

# People are strange

## Patricia Kennealy talks about her *Strange Days* with Jim Morrison

by Rosie McCobb

Patricia Kennealy has just completed a publicity tour to promote her new book, *Strange Days: My Life With and Without Jim Morrison*, and is now back in her home territory of New York. At an outdoor cafe in the Village, she is dressed all in black, with a big, floppy hat covering her long, reddish hair and is sporting tinted sunglasses; she seems to want to be incognito. When I ask her if she finds doing interviews annoying, Kennealy says, "Oh yeah, definitely, but you have to do it."

Normally, one would assume a new piece

of "trash" devoted to glorifying the Jim Morrison myth wouldn't need a push to get noticed. But then again, after countless books and Oliver Stone's film *The Doors*, perhaps people have had enough of Jim Morrison the drunk, Jim Morrison the Lizard King, Jim Morrison the performer, Jim Morrison, the lead singer of the Doors.

In this case, that is a blessing, because Kennealy, a writer who wed Morrison in 1970 in a Celtic ceremony called "handfasting," has written a book about Jim Morrison that shows a side of him that is as unconnected to the aforementioned personas as one could get. And oh yeah, if you're looking for the male

perception of dirt, go read Danny Sugerman's book *No One Here Gets Out Alive* instead.

So I walk down the Plaza hallway, what seems like my last mile, the walk to the scaffold, to the door of Jim's suite. I remind myself of all the warnings I have received about this person I have come to interview. Like Byron, they all dourly cautioned me, when I announced, thrilled and terrified, that I was going to be talking to him; and like a good

Lit. major I cap the quotation now in my mind: "Mad, bad, and dangerous to know."

—Patricia Kennealy, *Strange Days*

In 1969, the year I was born, Patricia Kennealy was 22 years old and the editor of *Jazz and Pop* magazine. Due to a phone friendship with publicist Diane Gardner (whom Doors groupie/manager Danny Sugerman, by the way, describes as "a cute little blonde, companionable 21 year-old college drop-out") Kennealy was offered an interview with the lead singer of the Doors. "Diane called and said: 'I'm doing stuff for the Doors now, would

you like to talk to Jim?' He's read your stuff and he really likes it." So I said: "Uh no, thanks very much, I'll pass!" Kennealy says sarcastically. Was she shitting bricks over the notion of meeting Jim Morrison? "No, I was a professional, I was doing a job."

Of course I, as a music writer myself, do not believe this. And even though Kennealy stresses that this meeting would only be added to the list of many rock personae she had already encountered, didn't the fact that the Doors was one of her favorite bands make her feel slightly uneasy?

"This was a little special," Patricia admits, "because I really had a feeling that something was going to happen and it was a little upsetting on kind of a karmic level, and 'Oh my God, this is it,' but as far as professionally goes, it was just another interview. Okay, not quite another interview."

As *Strange Days* documents, Patricia showed up at the Plaza hotel in New York one afternoon in January, met one-on-one with Mr. Morrison, asked her repertoire of challenging questions, and spent the rest of the afternoon there, discussing literature, music and her affiliation with witchcraft (which is not about Satanism or evil, it is the "honoring and the drawing upon of the female principle of the Universe, as logical and natural as the honoring of a male God," and is based around ancient Celtic rituals and traditions).

Unlike the scene in Oliver Stone's film, where Kathleen Quinlan's Kennealy and Val Kilmer's Morrison are shown dancing around naked like Dionysus, then in bed, snorting coke on the evening of their first meeting (Quinlan's big line is "fuck me hard, rock God"), Patricia Kennealy neither slept with nor even heard from Jim Morrison until a month after she met with him.

"The Oliver Stone version of me is as a wild woman," Kennealy says, sipping a diet Coke. "I'm not like that. The whole point of Jim's attraction to me was that I wasn't a wild woman. I mean it was like, 'Oh, you're a witch, you're really smart, you're running around doing rock'n'roll stuff and doing drugs. Obviously you must be a wild and crazy boozier.' But no, I'm really not."

I'd far rather he get to know me first as somebody he can talk to on his own level, not somebody he can go to bed with (though naturally I'd like to work up to that eventually, of course).

I half-seriously suggest that maybe it was all because of the skimpy outfits Kennealy was so fond of wearing. "The way things are now, I can see where people would think that, but it was very different back then. That was the way everybody dressed. Basically everyone wore skirts that were six inches long. It wasn't necessarily a sexual statement if you had on a microskirt that was no wider than a belt. You really could go out wearing a skirt that was that wide and not expect to be hassled. I don't think you'd find that anymore."

