

## Chapter 2

# Instructive Poison Cases

### Introduction

In this chapter, we will look at several cases and, for each, identify points of particular relevance with reference to perpetrators: Roger and David Cooper [99], Paul Marshall Curry [95], Harold Shipman [81], Lynn Turner [88], Lakhvir Singh [93], Kristin Rossum [82] and Jessica Wongso [100].

### Roger and David Cooper, UK

#### *The Case*

On Christmas Eve 2014, Costco boss Roger Cooper and his brother David Cooper, a doorman, of Leicester, England conspired to poison Sameena Imam, Roger's lover and co-worker. To prevent Sameena exposing their 2-year affair, Roger spent a month plotting to kill her, buying poisonous metals and identifying a location in which to bury the body. David helped Roger to kill the victim and he disposed of the body.

In late November 2014, Sameena Imam booked a stay at the Malmaison Hotel, Birmingham for herself and Roger for December 24 and 25. She was led to believe that Roger intended to leave his long-term partner for a future with her, starting with a shared Christmas at the Birmingham hotel.

On Christmas Eve, at around 4 p.m., Roger left the Costco store in Coventry (where he and Sameena were both working) ahead of Sameena and they drove off in their separate cars. Later meeting up nearby, the couple left Sameena's car on a side road. Sameena transferred her hotel luggage into Roger's car before the pair headed to David Cooper's Leicester address for what she thought was a brief Christmas visit. At the house, the brothers overpowered her on a settee, killing her

by holding a tea towel doused in chloroform over her mouth. David later buried the body at his allotment (a plot of land used for non-commercial gardening).

On Boxing Day, David drove from his Leicester home, picked up Sameena's car in Coventry, and drove it back to his address. Next day, he drove the car to Luton and abandoned it in a side street, next taking a taxi to Luton rail station and travelling back to Leicester. On December 29, he collected a hire car from Coventry and travelled to Luton once more where he moved Sameena's car again and used cleaning agent to wipe away any trace of fingerprints and DNA.

Sameena had been reported missing when she failed to join her family in Essex as planned for Boxing Day and a police enquiry was initiated. Police interviewed Roger as a significant witness on January 1 and 2. David was questioned as a witness on January 4. The brothers were arrested on 7 January 2015 on suspicion of murder and on January 9 were charged, despite Sameena's body still not having been found.

Initially, David made a partial admission to having pressed a chloroform-soaked tea towel over Sameena's mouth but claimed that her death had been accidental. Later still in court he stated that he had found Ms Imam's body after being asked to move a car. Roger Copper told police that he last saw the victim when she left the Costco store at about 4 p.m. on December 24.

A female friend of David's contacted police on January 11 to report that David had given her a set of keys before being arrested. They were for his Leicester allotment. Later that day, officers visited the allotment and excavations by forensic specialists began the following day. Sameena's body was found in a grave 5 days later and subsequently an autopsy was carried out. Guided by Roger Cooper's confession, indications of possible poisoning by chloroform were found. Also, toxicological tests requested for chloroform established that the victim had been poisoned by the substance. It appeared that a combination of metallic elements, including antimony, cadmium, tin, mercury and arsenic had also been administered to Sameena Imam in a liquid.

At the trial at Birmingham, computer printouts of David Cooper's eBay purchase history for December 8 showed that he bought chloroform. While admitting making the purchase, he claimed that it had never arrived. Evidence was presented of mobile phone messages linked to David showing that the brothers had made a previous attempt on Ms Imam's life on 11 December which may have been aborted because she arrived at the arranged meeting place too conspicuously. Telephone evidence also supported Roger and Sameena's joint arrival at around 5 p.m. in Leicester where it is believed that the victim was very soon killed. At 6.25 p.m. Roger began his return journey to Coventry leaving David to dispose of the body. Evidence showed that when Roger got to Coventry he used Sameena's mobile phone to send himself a text message to suggest that she was still alive and well.

Automatic number plate recognition hits showed the vehicles that the brothers had used travelling between Coventry and Leicester. A bottle of Bellini drink shown to have been bought in Coventry by Ms Imam on Christmas Eve was also found in the refrigerator at David's home.

