

# THE MOST EVIL WOMAN EVER : THE TRUE STORY OF GERTRUDE BANISZEWSKI PDF, EPUB, EBOOK



## **Murder of Sylvia Likens - Wikipedia**

The Likens' girls mother, Betty, was at the time in county jail after having been arrested for shoplifting, which left Sylvia to care for her sister; Betty had abandoned Sylvia's father, Lester, and effectively kidnapped their two daughters. When Paula heard of the girls' circumstances, she offered to let Sylvia and Jenny spend the night. The next day, Lester Likens arrived in town, having tracked down his wife. He ran into McGuire, who recognized the description Lester gave of his daughters, and she directed him to the Baniszewski home. When Lester Likens arrived, Baniszewski

introduced herself as "Mrs. The two struck up a conversation, over the course of which the idea came up that Gertrude might take in Sylvia and Jenny as boarders; he had spoken with his wife at the county jail, where they had reconciled and agreed to travel the United States carnival circuit as carnies.

Lester did not inspect the home before leaving; had he have done so, he would have discovered that Gertrude's home had no stove or microwave; that there were only enough beds for half the people in the house; that the only things Gertrude kept in her pantry were bread and crackers; that most of the surfaces in the home were caked with thick layers of dirt; and only enough plates and eating utensils for 3 people.

The first week of Sylvia and Jenny's lives at the Baniszewski home went relatively well. They attended high school and attended teenage social functions with the Baniszewski children as well as church with Gertrude Baniszewski on Sunday. Shortly thereafter, Lester and Betty Likens came into town to check on the girls; neither of them made any reference to the beatings, presumably under threat from Baniszewski. The next week, Sylvia and Jenny went through the neighborhood garbage, collecting old Coca Cola bottles to sell in order to get money for candy. When they came home with the candy, Baniszewski accused them of stealing; when Sylvia explained how she had gotten the candy, Baniszewski accused her of lying and made her bend over her bed as before while she beat her across the buttocks with a paddle.

Shortly thereafter, the Baniszewski children came to Gertrude Baniszewski after a church social and told her that they were disgusted with the amount of food they had seen Sylvia eating. Baniszewski told Sylvia that she was angry that Sylvia would do something to ruin her physical appearance, and forced the girl to eat a hot dog piled with condiments; when Sylvia vomited, Baniszewski forced her to scoop the vomit up and devour it. Soon afterwards, Lester and Betty Likens again came into town to check on the girls; per Baniszewski's instructions, Sylvia made no reference to the vomit eating incident. The incident which appears to have either precipitated, triggered, or coincided with the sharp decline of Baniszewski's mental stability occurred in August of when she overheard Sylvia remark that she had once allowed a boy to feel her up.

Baniszewski inexplicably burst into a fit of obscenities, accused Sylvia of being a prostitute, and informed the rest of the house that Sylvia was pregnant because she had let a boy touch her vagina. Baniszewski then attacked Sylvia, repeatedly kicking her in the crotch. When Sylvia attempted to sit down afterwards, Paula threw her out of the chair and informed her, "You ain't fit to sit in chairs. From there on, Baniszewski only allowed Sylvia to sit in a chair with permission. Around this time, Baniszewski also began allowing her older children to use Sylvia as a sort of living "play thing", with the "games" ranging from beatings to being pushed down the stairs. Why Sylvia's story so enraged Baniszewski is still uncertain. It has been theorized that she saw in Sylvia the beauty and opportunity for happiness that had long ago escaped her, and so encouraged and participated in Sylvia's degradation and torture as an act of self loathing.

Others have theorized that Baniszewski's hard life and current living conditions resulted in a mental break. Still others have theorized that the violence against Likens was an extreme form of domestic abuse, in which Baniszewski directed her rage onto Sylvia. Whatever the case, Baniszewski manifested this rage by justifying her attacks by accusing Likens of being a prostitute, and delivering bizarre "sermons" to her children and Sylvia about the filthiness of prostitutes and women in general.

The day after Baniszewski kicked Sylvia in the crotch, according to Jenny, as an act of vengeance, Sylvia and Jenny told their classmates that they had seen Paula and Stephanie Baniszewski's second oldest daughter having sex with boys in exchange for money. When Stephanie's fifteen-year-old boyfriend, Coy Hubbard, discovered what Sylvia and Jenny had said, he came to the Baniszewski home and beat Sylvia. From then on, Hubbard, encouraged by Baniszewski, made frequent visits to the Baniszewski home, during which she would instruct the boy to practice his judo on Sylvia.

