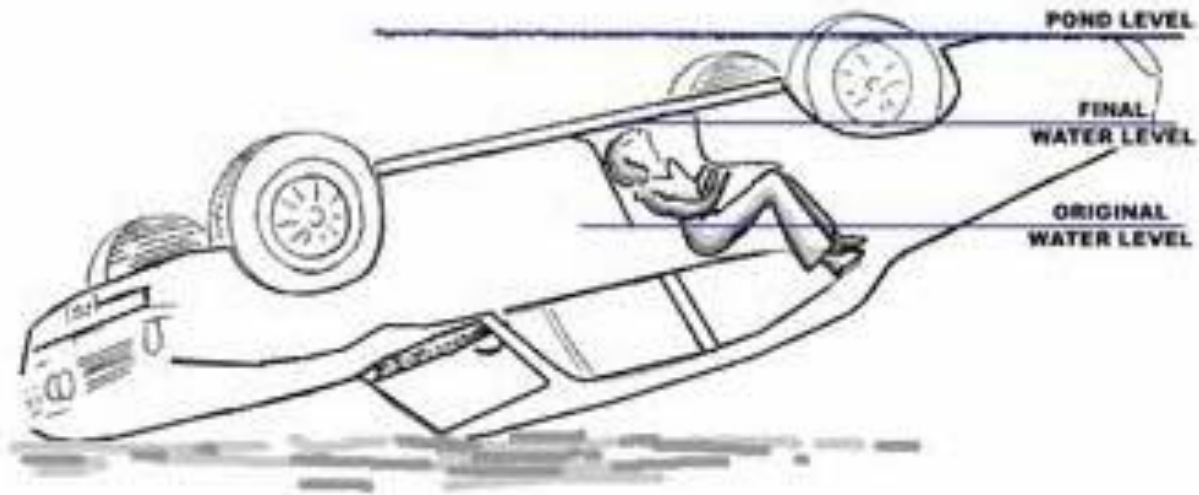


CHAPPAQUIDDICK

Local residents discover a car turned upside down in a lake. The residents summon the authorities, who get to the car and find the body of a woman in the back seat of the car, passenger side. Both passenger side windows are blown out. The authorities check the license plate of the car and determine the identity of the owner, a man who serves in the United States Senate, Edward M. (Ted) Kennedy.





These are the basic facts of an event known as Chappaquiddick which took place over 50 years ago. A young woman, Mary Jo Kopechne, lost her life and a possible presidential campaign was derailed.

