

MEMORANDUM

To: Richard Edelman
From: Gary Schoener
Date: 6/18/69

Re: Death and autopsy of Dorothy Killgallen

Info: Received through conversation with Professor Gilbert J. Mannering, Department of Pharmacology, Rm 102 Mayo Hospital. Professor Mannering is an expert on Alcohol in the body and is utilized by the state for autopsy work in this area.

There are many factors which affect the alcohol found by an autopsy, the most notable of which are the state in which the body was kept prior to the autopsy (i.e. was it frozen), how long after death the body was put on ice, and how long after death the autopsy was performed, and where the blood samples were taken from. Over a period of a week, for instance, if the body was not on ice, not embalmed, there could be considerable diffusion of any alcohol in the stomach into the rest of the body. The best place from which to take blood samples would be, of course, from some very peripheral vessels, as in the skin, or best of all, in the brain.

Barbiturates are also affected by the above factors, and, in addition, we must further be concerned with what type of barbiturates, since each is deadly in different amounts. In the event that we can get more specific data, I am certain that Professor Mannering would be of much further help.

Recommendations for further research: See if there is any way of getting the amounts of barbiturate and alcohol reportedly found in the bloodstream, either in amount per liter of blood, or per kg of body weight. In the event that the figure is given in terms of concentration in the blood, it would be very helpful to know her approximate body weight. Further, the type of barbiturate is very important. Some of this info must be available, because there was a lot of talk at the time about there not having been much barbiturate present.

Then, per your suggestion, attempt to find any mention that she had a prescription for barbiturates, and if so, find out what type.

It might be good to check the Journal-American for this stuff since they should have a more complete report than anyone. Then, perhaps, there might be someone from the old Journal-American (perhaps whoever wrote her an obituary editorial) who would know more details, or have seen the autopsy, even if they didn't print it.

After exhausting all public sources (don't forget checking Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News and World Report just in case, you might try approaching her husband. If you do you should emphasize that you are a student, will not under any circumstances commercialize this (and would be willing to sign a written agreement to that fact), and are concerned about the nature of her death. Your interest, you might say, derives from your respect for her as a crusading columnist, and also your interest in the assassination. The story, as reported by the press, has many irregularities, especially with regard to the cause of death. Tell him that you would like the exact details in the autopsy so that you could submit them, in confidence (and without reference to her name), to several top pathologists for their opinion. Ask also about any prescription for barbiturates, what kind, her use of them, etc. Then ask about the possibility that she had a drink somewhere prior to bed, and ask if he has any ideas where she might have done this, etc.

He may very well agree to a talk. Sometimes it is better to proceed it with a careful worded letter. It has been several years and the grief should be gone. Perhaps he also has questions. And, of course, there is the old question as to what she learned from Ruby: does he know of notes, did she talk about it, what about the alleged quote that she would blow the case wide open, does he know of anyone else (friends, NY Journal-American people) who might have been privy to her secrets or of a detective agency or something of the like she might have utilized.

MEMORANDUM

To: Gary Schoener
From: Richard Edelman
Date: June 14, 1969

RE: Death of Dorothy Kilgallen

Dorothy Kilgallen died early Monday morning, Nov. 8, 1965. She had appeared as a panelist on "What's My Line?" on Sunday evening, Nov. 7. She then returned home and wrote her regular column, "The Voice of Broadway," and sent it by messenger to the editorial offices of the N.Y. Journal-American. She was found dead when her hairdresser arrived at 12:45 to keep an appointment.

The above information is from the NY Times of November 9, 1965 (page 43, col.1). The details are confirmed by the same day's issue of the NY Herald-Tribune. The only additional info provided by the latter is that the cause of death was first thought to be a heart attack. The Times, however, reports that "an autopsy, which was completed last night, failed to reveal a cause of death. The Medical Examiner's office said there would be further chemical and microscopic analyses performed to determine the exact cause of death."

The Times mentions that two other persons lived with Miss Kilgallen at her house at 45 E. 68th St. in NY: her husband, Richard Tompkins Kallmar (former actor and producer), and her youngest child, Kerry Alden, age 12. Both were said to have been asleep in other rooms on the night of her death. (Presumably, Miss Kilgallen and her husband slept in different rooms on Sunday nights since "it was her custom" to write her column after returning from her TV show; this probably resulted in her getting to bed at a very late hour. Whether they always slept in different rooms cannot be determined from the evidence available.)

