

Kathy Fiscus

Kathryn Anne Fiscus (August 21, 1945 – April 8, 1949) was a three-year-old girl who died after falling into a well in San Marino, California. The attempted rescue, broadcast live on KTLA, was a landmark event in American television history.

Biography

On the afternoon of Friday, April 8, 1949, Kathy Fiscus was playing with her sister Barbara and cousin Gus in a field in San Marino when she fell down the 14-inch-wide (360 mm) shaft of an abandoned water well. Her father, David Fiscus, worked for the California Water & Telephone Co., which had drilled the well in 1903. He had recently testified before the state legislature for a proposed law that would require the cementing of all old wells. Within hours, a major rescue effort was underway with "drills, derricks, bulldozers and trucks from a dozen towns, three giant cranes, and 50 floodlights from Hollywood studios."^[1] After digging down 100 feet, workers reached Kathy on Sunday night. After a doctor was lowered into the shaft an announcement was made to the more than 10,000 people who had gathered to watch the rescue: "Kathy is dead and apparently has been dead since she was last heard speaking." It was determined that she died shortly after the fall, from a lack of oxygen.

The rescue attempt received nationwide attention in the United States as it was carried live on radio and on television—a still-new medium—by station KTLA. It is regarded as a watershed event in live TV coverage^{[2] [3]} and was recalled nearly 40 years later during the successful 1987 rescue of Jessica McClure.

The exact location of the well is unknown today, but it is thought to be at the San Marino High School tennis courts or football field.^[4] Kathy is buried at Glen Abbey Memorial Park in Bonita, California. The inscription on her marker reads, "One Little Girl Who United the World for a Moment".^[5]

Country singer Jimmie Osborne wrote and recorded the 1949 song "The Death of Little Kathy Fiscus" (King 788).^[6] The single sold over one million copies and Osborne donated half the proceeds to the Fiscus family.^[5]



In April 1949, reporter Stan Chambers covered the Kathy Fiscus tragedy for KTLA.

Legacy

Woody Allen fictionalized the Kathy Fiscus tragedy in his 1987 film *Radio Days*. In the film a little girl named Polly Phelps falls into a well near Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. It becomes a big national story and, like Kathy, little Polly does not survive. *The Well* (1951) and Billy Wilder's 1951 film *Ace in the Hole* were also partially inspired by the event.

References

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External links

Kathy Fiscus (<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=10679>) at Find a Grave

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