

THRILLER OF CHILDREN KEPT SERIOUSNESS OF ILLNESS SECRET

# Disneyland Tinkerbell Fought Pain, Death Alone

By MARY NEISWENDER

Tiny Tinkerbell — the legendary Peter Pan character who turned into a real-life character at Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom—is dead.

She died without the glare of spotlights and without the enthusiastic screams of children.

She died alone in a remote Inglewood rest home away from the circus life in which she thrived.

Tiny Kline, the 90-pound aerialist who soared over Disneyland each night to disappear in a geyser of fireworks — was scheduled to return last weekend to her daily 22-second "flight" as Tinkerbell.

Instead, after a little more than a month of "extreme and constant" pain, she died of cancer.

"She considered the part of Tinkerbell as her own—the climax to her career," her agent, Walter Trask, said Tuesday.

"No one knew she was as sick as she was — she kept it to herself."

The spunky aerialist, who was widowed 40 years ago when her husband, equestrian director for Ringling Brothers Circus, was killed, lived alone in a small home in Inglewood.

"I've been her agent for 16 years," Trask says, "and I know of no relatives."

"Ever since I've known her she's been alone."

Her life, Trask says, was the circus.

And the peak of her career, she considered to be the part of the spellbinding fairy, Tinkerbell.

Ordinarily, circus performers are the biggest publicity seekers in show business, whose desire for pictures of themselves is insatiable. This was Tiny Kline — until she assumed the role of Tinkerbell.

"Then, she didn't want any pictures taken of herself," Trask said. "She said they would show her age — and more important, would disillusion the children who thought of Tinkerbell as a young, lovely fairy princess."

Trask quoted — the 74-

year-old performer as saying:

"I have no age in the air — but when my feet touch the ground I grow old."

To the thousands of children and adults who wrote to her, she never grew old.

She answered everyone of the letters individually, but she never sent a picture.

She came to the United States from Hungary at the age of 14 with a dancing troupe. Since then she has performed with circuses, worked in theaters, in animal acts and hung by her teeth from a dirigible balloon 1,500 feet above the ground.

Excitement was almost a

commonplace experience with her.

Like the time she agreed to slide across Broadway at Times Square in New York to publicize the opening of a new stage show.

Her stunt was to descend from a 27-story hotel to a theater where the play was to open. The police, to prevent the stunt, stationed a man on the hotel roof. But Tiny got into a hotel room beneath the wire, tossed a rope over it, climbed the rope, then slid down the cable as photographers took pictures, traffic stopped and reporters applauded.

Tiny ended up arrested amid a glare of publicity in

which most performers thrive.

But there was no publicity Sunday when she died. Newspapers two days later learned of her death.

In the legend Tinkerbell once was saved by the applause of the children she loved and protected. Their vigorous clapping saved her from death by poison — so the story goes.

This week, there were no children to clap as a much-loved Tinkerbell flew away for the last time.

Funeral service has been set for 10 a.m. Friday at Pierce Bros. Mortuary in Inglewood with interment in Inglewood Cemetery.



TINY KLINE