John Wayne Gacy:
Life and Death in Chicago Illinois

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Senior division
Senior division Paper
Paper Length:1819
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Throughout its existence, the United States has always overcome the hardships of tragedy through recovery and reform. Then, through its recovery and reform, it brings about times of triumph. In history, triumph and tragedy can be brought about from many different perspectives perceived from the eyes of each person’s judgement. John Wayne Gacy, an American serial killer and rapist, viewed his personal triumph and tragedy completely differently than the victims, their families, and the public around them.

John Wayne Gacy, born on March 17th, 1942, grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois. Gacy had an abusive childhood and struggled with his sexuality. Young boys usually look up to their fathers, but Gacy’s father was no role model. He was an alcoholic who beat Gacy on a regular basis. Along with enduring the beatings, he was forced to watch his mother’s abuse by his father. Around the age of twelve, Gacy’s beatings were so brutal that he was hospitalized regularly, suffering from blackouts and seizures. Since his medical conditions were never diagnosed, his father always accused Gacy of faking an illness. These accusations continued even while Gacy was lying helplessly in the hospital. In addition to his horrible homelife, he was constantly bullied at school for being overweight due to a heart condition. Abuse, neglect, violation, and homophobia led to the development of the monster that Gacy became, and in the end, harmed and killed many innocent young men.

As Gacy reached adulthood, he married Marlynn Myers. He quickly decided to work for a chain of Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants owned by his in-laws in Iowa. Later in 1967, after Gacy’s wife gave birth to his first born, he was indicted
by a Grand Jury in Black Hawk County for sodomy with a teenage boy. He received a 10 year sentence and was sent to Iowa State Reformatory for men. Shortly after he entered prison Marlynn Myers divorced Gacy. After serving only 18 months of the 10 year prison term, Gacy was released and moved to Chicago to immediately start his new life. This is where he met his second wife Carole. Carole Hoff was a newly divorced single mother with two daughters. Carole and Gacy were married on June 1, 1972. Although they were married, she never lived with Gacy in his Summerdale Avenue home. This house would become the residence that Gacy would use to lure his victims, trapping, killing and eventually burying them. Carole divorced Gacy on March 2, 1976, after years of disconnect. When Carole found out about the sexual abuse and murders her ex-husband had committed, she packed up her life and relocated immediately. Deciding to disappear to avoid all of the negative attention she was receiving, Carole left Gacy to rot away in a jail cell for his transgressions.

After Gacy’s short time in jail, he had decided to move to Cook County, Illinois, to start a new and better kept life as a contractor. Gacy promised himself that he would stay away from young men in order to restart his new and changed life. As the years passed by, Gacy’s growing business in Chicago, Illinois, had become very successful. But the ideal “better life” did not endure, giving birth to the idea to use his newly made business as a gateway to lure potential victims. Gacy would be able to screen a large number of young men to employ at his business; this allowed Gacy to hire the specific young men of his interest, eventually leading them to a brutal death. Around this same time, as a side job, he had become the clown called Pogo. Pogo would volunteer at children's birthday
parties, gaining the trust of many different families that lived in the area. Creating Pogo had given Gacy another opportunity to be close to more children. By gaining the trust of the parents, came the trust of their children, who often decided to work for him. With the promise of a well paying job, some of the boys were often allowed to stay the night at the Summerdale Avenue house that Gacy used as a business property. Gacy normally allowed only one boy to stay per night, thus creating the perfect environment for his premade plans to be set into motion.

When he fully settled into the neighborhood, and with the trust of the parents, all Gacy had to do was get the boys into his house. His first victim was a 15-year-old boy by the name of Jack McCoy. Gacy found McCoy by the bus stop in Chicago on January third 1972, taking him to his house for the night, promising McCoy that he would have him back by morning. The morning McCoy was supposed to leave, he decided to express his gratitude by making breakfast for Gacy. “McCoy had a kitchen knife in hand when he woke Gacy to surprise him that he was making breakfast. However, Gacy did not realize this until after he brutally murdered McCoy. Gacy later told police that he wrestled the knife out of McCoy’s hands by slamming his head against one of the bedroom doors. Once Gacy managed to obtain the knife, he stabbed McCoy in the chest several times until he stopped breathing. After murdering McCoy, Gacy proceeded to cover the child in concrete and bury him under the crawlspace in his home” (qtd. by johngacythekillerclown.com).

Gaining both experience and confidence from the first several murders, Gacy thought that he would never be caught. Many of the officers working on the Gacy case, along with Joe Kozenczak, claimed Gacy “was a cocky bastard and had many
tricks up his sleeve”. At times, Gacy had even decided to invite the officers over, joking often that he has to end the night to hide the bodies of his latest victims. When Gacy was caught, he was surprisingly candid giving all of the information on the murders including the location of the missing bodies. According to Officer Nathan Hilse, “I was blown away by the fact that he was so willing to share the information given the sensitivity of the subject manner” (Northern Star Media). Just like Hilse the Des Plaines detectives were not the only people working on the case that was genuinely confused by Gacy’s choice to help. Ultimately the decision was made to use the acquired information to help recover the bodies. After Gacy was finally put behind bars, personal triumph and tragedies were revealed.

