

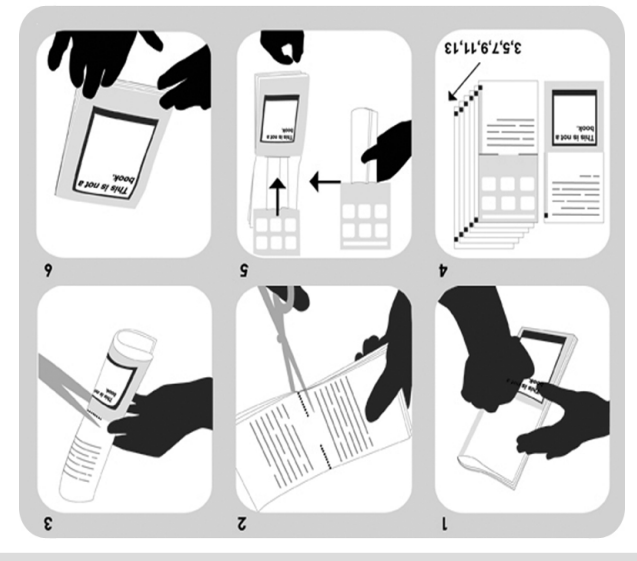
mother was living with his main rival for her affections from the sixties until her death, it would have become a bone of contention between them. To ensure that Bruno didn't find out she'd rekindled her old relationship with Grainger, my mother had to keep it a secret from anyone who was close to him. Thus Nina informed me: "The flat was Grainger's. Presumably Julia was living there with him at the time, although I didn't realise it was his when I spent that night there. Judging by the timing, he must have moved out shortly afterwards, quite possibly because of the associations." Soon after my mother's death Grainger relocated to what one of his heroin buddies described as 'a pokey council flat in the Elephant and Castle'. The distance in miles between Ladbroke Grove and the Elephant isn't great but the ambience of these two districts is completely distinct. I have been told by some of those who knew Grainger that he was very 'cut-up' about my mother's death, and it seems his move from west to south London was at least partially prompted by it.

Mary Jane Duchene who found my mother's body told me: "We often went to Divine Light Mission meetings together, and that was the reason I

Everybody knows there are a million stories in the city and yet most of them remain untold. Local newspapers are a good source for backdated gossip but often these publications lack both the resources and the motivation to properly investigate the stories they pick up. For anyone who shares my interest in the London counterculture, the weekly back issues of *The Kensington News & Post* from the sixties and seventies are a valuable resource. Here one can find lurid tales of drugs, squats, hippies, bent coppers, black power, prostitutes and much else that resulted in figures both famous and obscure being hauled up before London courts, or sometimes less unhappily dealing with local reporters after they'd issued a press release. The running story in the *Kensington News* at the end of 1979 was the hunt for a school boy Martin Allen who'd been missing since 5 November. The lead feature of Friday 7 December 1979 concerned a fire close to Westbourne Grove which resulted in seven people who lived above the Rhodes Restaurant being plucked to safety from the flames that engulfed the building. Other stories covered that week included a call by Labour Party councillors for the neo-Nazi

# On The Death Of Julia Callan Thompson

Stewart Home



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 Stewart Home**

organisation The League of St. George to be banned from holding meetings in municipal buildings. However what most interests me in the 7 December 1979 edition of *The Kensington News* is a tiny paragraph tucked at the bottom of an inside page. Under the heading 'Found Dead' are these words: "Julia Callan-Thompson was found dead in her basement flat in Cambridge Gardens on Sunday December 2. Police say there were no suspicious circumstances. She was middle-aged." There was no follow-on reporting in subsequent editions of the newspaper.

