

**Karen Kelly, 49, is a mother of three from Belfast. Just after their 'best Christmas ever' last year, her youngest child, Martin, then 21, went missing...**



# MY SEARCH FOR MARTY

**I**t was our best Christmas ever. But I didn't know it was going to be our last. Because as the festive season came to an end, on New Year's Day, my wee lad disappeared off the face of the earth.

Martin was my youngest and the only one still at home. His sister Suzanne, 26, had moved to London and Fiona, 27, the eldest, was pregnant with her second child and living with her husband, Paul, not far from us in Holywood, Belfast.

Me and my partner Drew, 48, had decided to move to a bigger house so Martin could have more space - he was 21 and needed a bit of privacy. We'd bought a lovely house with a loft conversion.

So it was our last Christmas in the family home and we made the most of it. I had to cook for 13 friends and family on Christmas Day, but it was no problem. Martin made the prawn cocktails and a few drinks helped keep me merry.

Caollin, my first grandchild, now two, had just started running around and no one could stop him. Martin was his godfather and they doted on each other - Martin doesn't know he's now got another nephew, Aidan.

'I'll take Caollin home to bed after dinner, Mum,' Fiona told me. But he was so excited when another 25 or so of Martin's friends turned up for a party on Christmas night,

he kept going until he collapsed at one in the morning. The rest of us managed a couple more hours of partying.

We spent Boxing Day meeting up with more friends for a meal.

'Hadn't we better start packing yet, Mum?' Martin laughed. 'It can wait, Marty,' I told him. 'Let's enjoy New Year first.'

Martin was working in our local pub, The Priory Inn, that night so Drew and I went for a curry before joining him to see in the New Year.

'This will make you VERY happy, Mum,' Martin said as he handed me

**'He said he'd catch up with friends. He never arrived'**

a huge cocktail with a smile on his face. He was right - it was lethal! The bar staff were allowed to stop working for a few minutes



as the New Year rang in. Martin and I had a dance together, gave each other a kiss and said 'I love you'. That's how we saw in what was about to become the worst year of my life. It was the last time I saw my lovely boy.

Martin went on to a couple of parties, stayed the night at a friend's, then spent New Year's Day watching a football match in the pub. But he must have been in the loo when his mates all caught taxis and went on to another pub. They called his mobile, though, and he said he'd catch them up a little later when he'd finished his pint. He never arrived.

The next day, Drew and I went to the sales to buy furniture for the new house. Then we went looking for Marty, thinking he'd have stayed at someone's house and we'd catch up with him in one of the town's bars.

We met one of his friends, but she said no one had seen him in 24 hours. We were immediately worried. We waited up all night



Martin

Suzanne

Me

Fiona

Friend Sarah