Recalling a section in *Strange Days* where she states: "Whatever one's credentials, women rock writers were very often condescended to by the people they wrote about as little more than well-connected groupies." I ask if there was still a lot of sexism directed at her as one of the few women involved in a scene that was (and still is) largely dominated by men. "Not really. I mean, there was this general all-pervasive malaise that women just didn't have a place, which I could never really understand. Because up until then, I had always been fortunate. I'm smart enough to always pretty much get what I want. But going up against that was really enlightening."

Getting off the Jim track for a minute, we discuss the current state of affairs for our gender. As a music journalist, I offered that while there still aren't as many female music writers as there are male (in one issue of this very magazine, I was the only one who contributed a major piece that month), I never feel like anyone is condescending towards me because of my gender. But then again, I usually dress fairly androgynously and make sure most of my female character traits do not sneak out in professional situations. The old "act like a guy and you'll be treated like one" syndrome. But in everyday life, it happens a lot, and you either ignore it or say something at the risk of having someone call you a cold bitch for being a feminist.

Feminists these days "are getting a bad rap," Kennealy proclaims. "I think that's very unfortunate because men ask women—are you for choice, are you for people pulling for equal work, are you for laws against sexual harassment on the job—and you say: 'yeah, sure.' Well, it's just the label people are having



trouble with. Anyone who takes offense to the label really ought to know better."

But then there's always the dichotomy of conquering by doing or conquering by making a public statement. In the music world lately, there's been the big argument of who's doing more for feminism—people who just happen to be female and just happen to be in bands? Or people who make the fact that they are female well known in the bands they have fabricated to promote their gender?

Patricia offers her opinion of the latter. "If that's what they want to do, that's fine. I don't think they can really expect to be taken seriously, or as serious, as they might like to be. You have to consider the people we're dealing with. There's probably a lot of guys who just get in there in the audience to slobber and shout rude things at them, and [the female band members] can't really complain. Because if that's the way they're going to present themselves, they're presuming enlightenment on the part of their audience and I don't think you can do that to a large extent, not even these days. I mean, we have come a long way, but nowhere near as far as we think we've come. You forget that women only got the vote 70 fucking years ago, the year my mother was born. But there's 5000 years of patriarchy before that that we've had to overthrow. We're not going to see it, people in my generation. You'll see a little."

Even now, in this last decade of the millennium, there has yet to be a dangerously intelligent, supernaturally beautiful, musically brilliant young woman. Grace Slick, in the '60s, probably came the closest. Latterly, perhaps Chrissie Hynde, once; but no one since.

If Emma Peel, say, has been a real-life rock star instead of a TV-fictional Avenger, we might have seen it. We haven't yet. And given the state of rock today—all product, no creation—I do not think we will. Not anytime soon.

Unlike the preconceived notion that people my age have of the 1960s' supposed enlightened hippie culture, being a hippie, according to Kennealy, did not necessarily denote complete open-mindedness, intelligence or reverence. "We didn't describe ourselves as hippies," Patricia explains. "People like Jim and me and my friends—a lot of people in the music business, especially—we called ourselves more freaks. The hippies were all the peace-and-loves living in the communes. We just sort of did our own thing."

We pause while we're served our salads. Patricia makes a face and says, "I hate greens."

Did the people living the more alternative lifestyle look down on the hippie culture? "Yeah, a little bit," Kennealy admits. "I don't think we took [hippies] as seriously as they either wanted to be taken or took themselves. They just basically did their thing and we just basically did our thing and everybody co-existed, rather peacefully. It was a much more tolerant time, in that regard."

But how tolerant were people when it came to understanding and handling a relationship between two people that started off as little more than written correspondence between

two coasts and ended up being an intense meeting of the minds every couple of months that was consummated in June of 1970 with the handfasting (i.e. Patricia and Jim)?

"Back then, I didn't tell [my parents] hardly anything," Kennealy says, fiddling with the claddagh rings on her fingers. "We didn't discuss it because they were Irish Catholic, and they just didn't want to know."