Also around this time, Baniszewski got Sylvia's best friend, a thirteen year old named Anna Sisco, alone long enough to convince her that Sylvia had been telling boys at school that Anna's mother was a whore. When Baniszewski took Anna to see Sylvia, she directed Anna in a violent attack on the girl. Soon after, Baniszewski told one of Paula's friends, a girl named Judy Duke, that Sylvia had been spreading rumors about her mother, and pitted the girls against each other in a fist-fight. During the fight, Baniszewski instructed Jenny to punch Sylvia.

When Jenny refused, Gertrude began to beat her in the face with her fists, until Jenny finally agreed to punch Sylvia. In August of , the vacant house next door to the Baniszewski residence was purchased by a middle-aged couple named Phyllis and Raymond Vermillion. Phyllis, seeing the number of children Baniszewski cared for, believed that Baniszewski would make a good babysitter for her two young children, and that she would also be helping Baniszewski out by paying her for her services. The Vermillions arranged a backyard barbecue so that the two families could get to know one another. During the course of the barbecue, Phyllis noticed Sylvia wandering around the yard with a pronounced black eye; Paula proudly announced to Phyllis that she was the one who had given it to her.

Then, under Baniszewski's supervision, Paula approached Sylvia with a glass of steaming water and threw it in Sylvia's face. Neither of the Vermillions reported this incident to the authorities. Two months later, Phyllis went to the Baniszewski home to borrow something. Over the course of the few minutes she was there, she noticed Sylvia wandering around as in a daze with swollen lips and a black eye that had swollen shut. To demonstrate how this had happened, Paula took her belt off and began to beat Sylvia with it in front of Phyllis.

Phyllis again neglected to report anything to the authorities. Around the time that Phyllis Vermillion witnessed Paula beat Sylvia, Sylvia came home from school and told Baniszewski that she needed a sweat suit for gym class. When Baniszewski told Sylvia that they could not afford one, Sylvia stole one from the school. Baniszewski questioned Sylvia about her new gym outfit, eventually coercing Sylvia into confession. Baniszewski inexplicably segued from the topic of Sylvia stealing into the topic of Sylvia being a prostitute, and threw Sylvia onto the ground, where she repeatedly kicked her in the crotch before once more returning to the topic of theft; to "cure" Sylvia of her "sticky fingers," Baniszewski burned the tips of each of Sylvia's fingers with a lit cigarette.

Afterwards, she made Sylvia bend over while she whipped her with a belt. After this incident, the smokers in the Baniszewski home began arbitrarily putting their cigarettes out on Sylvia's body as a reminder for her not to steal. Sometime later, Likens went out again to sell old soda

bottles for money. When she returned home, Baniszewski accused her of prostitution. Baniszewski took her into the living room of her home and forced Sylvia to strip naked in front of her sons and several neighborhood boys, on the threat of beating Jenny. Once Sylvia was fully naked, Baniszewski handed her a glass Coca Cola bottle, and forced Sylvia to masturbate with it for the boys. Following the Coke bottle incident, Sylvia became incontinent; as a result, Baniszewski decided that she was no longer fit to live with humans, and locked her in the basement.

The lack of a toilet in the basement forced Sylvia to defecate and urinate on the floor. When Baniszewski saw this, she began a "bathing regime" to "cleanse" Sylvia, whom she began calling "dirty girl. The "regime" consisted of filling Gertrude's claw-footed bathtub with scalding water, binding Sylvia's wrists and ankles, and then dunking Sylvia into it. The regime was administered arbitrarily, sometimes once or many times a day, some days not at all.

Following the baths, Paula Baniszewski would rub handfuls of salt over Sylvia's nude body. During this period Baniszewski took on 14 year old Ricky Hobbs, a neighborhood boy, as her "personal assistant" when dealing with Sylvia. Hobbs, an honor student from a middle class family with no previous legal trouble, experienced a sudden shift in personality upon becoming Baniszewski's assistant, blindly following whatever orders she gave him; crime reporters have since speculated that Hobbs was Baniszewski's lover, and that she had seduced the boy into becoming her henchman.

