

Portrait of a Tragedy

Fun on Ice Turns Into Death for Three Girls; Youths Relive Horror

Editor's note: Jan. 2, a car carrying six teenagers plunged through the ice of Little Muskego Lake near Milwaukee. Three girls drowned, and three boys got out alive. The following account is a reconstruction of the tragedy, and the aftermath.

By RAY W. DOHERTY
Milwaukee, Wis. (UPI)—Six houses and six young people. In one of the houses, talk of a Florida vacation. In another plans for marriage. Outside the day was bright and cold.

Before the day was ended, death would take three of the teenagers in what some call a "senseless tragedy."

It was New Year's Day plus one. A lazy day. Time for late breakfasts, football on television.

The characters:
Miss Jean Hammernik, 20, Milwaukee
Miss Helen DeStrampe, 17, Milwaukee
Miss Korinne Wellner, Milwaukee
Dale Olson, 20, Muskego
Roger Holtz, 20, Muskego
Jerry Hammernik, 18.

Was Getting Breakfast
In the ranch style home in the suburb of Muskego, a summer home recreation center southwest of Milwaukee, Mrs. Norman Holtz was getting breakfast. It was 10 a.m.

On her mind were the many things she had to do that day to get ready for a vacation with her husband in Florida. Their son was staying home to help mind the family hardware store in the village.

His girl friend, Korinne Wellner, got up late in her South Milwaukee home. She talked with her mother of her coming marriage to Roger in September.

Next door, her cousins, the Hammernik family took it easy. A late breakfast, maybe an afternoon nap, or a couple of football games on TV, had a big day ahead of him Tuesday because inventories Hammernik, a shipping clerk, would start.

Laughing and Kidding
It was now late afternoon, hi-fi music rang through the Hammernik home. There was laughing and kidding. The six young people were having fun.

Then someone suggested ice. "They had gone on skating parties before. The three girls were especially close having known each other since they were youngsters," Hammernik said. Helen DeStrampe was Jerry's girlfriend.

Before leaving the house, Jean and Jerry told their parents they would be home late for dinner.

Two of the boys knew the Lake Muskego area, so they headed there. A friend had told them of the fun of "buzzing" a car on the ice in which the fast-moving vehicle is braked suddenly and spins around.

The girls didn't want to go, but the boys egged them on by threatening to leave them behind.

A 19-year-old friend showed them how to "buzz." After 30 to 45 minutes of this, according to their testimony at a coroner's inquest, they left the ice. Someone suggested getting a couple of six packs of beer.

Each of the boys had a car, giving the girls a couple of sips. Hammernik drank only half of his.

They returned to the lake after dark, because they "wanted to show the girls what it looked like." The boys said they weren't speeding. Suddenly, the car seemed to leap off the ice. It began sinking. There was panic.

"I hit the glass once and nothing happened," Holtz said. "I hit it again and again and it cracked. Then Jean rolled down the window. I climbed out and swam to the ice."

Hammernik said someone pushed him out a window. Olson said he remembers getting halfway through a window, then nothing more until he came to on the surface. He was the driver of the 1951 Ford.

One of the girls got out of the car, but no farther. Bodies

of the other two were found huddled together.

As the boys popped to the surface, ice fishermen pulled them out. Holtz became hysterical and wanted to jump back in to try to save his girl friend.

"There's three girls down there," said Hammernik. A skin diver found the bodies. Got Everything Straight

Young Olson sat nervously on the witness stand. He was telling a coroner's inquest about the tragedy. He chewed his lip and toyed with his face. He spoke in almost a whisper.

He was asked why he now says they weren't spinning the car the night of the tragedy. In a signed statement then he said they were spinning.

"I couldn't remember that night. But I kept thinking about it, and thinking about it, and finally got everything straight. I didn't spin. I thanked God for that," he said.

Howard Sake, Muskego, 40, a truck dispatcher, who lives on the south side of the lake, said he watched the car's headlights on the lake through a picture window while he ate supper. He said the car seemed to be going straight.

Jay Fehr, 17, a high school student who was ice fishing, said the car lights seemed to go out for a moment, then came straight toward us.

Then it seemed to hit a snowbank and started down. I heard a cracking sound, like the ice.

Two witnesses said they saw the car spinning in the afternoon.

Seeking Ban
What of the aftermath? Authorities were seeking a ban against cars "buzzing" the frozen lakes.

The parents wouldn't see anyone for several days after the tragedy. Then they talked some.

"With God's help, we'll bear up," Mrs. Hammernik said. "They were good kids most of the time."

"But kids are kids. They're carefree and they'll try anything. Even if told not to, because they feel it can't happen to us," she said.

"We won't forget it, ever," Mrs. Holtz said.

me from concentrating. He'll stand there coughing or shouting to Mother downstairs or tap-dancing or doing anything to let me know he'd like me to quit and keep him company.

If he were in a dormitory he couldn't come barging in like that disrupting other boys' studies. How can I make him see how selfish he is?

Edgar M. — Talk about selfish, does he? Once he shuts himself in his room, we could all drop dead for all he cares! Telephones and doorbells ring, he'll never answer them, even when they're for him. He uses me and Mother as his answering service. "Take the message and tell them I'll call," are his orders.

How does Lee think he can live among people and still be a recluse? Either he's approachable and human, or he's unapproachable and should build a wall around himself that says Keep Away.