Who was Julia Callan-Thompson? My interest in her stems from the fact that she was my mother, but given her long involvement with bohemianism and the drug subculture, her biography is also closely bound up with many of the things that continue to fascinate all of us about the swinging sixties. My mother had an action packed and sometimes troubled life. She was thirty-five when she died but having been separated from her as a child, I only learnt of her death twenty-three years later. By chance as an adult making a living as a writer I'd established professional and social relationships with people who'd moved in the same circles as my mother. As these overlaps

who have seen Grainger since 1986, five years ago I called several times at a flat in south London where I believed Grainger was living, but the man resident in the property wouldn't answer the door and it is now occupied by someone else. Although my mother had many lovers, ultimately only two were really significant to her, Grainger was one and Bruno de Galzain the other. And to wrap up, while Brian Barritt can be contacted easily enough, he has to date refused to speak to me about my mother and her death.

became apparent to me, I found myself in a position to learn a great deal about her. In my mother's *Post-Mortem Examination*, Dr. Iain West records that she was: "A well nourished woman, 5' 6" in height, looking considerably older than her stated age. There is a healing injection mark on the front of the left wrist, this is of several days duration. No evidence of fresh injection marks. There are multiple old scars of the veins of the fronts of both elbows and some scarring over the wrists including some horizontal scarring over the proximal part of the right wrist." Julia Callan-Thompson died in the back basement flat at 104 Cambridge Gardens on 2 December 1979. She was found dead in bed at 6pm by an American friend Mary Jane Duchene. The Coroner's Officer PC Peter Weyell records the authorities as having spoken to only two of my mother's friends in the course of a cursory investigation into her death. Both these women, the aforementioned Mary Jane and a Nina Trott, knew at the time they spoke to the authorities that my mother had undergone withdrawal from heroin three weeks before she died; and both were of the opinion that heroin may well have played a role in her death.

money and more junk).

On the night my mother died, Grainger had sold a lot of gear and used all that was left over himself. Therefore there wasn't a shot for my mother when she got in from work. Desperate for a fix, my mother went and scored street heroin from Brian Barritt. She bought the equivalent of what she thought she'd been getting from Grainger, not knowing he'd exaggerated the size of the hits he'd been giving her. She shot up before going to bed. My mother woke Grainger in the night to tell him she couldn't breath and needed help. He told her to go back to sleep, which is what he did. When Grainger woke up in the morning my mother was dead in bed beside him because she'd overdosed. Grainger proceeded to clean up the flat, removing all needles and other signs of drug use. When he called on his near neighbour Brian Barritt to tell him what had happened, he was visibly upset and in a panic.

Without some form of corroboration, it is impossible to know whether or not there is any truth to the story I've just related. Grainger may be able to throw some light on my mother's death, but to date I haven't managed to speak with him. I can't find any west London hipsters

Nonetheless rather than noting this, PC Weyell opted instead to use my mother's fraudulent 1975 job application for the post of social worker at The Blenheim Project as conclusive proof that her use of drugs was well in the past at the time of her death. Since my mother appears to have been known to PC Weyell prior to her death, I have difficulty understanding how he overlooked the incongruities contained in this document. For example, my mother had been a club hostess since she was a teenager and I find it surprising that someone in Weyell's position would accept at face value her claim in the job application that she was awarded an MPhil by University College London in 1966. A simple phone call would have enabled Weyell to establish that my mother had never been a postgraduate student at UCL. Indeed, my mother had never attended a university, let alone gained postgraduate qualifications from what was in the sixties considered one of the best academic philosophy departments in the world.

My mother had a history of involvement with frauds, and PC Weyell should have been able to access information about this if it wasn't already known to him. Had he done so, I would have

In the late-seventies my mother was having a down period. However, at the very end of her life she got a job in a clip joint. The manager had employed her before but was wary of her smack habit, so she'd had to convince him she was clean in order to get the job. Since it isn't easy to land a hostess job at the age of 35, my mother really felt she was on the up again. She had just done cold turkey in the US, but once she was back in the UK with her boyfriend Grainger, she wanted hits to help her relax after she finished work. Grainger made these up from his personal stash, and although Julie was living with him as his common-law wife, he charged her for the gear. He told friends he exaggerated the size of the hits he was giving my mother, because lying to her about this kept her straight enough to do her clip joint job (it also meant Grainger had both more