Roger Cooper's motive appeared to be to conceal the affair with Sameena. She believed that their relationship would now be open, and widely known. He feared that this would lose him his job at Costco which forbids intimate relationships within the management structure, and jeopardise the long-term relationship with his partner. But it is unclear why his brother agreed to help to kill someone whom he had only briefly met. Found guilty at Birmingham Crown Court, the brothers were each sentenced to 30 years imprisonment.

### ***Points of Special Interest***

Poisoning is normally used where the deceased's body is left in situ. Usually, the intention is that murder will not be detected because death might appear to be from natural causes or suicide for example. In this case, the body was disposed of with the hope that it would not be found. Chloroform was apparently used to silently subdue the victim so that no sounds of a struggle would be heard.

Another feature was the careful planning involved by the perpetrators to suggest that the deceased was still alive when she was not, to lay false trails about the brothers' movements, and to try to remove any detrimental traces from the deceased's car. However, thorough investigation enabled the prosecution to present evidence of telephone contacts, indications of the journeys taken, shop receipts and records of eBay transactions all building up an incriminating picture. Changing accounts provided by David, and the evidence contradicting Roger's version of events provided the jury with further evidence to find the pair guilty.

Relatively few examples are available of a person being poisoned and then the body being disposed of. Dr. Crippen [35] poisoned his wife then buried the body in the cellar of his house claiming that she had left him. Arthur Devereux [31] disposed of the bodies of his wife and twin sons whom he poisoned. Also, French physician Dr. Marcel Petiot [55] killed potential escapees from Nazi occupied France with cyanide injections before burning the bodies.

## **Paul Marshall Curry, US**

### ***The Case***

At his trial in 2014, Paul Marshall Curry then 58 years old and from Salina, Kansas, was convicted of the murder of his third wife perpetrated over 20 years earlier. It was a prime example of a cold case being successfully revisited by investigators.

Paul Curry met Linda in 1989 while both worked at the San Onofre nuclear power plant in northern San Diego County, California. Although 13 years older, she would become his third wife. They lived in San Clemente where within a year

of marriage Curry began poisoning his wife. In 1993 Linda Curry was hospitalised several times suffering unexplained vomiting, headaches and bloody diarrhoea. In one such visit, hospital staff discovered lidocaine in Linda Curry's intravenous (IV) bag and suspected tampering. An overdose of lidocaine, a tissue numbing medication, can be fatal, and the couple were questioned. Linda told investigators in a recorded interview that the only person of whom she could think who might harm her was her husband, and the only motive she could contemplate was money. She did not want to believe this was so. Paul Curry claimed that he had nothing to gain from his wife's death.

From 1993 through to mid-1994, Curry then a nuclear power plant engineer secretly administered his wife small doses of nicotine. On 9 June 1994, Curry gave Linda sleeping pills before injecting a final fatal dose of nicotine behind her ear. Calling the 911 emergency services, Curry reported that he had found his wife in bed and not breathing. Orange County emergency services got Linda Curry to hospital where she died a few hours later.

It was only a day after the funeral was held that Curry began trying to collect life insurance benefits, over a period claiming \$547,000. Even at the time, police suspected Curry of murder. Linda had been a non-smoker, so lethal amounts of nicotine in her system were difficult to explain. However, investigators lacked sufficient evidence to press charges.

Curry moved to North Las Vegas, Nevada where he worked as a senior plans examiner. In the meantime, investigators uncovered fresh evidence shortening the time that it would have taken Curry to administer the lethal nicotine injection, a previous stumbling block. In March 2010, he relocated to Kansas after being hired by the city of Salina and was arrested the same year by which time he had a new job as chief county building inspector.

Sent for trial at Santa Ana, Orange County, California, Curry appeared before Judge Patrick Donahue. Prosecutor Ebrahim Baytieh pointed out Curry's financial gain from Linda's insurance, suggesting that he had an, 'insatiable appetite for money'. A former wife Leslie, who had been married to Curry before he met Linda, testified that in the last year of their marriage she was constantly ill. Curry suggested that they both apply for life insurance. They did so but while his application was accepted, hers was rejected. Soon after, the couple separated and Leslie moved back to Las Vegas where her family lived. Once apart from her husband, her health recovered.