Baniszewski's children turned Sylvia into a money-making opportunity, charging neighborhood children a nickel to gawk at the nude Sylvia or to push her down the stairs to the basement, where she was now kept when not being bathed or put on display. She was kept constantly naked and rarely fed; when she was allowed to eat, it was in some bizarre fashion such as the instance in which Baniszewski insisted that she eat soup with her fingers. Often, Baniszewski and her twelve-year-old son John Jr. Sometime around this period, Jenny managed to send contact to her and Sylvia's older sister, Diana, who was married and had a family of her own. Jenny outlined the horrors that she and Sylvia were experiencing, and instructed Diana to contact the police to come rescue them.

Diana ignored the letter, believing that Jenny was simply displeased with being punished and that she was making up stories so that she could come live with her. Also around this time, one of the neighborhood children who had been by to see Sylvia, a twelve year old named Judy Duke, went home and told her mother "they were beating and kicking Sylvia. Shortly thereafter, the Baniszewski's reverend, Roy Julian, visited them as part of a program he had set up to see each of his parishoners at their homes. While he and Baniszewski drank coffee, she complained to him that Sylvia had been an intense burden on her, claiming that the girl was a prostitute who had been servicing married men and had gotten pregnant.

Although at the time Paula Baniszewski was several months pregnant, Gertrude Baniszewski insisted that her daughter was a virgin and that Sylvia was attempting to pass off her own misdeeds onto the pure Paula. Baniszewski and the reverend prayed for Sylvia's salvation before the reverend left. When the reverend returned again a few weeks later, Paula told the reverend during prayers that she had "hatred in [her] heart" for Sylvia, to which Baniszewski interjected that the opposite was true. Shortly after this, Diana came by to visit her sisters. Baniszewski refused to allow her into the home, at first telling her that Lester had contacted her and instructed her not to allow Diana into the home.

When Diana questioned this, Baniszewski threatened to call the police and have her arrested for trespassing. Diana hid nearby the house until she spotted Jenny outside, and then approached her. Jenny told her older sister that she was not allowed to talk to her and then ran away. Concerned, Diana contacted social services. When a social worker arrived at the home, Baniszewski informed her that she had kicked Sylvia out of the house for being physically unclean and a prostitute, and that Sylvia had since run away. Baniszewski then managed to get Jenny alone long enough to inform her that if she told the social worker the truth, Jenny would join her sister naked in the basement. Jenny then told the social worker that Sylvia had indeed run away. The social worker returned to her office, where she filed a report stating that no more calls needed to be made to the Baniszewski home.

On October 20th, Gertrude called the police to come arrest a boy at her home. Robert Bruce Hanlon was a local youth who claimed that the Baniszewski children had stolen things from his basement. He had come to the home earlier in the evening demanding that Baniszewski return his things; when she refused, he attempted to sneak into the home to take them back. Phyllis Vermillion witnessed Hanlon being put into the back of a squad car and approached the police to speak on his behalf, as she had earlier overheard the argument between Baniszewski and Hanlon over the stolen goods.

Vermillion made no mention of Sylvia during her conversation with the police. On October 21st, Baniszewski instructed John Jr. When Baniszewski checked Sylvia the next morning and discovered she had wet the bed, Baniszewski made her dress, then took her into the living area, where she was once again forced to perform a striptease for her sons and the neighborhood boys, again climaxed by Baniszewski forcing Sylvia to masturbate with a Coca Cola bottle. When Sylvia was finished, she was allowed to dress. After a few moments, apropos of nothing, Gertrude brought up Sylvia's lies about Paula and Stephanie, and declared, "You have branded my daughters so I will brand you!

When the needle was orange, Gertrude used it to carve and burn the letter "I" and part of the letter "M" into Sylvia's stomach. At one point Hobbs stopped and asked Baniszewski in a confused manner to spell "prostitute" for him. When the process was finished, the tattoo - consisting not only of the actual carving but third-degree burns left behind by the heat of the needle - was such that modern plastic surgery would have been unable to correct it. Satisfied, Baniszewski left the room, leaving Sylvia tied, gagged, and naked. At this point, Ricky, Paula, and Baniszewski's ten year old daughter Shirley decided to give Sylvia another tattoo, an "S" in the middle of her chest; the three would later become confused as to whether they had intended the "S" to stand for "Sylvia" or "Slave," though the latter explanation was the one which was leaned towards as being correct.

