

Death by fire in Hollywood: All that was found of Jack Cassidy was his teeth...

Shaun and David mourn their Father

Thanks to his television roles (e.g. in 'Columbo'), most of us know him as an elegant gentleman gangster. In America, however, he was primarily known as a singer and entertainer: Jack Cassidy (49). His first marriage to Evelyn Ward produced David Cassidy; his second to Shirley Jones produced Shaun Cassidy. For two years, Jack had been living apart from his family in the apartment building where he now fell victim to a fire. BRAVO provides you with the background information here...

With sirens blaring, five fire engines raced down Hollywood's Sunset Boulevard at around 6:15 a.m. on the fourth Sunday of Advent. The police had reported smoke... The fire brigade screeched to a halt in front of 1221 Kings Road. The fourth floor of Jack Cassidy's apartment was ablaze. The 100 residents of the building (Jack was the owner) were evacuated. A neighbour alerted Jack's ex-wife Shirley Jones: 'Where's Jack? His apartment is on fire.' Shirley made some phone calls, suspecting he was with friends or at his house in Palm Springs. Twenty-five minutes later, the fire was extinguished. No one could find Jack Cassidy, so Shirley Jones informed David, and the Cassidy family gathered at the scene of the fire to salvage what they could from the apartment. Meanwhile, the fire brigade had found a completely burnt and mutilated body next to the sofa in the living room. It was impossible for Shirley and David to identify the corpse. Only the body was recognisable as such. It had to be a friend of Jack's. Jack often let friends stay at his flat. His Mercedes was not in the garage, and he never lent his car to anyone else... Shirley, David, Shaun and the brothers Ryan and Patrick did not give up hope all day, even when Jack's wallet was found with his ring inscribed 'God is Life'.

It was not until late afternoon, around four o'clock, that they had to accept the tragic news when, based on the dental records...

The coroner determined that the charred body was that of Jack Cassidy.

Jack Cassidy died on the fourth floor of this building. The fire brigade arrived too late.

Ten minutes later, radio and television reported on the tragic accident. The cause of the fire was a burning cigarette butt. The subsequent autopsy revealed that Jack had probably fallen asleep while smoking, dropped the cigarette from his hand and set the couch on fire. The Cassidy family was devastated, painful tears were shed. The next day was supposed to be Shaun's first day of filming for his first TV series, 'Hardy Boys.' It was postponed until Thursday.

David seemed to be hit the hardest. He hadn't spoken to his father in a long time. David wanted to be alone. His mother, Evelyn Ward (Jack's first wife), flew in from the east coast and stayed with David. 'He was a great man. He's not dead, he lives on in us,' said Shaun Cassidy three days later, his voice choked with emotion, to the 300 mourners who attended the funeral at Pierce-Bros Chapel in Beverly Hills. It was an Irish funeral, just as Jack had wanted, without pomp and ceremony or long eulogies. As a final tribute to his father, Shaun read from the poem 'Waltz for Billy Ryan,' which Jack had written. Shaun's brother Patrick (14) recited a poem that his father had dedicated to him, while the youngest Cassidy, Ryan (10), was too overcome with emotion to speak. Shaun protectively put his arm around him and read the poem that Ryan had wanted to recite.

David: 'I wanted to make peace with him.'

Shaun: 'Jack isn't dead – he lives on in us.'

This picture of David and Jack is misleading: their relationship had been strained for a long time.

David Cassidy did not say a word during the funeral service. But you could see from his face how deeply his father's death affected him—for him, it was a reconciliation at the grave with Jack, with whom his relationship had been strained until the end...

(He and his mother were the only ones dressed in black at the funeral; the other Cassidy's were not.)

David felt abandoned by his father since his parents Jack Cassidy and Evelyn Ward had divorced. David was only five years old at the time and grew up with his grandparents and his mother. Jack then married actress Shirley Jones, with whom he had three children: Shaun, Patrick and Ryan. This marriage also ended in divorce at the end of 1974 after 18 years. Jack Cassidy, undisputedly a master of his craft as an actor, singer, dancer and entertainer, found it difficult to accept that David, as a teen star, had become more famous than him, that his son had achieved the fame that he, the father, had always fought so hard for.

'I was about to make up with Jack,' said David, shaken. 'The terrible accident prevented that from happening.' Shaun, his brothers and mother Shirley, on the other hand, got on very well with Jack after the divorce two years ago, when he left the family home. Although Shaun had not been on good terms with his father for a while after he banned him from listening to rock music in 1974 and insisted that he finish school. David and his mother were the first to leave the funeral service, where Jack's friends had recounted many episodes from Jack's life. The ashes of the deceased were later scattered at sea. Jack, who loved the water and the vastness of the sea, had wanted it that way. Frances Schoenberger

After the funeral, Shaun on the left, David and his mother Evelyn Ward on the right, who drove away together in a car after the funeral service.