

How Four Teen-Agers Met Death

Actual Case History Shows Tragic Price of Highway Pranks

(Editor's Note: The following story, which appeared originally in the Des Moines (Ia.) Sunday Register, Nov. 13, 1949, is reprinted here as an actual report of how four teen-age drivers met death. It's a long story and not a pleasant one. But it shows factually and graphically why we consider traffic safety, especially among younger drivers, a matter that deserves our attention at all times.)

By GEORGE MILLS
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Des Moines Sunday Register

Hampton, Ia.—Eighteen-year-old Francis Elwood plowed all day on the Heilskov farm where he worked southwest of town.

After a supper of weiners, he went up to his room to write some letters. He was tired. He planned to go to bed early.

He didn't know that he had a date with death in three hours.

In northeast Hampton, big George Kibsgaard also didn't know he had only three hours left to live. George, 18, had helped his electrician father move a meter in a house that day.

After supper, George took his 1936 Oldsmobile and went uptown, just as he always had done. It was so routine that he didn't even say goodbye to his parents.

In west Hampton, little Russell Jensen, 19 and young-looking for his age, washed up in the little back-lot house where he lived with his father.

Russ polished cars that day in the Ford garage. Now he was going to have a bowl of chili at the Skelly lunchroom where the teen-agers hang out.

Russell similarly had no realization of the fact that the end of his life was only hours away.

Lloyd Casey, 18, a big likable redhead, went home from the Hampton Chronicle where he was working as a printer apprentice. He also thought he would drop over to the Skelly diner after the evening meal. The march of events was to claim Lloyd's life, too, very soon.

In two other homes, boys ate at the family tables, perhaps looked at comic books, talked on the telephone, got ready to go out for a while.

As the minutes ticked away that Tuesday night, the cast slowly gathered for the tragedy in which four were to die. The question came up: Shall there be any girls in on this? No, it was decided.

In the Skelly lunchroom, mean-

while, a dozen youths had gathered. Russ Jensen had his bowl of chili. He kidded Elsie Woodley, the waitress, by telling her it was hot tomato juice.

The jar with \$1 bills and half-dollars in it, "In Remembrance of the Boys" wasn't out yet. That was to come later.

Russell Bonjour, 22, played the pin-ball machine, as several boys clustered around it. Jensen had a bottle of pop. Somebody broke a salt shaker.

Elsie didn't like the loss of the shaker. To punish the boys, the waitress pulled the plug on the pin-ball machine so that nobody could play.

The fellows all sat quietly on the stools for a minute, "just to show me they knew how to act," said Elsie.

In the crowd was Lawrence "Sleepy" Muhlenbruck, 18, who has done considerable chasing around in cars. He had a 1936 Ford parked outside.

Probably parked there at the same time was Kibsgaard's Olds. George Kibsgaard was perhaps even a bigger highway menace than Sleepy, but neither of them, or any of the other boys for that matter, indulged in liquor.

George, though, had been fined twice in the last six months for reckless driving, and once before in 1948. Sleepy was in court in 1948 at the same time as George.

The two youths several nights before had been in a near-crash with each other out on the highway. At least once before they may have scraped front fenders.

At least one of them also thought there was something manly about speeding down the highway at night without lights. Their idea of a good time was to play "swerve" with cars going 60 or 70 miles an hour.

Elsie in the lunchroom remembers that on the night of the accident "George Kibsgaard and Elwood were not in here. They were out in front."

It was getting along toward 8 o'clock, time to go.

Russ Bonjour, oldest of the bunch, brought along some apples and gum.

For the next half-hour, where the boys went and what they did, nobody seems to know.

But this is known: About 8:30 the two automobiles dashed along Highway 3 west of Hampton. Kibsgaard, going west, had the Olds wide open at 73.

Speeding east was Sleepy's car. Kibsgaard had two passengers and

himself. Muhlenbruck had four and himself.

At least one car had the lights off.

Death waited in the pleasant moonlight night, just east of a stone farmhouse six and a half miles west of town.

The highway patrol says one car was 18 inches over the middle of the road, the other 14. That's the story the marks tell on the concrete. Unless somebody swerved, a collision was inevitable.

With a tearing impact of metal on metal and flesh, the two cars met in a terrific crash. Whether the drivers didn't see each other or were testing each other's nerve is uncertain.

Kibsgaard's bluish-green Oldsmobile literally climbed up on the left side of the Muhlenbruck car. The Olds flew through the air. Bodies hurtled from the seats.

The car landed with a crunch on the shoulder, with its rear wheels down in the ditch.

It also landed on top of Francis Elwood, the boy who was going to write some letters that night and go to bed early.

The muffer pressed down on Elwood's face, broke his nose, mashed in his features and seared the skin. Undoubtedly unconscious, he suffocated.

They didn't even find his body until one and a half hours later when a highway patrolman happened to turn a flashlight on the bottom of the car. He saw Elwood's shoe sticking out.

Kibsgaard died quickly, perhaps immediately. His face and head were crushed beyond recognition.