Ricky burned the bottom curve of the "S" into Sylvia; he then either choked, or changed his mind, because he then ordered Jenny to come over and carve the top half. Although threatened, Jenny refused; Ricky relented, and ordered Shirley to finish the tattoo. The eleven year old choked and accidentally carved the curve backwards, so that the numeral "3" appeared on Likens' chest. Baniszewski re-entered the room at this point to address the still bound and gagged Sylvia: "What are you going to do now, Sylvia? You can't get married now, you can't undress in front of anyone. What are you going to do now? Sylvia was un-gagged to address Baniszewski. She replied: "I guess there's nothing I can do. It's on there.

Hubbard then took Sylvia back to the basement, where he used her for judo practice for a period before returning home. In the middle of the night, Jenny Likens sneaked into the basement to visit her sister, where Sylvia told her, "I'm going to die. I can tell. Shortly after Jenny's visit, Baniszewski inexplicably went into the basement and brought Sylvia upstairs, and allowed her to sleep in one of the beds.

She was allowed to sleep until noon of the next day, October 23, when Baniszewski woke her; once Sylvia was awake, Baniszewski and Stephanie took her into the bathroom and gave her a warm, soapy bath. After the bath, Baniszewski and Paula dressed Sylvia, and then dictated a letter to her, intended to look like a runaway letter to her parents. For reasons unknown, Baniszewski dictated that Sylvia open the letter "Dear Mr. I went with a gang of boys in the middle of the night. And they said that they would pay me if I would give them something so I got in the car and they all got what they wanted And they also put on my stomach, I am a prostitute and proud of it.

I have done just about everything that I could do just to make Gertie mad and cause [sic] Gertie more money than she's got. I've tore up a new mattress and peaed [sic] on it. I have also cost Gertie doctor bills that she really can't pay and made Gertie a nervous wreck and all her kids. Just as strangely as Baniszewski's insistence on the formal salutation, she instructed Sylvia not to sign it. After Sylvia finished the letter, Baniszewski began formulating a plan to have John Jr. When Sylvia overheard this, she ran for the front door, but in her emaciated and mutilated state moved so slowly that Baniszewski was able to grab her just as she reached the front door and drag her back into the house.

Once Baniszewski settled Sylvia down, she took her into the kitchen and made her some toast. Sylvia attempted to eat it but then said she couldn't swallow; Baniszewski took down the curtain rod in the kitchen and beat Sylvia in the mouth with it. John then took Sylvia into the basement and tied her up while Baniszewski prepared a plate of crackers for Sylvia. When she offered the crackers to Sylvia, Sylvia replied, "Feed it to the dog. It's hungrier than I am. On the next day, October 24th, Baniszewski came into the basement and, attempted to bludgeon Sylvia; first she tried to hit her with a chair, but missed and broke it against the wall.

Next she tried to beat her over the head with a paddle, but swung in such a wide arc that it came back against her own face, blacking her eye. To stop the strange show, Hubbard stepped in and beat Sylvia unconscious with a broomstick. Over the course of that night, and into the morning hours of October 25th, Sylvia beat the basement floor with the scoop portion of an iron shovel. Nextdoor neighbors would later report considering calling the police, but chose not to. On October 26th, Baniszewski voiced her intentions to give Sylvia a warm bath. Stephanie and Ricky brought Sylvia upstairs and laid her in the tub fully clothed; they took her out shortly thereafter when they realized she was not breathing. Baniszewski instructed her children to take Sylvia's body to the basement and strip it naked. She then told Hobbs to go to a nearby payphone and call the police her house having no working telephone.

When the police arrived, Baniszewski gave them the letter she'd made Sylvia dictate; in the midst of the commotion, Jenny Likens whispered to one of the police, "Get me out of here and I'll tell you everything. Other neighborhood children present at the time - Mike Monroe, Randy Lepper, Duke, and Siscoe - were arrested for "injury to a person. Baniszewski, her children, Hobbs, and Hubbard were held without bail pending their trials. Charges against Siscoe, Duke, Monroe, and Lepper were dismissed. Stephanie's lawyer got her a separate trial; before it was able to begin, the district attorney dropped the murder charges. Meanwhile, an autopsy of Sylvia Likens turned up over cigarette burns on her body, in addition to various second and third degree burns, severe bruising, and muscle and nerve damage. In her death throes, Sylvia bit through her lips, nearly severing each of them.

