

Shirley Crain Williams, Class of 1932.



Memphian Gives Up Own Life To Save Daughter From River Trap

Shirley C. Williams, Sr., Plunges In After Girl, 13, Falls Overboard From Pleasure Cruiser – Fishermen Rescue Child – Father's Body Still Missing.

A Memphis business executive leaped from his cabin cruiser into the Mississippi River to rescue his young daughter yesterday, but was caught in the swift current and swept to his

death below the foot of Mud Island.

The child was rescued moments later by two fishermen. Victim of the tragedy, which ended a family holiday outing was Shirley C. Williams, Sr., 37-year-old owner of the Williams Window Cleaning Company at 190 Jefferson.

Edwina Williams, 13, was rescued unharmed, except for shock and exhaustion.

Mr. Williams, who was taking the family for a cruise aboard his 32-foot Chris Craft, jumped into the water, when he saw Edwina, who can't swim, lose her balance and fell off the stern. His son, Shirley Williams, Jr., 16, cut the boats engine to idling speed, grabbed a floating seat cushion and plunged into the river after his father and sister, but was unable to overtake them.

Brought In By Coast Guard

The cruiser, with Mrs. Williams aboard, floundered out of control and was later brought in by a Coast Guard craft. Young Williams, almost overcome by grief, sobbed out his account of the accident, which occurred about a 11:35 a.m. "I saw my father jump in after my sister, who can't swim, he held her up for a while and evidently told her to float. The last time I saw them they were both floating on their backs and had drifted about 30 feet apart.

Young William, unable to reach either of them, swam back to the boat, clambered aboard and took the wheel. His sister was rescued, meanwhile, by Percy Harper, watchman on Mud Island for the Wolf River Transportation Company, and an unidentified companion, in a small boat.

Family's Third Trip

Mrs. Williams said the family, aboard the Ladye Edwina, bought two weeks ago by her husband, left the Memphis Yacht Club around 11:15 a.m. for a casual outing. The boat had been recently overhauled and it was the third trip for the family.

"Edwina was leaning over the stern and suddenly fell in," she said. Shirley was steering. My husband, standing nearby, saw her fall and jumped in immediately behind her. He held her up and told her what to do."

The frantic wife was unable to operate the boat and after her son came out of the water, he guided the cruiser in circles trying to find his missing father. Dripping wet, chilled by the water, the son and his mother, called for help to the Coast Guard cutter White Pine, docked at the foot of Calhoun. Coast Guardsmen in a small launch came aboard and piloted the

cruiser back to the Yacht Club. Yacht Club officials said it marked the first water fatality of a member in 35 years.

Water Deep and Swift

They added that dragging was almost impossible in the area where Mr. Williams went down. They said the depth of the water ranges from 60 to 90 feet and the current has a powerful sweep there. His body was not found late yesterday.

After Edwina's rescue, she was transferred to a 48-foot cruiser Barwie, owned by Merrill Schwartz who gave her first aid and returned her to shore where she was taken to St. Joseph Hospital. Physicians said the child took a small amount of water in her right lung, but aside from shock and exhaustion her condition was satisfactory.

Mr. Williams, an avid fisherman, has been interested in boating for the past five years. The Ladye Edwina, named for his wife and daughter, was the second cruiser he has owned.

He was president of the Williams Window Cleaning Company and the Superior Cleaning Company, both of 190 Jefferson. He founded the companies eight years ago.

Born In Mississippi

Mr. Williams previously worked as an accountant for the Illinois Central Railroad here for four years. Born at Sandersville MS, where he has lived in Memphis since infancy. His home was at 970 Park Haven Lane. He had attended Memphis State and was a Baptist.

In addition to his wife, son and daughter, Mr. Williams leaves his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Willis W. Williams of Memphis; two brothers, Billy Williams of Memphis and Fontaine Williams of

Johnson City TN, and a half-sister, Mrs. Edwina Smith of Laurel MS.

Information from The Commercial Appeal, Sunday, April 5, 1953.