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Senior Paper Category

The Triumph and Tragedy of Ed Gein

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Ed Gein was an American murderer who grew up in the town of Plainfield, WI and is still thought to be one of the scariest men known in history. Ed Gein created a lot of tragedy for many families but there was also a small amount of triumph surrounding his name. The triumph started for Gein at a young age and didn’t end until after his death. Not much triumph took place for Gein during his life, but the people gained triumph after his death because they knew that things would be different and well again.

The tragedies started the day Gein was born. On August 27, 1906 one of America’s most known psychos was born. He was brought into a small family consisting of his brother Henry George Gein, mother Augusta Wilhelmine Gein, and father George Philip. Ed was the youngest and was thought to have been treated the poorest. He was brought up alongside an alcoholic father who couldn’t keep a job no matter how hard he tried and a controlling mother. The family depended on their mother at this point because it was all they knew. “Following her death in 1945, his mental health disintegrated...Gein grew up alongside his older brother, Henry, in a household ruled by his mother’s puritanical preachings about the sins of lust and carnal desire.”, Augusta Wilhelmine was more than passionate about the religion they practiced. She would keep the boys kept in the house whenever possible and would only let them out to go to school. She spent her free time preaching that women were nasty people who deserved to be dead. “ She told the boys that women, with the exception of herself, were the Devil’s tools, and by nature whores and prostitutes.”. After school Augusta made her sons come home to memorize verses of the Old Testament depicting death, murder, and
divine retribution. “With a belief that the world was made up entirely of sinners she constantly warned her two boys about how immoral women were and how feeling and acting upon sexual desire would lead to burning in hell for all eternity.” Augusta thought it was her job to make sure her boys worshipped her and no other women. She treated them poorly the same way she did to her husband after he passed away.

It is believed that the death of Ed Gein’s mother was what set him off to have hatred towards women. In 1945 Augusta had a paralyzing stroke leaving Ed to devote all of his time towards taking care of her. He spent everyday with her and did everything that was asked of him. Shortly after she had another stroke causing her death to follow. “Augusta had a second stroke shortly after the Smith incident, and her health deteriorated rapidly. At the age of 67, Augusta Gein passed away, leaving behind a devastated Ed, who had lost his one and only friend and love.” Ed was unable to comprehend the death of his mother. He lived by himself on the family farm and boarded up her room to preserve her things. Police say that there were signs of neglect everywhere in the house except her room which was kept in pristine shape. Ed followed his mother’s wishes and continued to read the Old Testament but he found himself picking up books involving death and abuse, especially to women. His mother was buried in Plainfield, WI where Ed and his family grew up. He often visited his mother only to find himself wandering off towards other women’s graves. “The graves that attracted him the most were those of middle-aged women, whom he felt closely resembled his mother.” Gein’s true colors began to show soon after the death of his mother.
Ed Gein struggled to feel whole after the death of his mother. Over time he began to take women’s bodies from their graves and would mutilate their bodies. He would dissect their bodies, keeping the parts he liked the best such as heads, sex organs, livers, hearts, and intestines. He would flay the skin from the body, then drape it over a tailor’s dummy. The skin would be tanned, and later turned into articles of clothing. It is thought that he was trying to find a woman to replace his mother but he would only feel hatred towards the dead corpses. “Human facial skins, that had been carefully peeled from the skulls of the corpses to be used as masks were thought to be shrunken heads. Kids from town would sneak onto the property to try and catch a glimpse of these shrunken heads, which Ed described as being relics from the Philippines sent to him by a cousin who had served on the islands during WWII.”

Eventually it was thought that Ed got bored of the corpse from the grave and wanted more of a challenge. He switched to going after people in the town of Plainfield, but the strange thing was that there was no pattern of age in the people that were disappearing. While it was suspected that Ed was involved in several other unsolved cases including the disappearance of Georgia Weckler age 8, Evelyn Hartley age 15, Victor Travis age 43, and Ray Burgess. However, none of those disappearances were linked to Ed until the disappearance of Plainfield hardware store owner, Bernice Worden.

