she has grown accustomed to putting on a brave face. Has she had to steel herself for this interview? "Sometimes it's nicer to talk to someone you're not close to, although I did have one counselling session after he died and I cried the whole way through."

It's the little things that still trigger Scarlett's tears: the smell of the perfume she used to wear when she was visiting her father – "I can't wear it any more" – and unexpected pictures. Not long ago she was thrown when she came across a photo album belonging to family friend, former model Amanda Eliasch, packed full of childhood photographs from when the two families holidayed together.

After his death she turned to her uncle Andrew – her father's younger brother – for comfort. A former heroin addict who had cleaned up his act and become an estate agent, he became her new father figure. She was utterly devastated when, a year ago, he died of a heart attack brought on by a heroin overdose. Life has dealt her such an intensive crash course in grief she has had to grow up quickly. "I'd got so close to him but I hated that he'd been lying to me and still smoking heroin. Now I feel that nothing else can happen that's bad – it's all done. The only other terrible thing that could happen would be if Mum dies." She reflects: "I used to think I had the perfect life. How can such a perfect life get so messed up?"

However, her father's influence lives on. In September she is taking up a place at Chelsea College of Art and, like her dad, is passionate about photography. Of all his pictures her favourites are *Paradise Lost* and one featured in the retrospective, *Sarah Kneeling*. "He was an amazing photographer and printer. I wish I could know him now I'm older but I hope I can take everything I learnt from him. I'd like him to be remembered for being witty, clever and fun; his good side."

■ **Bob Carlos Clarke: Full Throttle**, 14 April-5 June, *The Little Black Gallery*, 13A Park Walk, SW10. [www.thelittleblackgallery.com](http://www.thelittleblackgallery.com)

Clarke, could you please sit down,' and, at that point, I just began to gulp and take huge intakes of air."

Unable to bring herself to go downstairs, she loitered by the banisters catching snippets of the conversation. "When I did finally go downstairs I saw Mum white-faced sitting on a chair and the first thing I blurted out was, 'Has he died?' and mum just nodded. She went to call a friend to ask her to come to the house and I stayed downstairs talking to the policeman, asking him about his family and drifting back and forwards to the fridge. In the back of

my mind was, 'Oh my God, my dad's just died,' but it didn't feel like it had happened at all."

Later that evening one of her former nannies came over to be with her while her mother, equally dazed, took the ostensibly bizarre decision to go to a drinks party. "I don't even think she told anyone there that dad had died. Looking back I feel kind of angry and she knows that, but I realise that Mum deals with stuff in a different way to me."

She scarcely remembers the funeral, held at Brompton Cemetery. The coffin

was jet black and covered in red roses, and her mother had chosen one of Carlos Clarke's favourite tracks, *Sympathy For The Devil* by The Rolling Stones. "I think he'd have appreciated it. It was the most surreal thing: I felt as if I was the only person there, I didn't notice anyone. I was still in shock, so it didn't feel real. I couldn't believe he was in the coffin."

For weeks afterwards she shut herself away at home, overwhelmed by isolation and not wanting to speak to anyone. "I did see some people and try to be normal but the night would always

end with me crying. It was always in the back of my mind."

She has a tight-knit group of friends but understands it was impossible for any of her contemporaries to fathom her grief. "Hardly anyone I know has even lost grandparents. When I went back to school after the Easter holidays my friends were really good, but nobody really gets it or knows what to say to make you feel better, so you just have to get on with it. Although then you look like you're fine and people think you're weird and haven't got any feelings. There's nothing you can really

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say unless you've been through the same thing and can understand what it's like. I remember getting really angry when everyone started talking about their dads and thinking, 'Make the most of your parents while you can.'"

She readily acknowledges her school-work nosedived. "I stopped caring if I did well. He was the one who made me want to do well and I feel as if I never really got to prove anything to him."

When a loved one commits suicide it's perfectly usual for those behind to



**Sexually charged:** two works by Bob Carlos Clarke. A retrospective opens at the Little Black Gallery in Chelsea next week