Jensen lived until 7 o'clock the next morning. He had a fractured skull and a scalp wound that bled interminably. His face was swollen, he was cut from flying glass, fracture and severe cuts and abrasions. He was cold and clammy with sions.

Lloyd Casey, 18, had a badly cut throat, cuts on his face, abdominal injuries, a left leg in which the bones were shattered. He died Friday night.

Sleepy Muhlenbruck had four fractures in the pelvis, a broken face from the corner of one lip left arm, a right shoulder blade



Teen-age tragedy in Texas! No, this is not one of the cars involved in the accident described on this page. Two young citizens of our state became statistics when tree, steel and flesh came together to form this scene. Follow the arrows — they point to what is left of two human

beings. Gruesome? Shocking? Yes. But it tells much better than words why every citizen, especially ones between the ages of 16 and 25, must face and defeat the teen-age driving menace. It can and does happen here.

He lost all his upper and lower front teeth, suffered a crushed nose and a broken right wrist.

Merlin Numelin, 16, had a possible skull fracture. The left side of his head was badly swollen.

M. J. Greenfield, the Hampton undertaker, said afterward:

"If all the teen-agers in town could have been out there picking up those boys, it would have

been the best lesson in driving they ever could have."

The accident toll of four dead and four injured shook this Franklin county seat town to its foundations. It also uncovered some startling things about teen-age driving in this area.

The condition isn't peculiar to Franklin county, however. The teen-age traffic death rate for the state is four or five times worse than that of the adult driver.

Jane Maneely, whose life may have been saved because she had to take care of children that night, said some amazing things in an interview.

Jane went riding often with Kibsgaard and Elwood. She wears Elwood's motorcycle ring attached to a chain around her neck.

"I like reckless driving and I like speed," she said frankly.

"It's only something like this that teaches you a lesson, when somebody awfully close to you is killed. I don't think you can learn, only by experience."

"I was in a motorcycle accident once but that didn't bother me. (She had a couple of stitches in her head and a scar on her leg.) But this accident has jarred me quite a bit."

She isn't sure, however, but that "this spell" will wear off and she will crave speed again. She said she had ridden on a motorcycle going 105 miles an hour.

Her top speed in a car is also 105. An adult was driving the car, incidentally.

"Just cruising along at 55 or 60 on a motorcycle satisfies me perfectly," she related. "When it gets up to 75 or 80, I get a little wary." She doesn't believe it would do

any good to bar young drivers from the highways. Probably "just as many would be driving without drivers licenses as there are now."

Jane gave an insight into how the Hampton teen-agers tore around in cars.

"We would be cruising around in George Kibsgaard's car," she said. "Pretty soon Sleepy Muhlenbruck would start following us. We never followed him, he always followed us."

"We would go out on the highway and outdistance him, then double back on a gravel road. George's car was faster than Sleepy's."

"The day George got his carburetor fixed," she recalled, "we went out to see how fast it would go. Seventy-five was the top. It got up to 80 once but came right back down."

"It's just a matter of luck that I wasn't along the night of the crash. If I hadn't been babysitting, I would have."

In describing other teen-age driving escapades, Jane told of the practices of "rat racing" and "swerve."

"Rat racing" as described by the high school bobby soxer is one car racing to pass another.

"In swerving, you just swerve the car down the road, back and forth, back and forth, just enough to give it a gentle rock," she said.

Jane was along when they had two close calls. Once the teen-agers "nearly hit another car" and another time almost went into the ditch.

Still another time she was out "bushwhacking" with George. (Bushwhacking is the practice of turning a spotlight on a parked couple.)

A Hampton youth, who is in the service now, and Kibsgaard (See 'BRAVEST,' Page 7)

Driving I.Q. Answers

Here are the answers to the quiz on page 5. Score yourself eight points for each multiple choice question you get right. Add four points for each correct True-False question.

1. d. 100 persons. In the last pre-war year, 1941, the death total was 40,000, or an average of 112 per day. Current trends indicate that the daily average now is approximately the same.

2. c. clear. Note that this question refers to fatal accidents. Most of us have learned to fear snow, rain and fog, and we drive accordingly. There are many minor mishaps in such weather, but because few of us drive at high speeds under these conditions, fatal accidents occur more rarely than one would suspect.

3. b. 18 to 24 years. Recent figures indicate that the most dangerous ages are 18 and 19; that drivers under 20 and over 60 have the highest accident rates.

4. c. twenty to thirty feet. The Uniform Vehicle Code specifies 30 feet. Various states specify varying distances between 18 and 30 feet. Your answer is correct if you checked c. Now check one thing more — your brakes!

5. c. the pedestrian. He is legally entitled to continue his progress uninterrupted and drivers must wait for him even though they now have the green light or GO sign.

6. d. is quadrupled. The energy in a moving body increases not in direct proportion to speed, but as the square of the speed. At 40 miles per hour, therefore, it takes four times the braking distance to stop the car that it would at 20. At 60 miles an hour it would take nine times the distance.

