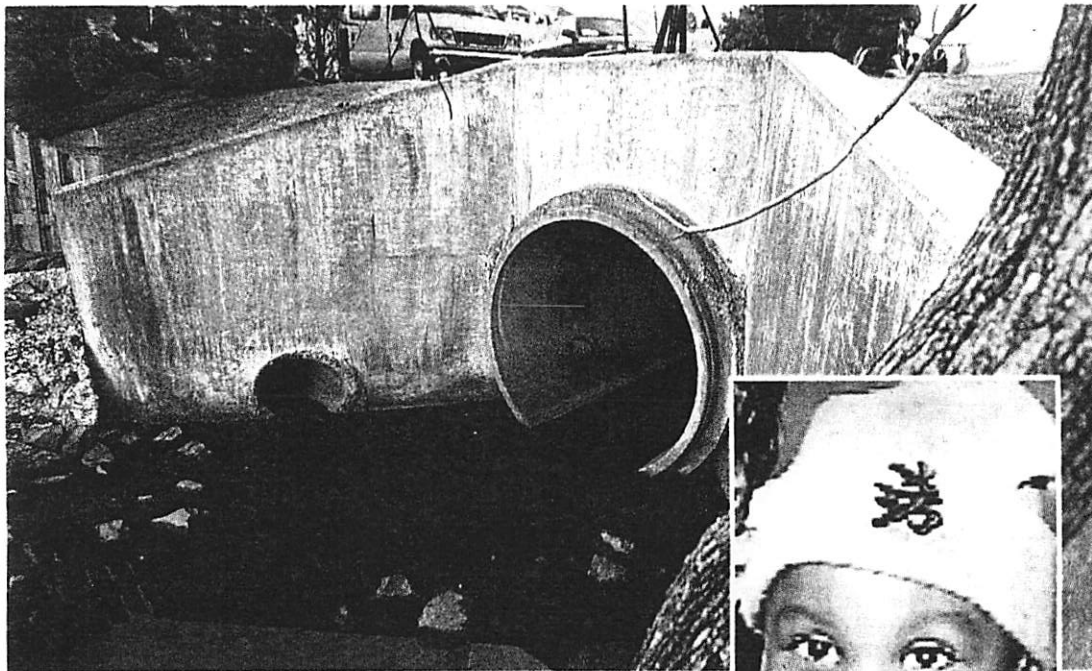


10-Year-Old Is Charged With Molesting and Killing a Boy, 3



Dith Pran/The New York Times

Amir Beeks, 3, was found in a storm drain in the Colonia section of Woodbridge, N.J., on Wednesday. He had been beaten, apparently with a baseball bat, the authorities said, and he died yesterday. A 10-year-old has been charged in the case.



By N. R. KLEINFELD

A 10-year-old boy was charged yesterday with enticing a 3-year-old boy to leave a library in Woodbridge, N.J., and then beating and sexually assaulting him before leaving him to die in a storm drain.

It was a crime without obvious motive that countered notions of childhood innocence, the authorities said, between two young boys who were strangers. It all unspooled in the space of not more than about half an hour.

The 3-year-old, Amir Beeks, was apparently battered with a baseball bat and then dumped in the drain, the authorities said. He was discovered around 5 p.m. Wednesday and taken to a hospital, where he remained in critical condition on life support until he died yesterday morning.

The police refused to identify the suspect, because of his age, but his neighbors in Woodbridge were quickly aware of who he was. They described him as a troubled and troublesome loner who lived with his legally blind father. One neighbor said that she and others had complained to the authorities in recent months about turmoil in the home.

Both the suspect and the victim

lived in the same part of town, but the authorities said they did not know each other until their encounter in the library. Investigators were still trying to understand what compelled the 10-year-old, as they believe, to act so savagely.

"This is a shocking case, this is a tragic case," the Middlesex County prosecutor, Bruce J. Kaplan, said yesterday at a news conference.

Frank G. Pelzman, the mayor of Woodbridge, who was at the hospital on Wednesday night to console members of Amir's family, said, "Our concern now is for the families to get through this very difficult time."

Mr. Kaplan and other authorities offered only the sketchiest of details of what happened. They said that the two boys chanced upon each other around 4:25 p.m. Wednesday in the tranquility of the town's Colonia library, a beige brick V-shaped building. Both of them lived in Colonia, one of 10 sections that make up Woodbridge, a middle-class township of about 97,000 people in central New Jersey, about 25 miles from Midtown Manhattan.

The 10-year-old somehow lured Amir from the library, the authori-

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10-Year-Old Held in Killing Of a Boy, 3, in Woodbridge

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ties said. Soon after, the police were contacted and, after scouring the area, found the 3-year-old lying face down in the drain, a few blocks away. Paramedics took him to John F. Kennedy Hospital in Edison, where he was pronounced dead at 11:16 a.m. yesterday.

Neighbors of the suspect and other witnesses offered other details and conjecture. The prosecutor would say only that Amir was with relatives at the library. A story making the rounds of Colonia was that Amir went there with his mother and 5-year-old sister, though the woman might have been a different relative. She went to the bathroom and asked her daughter to watch Amir. It was during that brief interlude, according to this story, that the 10-year-old persuaded Amir to leave the library with him.

The 10-year-old lives a couple of blocks away. There is a Getty gas station between the library and his house. Gregory Fedorchak, 18, who pumps gas at the station, said he saw the two boys walking together on Wednesday around 4:30. "The little kid was following him up the street," he said. "We thought everything was like fine. Then 10 minutes later, the mother came in looking for him."