**APPENDA**

There are a number of stories in circulation about my mother's death, and these vary from the claim that she was murdered by an obsessed john to the less sensational suggestion that she died from an accidental heroin overdose. Only the latter rumour need concern us here. The story runs as follows.

expected it to lead him to query the veracity of the information on her Blenheim Project job application. Most cops working in west London in the late seventies would have recognised the first referee on this document as a leading figure in local drug subculture, and Alex Trocchi's name alone should have aroused PC Weyell's suspicions about the truthfulness of a job application in which my mother claimed to have overcome her addiction to opiates in the early seventies. Likewise, I find it hard to envisage any competent police officer failing to find something dubious in a registered heroin addict applying for a job as a drug worker that entailed them making prison visits to jailed junkies. My mother also falsified her date of birth on the application and this slippage alone should have aroused suspicions about its veracity. One of the consequences of PC Weyell's flawed work was that no toxicology was performed on my mother's body, and given the circumstances in which she died there clearly should have been one. If a toxicology had been carried out it seems likely the results would have led to a public inquest into her death. The autopsy performed on my mother was a purely visual examination. As a consequence, if

the part of those entrusted with investigating her death.

Just why the Coroner's Officer conducted his inquires the way he did strikes me as a greater mystery than the actual cause of my mother's death. That said, for the *Kensington News* there was nothing puzzling about my mother's death or the investigation into it. For local newspapers the police are a vital source of information and thus it is generally in their own best interests to take what the authorities tell them at face value. There are a million stories in the city and my mother's is one of many that might very easily have remained untold.

shortly before her death she had been injecting heroin into some of the less immediately visible parts of her body, such as between her toes, the resulting scarring would have been neither seen nor noted during the course of her *Post-Mortem Examination*. As a result my mother's death was certified as being due to natural causes, more specifically bronchopneumonia. Since something will invariably be found in the lungs after death, bronchopneumonia is often given as the cause of death in instances when nothing else can be established; or where those in a position of authority prefer not to do a proper investigation for whatever reason.

It is a banality to state that death is always the result of the failure of a major organ, and from a legal standpoint what should be determined by the coronary process is the chain of events leading to the fatality rather than its ultimate cause. Paul Knapman who oversaw the investigation into my mother's death states in the third edition of *Thurston's Coronership*, which he co-authored with Michael J. Powers, that bronchopneumonia alone should generally only be treated as a cause of death among the elderly or the homeless. By the late seventies the

My mother had composed better poems, but in its raw and unstructured state this one sums up very well a side of her life that remained strangely overlooked by the authorities when they investigated her death. Since my mother's diary was among the few of her possessions to be found in the room in which she died, it was anything but inaccessible to PC Weyell. Again, I find it difficult to envisage a competent police officer looking at this last diary entry and then concluding, as Weyell did, that my mother was not addicted to drugs at the end of her life. It remains possible that the authorities failed to examine my mother's diary, although if this is the case then it is yet another serious oversight on

*For hours you have put me through mental torture  
Because I desired you  
Sure I wanted love  
anyway I could  
But you denied me  
both  
fuck & fix  
And then dropping a Tuinal  
like an over the hill whore  
you became an easy lay.*

authorities were perfectly well aware that in west London it was not uncommon for deaths from bronchopneumonia to be brought on by an overdose of drugs. In such cases the law requires that the circumstances be properly determined and if there had been an overdose then an inquest into the death should be set up to establish among other things whether this was accidental, suicide or the result of foul play. The general comments at the bottom of *The Coroner's Officer's Report* into my mother's death are the most curious part of that document. They are wildly inaccurate and read as follows: "The deceased woman was separated from her husband (sic) who now lives in Hong Kong (sic) and residing at the above address (i.e. 104 Cambridge Gardens) alone (sic). There is a long history of addiction to drugs but well in the past (sic). No recent indications of this at all (sic). She was found dead in bed at 6pm on Sunday 3.12.79 (sic) by a friend Miss Mary Jane Duchene who then called the police. Miss Nina Prot (sic) is also a friend who stayed with her last week and observed that she seemed quite well although she had a bad cough. Enquiry re relatives still continues."

was in Bath, Bruno took my mother's ashes to bed with him at night. After staying with Nina for a week, de Galzain went to the grounds of a large house Maharaj Ji owned in Reigate and scattered my mother's remains there.

