

Where are you, son?

Karen and her son toasted in the New Year — but by the next morning he'd vanished

He touched the guitar's shiny wood. 'Great, thanks, Mum,' my son Martin beamed. It had cost me £430. But it was his 21st birthday.

I was 48, divorced, a mum to Fiona, 26, and Suzanne, 24, as well. Martin lived with me and my partner Drew, 46. We were so close. We both loved our local, Neil Young's music, spaghetti carbonara...

At 17, Martin had gone off to Africa to help build an

orphanage. Now he was a trainee plumber, hoped to use his skills abroad. For extra cash, he worked in a pub.

Nine months after his birthday, last New Year's Eve, Drew and I popped in to see him. 'Cocktail?' he twinkled.

'Wow!' I gasped. 'Packs a punch.' At midnight, I hugged him. 'Have a great year, love.'

'Love you,' he grinned. As we left to go to a friend's party, Martin winked: 'I'll celebrate after work.'

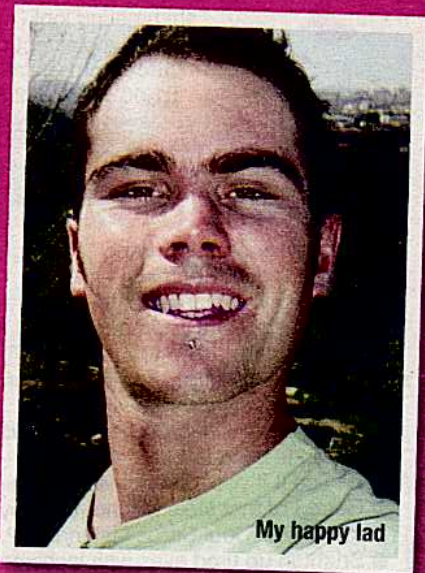
On New Year's morning, he

wasn't home. 'Must've been a good night,' I smiled. I rang him, left a message.

Next day, still no sign. His mobile had run down. His mates said he'd partied till 8am, then stayed at a pal's.

At 2pm, they'd hit Belfast's Clarendon Docks area. They last saw Martin at 6.30pm in Pat's Bar, then caught taxis home. Martin wasn't with them. *So where was he?*

I reported him missing. Two days on, police combed our house for clues — had



My happy lad

he run away, killed himself?

Impossible. 'He wouldn't just disappear,' I wept. 'He was happy. I know my son.'

I lay awake at night, waiting. By day, I went through Belfast showing people his photo.

A week after he vanished, divers searched the docks. 'We think he was drunk, then fell in,' an officer said gently.

'No!' I raged. He'd never be that silly. But then a body was found on wasteland. We waited for the morgue to confirm it was Martin.

But it wasn't. Relief met despair. I racked my brain. Did he have amnesia? Had he jumped onto a ferry?

Five months on, his mates held a concert, raised £12,000. 'For you,' they said. 'To find him.'

A friend gave me a motor home and a month on, Drew and I drove to all the major cities from

Scotland downwards. We'd hand out flyers, ask: 'Do you know this man? Think hard.'

A month on, desperate, we reached London. Was Martin homeless? Destitute? We stood by hostels, scanning every haunted face. Nothing.

A year later, I cling to the hope Martin's alive. His bed's made. His guitar's waiting. I'll never give up on my son.

**KAREN KELLY, 50,
HOLLYWOOD, CO DOWN**



I've scoured every city