Defence attorney Lisa Kopelman told jurors that Curry was a loving husband who nursed his chronically sick wife. Arguing that Linda was often ill with digestive ailments, the lawyer suggested that she may have taken nicotine as a treatment for irritable bowel syndrome. The large amount found in her system may have been owing to a self-administered nicotine enema used as a holistic treatment. Indeed, Linda Curry had had illnesses for several years before she married. Also it was argued there was little direct evidence pointing to Curry's guilt.

In the event, the jury found Curry guilty of 'first-degree murder, with special circumstances for poisoning and murder for financial gain'. Curry was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole.

## ***Points of Special Interest***

Among points raised by the Curry case are that evidence can emerge after a long period and prosecutions can still be secured, but even for a ‘cold case’ this was a lengthy interim. Defence lawyers had put forward a motion that Paul Curry was denied his right to due process because of the delayed prosecution but that was rejected.

Linda Curry not being a smoker and yet nicotine being found in her system had remained suspicious. Her view that her husband could be the only one harming her that she had expressed at the hospital in 1993 had been recorded and was played to the court. Furthermore, the time frame in which Curry could be assumed to have given the lethal dose was originally thought to make it difficult to claim that he had been the killer. But later findings allowed this time scale to be shortened.

Circumstantial evidence that a former wife Leslie may have also been given poisoned by Curry added to the picture of potential guilt. Claiming that the motive was greed was conversant with Curry’s precipitate claiming of insurance money, and supported the testimony that a similar pattern may have been attempted with another former spouse. The prosecution argument that poisoning was deliberate was met by the defence suggestion that the substance could have been taken medicinally by the deceased.

## **Dr. Harold Shipman, UK**

### ***The Case***

Dr. Harold Shipman (1946–2004) was the UK’s most prolific serial killer. In June 1963 when Harold was aged 17 years, his mother died of lung cancer. While still attending school, he looked after her and witnessed the doctor administering morphine to ease pain. Three years later, aged 19, he married Primrose Oxtoby, a 17 year old from North Yorkshire, pregnant with his child. Their marriage lasted throughout Shipman’s life.

Accepted into medical school at the University of Leeds in 1965, Shipman graduated 5 years later, aged 25 years. He was appointed preregistration House Officer at Pontefract General Infirmary and a year later was fully registered as a doctor by the General Medical Council. Shipman spent 3 years as a Senior House Officer and gained higher diplomas. Entering general practice in 1974, he was appointed to the Abraham Ormerod Medical Practice at Todmorden, where after a probationary period, he became a junior partner. Shipman stayed until September 1979 when his colleagues discovered that he had been dishonestly obtaining controlled drugs (pethidine) for his own use. In 1979, he pleaded guilty in court to drugs charges, and the General Medical Council took no action against him.

The following year, he became a General Practitioner at the Donneybrook practice in Hyde, a small industrial town south west of Manchester, admitting his criminal record at the appointment interview. Having left the Donneybrook practice in January 1992, Shipman began working as a sole practitioner in the same building. In October, he moved to the Market Street surgery nearby, again as a sole practitioner. For the great majority of those who knew him, he was a well-liked and respected doctor in the community.

In March 1998, some people in Hyde expressed concern at the number of Shipman's elderly patients who were dying in similar circumstances. Dr. Linda Reynolds, from the nearby Brooke Practice, alerted the South Manchester Coroner, John Pollard, to concerns about the number of Shipman's patients who were dying and the circumstances. Following a request from the Coroner, Greater Manchester Police conducted a confidential investigation. It was conducted by Detective Inspector (DI) David Smith under the supervision of Chief Superintendent (CS) David Sykes. DI Smith concluded that there was no substance in Dr. Reynolds' concerns, ending the investigation on 17 April 1998 after which Shipman killed three more patients before being arrested.