Her vaginal cavity was nearly swollen shut, although an examination of the canal determined that her hymen was still intact, largely discrediting-- along with a lack of any ripping or tearing to the rectum-- Gertrude's assertions that Sylvia was a prostitute and completely disproving her insistence that she was pregnant. The official cause of death was brain swelling, internal hemorrhaging of the brain, and shock. The case of the State of Indiana v. Gertrude Baniszewski, John Baniszewski, Paula Baniszewski, Ricky Hobbs, and Coy Hubbard commenced in May of ; the prosecution sought the death penalty for all involved, including John and Hobbs, who were thirteen and fourteen at the time, respectively. Paula's time in court was interrupted when she was rushed to the hospital to give birth to the child that she and her mother had insisted she wasn't carrying; in a show of solidarity, Paula named the child Gertrude.

Baniszewski and the children's cases were exacerbated by the fact that they were being represented by four different attorneys--one for Baniszewski, one for Paula, one for Hobbs, and one for Coy and John--all of whom worked against each other and attempted to shift blame against the other defendants, even though they were all being tried together.

Baniszewski's attorney attempted to shift blame onto the children, portraying her as weak, chronically ill, and incapable of preventing or perpetuating any of the abuse. The children's attorneys attempted to shift blame onto Baniszewski and the other children. Some of the most damaging testimony against Baniszewski was due to her own self-incrimination; she recounted bizarre tales of Sylvia Likens being a neighborhood prostitute and of her trysts with middle aged, married men, as well as accusing her of frequently starting fights in the home. To corroborate Baniszewski's testimony, eleven-year-old Marie was called to the stand. Initially, Marie backed up everything her mother had said, until, during cross examination, she suddenly screamed "God help me! The young girl's shocking turn against her own family was largely responsible for the eventual verdict: Baniszewski was found guilty of murder in the first degree.

To the shock of the citizens of Indianapolis, she did not receive the death penalty, but rather life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. Paula Baniszewski was convicted of second degree murder; she appealed and was granted a new trial, but before it began, she struck a plea bargain and plead guilty to voluntary manslaughter. She served three years in prison and was then paroled. John Baniszewski, Hubbard, and Hobbs were each convicted of voluntary manslaughter and sentenced to eighteen months in a juvenile detention facility. By the time the now seventeen year old Hobbs was released, the severity of his crimes had sunk in, and he suffered a nervous breakdown; he began a regime of heavy-chain smoking which had severely decayed his lungs by the time he was twenty. By the time he was twenty-one, he was dead of lung cancer. Baniszewski appealed, was granted a new trial, and was again found guilty, though this time she was sentenced to eighteen years to life.

Over the course of the next eighteen years, Baniszewski became a model prisoner, working in the sewing shop and becoming a den-mother to

younger female inmates; by the time she came up for parole in , she had earned the prison nickname "Mom. The news of Baniszewski's parole hearing sent shockwaves through the Indiana community. Jenny Likens and her family appeared on television to speak out against Baniszewski; the members of two anti-crime groups, Protect the Innocent and Society's League Against Molestation, travelled to Indiana to oppose Baniszewski's parole and support the Likens family, beginning a sidewalk picket campaign. Over the course of two months, the groups collected signatures from the citizens of Indiana demanding that Baniszewski be kept behind bars. In spite of all this, Baniszewski was granted parole. During the hearing she gave the following confession: "I'm not sure what role I had in it I never really knew her I take full responsibility for whatever happened to Sylvia.

Baniszewski walked out of prison on December 4, , and travelled to Iowa under the name Nadine Van Fossan. She died there of lung cancer in . The fates of Baniszewski's children remains largely unknown. Paula Baniszewski moved to Iowa and assumed a new identity; internet rumors claim that she is still alive and lives on a farm somewhere in the Iowa countryside. Stephanie Baniszewski became a school teacher and assumed a new name. John Baniszewski changed his name to John Blake and worked as a truck driver before becoming a real estate agent and lay minister; he was never arrested again.

He married and had three children, and has lived in anonymity, only surfacing briefly in the wake of the Jonesboro Massacre to speak for the first time about the Likens murder, saying that he took full responsibility for his role in the murder and that a harsher sentence would have been more just. Evans and Company, Inc. ISBN StarFiles: The murder of Sylvia Likens. It has been the most enduring nightmare in Indianapolis True Crime history -- the Oct. Other crimes have involved a greater number of victims, often including children, but the villains in those stories were hardened criminals or madmen, and their acts of violence played out rapidly within a span of minutes or hours.