As far as the rest of the world, Kennealy shared her romance only with very close friends and never became part of the inner Doors circle. She states in *Strange Days* that "the only Door I knew was Jim; I didn't know about them, they didn't know about me, and that was how Jim and I both preferred it... in the years since his death, I have kept away from the neocult that has sprung up around his name. I did so out of what seemed to me very good reasons indeed: unending grief and abiding love, and the fierce wish to protect our privacy, to keep what we had for ourselves alone."

In the two years Kennealy and Morrison were together, they remained (for the most part) physically apart. Kennealy continued to work at Jazz & Pop and live in New York, while Jim took up residence at various hotels in LA, sometimes living with on-again, off-again girlfriend Pamela Courson. Of the bi-coastal relationship, Kennealy says, "Most of the guys who [have found out] and written about me have been, in fact, guys, and they don't understand the whole point of view. They say, 'How could you be on one coast and he on the other coast?' Well, 'cause I didn't want him in the same fucking house with me most of the time. It was never going to be Ward Cleaver with him. I mean, that wasn't the kind of guy he was. 'Hi honey, I'm home'—I don't think so."

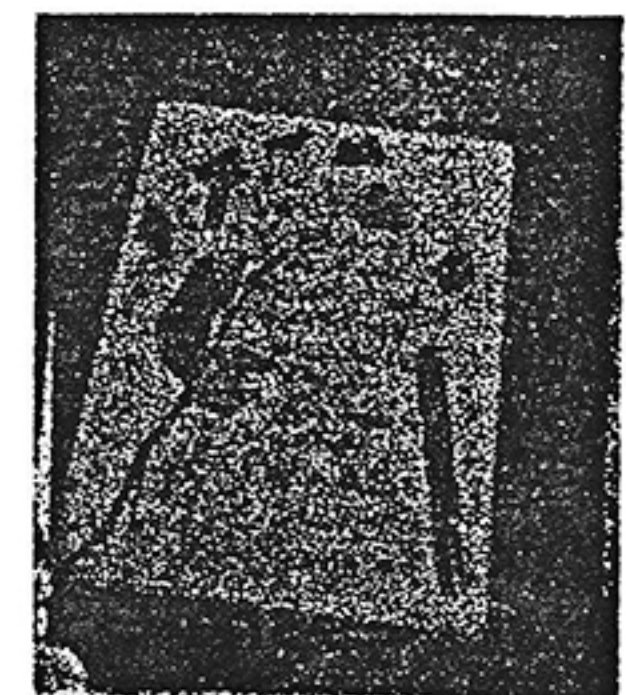
Kennealy even admits that if she had perhaps seen more of Jim, or lived with him, the side of Jim that she rarely saw (cold, obnoxious, drunk womanizer), she might've lost respect for him. "He would've had to clean up his act big-time before I would've put up with that, and I think that's why I did exist on the sort of bi-coastal relationship, because I knew that in close quarters, it might not have held up. I would never put up with the kind of crap Pam did. Of course, she was giving it back to him in spades, but that wasn't what we were into together, and I think the fact that we did see each other every two months—we talked three or four times a week on the phone, there were letters going back and forth, all this other kind of stuff—but he

would've had to admit that he had a problem."

Of course there will be traditionalists who either can't understand a woman who says "I need a lot of distance in relationships," or who straight-out shrug off Patricia's existence, lumping her relationship in with the many insignificant stampings Jim had supposedly strewn all across America.

Pamela was a redhead. She had freckles on the backs of her hands, smeared across her pale, delicate, fawnlike face, sprinkled like cinnamon on a body the length of a rope. She wore her hair parted in the middle, straight and long. Her eyes were translucent lavender, larger than most, giving her the look of a painting by Walter or Margaret Keane: vulnerable, dependent, adorable.

Patricia had well-thought-out opinions on nearly every subject; a facile, lashing Irish tongue, much like Jim's own; much better than average looks, with long auburn



hair, brown eyes and a voluptuous figure; an extensive knowledge of the occult, and a superb gift for storytelling.

—Danny Sugerman, *No One Here...*

The common misconception in the Morrison biographies is that Pamela Courson was Jim Morrison's number one girl. His one and only. His inspirational muse. The only one Jim could get true solace from. In

*Strange Days*, Patricia recalls her initial "introduction" to Pamela...

I hear about Pamela for the first time that summer... "She's our age," says my Elektra [Records employee] spy. "Short, no tits, and she had great hair until she started fooling around with it. Oh, it's really pretty now, too fire-engineered, but it was prettier before. Not intellectual, and I don't think she actually does anything but be the girlfriend. Why do they insist on clinging to their high-school sweethearts? Scared, probably."