Neighbors suspect the 10-year-old took the boy to his house, a modest red-brick Cape Cod with a backyard about a hundred yards deep. A tree-lined creek runs along the south side of the yard, patrolled by ducks, and at the edge of the property is an oval storm drain. The backyard has a blue plastic sled, a jungle gym and a frayed rope swing dangling from a tree branch. It had contained a plastic log cabin-style playhouse, but neighbors said they saw the police

A crime that seems counter to notions of childhood innocence.

remove it yesterday morning. The neighbors said Amir was found in the drain at the border of the property.

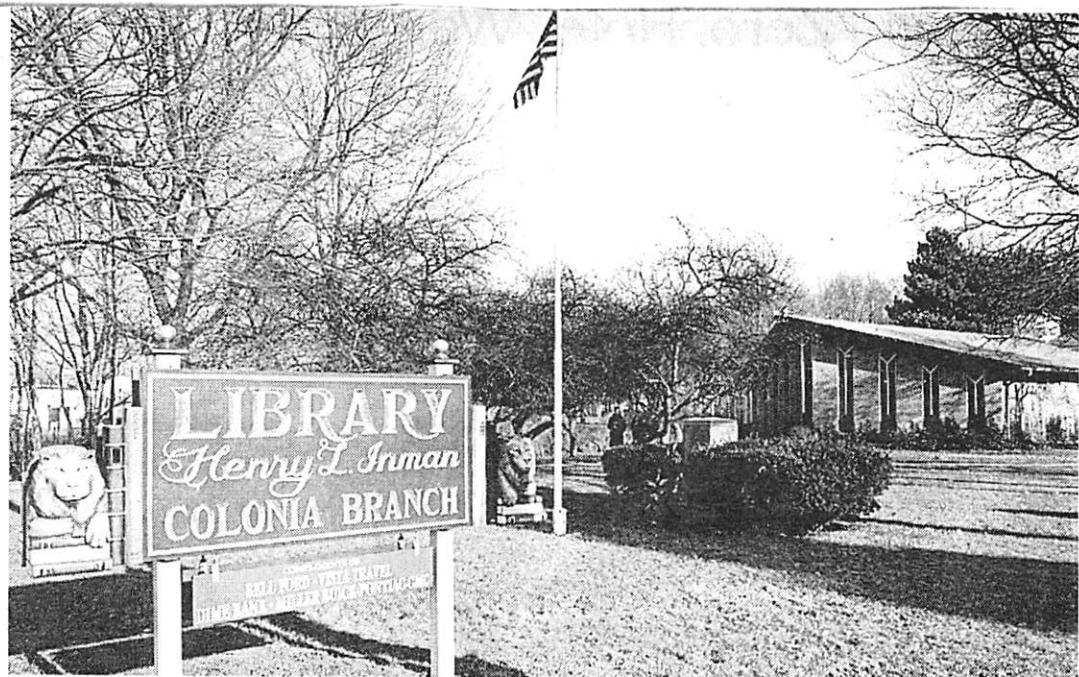
Joann Borrelli, who lives two houses away from the 10-year-old, said she believed he lived alone with his father, though he is thought to have an older sister. His mother, who was blind, died several years ago. Neighbors said she had cancer.

His father has attracted some attention as an advocate for the disabled. After being hit by a car in 1995, and other near misses, he lobbied local and state officials for enforcement of the "white cane" law, which gives a blind person with a cane or guide dog the right of way when crossing a street.

Yet neighbors reported a fractious relationship between the son and father. On a number of occasions, Ms. Borrelli said, she and other neighbors have called the state's Division of Youth and Family Services to complain that the father might be abusing the boy.

The New Jersey Department of Human Services, which oversees Youth and Family Services, would not discuss its involvement, but did confirm that the division had a case on the 10-year-old.

Ms. Borrelli said the boy was a cantankerous mischief-maker who was almost always alone. "He had no friends — no friends," she said. "He was always in the street riding his bike. He had a little mouth on him."



Dith Pran/The New York Times

A 10-year-old boy lured Amir Beeks from the Colonia library and killed him, the authorities say. The boys lived in the same part of town, but the authorities say they did not know each other until their encounter there.

Margaret Demkow, 14, who lives next door to the boy, said: "He was kind of an outcast. He didn't have many friends." She said there was only one other boy she ever saw him with, who she believed was his cousin. She said the 10-year-old was always getting in trouble and that she often heard his father yelling at him.

A married couple with a 2-year-old son, who live across the street and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that they often heard arguments raging in the house, and that police cars frequently came by to calm down tempers.

Last summer, the wife said, she was walking down the street with her son when the 10-year-old threw a rock at her little boy. "When I asked him why he did that, he cursed at me," she said.

Some teenagers who live in the neighborhood said that the boy had been expelled from the local school last year for hurling a chair at a teacher. They believed he was transferred to another school, but neighbors said they had seen him loitering around his house all week.

"He's a little wise guy," said Stuart Rudowksy, the owner of the nearby Getty station. He said he was constantly chasing him from the premises, because he would ride his bike endlessly around the pumps, disrupting business. He said he would throw glass bottles on the basketball courts a few blocks away.

The 10-year-old appeared yesterday before a Family Court judge in New Brunswick. He was charged with murder, felony murder, kidnapping, illegal weapons possession (a

reference to the baseball bat) and aggravated sexual assault. Mr. Kaplan, the Middlesex County prosecutor, would not specify the nature of the sexual charge. The boy was being held in the Middlesex County Youth Detention Center in North Brunswick.

The prosecutor said the boy could not be tried as an adult. He could be sentenced to as much as 20 years on the murder charge alone.

According to Mr. Kaplan, the precise cause of Amir's death has not been determined, but it appeared that the 3-year-old was beaten with the baseball bat.

"I think it was largely a fortuitous meeting," Mr. Kaplan said of the murder, "and largely being in the wrong place at the wrong time for this young child."