

WHAT HAPPENED TO WILLIE KOOPMAN?

By Paulus Breedveld



The Australian Post cover that attracted my attention

This article came about as a consequence of a glance at an Australasian Post magazine from the mid-sixties in a box of Posts and similar magazines of that period like Pix and People, at an auction in inner city Sydney. What attracted my attention was not so much the slightly sullen piercing look of the Italian film star on the cover, as the promise of the revelation of the 'Secrets of sex-appeal' inside.

I had fallen victim to the 'sex sells' marketing mantra and Pavlov like turned to the inside page. Here I came across the name of Willi Koopman for the first time who according to the article had been appearing as cover girl 8 times. This was enough for me to ask the questions above and below.

SO, WHO IS WILLI KOOPMAN

When a young Dutch girl came to Australia at 14 years of age, no-one suspected she would become one of Australia's most wanted fashion and photo models and go on to become a sought-after model and actress in America.

Willi Koopman was born in Utrecht the Netherlands on the 26th June 1944, daughter of Willie and Christina Koopman. Her talent was evident from an early age, she went on to become a trained ballerina, who first danced professionally in her native Utrecht at the age of four.

In 1959 we see the family emigrating to make a new life in Australia, settling in Mowbray Rd, Willoughby. NSW, At 14 years of age, Willi had already decided to become a fashion model and her modelling career quickly took off under the guidance of the Pat Woodley School for models.



Pat Woodley, principal, states:

"Willie Koopman has precisely that indefinable something, that sets her immediately apart from the average pretty girl."

A mysterious shooting occurred at her home in 1959 resulting in a manhunt and the arrest of a suspect. Although this was widely reported in several papers, including the Sydney Morning Herald and the Dutch Australian Weekly, the story behind the shooting remains a mystery.

Dutch Australian Weekly - 8 July 1959 SHOTS FIRED IN IMMIGRANT HOME (Edited)

Mrs. R. Bagnet became startled this morning when two shots were heard in the house from the Dutch immigrant Willie Koopman, who lives at Mowbray Road in the Sydney suburb of Willoughby, so reports the daily newspaper 'The Sun'.

Mrs. R. Bagnet, who lives diagonally opposite the Koopmans, saw Mrs Koopman run from her home. Then a car drove away.

The police were there on the spot shortly after and explained that the shots were fired from a .22 calibre rifle.

The police radio alerted all police cars in the city after a car was seen driving towards the Sydney harbour bridge. The car was last seen on the Tom Ugly's bridge.

It is assumed, that the driver was trying to escape to Wollongong.

The Koopmans have 2 daughters.

Daughter 'Willie is a famous fashion model.

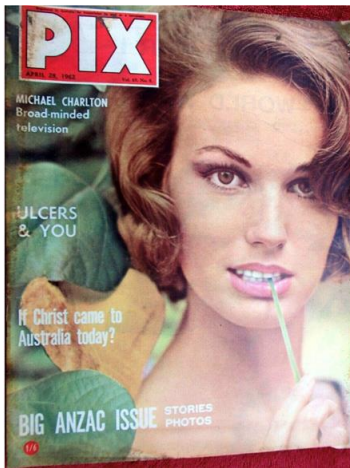
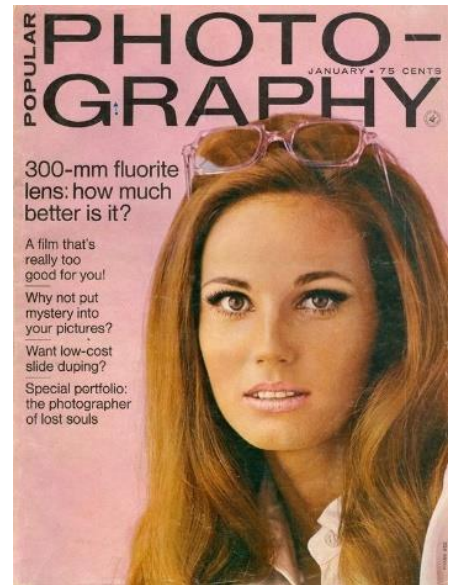
**THE SUN -Sydney 9 July 1959
ROADBLOCKS IN SYDNEY MANHUNT**

Police set up roadblocks near Sydney Harbour Bridge and Tom Ugly's Bridge, Sylvania, after a man fired two rifle shots at a woman in Willoughby to-day.

All police cars in the city, southern suburbs and south as far as Wollongong were alerted to watch for the man. No one was hurt in the shooting.

The house in which the incident occurred is owned by a Dutch migrant, Mr. Willie Koopman. A neighbour reported to police when she saw Mrs. Koopman run screaming from the house and a car drive off.

Police later charged a man with having assaulted a woman and having discharged a firearm in a public place. He will appear in North Sydney Court to-morrow.



Willi quickly became a favourite with Australian photographers appearing on the cover of Pix, Women's Weekly and an eye-watering 8 times on Australasian Post and it wasn't long till cosmetics, fashion clothes, swimwear, underwear and even chocolate advertisements in newspapers, magazines and on television were adorned with her face. She also became the face for CTC7'S identification ticket. Also, a talented actress, she has two roles in the Australian TV series "Whiplash" to her credit.

As if that's not enough, she was an accomplished pianist, and a portrait painter who was praised by critics.

In 1963 Willi Koopman was awarded "Sydney model of the year" and 1964 sees Willi receiving a summons from Mrs. Eileen Ford, who supervised one of the biggest model agencies, the Eileen Ford Agency, in New York.