Contrary to the scene in *The Doors* where Pamela and Patricia meet for the first time at the Morrison household for Thanksgiving dinner and Pamela tartly says, "Jim, you actually put your dick in this woman?" the real-life first meeting (when Patricia was staying at an apartment which was downstairs from Pamela's) was much less dramatic. Pam didn't have a phone. Diane Gardner's rang. It was someone trying to reach her. They ended up smoking pot and talking about Patricia's relationship, to which Pam reacted, "Wow, I've never met one of Jim's girlfriends before!"

When Patricia told Pam that she had aborted Jim's baby, Pam said, "It would have been nice if you could have loved Jim enough to have the baby." Then she went on to admit "Jim and I aren't married, you know. He hates it when I tell people we are, but we aren't and never will be."

The words of a seemingly harmless hippie. But to Patricia, deeply in love with the man that this hippie allowed to wallow in alcohol, they weren't harmless at all. On a regular everyday level, Patricia says, "I could never understand what they talked about—she had the vocabulary of a good parrot, and all the intellectual curiosity of paint. She was a junkie, a manipulative little drughead, but she was extremely pretty. You'd think that sort of thing would pall after a while, since basically he could have anybody he wanted to."

But on a deeper level of feeding off one another's weaknesses, Patricia adds, "You see now that it was a really co-dependent relationship.... We really didn't know the dynamics of a situation like that—he was an alcoholic, she was a heroin addict."

Patricia Kennealy has a lot of harsh words to say about Pamela Courson, including that "she should be damn glad she's dead" (Courson died of a heroin overdose three years after Jim's death in 1971), for if she weren't, Kennealy says, "I'd kill her with my bare hands."

Unlike the romanticized version of Jim languidly dying of heart failure in a Paris bathtub after weeks of quality time spent writing and with Pam, (and, according to what Pam says in *No One Here...*, Jim was getting off the booze and had "never been better"), Patricia, as well as unnamed close friends of Jim, tell a different story. Jim's letters from Paris reeked of extreme depression over not being able to write. Friends in Paris confirm a steady stream of alcoholic nights, and finally of Jim being so depressed one afternoon that he sat in a room with Pam and allowed her to administer a large dose of heroin to him, a drug he had always despised and had never used. According to a friend of Patricia and



Jim who was in Paris, Jim died of an adverse reaction to a drug his body wasn't used to. Apparently, when he started hemorrhaging, Pamela was too stoned out to do anything besides notice it, then crawl into bed. If Pamela had simply called a doctor, Kennealy says, Jim would've been saved.

In *Strange Days* though, Kennealy notes...

In the end, Jim Morrison killed himself. If Pamela had not been there handing him heroin, at a moment when he was despairing and vulnerable and maybe wanting an end to the pain, he might have lasted longer. Though Pam may have been pushing the skag, Jim was still the one who accepted it."

In my conversation with Patricia Kennealy, we do not talk about Jim's death, or a lot about Jim for that matter. We chat about writing, and of her series of novels entitled "The Keltiad" (which include some elements of science fiction, some ancient Celtic myths, that occupy most of her spare time. For some reason, I do not feel the need to hear her say all the things that I learned by reading her book. I do not know if it would make her cry or if she would just tell it like it was. Since she started out our conversation by telling me she got out of the music scene "when Jim died" and "can't listen to Doors music," and concluded by saying she's never moved from the original apartment she had when she was 22 because she doesn't want to live "anywhere where Jim hasn't been," I gather that talking about him is, still, an immensely difficult task. In a way, I'm dying to know more but something holds me back, and I simply can't think of anything to ask about him, so I do not press her.

After sharing a couple of hours of talk and laughs with someone who spoke in such a regular, cool way, I go to shake hands with Patricia Kennealy. Instead, she hugs me. I'm not sure why, but watching her walk away in my rear view mirror, I feel really sad, though listening now to my tape of the interview, remember having a good time, laughing at Patricia's comments. Why?

A clue is found at the end of *Strange Days* where Kennealy, in a self-interview, asks herself what she remembers best about Jim. "The love and the warmth and generosity, the most astounding passion and tenderness—and always so much more this side than the other. I remember us being silly together, giggly and hilarious; and I remember us cutting each other to bloody bits with words. I remember weeping as I have never wept for anyone else and I remember him weeping with me."



JIM MORRISON WITH PATRICIA KENNEALY