In 1998 a former mayor of Hyde, Kathleen Grundy, aged 81, died at home, having been a patient of Dr. Shipman. Her daughter, Angela Woodruff a solicitor, was puzzled by aspects of her mother's death, but it was duly registered. She was then surprised to find that her mother's Will which she knew had left her estate to near relatives had been changed in favour of Dr. Shipman shortly before Kathleen's death. Angela Woodruff reported her suspicions to the police. Greater Manchester Police started to investigate the death of Kathleen Grundy, searching Shipman's surgery and his home. Kathleen's body was exhumed and toxicology tests showed the presence of unexpectedly high levels of morphine in tissue samples. Police looked into 19 deaths that had been brought to light by the investigation in March and further exhumations were carried out showing the presence of morphine in the bodies. When Shipman's computerised medical records were examined, it was evident that they had been changed to make it appear that patients had had long established illnesses leading to their death so that the real cause of death by morphine was unsuspected. Shipman was arrested and charged with murder.

In 1999, Shipman was tried at Preston Crown Court on 15 counts of murder and the forging of the Kathleen Grundy's Will, pleading 'not guilty' to all charges. Found guilty on all counts, he was given a prison term of 15 life sentences and 4 years for forgery. The Director of Public Prosecutions stated that no further criminal proceedings would be started, it being impossible for Shipman to have a fair trial.

Before the trial and following it, police investigated many deaths of Shipman's patients where there was evidence that Shipman was responsible. Those deaths were reported to the South Manchester Coroner, who, between August 2000 and April 2001, conducted inquests into 27 deaths of Shipman's patients, recording verdicts of unlawful killing in 25 and open verdicts in 2. In May 2001, the Coroner opened inquests into a further 232 deaths, then immediately adjourned them, pending publication of the findings of a public Inquiry.

The enquiry established in 2001 and chaired by Dame Janet Smith produced a series of reports. Report 1 found that Shipman killed 215 of his patients, the first, Mrs. Eva Lyons, in March 1975, when Shipman was practising in Todmorden, and the last, Mrs. Kathleen Grundy, in June 1998. (Report 1, Vol 1 summary para15). By the time of the sixth and final report, the estimate was that Shipman started killing earlier (in 1971) and murdered about 250 patients between 1971 and 1998, of whom the inquiry was able positively to identify 218. The usual method of killing was administering a lethal dose of an opiate (usually diamorphine). Shipman committed suicide in Wakefield Prison on 13 January 2004.

### ***Points of Special Interest***

Probably the foremost question in this case is how the crimes could go undetected for so long. As well as subverting the procedures for death certification, Shipman combined the high respect in which he was held by many patients with the harsh dismissal of concerns of relatives to prevent suspicion. When concerns were eventually raised with authorities, the police enquiry was hampered by the lack of experience of officers directly involved, and a tendency on behalf of the advising doctor to believe that there was nothing wrong.

The use of morphine-based drugs to kill was disguised by various features. Shipman as a physician was allowed to use the drugs. He was in a position to determine the cause of death. Also, especially where elderly or ill patients were involved, the deaths were to varying degrees 'expected'. Evidence presented at the trial included autopsy and other toxicological evidence, computer medical records indicating tampering and the forged Will.

## **Julia Lynn Turner, US**

### ***The Case***

Born in 1968, by her early twenties, Lynn Womack (as she was called before marriage) worked as a 911 dispatcher for Cobb County, Georgia. There she met local police officer Glenn Turner whom she married in 1992. Lynn Turner left her job and despite Glenn working an extra job at a gas station, his income was still insufficient to support his wife's lavish spending. Their relationship deteriorated and Lynn began a secret affair with Randy Thompson, a Forsyth County firefighter.

In 1995, Glenn started plans to move out and file for a divorce but fell ill. He visited the emergency room of Kennestone Hospital in March 1995 complaining of symptoms that seemed to suggest influenza. After being given intravenous fluids and medication, he returned their Marietta home. Lynn's account was that on

returning home, Glenn took a turn for the worse. Waking after midnight, he had hallucinations and went down to the basement where he tried to drink gasoline. Lynn helped him back upstairs and the next morning he seemed to be feeling better. Lynn went out to do some errands and when she returned found Glenn dead. Cause of death was put down to natural causes owing to an irregular heartbeat. Lynn moved in with Randy and collected substantial life insurance on her husband's death.