On November 16, 1957 most men in the town of Plainfield left for the annual 9 day deer hunt. Bernice Worden had opened the town hardware store early so the last few hunters could get what they needed. Everything was out of the ordinary when a witness entered the store. “with the cash register also gone and a trail of blood leading
out the back." There were suspicions that Gein had something to do with the disappearance of Mrs. Wordens so the town sheriff, who happened to be Bernice’s son, set out to Gein’s house. “The authorities sent to Gein's home that night were greeted by the gruesome sight of Worden's headless, gutted body hanging from the ceiling. Further investigation yielded more shocking discoveries, including organs in jars and skulls used as soup bowls.” While under questioning he admitted to killing Mrs. Bernice Worden and three years earlier, Mary Hogan. Along with confessing to murder, he also confessed to digging up a large number of graves and using their body parts for clothing, kitchen materials, and for necrophilia purposes.

Although the life of Ed Gein was very tragic, there was also a small amount of triumph for the people of Plainfield towards the end of his life. Gein was taken into the Wautoma County jail where all of his requests were denied. Officer Schley says that “subjected Gein to a brutal assault, banging his head repeatedly against a brick wall, which rendered his confession inadmissible, but Gein was assessed by psychiatrists and, in any case, declared mentally unfit for trial at that time.” It took 10 years for his trial to begin because of the state he was in physically and mentally. Around 1968 Ed Gein was fit to stand trial and was determined to plead not guilty. His lawyer, William Belter, and him pleaded not guilty under the reasoning of insanity. “That November, he was found guilty of the murder of Bernice Worden. However, he was also found insane at the time of the murder, and as such he was recommitted to Central State Hospital in Waupun, WI.” The people of Plainfield were safe after Gein was found guilty of the
murder of Bernice Worden and Mary Hogan. “...but a judge ultimately found him guilty by reason of insanity and he spent the rest of his days in a state facility”.

Gein was sent to the Mendosa State Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin to live out the rest of his life. The Mendosa State Hospital was a mental institute that mainly serviced male patients. The Mendosa website states that its purpose is that it, “...assesses and treats elderly men and women who suffer from emotional and neurological conditions that affect behavior. “6 After treatment he was kept at the prison where he was sentenced to life. He lived out the rest of his life quiet and uneventful. “Save for his attempt to petition for a release in 1974, which was rejected, the mild-mannered Gein made virtually no news while institutionalized. Later that decade, his health failing, he was transferred to the Mendota Mental Health Institute, where he died of cancer and respiratory illnesses on July 26, 1984.” He was buried beside the love of his life, his mother.

After the life of Ed Gein the people of Plainfield couldn’t live without knowing that his property and belongings were still in Plainfield. On the 20th of March, early in the morning, a fire was reported at Gein’s family farm. “The volunteer fire department did little to put out the blaze and many town residents simply watched silently as the flames razed the house to the ground.” The town stood and watched as the house burned down and shortly after the fire it was bulldozed away so there were no remains of the house left other than the foundation. To this day people still take trips out to see where in infamous house of the Gein family stood. As a last goodbye to Ed Gein, in the year 2000, his headstone was stolen. It was later returned to the local police department
where it was put back on his grave. Since the life of Ed Gein, Alfred Hitchcock directed the movie *Psycho* and Tobe Hooper directed *The Chainsaw Massacre*. 7 Both of these movies were based on the life and story of Ed Gein and the horror he caused to the people in southern Wisconsin.

Ed Gein caused a lot of tragedies for the people of Plainfield Wisconsin, but by the end of his life the people made a triumph and got their town back. After his life, the town was back to feeling safe again. They had no more worries about whether or not they were going to be mysterious taken or if anymore bodies would be missing from the graveyards.

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This website gave me the information about the process of his trial after being taken into custody. It told me where it took place and how he acted while being questioned. I also learned the name of the man that questioned Gein when he first arrived to the county jail.


I used this website to learn about his family. I read a lot about his mom, dad and brother. I got a better understanding of how he got the mindset that he did and where it came from.


This short story helped me get a more in depth description of what his life was like. Unlike the websites I looked at, this book gave me more detail of every major event that happened in his life.


This website told me what the similarities and differences between Ed Gein’s life and the movies The Chainsaw Massacre and Psycho.

This website told me about Ed Gein’s death and about where and how he died. It helped me form the ending of my paper.


This was the first thing I watched and took notes on when I chose the topic of Ed gein. I didn’t specifically site the video in my paper but it helped my get a better understanding of his life. It also gave me topics to look up and research more about


This website gave me pictures and descriptions of the things that Gein made out of the human bodies and what his house was like.


I just got general information that I needed from this website and it was the website I went to when I needed to find a general thing out.


I liked the way this website was set up so I used its setup as a general guide for what I wanted to say in my paper. I also used it to make sure my information was in the correct order.

This website was used to understand what Gein’s time at the state facility was like and how he was treated during his time there.