

The suicide of Jill Messick: #MeToo campaign claims a victim

By David Walsh
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Film producer Jill Messick, 50, committed suicide on February 7. Messick was the manager of actress Rose McGowan at the time of an incident involving producer Harvey Weinstein in January 1997 at the Sundance Film Festival, during which McGowan alleges a sexual assault occurred. That incident has become one of the linchpins of the #MeToo campaign.

On January 30, in response to McGowan's widely publicized insistence that criminal charges be laid against Weinstein, the latter's lawyer released a July 2017 email from Messick in which she asserted that McGowan told her at the time that the episode was consensual. The actress responded to the email's publication with obscenity-laden tweets.

McGowan has previously accused Messick of betrayal and taking Weinstein's side in exchange for a job with Miramax, Weinstein's film production company at the time.

Following Messick's death, in a strongly worded statement, her family charged that "Jill was victimized by our new culture of unlimited information sharing and a willingness to accept statement as fact ... She became collateral damage in an already horrific story."

The statement takes note of the many women who have come forward with allegations against Weinstein, "including Rose McGowan, who has repeatedly spoken with the press, striking out against not only her alleged attacker, but a great many others. One of them was Jill, who chose to remain silent in the face of Rose's slanderous statements against her for fear of undermining the many individuals who came forward in truth. She opted not to add to the feeding frenzy, allowing her name and her reputation to be sullied despite having done nothing wrong."

Messick's family, they explain, now wishes to set the record straight. In their version of the January 1997

incident, Messick, as part of her job as an entry-level manager, set up a breakfast meeting for McGowan with Weinstein during the Sundance festival.

"Following the meeting," the statement continues, "Rose told Jill what had happened—that she made the decision to remove her clothes and get in the hot tub with him—a mistake which Rose immediately regretted. Rose never once used the word rape in that conversation. Despite this, Jill recognized that Harvey had done something untoward to Rose, if not illegal. She immediately went to her bosses ... to recount Rose's story and to insist that they immediately address the situation. They told Jill that they would handle the situation. The ensuing arrangements [which resulted in a \$100,000 settlement for McGowan] between Rose and Harvey were then negotiated, completely without Jill's knowledge. At that time, all Jill knew was that the matter was settled and that Rose continued making films with the Weinsteins. She never knew any details until recently, when Rose elected to make them public."

The statement explains that it was not until 10 months later, in November 1997, that a Miramax executive recruited Messick "for a job as an executive at Miramax Films working in production in Los Angeles." It continues, "Jill was hired based on merit and her excellent work of over two years as a young development executive."

The Messick family points out that McGowan's recent round of press interviews to promote her new book, *Brave*, included "new stories involving Jill." They explain, "The constant press attention Rose has garnered in print and on national TV led to Harvey Weinstein releasing two documents." One of these was Messick's July 2017 email, released by Weinstein's lawyer "without her consent." The other was an email

from Ben Affleck claiming that McGowan never told him about a sexual attack.

“Seeing her name in headlines again and again,” the statement goes on, “as part of one person’s attempt to gain more attention for her personal cause, along with Harvey’s desperate attempt to vindicate himself, was devastating for her. It broke Jill, who was just starting to get her life back on track. What makes Rose’s inaccurate accusations and insinuations against Jill ironic was that she was the first person who stood up on Rose’s behalf, and alerted her bosses to the horrific experience which Rose suffered.”

The decision by Messick, who, according to the family’s statement, suffered for years from depression, to take her life is a very sad event for those who were immediately around her, including her two children, their father, her father and brother, and her partner.

It appears that Messick found herself in an impossible situation, sympathetic to the women who were coming forward with charges of sexual misconduct and yet allegedly aware of the true circumstances of the Weinstein-McGowan episode, which threatened to undermine the #MeToo movement.

McGowan’s behavior has certainly been deplorable. Her irresponsible claims, vindictiveness and self-absorption have contributed to the media frenzy over alleged sexual misconduct. After accepting \$100,000 in 1997, she remained silent about the Weinstein incident for two decades, until it became politically and personally convenient. McGowan has now parlayed the sexual witch-hunt into a book deal and the production of a five-part documentary television series, *Citizen Rose*.

However, the real culprits in this case are those manipulating McGowan and other Hollywood and entertainment industry personalities for their own rotten political ends: the *New York Times*, Ronan Farrow and the *New Yorker*, *Time* magazine, the *Washington Post*, significant figures in the Democratic Party and the entire cabal of right-wing feminists unremittently seeking to advance their careers and swell their incomes.

These forces, day in and day out, are cynically making use of subjective and often unstable individuals such as McGowan in an effort to convince the public that sexual harassment is the great issue in America—at a time of the widest social inequality in modern history,

disastrous conditions facing broad layers of the population and the growing threat of nuclear war.

It is very troubling, but there is no reason to assume that Jill Messick will be the last person to make such a terrible decision. The pressures being exerted by this reactionary witch-hunt are enormous. In certain cases, actors, writers, musicians and others are seeing decades and decades of work going down the drain in a matter of minutes on the basis of allegations about incidents that occurred many years ago. Others are too intimidated to speak up. In that regard, Messick serves as a tragic example. Her great crime, in the eyes of the #MeToo fanatics, and for which she came under attack, was her unwillingness to go along with the anti-Weinstein narrative.

The current purge in Hollywood has claimed its first significant victim. The “red scare” of the 1940s and 1950s not only cut short the careers of many actors, writers and directors, it also cut short numerous lives. One of its prominent victims was actor Philip Loeb, who was named as a communist in 1950 and subsequently dropped from the popular television series, *The Goldbergs*. In September 1955, unable to find consistent work and burdened with financial problems, Loeb took a fatal overdose of sleeping pills in the Taft Hotel in Manhattan.

It is generally believed that the anti-communist hysteria, threats by the Hollywood studios and relentless FBI surveillance and persecution also led to the early deaths of actors John Garfield, Canada Lee, J. Edward Bromberg and Austrian-born actress Mady Christians.

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