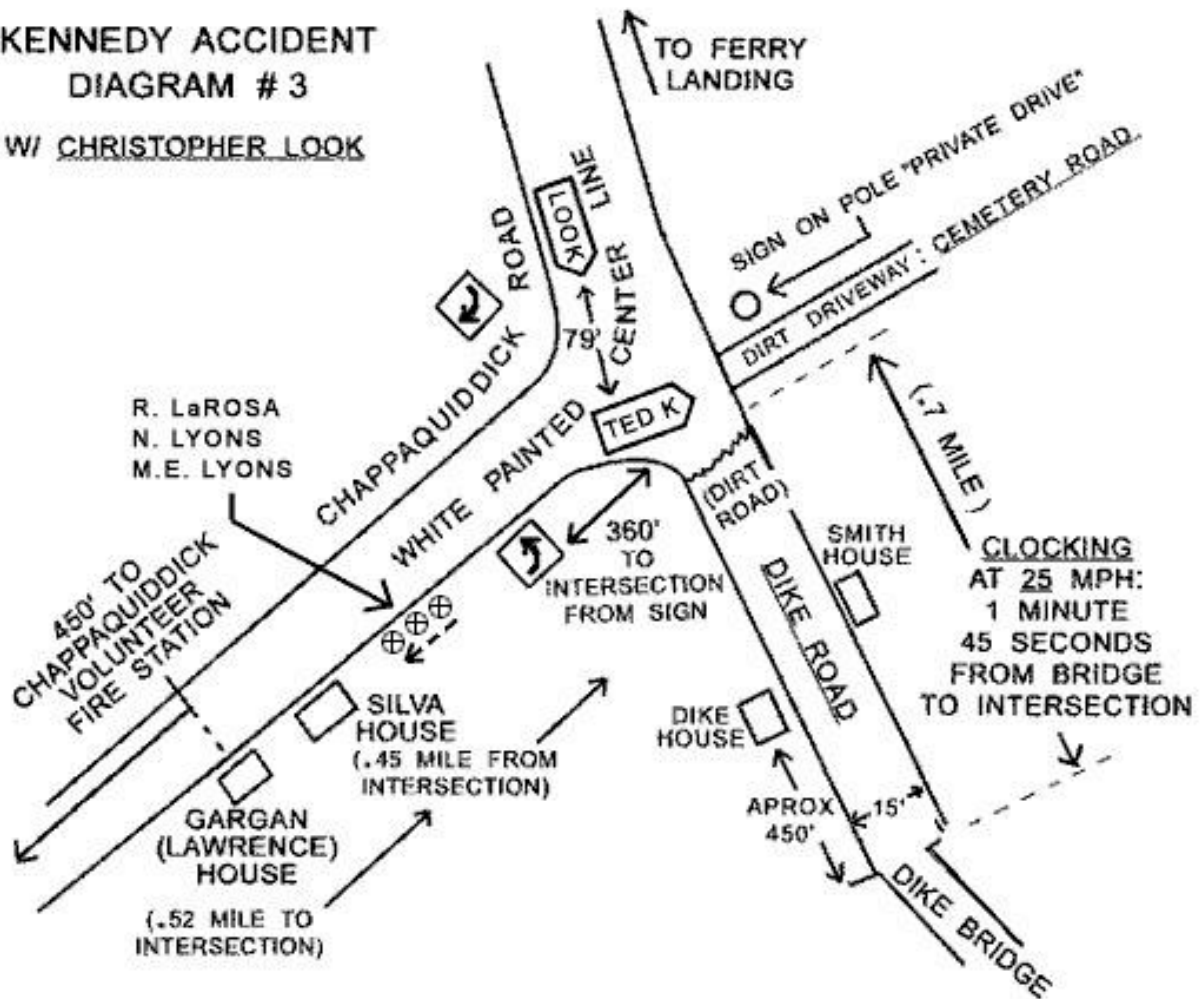
What happened?

To start to answer this question, we might reason that Kennedy drove the car, but that is not the only possibility. So, we move on in search of more facts.

The authorities talk amongst themselves and one of them, a police officer named Christopher Look, says he saw a car just like the car in the lake the previous night between 12:30 and 12:45 AM. He had written down the license plate, which matches the license plate of the car. He also provides a map (below):

**KENNEDY ACCIDENT
DIAGRAM # 3**

W/ CHRISTOPHER LOOK



The officer relates that he saw a man and a woman in the front seat and possibly another person in the back seat. The driver had perhaps gotten lost, but when the officer approached the car, the man sped out of the area.

The authorities find Kennedy, who states that he drove the car and that no one besides he and Kopechne, who had attended a party and left together, were in the car.

By this time, it is 10:00 AM, approximately nine hours after Kopechne's death. Serious questions emerge, among them:

Why had Kennedy not reported the accident to the authorities?

Why did he take the road to the bridge?

How did he alone escape the car?

Had he tried to rescue Mary Jo Kopechne?

Kennedy responds that he was not familiar with the road and had no recollection of how we managed to get out of the car to safety. He also says that he made repeated dives to attempt to rescue Kopechne and eventually got “someone” to take him back to the mainland, where he would eventually talk to the police.

Effectively, Kennedy confesses to leaving the scene of an accident, a misdemeanor.

But we may have trouble taking his account seriously. There were plenty of houses nearby and even a fire station where Kennedy could have gone to report the accident and call for help (see map).

Kennedy had also been to this road on a number of occasions previously and could hardly be said to be unfamiliar with the road.

He also has had back injuries and would have had a difficult time escaping the car and also diving to attempt a rescue. Also, the diver who found the car stated that the driver side door was closed and locked.

Furthermore, neither he nor Kopechne appear to have injuries consistent with having been in a car which flipped upside down into the water.

We may well conclude Kennedy’s account is false.

