

Other material on this filed Edward Kennedy (B).

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Kennedy Book NL 4220

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BOSTON AP - A book published Friday contends that Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., was not with Mary Jo Kopechne in his car when the auto plunged into the water off Chappaquiddick Island and the secretary died. An inquest into Miss Kopechne's death is set to open next Monday.

Jack Olsen, a senior writer with Time, Inc., made the claim in a book called "The Bridge at Chappaquiddick," published by Little Brown & Co.

Kennedy was not immediately available for comment.

Olsen discounted Kennedy's version of the accident last July, saying, "No normal motorist could commit such a grievous error."

Kennedy, in a statement televised nationally, had said he was driving Miss Kopechne to the ferry to Edgartown, Mass., and lost his way. He said his car went off the bridge into a pond. He said he got free but could not rescue Mary Jo.

Olsen's book contends that when a deputy sheriff approached the car shortly after midnight, Kennedy got out of the vehicle and told Mary Jo to drive, fearing his presence with the girl would be misunderstood.

"She might not have taken time to readjust the seat so that her feet could reach the pedals comfortably," Olsen wrote.

"At 5 feet 2, she was exactly one foot shorter than Kennedy; her own car was a Volkswagen, about half the size of an Oldsmobile 88, and most of her driving had been done on city streets."

Olsen theorized the girl was barely able to see over the dashboard and, unaware that the bridge veered to the left, drove straight-toppling into the water.

Deputy Sheriff Christopher Look Jr., has said he saw what he thinks was Kennedy's car about 12:45 a.m. with at least two persons inside, but said it moved down the road toward the bridge as he stepped toward it.

Miss Kopechne was a Washington, D.C., secretary who had been a campaign worker for Kennedy's brother, the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, D-N.Y.

She and five other women campaign workers had come to Chappaquiddick for a cocktail at a rented cottage, attended also by Edward Kennedy and several of his colleagues and friends.

The girl's body was found in Kennedy's car in the morning of July 19, about the same time the senator went to the Edgartown police station to report the mishap—some 10 hours after he said it occurred.

He later pleaded guilty to a charge of leaving the scene of an accident and was sentenced in district court at Edgartown to two months in jail, suspended for a year.

The inquest into her death, which begins in Edgartown Monday, was delayed four months by a legal challenge of the ground rules for the proceeding, and an unsuccessful bid for an autopsy on her body, buried in Pennsylvania.

Olsen asserted that Kennedy gave his version of the accident in part because he "had a public image to consider" and because his wife was pregnant, already had two miscarriages and would be "upset by public insinuations," should a full disclosure be made.

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