In the aftermath of grief and anger good people could at least comprehend the chain of events that had just unfolded. On the surface, the Likens murder is not much different from any number of heinous crimes. It was a Cinderella story without the happy ending -- a teenage girl left under the care of a strict authoritarian whose idea of discipline is physical abuse that escalates until the abuse victim dies. If that was the extent of it, this case would likely have been lost to history long ago like so many other long-forgotten murders.

Upon hearing this, Gertrude asked, "Why did you do that, Sylvia? Several days later, Gertrude returned to the subject with Likens, telling her, "You're certainly getting big in the stomach, Sylvia. It looks like you're going to have a baby. I'm just going to have to go on a diet. However, Gertrude then informed her, and the other girls in the house, that whenever they "did something" with a boy, they would be sure to have a baby. She then kicked Likens in the genitals. Paula — herself overweight, three months pregnant, and also jealous of Likens' physical appearance — then participated in attacking Likens; knocking her off her chair and onto the kitchen floor, shouting, "You ain't fit to sit in a chair!

On another occasion, as the family ate supper, Gertrude, Paula, and a neighborhood boy named Randy Gordon Lepper, force-fed Likens a hot dog overloaded with condiments, including mustard, ketchup and spices. Likens vomited as a result, and was later forced to consume what she had regurgitated. In what was Likens' only act of retaliation, she is alleged to have spread a rumor at Arsenal Technical High School that Stephanie and Paula Baniszewski were prostitutes.

She supposedly did this because she was upset with the household singling her out for similar accusations. While at school, Stephanie was jokingly propositioned by a boy who told her that Likens had started this rumor about her. Upon returning home that day, Stephanie questioned Likens about the rumor and she admitted to starting it. Stephanie punched her in response, but Likens apologized to her, in tears, and Stephanie then also began to cry. However, when Stephanie's boyfriend, year-old Coy Randolph Hubbard, [35] heard of the rumor, he brutally attacked Likens; slapping her, banging her head against the wall and flipping her backwards onto the floor. When Gertrude found out, she used a paddle to beat Likens.

On another occasion, Paula beat Likens about the face with such force that she broke her own wrist, having primarily focused her blows upon Likens' teeth and eyes. Gertrude would later occasionally force Jenny to strike her own sister, beating Jenny if she did not comply. Coy Hubbard and several of his classmates frequently visited the Baniszewski residence to both physically and verbally torment Likens, often collaborating with Baniszewski's children and Gertrude herself. Gertrude eventually forbade Likens from attending school after she confessed to having stolen a gym suit from the school due to Gertrude having refused to purchase the clothing for her.

Gertrude then switched her conversation to the "evils" of premarital sex before repeatedly kicking Likens in the genitals as Stephanie rallied to Likens' defense, shouting, "She didn't do anything! The Likens sisters were fearful of notifying either family members or adults at their school of the increasing incidents of abuse and neglect they were enduring, as both were afraid that doing so would only worsen their predicament. Jenny was also subjected to bullying by girls in her neighborhood, in addition to occasionally being ridiculed or beaten whenever she alluded to Sylvia's situation. In July and August, both Lester and Elizabeth Likens would occasionally return to Indianapolis to visit their daughters, whenever their travel schedule afforded them the opportunity. The last occasion Lester and Elizabeth visited their daughters was in late August. On this occasion, neither girl exhibited any visible sign of distress about their mistreatment to their parents. This was likely because both were in the presence of Gertrude and her children.

Almost immediately after Lester and Elizabeth had left the Baniszewski household on their final visit, Gertrude turned to face Likens and stated: "What are you going to do now, Sylvia? Now they're gone? On one occasion in September, the girls encountered their older sister, Dianna Shoemaker, at a local park. Both Jenny and Sylvia informed Dianna about the abuse they were enduring at the hands of their caregiver, adding that Sylvia was being specifically targeted for physical abuse and almost always for things she had neither said nor done.

Neither sister mentioned the actual address where they resided and, initially, Dianna believed her sisters must be exaggerating their claims regarding the scope of their mistreatment. Several weeks prior to this, Sylvia and Jenny had encountered Dianna in the same park, while in the company of year-old Marie Baniszewski, and Sylvia had been given a sandwich to eat when she mentioned to her sister that she was hungry.