Nina says: "I think the key to understanding Julia especially in the last part of her life, is in the split between her two lives. The life as a premie (a follower of Guru Maharaj Ji) and the life as a junkie, which was really her previous life but one she couldn't ever quite get away from. I also think she probably found the life as a premie a bit too safe or whatever compared to what she'd been used to. It wasn't particularly tame to be a premie in those days, but she would have missed her friends like (Alex) Trocchi too much if she'd cut off from them completely." My mother's funeral and the scattering of her ashes at what was to her a site of spiritual importance cover one side of this; the last undated entry in her diary provides the other. Pretty much the final thing my mother wrote is a poem dedicated to her boyfriend Grainger and entitled *Computer in Pursuit of a Dream*:

*You lie there, legs straddled an easy lay  
Like some 'motherfucker' (your words)*

On the basis of the report drawn up by PC Weyell, the then deputy coroner Paul Knapman was satisfied that my mother was not addicted to drugs at the end of her life. This despite the fact that the *Post-Mortem Examination* states there was a healing needle mark a few days old on her right wrist. In most instances when a drug addict dies it seems unlikely anyone is going to question what the authorities record about the circumstances of their death, and this may account at least in part for the shoddy way in which PC Weyell conducted his investigation. Weyell didn't record and possibly didn't even know that Mary Jane Duchene was able to gain entry to my mother's bedsit because the street door that gave direct access to it was open. This certainly provides grounds to arouse suspicions that foul play may have played a role in her death; a more thorough investigation might have determined whether or not this was the case.

If, as I think likely, drugs played a role in my mother's death, then the trajectory of her life does offer insights into why she died at an early age. There is no single reason why my mother was addicted to heroin. That said, she moved in a milieu where both hard and soft drugs were

readily available, and she was greatly pained by the fact that she was separated from me. Heroin was one means of dulling the anguish and guilt she felt about me. A quite separate factor is that from the early sixties onwards my mother was engrossed in spiritual matters and her quest for knowledge about other realities spurred her on to experiment with various mind-altering substances. In the beatnik circles in which my mother moved, drugs were seen as a short cut to enlightenment. To someone from outside the counterculture it might appear strange how frequently addiction to heroin went hand in hand with new age religious pursuits, but within the hippie milieu, this state of affairs generated little to no comment. During the sixties my mother was attracted by the Subud movement, whose followers sought spontaneously achieved contact with God. In 1972 she joined The Divine Light Mission and she was involved with this body of followers devoted to the teachings of Shri Guru Maharaj Ji for the last seven years of her life. In early November 1979, less than a month before her death, my mother flew from London to Orlando in the United States where she was one of thousands of Divine Light Mission devotees who had been an addict and may just have assumed it was an overdose, or assumed it was pneumonia and did not look into it too carefully."

Neither Grainger nor Geoff Thompson (who'd cohabited with my mother for five years during the sixties) attended her funeral at Llantarnam Crematorium outside Newport in south Wales. However, Bruno de Galzain with whom she'd enjoyed one of the two most important relationships of her life attended the ceremony and then spent a few days with her family in Newport. Other people involved with the Divine Light Mission who were close to Bruno - including Nina Trott - had gone ahead with their plans to visit America for Maharaj Ji's birthday, and de Galzain was waiting for them to return to Bath. When Bruno left Newport he took my mother's ashes with him and went to stay with Nina. After a few nights in the west country, Bruno asked Nina to hold out her hands and close her eyes. De Galzain gave Nina the urn holding my mother's ashes and asked her what she thought he'd put in her hands. Eventually, he told Nina that he'd given her Julia. Then they both started to laugh because the ashes weren't Julia, they knew she was so much more than these remains. While he

she died. To be fair, I really did not like Grainger, so I was abrupt with him on the phone."