Of course, the false account acknowledges criminal conduct. If a person is going to lie, why not exculpate themselves?

Or is he admitting to a lesser offense to cover up a greater one? Under the facts, it is possible he killed Kopechne with great recklessness or with intent, far greater crimes than leaving the scene of an accident.

What about his state of mind? Was he intoxicated, for example? What was his relationship with Kopechne? How did he get back from the island to the mainland?

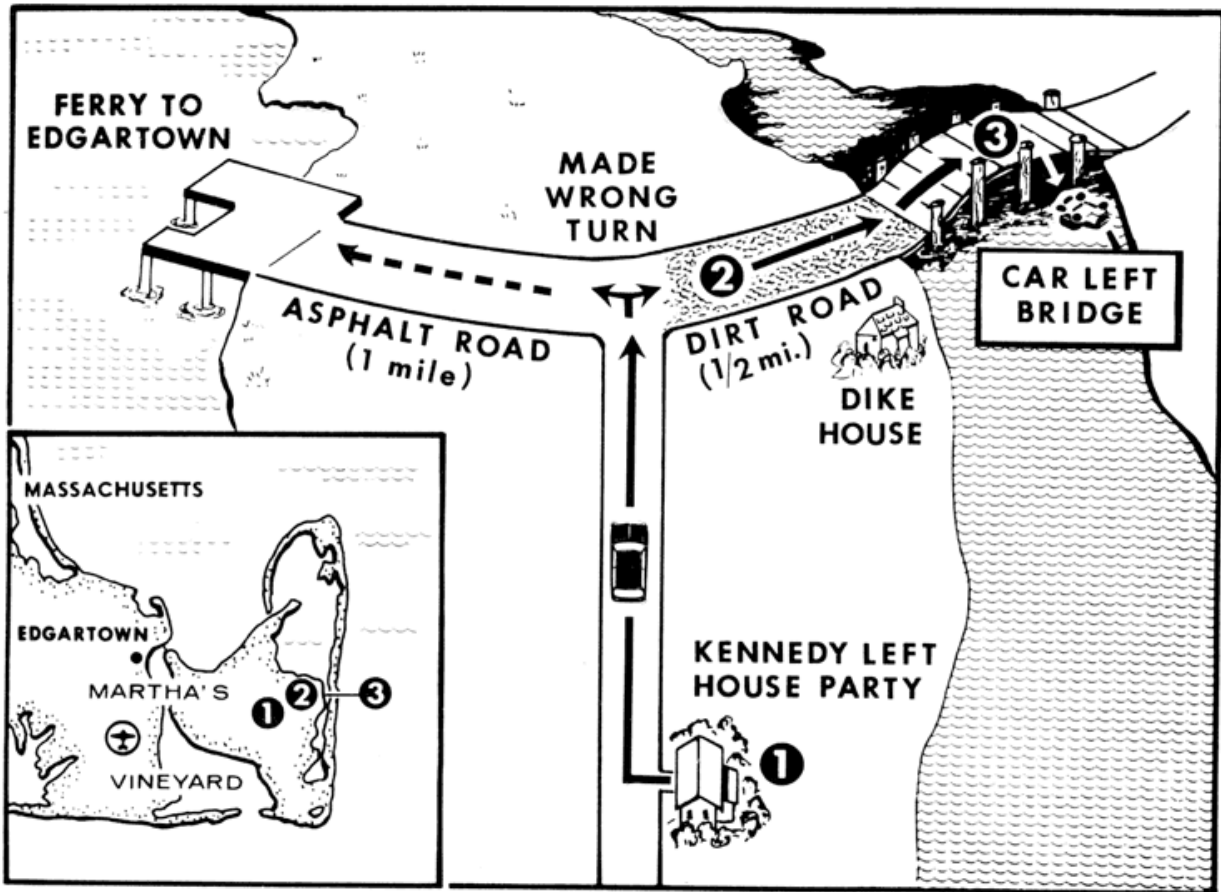
Kennedy makes a second statement: (Admittedly, with the first account full of flaws, is there much reason to believe the second one?)

He was not under the influence of alcohol.