Although the majority of the people that heard about Gacy’s case were disgusted by his work, Gacy was personally proud of the progress and his accomplishments. He viewed all thirty-three of his victims as triumphs, often flaunting his successes to the inmates, officers, and detectives. Gacy would make jokes to the officers when they would come to his residence to investigate him, having lunch and making awkward conversation implying fault. While in jail, he began to paint. Gacy would paint to fill in his lonely void. Many of the paintings would be about Pogo the clown and sex. Gacy would spend his remaining time in jail selling his paintings about his life as Pogo to buy more art supplies and showcase his success as a killer. Along with making paintings to show his successes, Gacy had a collection of personal belongings like rings, necklaces, or other items found on the bodies that he had gathered from the young men that he had murdered.
In addition to the triumphs, Gacy had a fair share of tragedies too. One of the most obvious tragedies would have been his imprisonment due to his transgressions. Gacy had been arrested multiple times; he had originally been jailed for violating a young man dating back to his first marriage. Another tragedy was when a pipe burst on December twenty-first 1978, flooding part of his crawl space. This created a foul odor from the bodies that were slowly decaying there. That very day was the day that the police and officers on Gacy’s case had finally put him behind bars. Lastly, for the crimes that Gacy committed, he was put on death row, to be sentenced to death by lethal injection. He died on the tenth of May, 1994.

Just like Gacy, the public and all of the involved law enforcement had developed their own version of triumphs and tragedies. Gacy’s triumphs were viewed as the public’s tragedies and Gacy’s tragedies were the public’s triumphs. One of the public’s triumphs had been that Gacy was finally caught and jailed. Along with Gacy being jailed, the public was ecstatic to hear that Gacy was being put on death row; they had awaited that moment that Gacy was to be killed for all of his transgressions and sins. Another triumph for the police was when Gacy was willing to show them exactly where he had hid the bodies in the crawl space or by the river. The police took this as a sign of good luck and used his willingness to their advantage. Finally, when Gacy was killed, all of the people involved were happy to finally see the murderer and rapist that had caused the pain and suffering of many families finally paying for the pain that he caused.

Along with all the triumphs, come the tragedies that Gacy had brought to many families and friends of the young men that he had murdered. Gacy had
caused families much pain and misery. He caused parents to worry for their children’s safety. He forced parents to wonder if their children that had been missing had been murdered by Gacy. They suffered, not being able to see their children alive and well. Gacy had taken children and friends away from their families and loved ones. He took away the trust that parents had in the world and in other people around them, giving a sense of lost hope for the families that he had taken from. In addition to Gacy killing the children, he had covered most of the bodies in concrete, shielding their dead bodies from the eyes of their families.

The different triumphs and tragedies that entwine John Wayne Gacy and the public bring into focus the idea of perceptions being inversely related. Joseph Brodsky, a famous Russian-American poet, once said, “When all is said and done, a murder is a murder” (The Chicago Killer). Gacy never thought that he was a bad person. He believed that what he did to the young boys was not a big deal. He was even proud of all the bloodshed and the pain caused to the boys loved ones. Gacy told many inmates that putting him on death row will not bring back to life all of the thirty-three boys that he had murdered. Oppositely, the public saw a monster that was put to death for his sins and Gacy’s death had given the families some sense of justice.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Books:


This book was written to show detective Joseph Kozenczak's point of view and his decisions that led to Gacy's capture. It had given insight on some of the murders and shifty deals Gacy made with the people around him. This was one of my main sources and it aided me throughout the whole paper.


Along with the other book, this one helped me with finding out about what Gacy would do to the boys. I didn’t finish the whole book, but it did help me a little with information the other book didn’t cover.
WebSites:


This newspaper article gave me a better look into the time when Gacy was caught and arrested. It gave me the insight of what the press had been let into and what they were able to release into the public.


Detective Joseph Kozenczak had given very little information on the Gacy case on this website, but I did like the little information on one of the other officers that was on the case. I used that information in one of my paragraphs to help better understand what the officers opinions on Gacy were.

The information on some of Gacy's murders and the victims were posted in this website. This helped me find out the names of the boys along with the ages, their looks, and how they died.


I used this website to piece together some of the blanks other articles left behind. This was very helpful to look back to when I needed more information on parts of Gacy's life and the times that the crimes and murders took place.


This website I didn't uses as much as the others. I only used this site to find out who he had married and why their marriage didn't last.

I used this site to gain more in-depth information on certain little parts of his life that I found important. Along with extra information, I had learned new things about Gacy that I didn't know about prior to reading the web site.


Most of the information on this website was a guide line on the time everything to do with Gacy went down. I didn't use this site much, but it did help me as an organizer.


Valium was a prescription that Gacy took to help mostly with sleep. This site was purely used to find out what Valium was used to treat and the effects it would have if misused.