In response, Gertrude accused Likens of engaging in gluttony before she and Paula choked and bludgeoned her. The pair then subjected Likens to a scalding bath in order to "cleanse her of sin," with Gertrude grabbing Likens' hair, and repeatedly banging her head against the bath to revive her whenever she fainted. Shortly after this incident, the father of a neighborhood boy named Michael John Monroe [48] phoned Arsenal Technical High School to anonymously report that a girl with open sores across her entire body was living at the Baniszewski household.

As Likens had not attended school for several days, a school nurse visited East New York Street to investigate these claims. Gertrude claimed to the nurse that Likens had run away from her home the previous week and that she was unaware of her actual whereabouts, adding that Likens was "out of control," and that her open sores were a result of Likens' refusal to maintain decent personal hygiene.

The immediate neighbors of the Baniszewski family were a middle-aged couple named Raymond and Phyllis Vermillion. Both initially viewed Gertrude as an ideal caregiver for the Likens sisters and both had visited the Baniszewski residence on two occasions while the girls had been under Gertrude's care. On both occasions, the Vermillions witnessed Paula physically abusing Likens—who on both occasions had a black eye—and openly boasting about her mistreatment of the child to them. On or about October 1, Dianna Shoemaker discovered that her sisters were temporarily residing at the Baniszewski residence. She visited the property in an attempt to initiate regular contact. Gertrude, however, refused Dianna entrance to her property, stating that she had "[received] permission" from their parents not to allow either of the girls to see her. She then ordered Dianna off of her property.

She was informed, "I can't tell you or I'll get into trouble. Due to the increase in the frequency and brutality of the torture and mistreatment she was subjected to, Likens gradually became incontinent. As a form of punishment for her incontinence, on October 6, Gertrude threw Likens into the basement and tied her up. Here, Likens was often kept naked, rarely fed, and frequently deprived of water. In the weeks prior to locking Likens in the family basement, Gertrude had increasingly abused and tormented Likens. She would occasionally falsely claim to the children in her household that either she herself or one of them had been the recipient of direct insults from Likens in the hope this would goad them into belittling or attacking her. Physical and mental torment such as this was occasionally ceased by the Baniszewskis to watch their favorite television shows.

Throughout Likens' captivity in the basement, Gertrude frequently, with the assistance of her children and neighborhood children, restrained and gagged Likens before placing her in a bathtub filled with scalding water and proceeding to rub salt into her wounds. On one occasion, Gertrude and her twelve-year-old son, John Jr. On October 22, John Baniszewski Jr. Gertrude Baniszewski eventually allowed Likens to sleep upstairs, on the condition that she learned not to wet herself. That night, Sylvia whispered to Jenny to secretly give her a glass of water before falling asleep. The following morning, Gertrude discovered that Likens had urinated on herself. As a punishment, Likens was forced to insert an empty glass Coca-Cola bottle into her vagina in the presence of the Baniszewski children before Gertrude ordered her into the basement.

Shortly thereafter, Gertrude shouted for Likens to return to the kitchen, then ordered her to strip naked before proclaiming to her: "You have branded my daughters; now I am going to brand you. When Gertrude was unable to finish the branding, she instructed one of the neighborhood children present, year-old Richard Dean Hobbs, [75] to finish etching the words into Likens' flesh as she took Jenny to a nearby grocery store. In what Hobbs would later insist were "short, light" etchings, he continued to brand the text into Likens' abdomen as she clenched her teeth and moaned.

Gertrude later taunted Likens by claiming she would never be able to marry due to the words carved on her stomach, stating: "Sylvia, what are you going to do now? You can't get married now. What are you going to do? That night, Sylvia confided to her sister: "Jenny, I know you don't want me to die, but I'm going to die. I can tell it. The following day, Gertrude Baniszewski woke Likens, then forced her to write a letter as she dictated the contents, which were intended to mislead her parents into believing their daughter had run away from the Baniszewski residence. The content of this letter was intended to frame a group of anonymous local boys for extensively abusing and mutilating Likens after she had initially agreed to engage in sexual relations with them before they inflicted the extreme abuse and torture upon her body. After she had finished writing the letter, Likens was then again tied to the stair railing and offered crackers to eat, although she refused them, saying: "Give it to the dog, I don't want it.

On October 25, Likens attempted to escape from the basement after overhearing a conversation between Gertrude and John Baniszewski Jr. Likens was then given toast to eat but was unable to consume the food due to her extreme state of dehydration. Gertrude forced the toast into her mouth before repeatedly striking her face with a curtain rod until sections of the instrument were bent into right angles.