Lynn and Randy bought a house and had two children Blake and Amber, but by 2000 they were having relationship problems and Randy moved out into an apartment. On 21 January 2001, Randy was feeling ill and visited the emergency room with symptoms of vomiting and stomach ache. He was treated and released the same day. The following day however, the 32 year old was found dead in his apartment. Lynn again collected money resulting from her boyfriend's death which was caused by irregular heartbeat.

Tests found ethylene glycol based antifreeze in Thompson's blood. Now Glenn Turner's body was exhumed and evidence of antifreeze poisoning was found in his kidneys. Crime scene photographs from Glenn's death were examined and one was found to show the garage where antifreeze could be seen. Late in 2001, Lynn was arrested for the murder of Glenn Turner.

Put on trial in 2004, she was found guilty. Although she was not charged with the murder of Randy Thompson's death at that time, the prosecution was allowed to refer to evidence of the similarities between the two deaths.

Vince Turley, a former insurance agent, stated that before Glenn and Lynn were married and she was his fiancée, she requested that Glenn make her the beneficiary should he die. Glenn complied in September 1993. Animal shelter worker, Samantha Gilleland stated that Lynn Turner has made several visits to the shelter and, discussing stray cats, had learned that antifreeze would poison them. The emergency room physician Dr. Donald Freeman who treated Glenn Turner the day before he died testified that symptoms did not suggest a single large ingestion of ethylene glycol and that Glenn Turner may have ingested smaller amounts of the poison over a period of several days.

Dr. Brian Frist, the Cobb County medical examiner, performed the autopsy on Glenn Turner in 1995 giving cause of death as heart failure. Microscopically, he did though find calcium oxalate crystals in Glenn Turner's tissue. It was only when he heard of the death of Randy Thompson that he reconsidered the presence of the crystals and the findings and ordered Turner's body to be exhumed. Realising with hindsight the significance of the findings he stated his belief that 'they are the result of ethylene glycol toxicity'. Dr. Kris Sperry the Chief Medical Examiner at the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, testified that Randy Thomson may have first consumed antifreeze up to 2 days before we visited the emergency room on 20 January 2001. He likely ingested more antifreeze later given the levels of ethylene glycol found in his body after death. Crime laboratory analyst Chris Tilson of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation stated that lethal levels of ethylene glycol were not detected straight away in Randy Thompson's body because he had made a 'mathematical calculation error' in the analysis. When a medical examiner found



calcium oxalate crystals in Thompson's kidneys (indicative of ethylene glycol poisoning) further test were conducted.

For the defence, Helen Gregory, Lynn Turner's mother testified that on the day of Glenn Turner's death, Lynn was, 'crying hysterically'. She stated that Lynn's apparent coldness at the funerals of her husband and common law husband was because she does not openly show 'her feelings and emotions'. Also for the defence, toxicologist Dr. Robert Palmer raised the question of whether the calcium oxalate crystals found where Turner's body was exhumed could be from embalming fluids, flowers or other materials decomposing inside the coffin. He stated that the crystals found in Glenn Turner's kidneys would have been expected to be detected in other bodily organs too.

In 2007, Lynn Turner was tried and convicted for the murder of Randy Thompson, receiving a sentence of life imprisonment without parole. On August 2010, aged 42 years old, Lynn Turner was found dead in a cell shared with several other inmates at Metro State Prison. She may have committed suicide by accumulating medication for raised blood pressure and taking a lethal overdose.

### ***Points of Special Interest***

This is an example of a case where the perpetrator had committed murder once and gone undetected and was only caught when she tried the same modus operandi a second time. It is worth reflecting on such cases when one considers poisoning statistics, as had Lynn Turner not tried a second killing it is unlikely that she would have come to police attention.

While methanol antifreeze ('methyl alcohol') is colourless, smells slightly of alcohol and is soluble in water, it has a burning taste making it detectable in bland foods. However, ethylene glycol antifreeze (1,2 ethanol) used by Lynn Turner is odourless and highly soluble in water but sweet tasting making it unlikely to be detected in food.

While it seems plain that Lynn Turner's broad motive in both murders was financial gain the timing is interesting. The timing of her first husband's murder prevented his filing for divorce and that of her boyfriend was perpetrated before their deteriorating relationship jeopardised the prospect of financial gain.

