

River Tragedy a Twist on Victim's Play: Shenandoah River Drowning Death A Twist on Victim's Movie...

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Master teacher William N. Teunis, called "William Shakespeare Teunis" by students at John F. Kennedy High School in Silver Spring, drowned Saturday in a tragedy that might have been written by his beloved bard.

Mr. Teunis' death at 34 was a real life twist to a fictional drama he had written and directed and made into a movie with his students several years ago.

In that fiction, called "The Rape of Lavinia," described as a wild farce blending Shakespeare and the Keystone Kops, the climax occurs when the hero leaps, off a rock, swims 1½ miles in the Shenandoah River,

and rescues the heroine, Lavinia, from a precarious perch in a dead tree halfway over a dam.

In the real-life tragedy, Mr. Teunis plunged into that same Shenandoah in an attempt to rescue a 17-year-old student who had been drawn into what she called a "whirlpool" at a Potomac Edison Co. hydroelectric plant.

The girl, Susan Woods, an 11th-grader at Kennedy, somehow passed through the plant's underwater sluice gates and turbines and saved herself on the other side by grabbing a weed growing from a concrete wall of the plant.

Mr. Teunis' body was found lodged against a pro-

tective grate meant to shield the generator from debris, about 25 feet below the surface of the dam.

Miss Woods and another Kennedy student, Harvey Luckensburg, 18, had been swimming near the power plant's dam when she was swept away. Luckensburg swam to safety.

The power plant is about three miles north of Front Royal. The two students along with Marcia Stickle, and her sister, Patrica, had been weekend guests at Mr. Teunis' cabin nearby.

Yesterday, Front Royal Sheriff Gary T. Kaiser said he had never heard of anyone swimming in the area where the drowning occurred.

The sheriff said the current by the dam was "extremely swift" and the water itself was "filthy dirty." He said signs around the power plant mark the area as "restricted," but there are no signs in the river itself.

The sheriff said he had been told by friends of Mr. Teunis that the teacher had visited the dam before and was familiar with the area.

Mr. Teunis, chairman of the English department at Kennedy, used to hold his classes spellbound as he strode before them with his red beard and kindled in them a love of literature and life, colleagues and students said.



WILLIAM TEUNIS

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Shenandoah River Drowning Death A Twist on Victim's Movie Script

TEUNIS, From B1

Behind his back, his students called him "William Shakespeare Teunis" in honor of the annual Shakespeare production he produced at Kennedy and in honor of his knowledge and love of the bard's works.

A former principal, Dr. Pashal J. Emma, called Mr. Teunis a "master teacher," who could "look through the hypocrisy of the human condition and make it almost palatable." He was an "authentic person," Dr. Emma said.

Mr. Teunis attended Montgomery County public schools until the 10th grade, when he won a scholarship to the Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire.

He went on to Harvard where he was awarded a bachelor's degree in 1958 and a master of arts in teaching the following year.

After five years of teaching at Northwood High School in Silver Spring, Mr. Teunis took a year of academic leave to attend the Fine Arts Program at the University of Iowa, where he was awarded a master's degree in fine arts.

During his year at Iowa he wrote an unpublished novel that he did not show to anyone, even his mother. He also wrote poetry and contributed articles to educational journals. A recent poem was a tribute to Allison Krause, a Kennedy graduate who was one of four students killed at Kent State University this spring.

Beginning in 1965, Mr. Teunis taught 11th and 12th-grade English and creative writing at Kennedy. In addition to his interest in Shakespeare, he introduced some modern authors into the classroom, a plan that

involved him in controversy, Dr. Emma said.

"In many ways he was very conservative," said Dr. Emma. "He dressed conservatively and neither smoked nor drank. But his philosophy was very liberal."

In addition to his duties as chairman of the English department, Mr. Teunis was also a "resource teacher" in Montgomery County, coaching new teachers and planning curricular innovations.

Mr. Teunis gained notice in the local press several years ago for his original film that he made with his students.

Mr. Teunis, a bachelor who lived at 2410 Colston Dr., Silver Spring, is survived by his father, Willard J., a retired contractor, and his mother, Edna, of 3710 Farragut Ave., Kensington, and a brother, Herman, of Damascus, Md.