He suffered a cerebral concussion and shock. This is why he could not alert the authorities.

He and Kopechne were not having an affair.

He also added two new assertions – two friends of his from the party had helped him attempt to rescue Kopechne and that he had swum across the water to the mainland.



Route taken by Sen. Kennedy and Mary Jo that July night.

The new account appears to self-serve. Driving under the influence is, of course, a crime in itself. The concussion and shock mitigate his failure to tell the authorities. An affair would not only make him look bad, but also unsympathetic to a potential jury. And the help of friends, while not the same as the help of authorities, makes his attempt to rescue Kopechne appear to be more sincere.

But swimming across the water to the mainland? This statement makes little sense for the aforementioned reason of his bad back.

The account makes even less sense in light of a witness who only made her story public in recent years.

In his 2018 book, *Chappaquiddick Speaks*, author Bill Pinney introduces Carol Jones, who claims that a white Valiant automobile “flew” by her as she drove on Chappaquiddick at around 11:35 pm that very night.¹ She said that she saw “three people in the back seat of the car,” a woman sitting between two men.²

The car matches the description of the other car the Kennedy group used on Chappaquiddick that weekend. Her memory is specific, for personal reasons, as to the time and place of the speeding car. And the excessive speed of the car stood out, because there apparently were not many cars on the island and motorists rarely drove especially fast and because, per Jones, it was not legal for one car to pass another moving car on the island.

What’s more, the car speeded in the direction of the bridge at Chappaquiddick. So, coupled with the statement by Look, two cars associated with Ted Kennedy drove in the direction of the bridge approximately an hour apart.

Neither witness appears to have any reason to lie. So what does it mean if they are both telling the truth?

- (1) The Oldsmobile did not go into the water until after 12:45 am on July 19, 1969.
- (2) A separate incident took place involving the Kennedy group before 11:35 pm on July 18, 1969.

Pinney also adduces that Kennedy made several phone calls during this period of time, mostly to advisors with legal backgrounds. This fact negates any idea of mental incapacity, such as trauma or shock.

What could have happened before 11:35 pm?

Pinney cites Kenneth Kappel, who made observations in his book *Chappaquiddick Revealed*. Kappel points to damage to the Oldsmobile inconsistent with the official

¹ Pinney, William A., *Chappaquiddick Speaks*. Stormy Weather Press, 2017, location 1095 in Kindle Edition

² Ibid, location 1102

version of events, that Kennedy had driven the car off the bridge, and that “no definitive skid marks appear to have been observed on the bridge itself.”³

These findings suggest that the prior incident involved damage to the car in a different manner. At this point Pinney theorizes that Kennedy injured Kopechne and damaged the car but was not himself injured.

This theory sounds highly plausible.

Pinney goes on to speculate that Kennedy and some people from the party later staged an event at the bridge, causing the Oldsmobile to go into the water and then placing Kopechne’s body in the car. Based on the damage to the car, the lack of injuries to Kennedy and Kopechne and other facts, I cannot find fault with this theory.

Pinney reasons that Kennedy did not go to the authorities for several hours because he feared that Kopechne was dead (upon the initial accident) and that he would go to prison. Here is where I disagree with Pinney.

Kennedy, had he reported the accident immediately, would have had a narrative that would present him in a reasonably good light. Had assistance come in time to save Kopechne’s life, the incident would not likely have harmed Kennedy’s career.

Had Kopechne subsequently died, Kennedy would at least be seen as someone who took responsibility for his actions and did what he could to help his passenger. Her death would still be viewed as a terrible tragedy, but ultimately an accident.

In either case, prison was not a likely outcome.

What Kennedy wound up doing also carried enormous risks:

- The risk that witnesses would see him and his group stage an accident

- The risk that his group would stage the accident poorly and risk getting caught in an investigation (they acted when it was pitch dark outside, which undoubtedly hampered their abilities)

- The risk that someone in the group might contact authorities

Any one of these risks, all of which were reasonable possibilities, could have led to criminal prosecution up to and including murder. What could possibly convince an

³ Ibid, location 1427

intelligent, high profile individual to take these risks when the alternative of contacting authorities promptly carried relatively little risk?