## **Lakvir Singh, UK**

### ***The Case***

Complicated relationships within several families emerged in the case of Lakvir Singh. Following the failure of his first marriage Lakhvinder 'Lucky' Cheema and

Lakvir Singh had been clandestine lovers. The relationship started when Cheema, a cleaner, moved into his family's home in Southall, West London. Singh then aged 20 was caught in a loveless marriage and was attracted to the new tenant. Later Cheema bought his own home in Feltham, Middlesex and the relationship continued. Singh became pregnant twice over this period but each time had an abortion, Cheema being afraid of the shame that their affair would bring if it were found out.

So Singh visited Cheema's house every day to clean, cook and do laundry for 16 years until October 2008. At that date, Lakvir Singh was 45, married to Aunkar Singh aged 57 and had three children. Cheema was 39. Cheema was introduced to Gurjeet Choongh an illegal immigrant aged 21 to whom he became engaged. Determined to marry his fiancé, Cheema broke off the long affair with Singh.

Singh sent text messages to her lover urging him to end the engagement, calling him a 'bastard' and saying that her heart was broken. Outside the house, after spotting Cheema in bed with his fiancé, she peered through the window and threatened to burn down his house. Cheema refused to end the relationship with the younger woman. Singh then took a trip to India and in December returned with a quantity of aconite with which to poison her former lover.

At the time of the murder, Singh's husband who had cancer was abroad receiving treatment. On 27 January 2009, Lakvir Singh of Southall, West London, slipped into Cheema's home in Feltham, Middlesex, England and sprinkled the poison into curry stored in a plastic container in the refrigerator. She knew that the couple were planning to eat the curry that same evening. Choongh microwaved the leftover curry and then served the two of them at the dining table.

Cheema and his fiancée ate the curry while discussing plans for their wedding which was scheduled to take place a few weeks later on Valentine's Day. Cheema had second helpings. Soon after the meal Cheema became ill and made an emergency 999 call in which he stated that his ex-girlfriend had poisoned him. Cheema also telephoned his sister asking her to come round to the house. He began to vomit, his face became numb and he lost his sight and the use of his limbs. Gurjeet Choongh was also gravely ill with similar symptoms. Cheema's sister Mrs. Khalon and her two sons arrived at the house. Cheema's nephews Gurinder and Surinder Singh helped Cheema into a car to go to hospital. The ill couple were taken to the West Middlesex Hospital. Within an hour of admission, Cheema died in great pain. Gurjeet Choongh having eaten less of the meal appears to have had the better chance of survival. In any event, she was placed in an induced coma to stabilise her heart beat and recovered.

The trial took place at the Old Bailey in 2010. Prosecution argued that Singh has killed Cheema and attempted to kill Choongh from revenge. The defence case was to show Cheema had deceived Choongh into thinking there was no relationship between him and Singh and to implicate Singh's brother-in-law Varinder in the killing of Cheema.

Sir Desmond de Silva QC led the defence. Cross examining Gurjeet Choongh, he asked her to read several romantic text messages sent by Cheema to Singh after

the engagement to Choongh. These he put to the witness showed, 'that it looks as though he was cheating on you behind your back' to which Choongh agreed, admitting that she was deeply hurt. It also emerged that Cheema was with Singh over the Christmas holidays only week before he was killed. The barrister put it to Choongh that 'Cheema had really told you a number of lies, the principal one of which was that you would be the only one in his life after the engagement'. Sir Desmond then had Choongh agree that Cheema's behaviour could be seen as a 'scandal' by some Sikh families and that Cheema's brother-in-law Varinder had spoken to her hours before Cheema's death. 'Was he angry and swearing a lot?' asked the barrister. 'Did he use the words, 'I am going to cover my hands with Lucky's blood and only then my aggression and my anger will calm down'. Choongh replied affirmatively. Sir Desmond stated, 'At 1 p.m. on January 27 Varinder was making, quite clearly, a threat to kill'.