7. e. ten stories high. Whenever you are tempted to speed, think of this graphic illustration. If you should hit a telephone pole, a culvert, or any other solid object at that speed you and your car will be smashed as irreparably as if you had driven off the top of a ten-story building.

8. f. 720 feet. As speed is increased, the car requires an increased turning radius. This radius increases as the square of the speed. Thus, when speed is doubled, the safe turning radius is quadrupled; when speed is tripled the safe turning radius is nine times longer. An appreciation of these facts will explain many accidents on curves.

9. c. within the assured safe distance which you can see. Road, light, weather and traffic conditions vary greatly, making 50 miles an hour safe at times and 20 miles an hour dangerous at others. No matter how straight the road, how good the car or how dry the pavement, if headlights carry only 200 feet you must drive in the dark at a speed which will allow you to stop, in an emergency, within 200 feet. Likewise, in daylight, you must drive at a speed which will allow you to stop in time should the car ahead stop suddenly, should another car emerge suddenly from a side road, or should a child dart suddenly into the road ahead of you.

10. d. no apparent defects. Many drivers, after an accident, will insist that the gas pedal stuck, or that the brakes suddenly failed or that something else went wrong. Actually, more than 90 per cent of all vehicles involved in accidents are found to be in apparently good condition with no major defects noted in steering, braking, lighting, etc.

11. FALSE Other and more serious hazards become a factor in driving at night. About 60 per cent of all traffic accidents occur during the hours of darkness when there is only about 25 per cent of the traffic on the roads. When the sun goes down, cut your speed down.

12. FALSE Approximately 90% of all accidents involve male drivers. Of course, there are more male drivers than female drivers, and on an average they drive many more miles each year; thus, they are exposed to more hazards.

13. FALSE Carbon monoxide gas is odorless. You can't see it, smell it or taste it, so beware.

14. FALSE The "one-drunk" driver may be as dangerous on the road as the ebriate because even a slight exhilaration may cause him to take chances. Studies indicate that one or two drinks definitely impair one's driving ability.

15. FALSE The majority of accidents are caused by drivers with a year or more of experience at the wheel.

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LITTLE BOY IN HIS
DADDY'S SHOES...

Imitation is one of the basic impulses of human life. From earliest infancy man has learned the ways of life and the paths of progress by imitating others. The child learns to walk as the fledgeling learns to fly — by imitating its parents.

The impulse to imitate others is strongest in infancy. That is why, the little boy in the picture tries to walk in his daddy's shoes.

Children learn to walk in their parents' footsteps in many ways. They acquire their habits, their mental attitudes and their sense of values mainly from their elders. And these are the things that will most largely determine their characters and shape their courses in the years to come.

This makes it all-important for people to walk uprightly before their children. Above all, parents should teach their children the dependence of all life upon God, and the value of religion and the Church as the guardian of man's spiritual existence. And this must be done, line upon line and precept upon precept, in practice as well as in words.

Calendar of Church Services

A&M CHRISTIAN CHURCH
9:45 A.M.—Church School
11:00 A.M.—Morning Worship

A&M CHURCH OF CHRIST
9:45 A.M.—Bible Classes
10:45 A.M.—Morning Worship
6:15 P.M.—Youth Meeting

A&M METHODIST CHURCH
9:30 A.M.—Sunday School
11:00 A.M.—Morning Worship

S. MARY'S CHAPEL
St. Mary's, Sunday Mass, 8:30 and 10 a.m.

A&M PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
9:45 A.M.—Sunday School
11:00 A.M.—Morning Worship Service
6:30 P.M.—Student League and Fellowship

COLLEGE STATION BAPTIST CHURCH
9:45 A.M.—Sunday School
10:50 A.M.—Morning Worship
6:15 P.M.—Training Union
7:15 P.M.—Evening Worship

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The Church is the greatest factor on earth for the building of character and good citizenship. It is a storehouse of spiritual values. Without a strong Church, neither democracy nor civilization can survive. There are four sound reasons why every person should attend service regularly and support the Church. They are: (1) For his own sake. (2) For his children's sake. (3) For the sake of his community and nation. (4) For the sake of the Church itself, which needs his moral and material support. Plan to go to church on Sunday and read your Bible daily.

AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH
9:30 A.M.—Bible Class
10:45 A.M.—Worship Service

ST. THOMAS EPISCOPAL CHURCH
8:00 A.M.—Holy Communion
9:30 A.M.—Aggie Coffee Club
9:30 A.M.—Church School

11:00 A.M.—Morning Worship
6:30 P.M.—Evening Services
6:30 P.M.—Student League
7:30 P.M.—Fellowship Service

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9:30 a.m.—Sunday School and Bible Classes
10:45 a.m.—Morning Worship Service
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Luther Club—Wed. 8:30 p.m.

The Rev. Wm. C. Petersen, pastor

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7:30 P.M.—Supper Group (3rd. Wed.)
11:00 A.M.—Morning Worship

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