In re-capping her career, the Times obituary states that "in August of 1964, officials of the Warren Commission expressed distress that a Kilgallen column had contained testimony made before the Commission by Jack L. Ruby, the convicted murderer of President Kennedy's assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald." (Interesting sidelight--the Times still continues to refer to LHO as the assassin, despite the uproar over this reference made to Oswald in the morning headlines of November 25, 1963.) The Times then adds a mysterious note: "Miss Kilgallen wrote that she had obtained the testimony from 'sources close to the Warren Commission in Washington.'"

The next reference to Miss K came on page 47, column 2 of the Times of Nov. 12--a Friday. Miss K's funeral had been held on the previous day, and a one-hour long solemn high requiem mass was held at St. Vincent Ferrer Roman Catholic Church (Lexington Ave. and 68th St.). The funeral arrangements had been taken care of by the Abbey Funeral Home, across the street from the church. The rites drew thousands, including many celebrities from the entertainment world. Yet the cause of death had still not been determined. As the Times reported: "Miss Kilgallen, who was 52 years old, was found dead in bed at her town house at 45 E. 68 Street on Monday. Toxological and other tests are still being made to determine the cause of death. They will not be complete for several days, according to a spokesman for the City Medical Examiner." (The report goes on to add that Miss K was buried in Gate of Heaven Cemetery, Mt. Pleasant, N.Y.)

Finally, on Tuesday, Nov. 16--more than a week after her death--the Times (page 49, col.1) reported that a cause of death had finally been determined:

"Dorothy Kilgallen, the newspaper columnist and television personality, died last week from the reaction of a combination of alcohol and barbiturates, the Medical Examiner's office said yesterday." "Dr. James L. Luke, assistant examiner, added that the circumstances under which Miss Kilgallen had died were 'undetermined.' Police said there was no indication of violence or suicide." "The official medical report of the office, which examines all unusual deaths in the city, said she died last Monday of 'acute ethanol and barbiturate intoxication.' Ethanol is a medical term for alcohol." "Dr. Luke noted that the quantities of alcohol and barbiturates in her bloodstream had not been excessive, but he added that the combination caused a fatal 'depression on the central nervous system, which in turn caused her heart to stop.' "Miss Kilgallen, who was 52 years old, was found dead in her five-story town house at 4 [sic, it should be 45, not 4.RE] East 68th Street. Her death had been tentatively ascribed to 'natural causes.' "Dr. Luke emphasized in a telephone interview that the overdose could well have been accidental. "It could have simply been an extra pill," he said. "We really don't know. All we know is that depressants such as alcohol and barbiturates one on top of another are dangerous." "Dr. Luke added that a person succumbing to such a combination would die peacefully."

The Nov. 19 issue of the Times reports that Councilman-at-Large Paul O'Dwyer (who was later to run for the Senate in 1968 as a supporter of Eugene McCarthy) introduced a bill to the

City Council to prohibit the disclosure of the medical examiner's findings in any death to all persons except "law enforcement agencies, relatives of a dead person, insurance companies, parties in litigation, and others having a 'direct legal interest in the revelation of such matters.'" The bill was introduced as a result of public speculation over the cause of Miss K's death. (Times, p.29, col.5, 11/19/65)

Comments: Well, that's about it. As Dr. Luke said, it could easily have been an accident. However, there are a few questions which I think should be cleared up. The main one is whether barbiturates and/or alcohol would still be detectable in the bloodstream of a deceased person some seven days after death. I have written to a girl I know who is a pharmacology student, and I hope to hear from her shortly on this matter. It would seem to me that the body would have begun to decompose, and that (especially after the performance of the original autopsy) it would be extremely difficult to find traces of alcohol or barbiturates. But I really don't know.

A few other questions come to mind, although I'm afraid the answers are unascertainable: Did Miss K have a prescription for barbiturates of any kind? Did she go directly home after "What's My Line?" (If not, maybe she went someplace where she had some drinks.) How late did she usually finish her column? Did she usually have trouble falling asleep? If so, did she usually use alcohol and/or barbiturates to help her sleep?

Comments by GRS contained in my memo to Rich of 6/18/69