Elaborating, Duchene said that when Grainger called: 'He just thanked me for handling things and not mentioning him and confirmed the obvious, that he would not have been able to handle the official matters because he was a junkie. He didn't say how he got my unlisted number, he knew about Julie's death, he knew I had found her or anything else. It was a brief call. He did seem sad and upset that Julie was dead. Emotionally I was not open to Grainger and felt that had Julie not been involved with him she would have had a better chance of getting off heroin, so I have to admit I have some bias against him."

Mary Jane then moved on to more general observations about the authorities: "The ambulance people and police on the scene seemed to handle Julie's death in a routine way. They took my name and phone number and I waited with people upstairs or in the front of the house, Julie's neighbours, for some time before I asked the police if they needed me for anything further, and then I left. I suspect with Julie's history that the police knew very well that she

flocked to Florida for a religious festival lasting approximately ten days. Nina Trott recalls running into my mother's ex-boyfriend Bruno de Galzain at the Orlando event, and being told Julie was there but in a bad way because she was suffering from heroin withdrawal. Nina didn't see my mother during the festival because Julia was in bed doing cold turkey.

Mary Jane Duchene who did spend time with my mother in Orlando has provided me with the following recollection: "I actually found out about Julia's heroin issues when we were flying to a Divine Light Mission event in Florida, from the UK, in the fall of 1979, just before her death that same year. We hadn't booked the flight together, but we met up on the plane. She told me at that time that she had been using heroin and that she was in withdrawal and ill, and asked me to help her. We shared a motel room for the week long event. She felt strongly that she wanted to stop using heroin and was on her way to the Divine Light Mission event to reinforce herself spiritually so that she could succeed. Julia was very ill throughout the event but enjoyed it tremendously. She communicated with many Divine Light Mission friends about what she was

found Julia the night she died. I was supposed to meet Julia to go to a meeting, and she didn't turn up. This was unlike her so I decided to go around to her flat, assuming she had been delayed and would still be there. When I got there, the door was open and all the lights were on. I remember she had a ground floor flat, situated in the back of a house or block. Julia was lying on her stomach with her head to the side, and I don't think she was clothed, but she had a sheet partially draping her body. I thought she was sleeping. I tried to wake her, and got no response. I called the emergency number for an ambulance immediately. When the emergency services got there, they said she was dead. At the time I had no idea of what had happened, and really anything I say now is still probably speculation. I guessed that her death had something to do with heroin but couldn't be sure. I never saw the autopsy report and wasn't contacted further by the authorities. However, I did get a telephone call from Grainger some time after this. This surprised me as I did not know he had my number. The call was odd and he thanked me for not mentioning his name to the police. What this means I don't know, for sure, but from that call I felt, or believe, that he had been with her when

going through with heroin and about her resolve to change. She said it had always been difficult to be in recovery and that she definitely wanted to kick heroin. Julia was very brave and strong in enduring the physical pain involved with withdrawal. I admired her for her strength and perseverance in overcoming this adversity. After we returned to London, Julia and I kept in close touch."

Bruno de Galzain, who'd been my mother's chief lover from the mid-sixties to mid-seventies, was extremely concerned about her well being in the last weeks of her life. He was living in the south of France, and he asked Nina Trott who lived in the south-west of England to travel up to London to check on my mother. Nina was thus able to provide me with the following recollections about the room in which Julia died: "The flat in Cambridge Gardens was a basement flat. I think it was just a bedsitting room with a kitchen and bathroom. I can vaguely remember a galley-type kitchen. It was a fairly large room. It wasn't furnished or decorated in any style I can particularly remember, but it was comfortable and quite cosy and warm. There were pictures of Mahara Ji on the mantelpiece, but Julia would