With his cranky disposition he'd never get along in a dormitory. From what I know about them, the fellows tear in and out of your room all day and night.

All I do is try to get Lee to relax and act like a regular guy. How will he ever get along in the world if he hits the ceiling when somebody says hello to him?

The Council: An interruption can be welcome or unwelcome depending upon how engrossed the one interrupted is in what he's doing and whether the intrusion can be postponed or not. These are questions for Edgar to consider at the threshold of Leon's room. Failure to do so is a form of cruelty.

To a person wrapped in thought, a casual demand for his attention is mayhem to his progress. Leon and his idea may be like the robin with the worm, to use Phyllis McGinley's simile. Open his mouth to say hello, and in that instant, it slips away!

Edgar appears to be an extrovert who resents his introverted brother and, in the name of preparing him for "life," harasses him more than life ever would. In an office, a dormitory, even an Army camp, a man's request for privacy is usually respected. Why not in his home?

We must assume that Leon is companionable towards Edgar at mealtime during periods of relaxation. We must also assume that he is receptive to interruptions which are essential and cannot be postponed. So the objectionable interruption is the one which Edgar inflicts as an attention-getter for himself.

Leon is within his rights in resisting Edgar's sabotage of his studies. People have had to shut themselves up in attics and closets to escape those who would rather destroy what someone else is doing than use their own wits to devise something satisfying to do themselves.

Coleridge was unable to finish his greatest poem, "Kubla Khan," because of interruptions. Genius or not, though, everyone has a right to protest needless disturbance.

By contrast, Hoover asked, "How many church members today are merely members in name, not knowing or even caring what membership in the church of God really means and entails?"

He said history has proved that "the Christian church has the power to capture men and lead them to divine levels."

If it is not doing so today, he said, the reason may be that "we have contented ourselves with catering to man's mediocrity, rather than attempting to bring out the noblest and deepest strands of his character."

"The Communists have discovered that a demand for the very best actually brings forth the very best from the individual," he said.

"If the Communists can create such responses on the basis of a cold, cynical materialism, just think of the accomplishments which can be wrought by Christians with the power of the Holy Spirit!"

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Editor's Note: The Family Council consists of a judge, a psychiatrist, three clergymen, three editors and a women's editor. Each article is a summary of an actual case history. The Council reports on problems that have been dealt with by responsible agencies and counselors. (Copyright 1961—General Features Corp.)

Leon M. — He interrupts me whenever he feels like it.

Edgar M. — All I say is hello, but to him it's a big interruption.

Leon M. — Am I being unduly sensitive, or am I within my rights? My brother Ed and I each have our own room at home. We live in a large house in Westchester and commute to college in New York. Ed's a junior, majoring in business administration, and I'm a sophomore with English as my major subject.

I want Ed to respect my closed door, my request for quiet, my right to privacy. Instead he bursts in for any trivial reason and disturbs my work and thoughts. And even when he doesn't break in, he lets loose enough sound effects outside my door to keep

me from concentrating. He'll stand there coughing or shouting to Mother downstairs or tap-dancing or doing anything to let me know he'd like me to quit and keep him company.

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Exercise Said To Be Dangerous For Those Over 35 Years

By HENRY J. BECHTOLD
UPI Financial Editor

New York—(UPI)—If you're over 35 put down those golf clubs or tennis racket and relax in a hammock.

Exercise not only is unnecessary at your age but can be highly dangerous.

This is another school of thought on keeping executives alive longer, and is presented by Dr. Peter J. Steincrohn, former heart specialist turned author and columnist.

Dr. Steincrohn is against executive exercise and for laziness. He says it's ridiculous for a man to work at a desk for 50 weeks, then spend two weeks at golf, tennis or other intensive exercise to build health. Such a man, he comments in the latest issue of Management Methods magazine, usually returns to his

job exhausted.

The retired physician does not suggest that people should never exercise. "Normal exercise is fine if you like it," he said. Exercise does have one advantage—it can help to relieve tension.

In taking a stand against exercise, Dr. Steincrohn contradicts the medical opinion of such eminent physicians as Paul Dudley White, President Eisenhower's heart specialist.

Relaxation Is Secret
Dr. Steincrohn said his secret is to learn to relax and keep the weight down. Exercise is not necessary for weight control, he said. You have to walk 36 miles to lose one pound, and "I'd rather forego an extra ice cream sundae and sit in a hammock than have to walk those 36 miles," he added.

The doctor's philosophy is to "live a day at a time. Emphasize the immediate present and forget about the worries of the past and future."

Some of his comments on various health topics follow:

Executive tension—Tension can weaken a man to the point where he caves in. Find small ways to relax during the day.

Attitude—Your outlook on life helps determine your health. Live a day at a time and stop worrying about what other people think of you.

Weight control—Proper weight is one of the foundations of good health. An overweight person is just inviting early annihilation it's slow suicide. But, if it took you 10 years to build up a spare tire around your middle, don't try to take it off in 10 days.

Sleep or Get Up
Sleep—Don't wrestle with insomnia. If you can't sleep, get up, read, shave, or take a walk. You will be tired the next day, but not as tired as if you fought with yourself all night.

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Winter vacations—For the executive under stress, a mid-winter vacation may be a necessity, not a luxury.

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