

The death of the 'Tea Time' lady

By [R. Marc Kantrowitz](#) July 11, 2019

She was so deathly afraid of the water that she wouldn't take baths, preferring to shower instead. She did not know how to swim nor did she care to learn. How then did she come to drown in four feet of ultra-calm waters, showing no signs of bruises or abrasions and a system clear of drugs and alcohol?

Carol Wayne was born in 1942 in Chicago. As a teenager, she and her sister performed as a figure skating duo, which brought excitement but at the expense of a normal childhood.

After suffering a serious injury, she migrated to Las Vegas where she became a showgirl, dancing with the Folies Bergere. Somewhere along the line, she married, though the union lasted less than a year.



Carol Wayne

Deciding to put her sparkling good looks and upbeat personality to better use, she moved to Hollywood where she quickly started appearing on the more popular television shows of the time.

What brought her the most attention, however, were her many stints on "The Johnny Carson Show," on which she appeared dozens of times during the 1970s. During that period she remarried twice, the last time to the highly successful producer Burt Sugarman, from whom she divorced in 1980.

Carson performed many memorable skits on his popular 90-minute late-night talk show. One of his more notable sketches involved hosting the fictional "Tea Time Movie" in which he played a smarmy, smooth-talking, less-than-trustworthy, mustached Art Fern, who pitched during the numerous breaks in the non-existent movie a variety of often completely useless gadgets, including in one instance a stick. His foil, Wayne, played his

loyal companion, a sexy, well-endowed, dim-witted, high-pitched, wide-eyed hostess with a talent for turning every innocuous statement into one sounding devilishly naughty.



Carol Wayne and Johnny Carson in character for 'Tea Time Movie'

In the early '80s, Carson, against the wishes of NBC, demanded to cut back his show to 60 minutes. Being the cash cow for the network, it had no real choice other than to accede to his wishes. With 30 fewer minutes each night, adjustments had to be made. One included slashing the number of Tea Time Movie sketches.

Hard times followed for Wayne. Still attractive, she appeared in Playboy magazine in 1984. While she was able to nab some other jobs, the money she made quickly disappeared, swallowed up by debt, drugs and alcohol. She soon lost weight and appeared pale.

She filed for bankruptcy shortly thereafter. In an effort to support herself, rumor had it that she occasionally served as an escort for wealthy businessmen.

Perhaps to start 1985 on a better foot, Wayne left for Mexico with a friend of some sort, Edward Durston, apparently born the same year as Wayne. Other than the fact that he reportedly was a car salesman, little is known of him or his relationship with Wayne.

Also little known is what happened during their last night in Mexico, Jan. 10. There appeared to be an argument. Some opine they missed their flight home and being short on funds bickered about where to spend the evening. Others believe their flight was the following morning and they went to stay at a different hotel from where they would depart.

Suffice it to say they apparently had a misunderstanding; Wayne left to walk the beach; Durston left at some point for the airport, taking Wayne's luggage with him and leaving it there with a note that she would retrieve it. With that, he departed Mexico.

Three days later, on Jan. 13, the body of Carol Wayne, a non-swimmer who greatly feared the water, was discovered floating in it. She was fully clothed and bore no marks or abrasions. Toxicology reports came back negative.

The conclusion: an accidental death.

Epilogue

With Carson's show shortened, a new talent and show was needed to fill the void, and "Late Night with David Letterman" came into being.

Years earlier, on Oct. 4, 1969, at 9 in the morning, Diane Linkletter, the 20-year-old daughter of television celebrity Art Linkletter, jumped from her sixth-floor apartment. Her father blamed her death on the hallucinogenic LSD and dedicated the remainder of his life speaking out against the deadly use of drugs.

The police interviewed the last person to see her alive, who told them that a highly distraught Diane called him. He went over at 3 in the morning, and they talked for hours. Diane remained emotional, despondent and at times irrational, upset over her career and being overshadowed by others. He tried, unsuccessfully, to grab her as she flung herself from the building.

Based on his statement, Diane's death was ruled a suicide. The name of the good Samaritan who spoke with — and allegedly tried to save — her? Edward Durston.

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