The prosecution was led by Edward Brown QC who told the court that Singh poisoned the couple owing to 'jealousy, anger and revenge'. The court heard that two lodgers saw Singh entering Cheema's house before putting something in the refrigerated curry on the day of the killing. Also, a plastic bag containing powder had been found in Singh's coat which she claimed was medication for a neck rash. It was in fact aconite, the poison found in the curry.

On 10 February, 2010 Singh was convicted of Cheema's murder and of grievous bodily harm against his fiancé. The Crown pressed for a life sentence with a minimum of 30 years given that there were two victims, and the level of premeditation was high. Lakhvir Singh was jailed for at least 23 years. Judge Paul Worsley told the Singh that she would be approaching 70 before she could be considered for parole. He told her 'You were not just a spurned lover, you did not simply explode with anger at the rejection. You set about a cold and calculating revenge'.

### ***Points of Special Interest***

The case is notable for the degree of planning, involving Singh travelling to India to procure aconite. Physical evidence of the poison found in Singh's possession matching that in the curry and a witness to Singh removing the dish from the refrigerator were important. Motive was also evident as a combination of anger, jealousy and a desire for revenge. Time constraints within which Singh had to act are clear in that she intended to remove Cheema before he could marry his fiancé.

The defence case was an example of admitting that poison had been administered and that the intention was to kill, but that it was not the defendant that tampered with the food, but the deceased's brother-in-law whom it was said had threatened to kill the victim to preserve family honour.

## Kristin Rossum, US

### *The Case*

While at high school in California, Kristin Rossum used methamphetamine and other illegal drugs. Later moving to San Diego, she met Greg de Villier and appeared to overcome addictive use of methamphetamine. She graduated with honours with a degree in chemistry from San Diego State University in 1998. A year later she began work at San Diego County Medical Examiner's Office as a toxicologist. Marrying de Villiers in 1999, she began an affair with her manager Australian Michael Robertson in 2000.

Police reports indicate that on the morning of 6 November, the day de Villiers died, Rossum telephoned his office to say he would not be coming in that day and that he was asleep. She then went to work herself. Returning around lunchtime she found her husband awake but groggy and they shared soup. She then left again. Terry Huang his boss telephoned the de Villiers La Jolla home at 7 p.m. that day and Rossum told him that her husband was sleeping. An hour later, she telephoned 911 reporting that de Villiers was not breathing. When paramedics arrived, they found de Villiers unresponsive lying on the couple's bed surrounded by rose petals in a scene reminiscent of the movie 'American Beauty'. On arrival at hospital de Villiers was pronounced dead, his wife claiming that he had committed suicide.

It emerged that de Villiers had discovered about his wife's affair with Robertson and her relapse into drug use and had threatened to reveal both facts to the Medical Examiner's Office if Rossum did not leave her job. It appeared that Robertson learned of this threat prior to de Villier's being killed. Jerome de Villiers, Greg's brother was convinced that Greg was not suicidal. A month after de Villier's death, Rossum was fired for hiding her drug addiction, and Robertson dismissed for concealing Rossum's habit, and their affair. Concerned about possible conflict of interest in an employee carrying out an autopsy on an employee's husband, the San Diego County Medical Examiner Brian Blackburn arranged for de Villiers' autopsy to be carried out by an 'outside' laboratory in Los Angeles. Tests indicated seven times the lethal dose of fentanyl in de Villier's system. Samples were limited as immediately de Villiers was dead Rossum had donated his eyes and parts of his skin for transplant. These tend to be the most water retaining and therefore forensically useful body parts. But there was enough to determine cause of death as fentanyl.

Rossum told police that Greg had been depressed. She had suggested that they have trial separation. On the day before he died, she had telephone his employer to say that he would not be coming in. In June 2001, Rossum was arrested, charged with murder and released on bail.

At her trial, defence attorney Alex Loebig claimed that de Villiers had committed suicide by drinking fentanyl from a glass at his bedside that was never tested by police. There was no suicide note because de Villiers may have wanted revenge on his wife for her affair. The prosecution case put by Dan Goldstein was that Kristin had murdered her husband to prevent him revealing her affair and her drug

thefts. The drinking theory did not explain that on Greg's body along with expected needle marks from the paramedics' treatment, there was an unaccounted for puncture where Kristin may have injected her husband with fentanyl. The rose petals may have been placed around the body by Kristin trying to create a melodramatic movie like scene. In marathon aspects to the trial, Rossum was on the witness stand for a total of over 8 h, prosecution closing arguments took over 7 h, and jury deliberated for 8 h.

