

In Memoriam

Juliet Crawley Peck

(1961-2007)

David Loyn, London, 25/1/2007

Juliet Crawley Peck was beautiful, refreshing, inspiring, and exasperating in turns, a force of nature cast from some empire-building mould left over from another age. She faced with brisk equanimity the shooting of both of her husbands, the loss of an eye, and then latterly the cancer that returned to kill her.

From her early days running the Afghan Aid office in Peshawar, through her years as a journalist, and right up to the end she never lost her passionate conviction that she could make a difference to the world, while having a good time along the way. When Rory Peck, her second husband, died she helped to found a Trust in his name, designed to help the families of freelance cameramen who died violently. Juliet always supported the aims of the Trust, although she detached herself from direct contact; she said she became rather fed up of being introduced to potential donors as 'the widow'. Even after cancer returned in recent years, she helped to set up Conflicts Forum, a group committed to finding a negotiated solution to the problems of the Middle East.

Juliet first moved to Afghanistan in 1986, initially for three weeks, extended to three months, and then full time. She soon married Dominique Vergos, a glamorous French fashion photographer, who had come out to get a taste of war photography, and was recruited as a spy. He was shot dead in front of her on Christmas Day 1988, as they were walking into their house in Peshawar.

By now, Rory Peck was living in Peshawar and had set up an agency with Peter Jovenal and others - the beginning of a partnership that would develop into Frontline TV news. He married Juliet in 1991, just before setting off to Baghdad to work for the BBC. The day after he left, Juliet fell horse-riding and broke her back; she had to fly home to England for

several weeks to recuperate.

Ideas of moving to India to set up home were shelved when the Moscow coup drew Rory to Russia instead. He chronicled the fall of communist order, and found his way to a dacha that had once belonged to Boris Pasternak. A Russian friend, Vladimir Snegirev, says approvingly that Rory spent money like a Russian. It went on caviar, whisky, the dacha in the woods. By now they had a daughter of their own, Lettice, as well as Fin, Juliet's son from her first marriage, and they would go on holiday to places like Mongolia, sometimes joined by Rory's other sons, Jamie and Alexander.

Juliet would travel to wars in the region with Rory when he was working, and helped to run the business and sell the pictures - the Moscow branch of Frontline TV news, while Vaughan Smith set up the main agency in London.

When Rory was shot dead outside the



Moscow TV station during a failed counter-coup, Juliet returned to live in England. She continued to work as a journalist, as well as being elected to the local council, and campaigning to save fox-hunting.

A visit to her North Yorkshire home, past a sign proclaiming an 'EU-free zone', and then through an obstacle course of rescued greyhounds and hunt puppies, was rewarded by the most entertaining conversation imaginable, all wrapped in a waspish wit.

Before going on a long trip into Afghanistan, Rory wrote this in his diary: "Am I worried about death? Not really. Always when going into this sort of situation there is a question mark with the grim reaper propped against it. I have seen enough deaths around the world to look at it in the face and accept its inevitability, however I have no wish to die. Years of not really caring have slipped past, now I am looking forwards to a gloriously happy future with Julie who I wish to love and look after for the rest of my days.

I am concerned about a remark of hers last night, not to worry if I am wounded as she would enjoy pushing me around in wheelchair. I refuse to pander to her charitable views and asked if she regarded me as a potential lame duck. She came back quick as lightening 'Certainly not I think of you as a particularly vicious gander.'"