Mrs Ford had heard of her from other Sydney models.

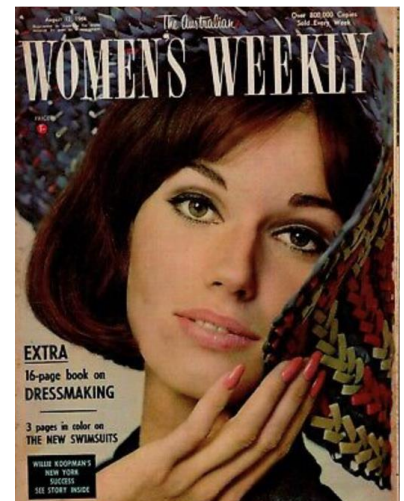
Dutch Australian Weekly Fri 21 Feb 1964 (Edited)

WILLI KOOPMANTO NEW YORK

"When Willi Koopman, one of Australia's most sought after fashion and photo models, leaves for New York in a few months there will be a great number of advertisers left behind complaining" writes "Newspaper News."

Willi Koopman undoubtedly has that rare quality of which stars are made; she is a true beauty.

She states that she will stay there as long as they need her there. 'Newspaper News' gives a comment on this: 'One can safely predict that they will need her there for a long time, a very long time.'



THE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S WEEKLY - Wed 12 Aug 1964.

Willie Koopman, 19, is the latest Australian model to invade the New York fashion scene. Within a month she was photographed for "Vogue," "Harper's Bazaar," and "Glamour."

She retains little trace of a Dutch accent.

"I worked very hard to learn English as perfectly as possible," she explained. "I had a tutor to help me."



These plum jobs represent the pinnacle of achievement for models of far more experience and renown.

More important to Willie, who was model of the year in Australia in 1963, is that she's getting the top rate of 9 dollars an hour (about A25).

"I can make more money here in three and a half hours than I could in Sydney in a week," Willie said between appointments at the office of Eileen Ford, her agent.

Neal Barr, one of Manhattan's top-fashion photographers, predicted that the lissom Dutch-born lass "is going to be very big in this town." "She has tremendous talent," he said. "At the moment she is a bit insecure, a bit overwhelmed by New York. When she relaxes, she will be sensational. She has great beauty and moves with unusual grace. She is also intelligent."

Meanwhile she works at the rate of a dollar a minute. She ought to be able to retire at an early age.

Her acting career also takes off with acting credits in the following;

1961 Whiplash - 2 episodes.

1966 Jericho

1966 The Man from U.N.C.L.E.

1967 I Dream of Jeannie

1968 Escape to Mindanao

1968 It Takes a Thief - 3 episodes.

1968 The Outsider

1968 Don't Just Stand There

1969 My Friend Tony



with Robert Wagner in it takes a thief

At the end of 1964 she met Academy Award winner, producer-screenwriter Stanley Shapiro in New York City. Stanley Shapiro's films include Pillow Talk, Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, Operation Petticoat, That Touch of Mink.

Early March 1965 she married Shapiro in their suite on the twenty-third floor of the Dunes Hotel in Las Vegas. He's 39 and she was 21. When asked about his future plans, Shapiro says "when a 39-year-old bachelor marries a 21-year-old girl, you only have one plan - survival."

There is one daughter from the marriage The baby is called Saskia after the wife of Rembrandt.

It's the first marriage for both, but unfortunately the marriage was not a success .



Mr. Shapiro said. “ *It's possible for two people each to be nice and yet not be compatible in marriage. We each decided it was best to separate and be divorced. I'm sorry to say it, but we found we weren't able to communicate with one another*”

The marriage did not last and February 1966 she divorced Shapiro in Los Angeles.

In 1973 she started dating Harold Coralnick , of who little is known. They date for 2 years and on 22 June 1975 she married Harold Coralnick in Los Angeles. He was 43 and she was 30.

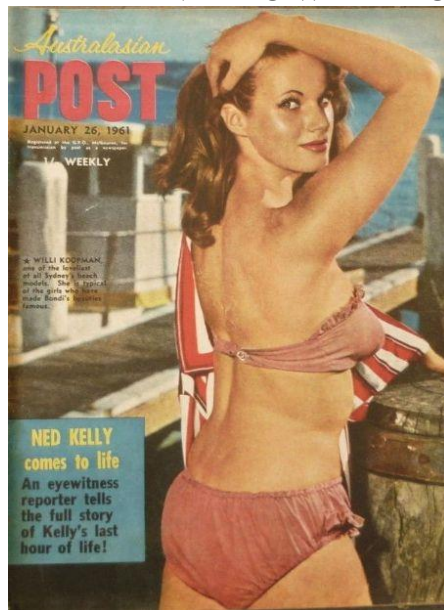
Now Willi dropped of the radar. Nothing is heard of her until 2016 when she came out in support of Ashley Graham the first plus size model to grace cover of Sports illustrated Swimsuit edition. “*Women feel they are never good enough. There is never a right weight, But if they are healthy they feel good.*”

Since then NOTHING
So, they Question remains,

WHAT HAPPENED TO WILLI KOOPMAN.



1965 by renowned photographer Sid Avery



1961



1962



1963



1964



1964

5 of the eight Australia Post covers featuring Willi Koopman

**Fun fact; Some early photoshopping. The 1962 cover is the same photo as the 1964 cover
Only flipped and with a colour change. The 1961 cover is also from the same photoshoot as she is
wearing the same outfit.**

**A collection of negatives depicting Willi Koopman by David Mist circa 1962 is part of the Powerhouse
Museum collection.**