Found guilty in November 2002, Rossum was subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. Robertson returned to Australia after his employment was terminated. He was named in Rossum's trial as a co-conspirator.

### ***Points of Special Interest***

As in many poison trials much of the evidence was circumstantial but was considered by the jury sufficient to convict. There are relatively many medic-patient poisonings, because of a combination of access to potentially poisonous drugs, knowledge of their action and access to patients for treatment. In this case, the murderer had access to poisons and detailed knowledge of their action. Access to the victim was not through a physician-patient relationship but through being a spouse. Also it appears that Rossum would have known that her laboratory and autopsy services would not routinely test for fentanyl and so believed that it would go undetected.

The important spotting of the 'extra' needle mark on de Villier's body is reminiscent of the needle puncture noticed on the body of Elizabeth Barlow injected with insulin by her husband Kenneth Barlow [63] before he drowned her in her bath.

The issue of the autopsy being compromised was addressed by using an outside source, making the evidence impartial. As far as motive was concerned, the probability of Rossum seeking self-protection outweighed the possibility of de Villier's suicide.

## **Jessica Wongso. Australia and Indonesia**

### ***The Case***

Jessica Wongso and Wayan Salihin an Australian resident attended design college together in Sydney Australia. Both were graphic designers. Jessica, her parents and two siblings emigrated from Indonesia to Australia in 2008 and are all permanent

residents of Australia living in Sydney. In 2016, Jessica was an administrator in the New South Wales ambulance service from 2014 until she resigned in November 2015. It appears that in late 2015, Jessica and her parents returned to Indonesia for a vacation and were due to return to Australia in late January 2016.

On 6 January 2016, Jessica Wongso and Wayan Salihin met along with another friend for an afternoon coffee date at the Olivier café in the Grand Indonesia shopping mall, Jakarta, Indonesia. Wayan Salihin, after one sip of her iced Vietnamese coffee, collapsed suddenly, dying hours later in hospital. Jessica Wongso was arrested in late January, three weeks after the café meeting.

Closed-circuit television footage from inside the restaurant on Jan. 6 showed Jessica Wongso arriving about an hour before Wayan Salihin and the third woman. After sitting in a booth, she ordered drinks for the three of them. Footage showed Ms. Wongso putting her three shopping bags on the table, blocking her and the drinks from the camera's view. After making a series of unknown movements, she placed the bags on the seat. In June 2016, in court in Indonesia, prosecutors argued that the defendant laced Ms. Salihin's iced coffee with cyanide from behind her makeshift screen. The motive it was alleged was Wongso's jealousy of Salihin's relationship with her new husband. Also, Salihin had apparently disapproved of a relationship between Wongso and an Australian Patrick O'Connor which has recently ended. It was unclear how the cyanide was obtained but prosecution lawyers suggested that it was available on the black market.

The court ruled that Jessica Wongso killed her friend by spiking her drink. Judging that the poisoning was 'sadistic' the court sentenced Wongso to 20 years in prison.

### ***Points of Special Interest***

This is a rare female-on-female poisoning. It is also unusual in that a public place was chosen for what is usually a surreptitious crime. Indeed, secrecy was involved in the concealing from the CCTV camera the movements that Wongso made with the coffee on the café table. But the real camouflage it appears was that Wongso thought that there was safety in committing the crime in plain sight.

### **Conclusion**

Cases from the US, UK and Indonesia were examined and points of particular relevance were identified.

## Suggested Activity

Begin to familiarise yourself with the glossary. Look at the cases mentioned in the present chapter and see how they are outlined: Harold Shipman [81], Kristin Rossum [82], Lynn Turner [88], Lakhvir Singh [93], Paul Marshall Curry [95], Roger and David Cooper [99] and Jessica Wongso [100].

## Reference

The Shipman Inquiry First Report. (2002, July) *Volume 1—Death Disguised; Volume 2—Decisions Todmorden; Volumes 3–6—Decisions Hyde.*

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