



# Behold the Man

By Marksteen Adamson

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SYNOPSIS



**THE BIG COLD TURKEY FOUNDATION**

ALL NET PROCEEDS OF THIS PROJECT ARE INVESTED INTO PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES CONCERNED WITH YOUTH AT RISK, OR IN RECOVERY FROM, DRUGS & ALCOHOL.

## Hidden Assets

There are strong links between substance misuse and homelessness, with drug users being seven times more likely to be homeless than the general population. In fact research suggests that two thirds of individuals report increasing problems with substance misuse after becoming homeless, and more than half of hostels report that the majority of their clients have a problem with drugs in the survey conducted by Homeless Link. It seems to me that Homelessness often leads to substance abuse and substance abuse often leads to homelessness. They are intrinsically linked.

### Finding Alan

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Out of all the homeless addicts I knew, Alan was the hardest to reach. He had a reputation for being a tuff nut to crack and very moody. So I chose him as I felt he would be the biggest challenge. My intention was not to try and fix Alan, but instead I wanted to find a way to make him see some hope and maybe that would start his journey of recovery.

To do that, I would have to uncover his hidden assets and find his soul.

I wanted to see if I could discover the real Alan behind this endless cycle of destruction that grips him and won't let go. I also wanted to learn more about myself.

I also wanted to understand in greater depth Addiction and Homelessness and explore the way we respond to this crisis. I did discover more about myself along the way too.

Using my camera and spending time with him I was able to, over time, capture a series of Alans varying states of mind I would otherwise miss with the naked eye resulting in a deeper realisation of a significant human soul trapped inside a body obscured by a lust for self destruction.

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## You and me

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Alan is just a man like me and many others who could have ended up in his hopeless state if it wasn't for the support of friends, family, permanent employment, hope and the legacy of a relatively stable childhood. We are all confronted with addictions in one form or another. For some it might be coffee, but for others it will be more. For some of us the power of addiction will dominate and send us unwillingly off track. A few will be able to moderate, but for some, one dabble is too many and ten thousand never enough, and for those, life can end in jail, institutions, premature death and homelessness. Some will come back but others will remain in a state of advanced addiction. For those, the pain of return is often harder to bear than the pain and suffering that a daily habit brings. It's a downward spiral with no off button.

## Discovering Alan

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The more I got to know Alan, the more I started to understand some of his inner pain and hopelessness. But I didn't know how to fix him. He's been in and out of rehab for years, and been prescribed methadone scripts, but to no avail. The process of conventional government-funded rehabilitation usually only allows for initial detox and a few counseling sessions. But without extensive residential rehab or longterm support, the chances of staying off drugs are slim. The mind requires much longer to rebuild a life that never was and to find new friends who aren't addicts or dealers.

To find Alan's beauty, I had to strip away the bad behavior and the sense of hopelessness. I had to crop away the smell and the dirt and focus only on the human spirit – the man himself.

As he stared through my lens I was able to see truth and beauty more clearly; I was able to see choices, values, gifts and strengths. I saw the possibility of a fresh start; a well of self-belief barely visible. I discovered stories, and variety and depth of emotion. When he finally relaxed and let go of his expectations, I began to discover the real him. I saw endless opportunities, dreams and aspirations, disappointments and regrets. I saw the litter of broken promises, abandonment and neglect. But I also saw confidence, charisma, intellect, humour and street-wise wisdom. A kind, loving, enduring being, noble in suffering.

I wanted to see if I could portray the significance of the man he could be or could have been. I wanted to see if I could inspire him to change, but I also wanted to warn young people of the dangers of dabbling with mood-altering substances, be it alcohol, or drugs.

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## Discovering Alan: *continued*

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I thought it would be a short project, but three years later I was still taking portraits (searching for that one image) and interviewing him and his friends for my video documentary.

*It's easy to let go of hope for this man when others have given up on him. But I wanted Alan to see my hope, however dim and distant it was. I wanted to discover the real Alan.*

*The Alan before he smoked his first joint, kissed his first girlfriend. It's the Alan before his parents died and he was sent to a children's home. Life was never going to be easy for him."*

## Alan's parallel universe

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Alan has existed in a parallel universe, one that is distant and unaware of the other.

Over time his view on life has narrowed, and only focused on basic and simple needs. He has lived at the sharpest end of survival, one day at a time, hand to mouth, chasing the impossible ecstasy of his first high. Living and working the streets all year round, he begged a living, only to drink it, smoke it or inject it away into his last functional veins. Slowly and surely, he stripped himself away. His body deteriorating at an unforgiving speed. His mind slowly closing down because of the impurities sliced and diced into bags of heroin by greedy dealers and shady runners, with their own habits to feed.

Heroin does not take rejection well - give it up and it comes looking for you like a vengeful demon in the night. And for some, the pain of freedom that life after detox brings is too high a price to pay.

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## Significance

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I decided to have a large print made of one of the portraits I took of Alan in the car park where he would score drugs. It was the shot where I felt I'd finally captured his inner soul; the innocent part of him that expresses what he could be, or could have been. It felt 'Christlike.' An Innocent state of Mind, Hopeful and Free, humble and compassionate.

I wanted to confront, face to face, the perception of significance. I wanted to show it to Alan. I enlarged the portrait of his face to the size of a human body. As I stood in front of the large portrait and looked up at Alan's image I was instantly dwarfed by his presence - the depth in his face and the beauty in his eyes. No animation, no drama, no request, just peace and stillness. Less is more. No need to smile, no need to act. No need to speak – just being. For a moment I feel insignificant standing in his presence and an overwhelming sense of shame and guilt, forever thinking that I was any more important than him.

For the first time I felt hope for Alan. I wanted him to see that hope too. I took the print back to the very spot where I had taken the portrait of Alan and I stuck it up high on the wall.

I went and found Alan to show him. He could hardly speak.

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If you would like to find out more information about this project please contact Marksteen Adamson: [me@marksteen.com](mailto:me@marksteen.com). Go online to purchase the book: [thebigcoldturkey.com](http://thebigcoldturkey.com)

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