Coy Hubbard then took the curtain rod from Gertrude and struck Likens one further time, rendering her unconscious. Gertrude then dragged Likens into the basement. That evening, Likens desperately attempted to alert neighbors by screaming for help and hitting the walls of the basement with a spade. One immediate neighbor of the Baniszewskis would later inform police she had heard the desperate commotion and that she had identified the source as emanating from the basement of East New York Street, but that as the noise had suddenly ceased at approximately a.

By the morning of October 26, Likens was unable to either speak intelligibly or correctly coordinate the movement of her limbs. Gertrude did move Likens into the kitchen and, having propped her back against a wall, attempted to feed her a doughnut and a glass of milk, although she threw Likens to the floor in frustration when Likens was unable to correctly move the glass of milk to her lips. She was then returned to the basement. Shortly thereafter, Likens became delirious, repeatedly moaning and mumbling.

When Paula asked her to recite the English alphabet, Likens was unable to recite anything beyond the first four letters or to raise herself off the ground. In response, Paula verbally threatened her to either stand up or she would inflict a long jump upon her. Gertrude then ordered Likens, who had defecated, to clean herself. That afternoon, several of Likens' other tormentors gathered in the basement. Likens jerkily moved her arms in an apparent attempt to point at the faces of the tormentors she could recognize, making statements such as, "You're Ricky" and "You're Gertie" before Gertrude tersely shouted, "Shut up! You know who I am! Your front tooth was knocked out when you were seven.

In an attempt to wash Likens, a laughing John Baniszewski Jr. In response to this effort, Gertrude stamped upon Likens' head before standing and staring at her for several moments. Shortly after p. He slipped on the wet basement stairs and fell heavily to the floor of the basement to be

confronted with the sight of Stephanie crying and cuddling Likens' emaciated and lacerated body after she had been ordered by her mother to clean Sylvia. Stephanie and Richard then decided to give Likens a warm, soapy bath and dress her in new clothes. They then laid her upon a mattress in one of the bedrooms [90] as Sylvia muttered her final wish that her "daddy was here" and that Stephanie would take her home. Stephanie then turned to her younger sister, Shirley, exclaiming, "Oh! She'll be alright! When Stephanie realized that Likens was not breathing, she attempted to apply mouth-to-mouth resuscitation as Gertrude repeatedly shouted to the children in the house that Likens was faking her death.

Gertrude Baniszewski initially beat Likens' corpse with a book, shouting "Faker! When police arrived at her address at approximately p. She also claimed she had been "doctoring" the child for an hour or more prior to her death, having applied rubbing alcohol to Likens' wounds in a futile attempt at first aid before she had died. She added that Likens had earlier run away from her home with several teenage boys before returning to her house earlier that afternoon, bare-breasted and clutching the note. Clutching a Bible, [95] Paula Baniszewski, having stated to all present in the household that Likens' death was "meant to happen," then glanced in Jenny's direction and calmly stated: "If you want to live with us, Jenny, we'll treat you like our own sister.

As previously instructed by Gertrude, Jenny Likens recited the rehearsed version of events leading to Likens' death to police, before whispering to the officers: "You get me out of here and I'll tell you everything. Baniszewski on suspicion of Likens' murder within hours of the discovery of her body. The same day, Coy Hubbard and Richard Hobbs were also arrested and charged with the same offenses. All were held without bail pending trial. Initially, Gertrude denied any involvement in Likens' death, although by October 27 she had confessed to having known "the kids," particularly her daughter Paula and Coy Hubbard, had physically and emotionally abused Likens, stating: "Paula did most of the damage," and "Coy Hubbard did a lot of the beating.

She became evasive when one officer stated the likely reasons Likens had become incontinent were her mental distress and injury to her kidneys. Lacking any remorse, Paula signed a statement admitting to having repeatedly beaten Likens about the backside with her mother's police belt, once breaking her wrist on Likens' jaw, and inflicting other acts of brutality, including pushing her down the stairs into the basement "two or three times," and inflicting a black eye. John Jr. He admitted to having burned Sylvia with matches on several occasions, adding that his mother had repeatedly burned the child with cigarettes. The autopsy of Likens' body revealed she had suffered in excess of separate wounds across her entire body, in addition to being extremely emaciated at the time of her death.

Her injuries included burns, severe bruising, and extensive muscle and nerve damage. Her vaginal cavity was almost swollen shut, although an examination of the canal determined that her hymen was still intact, discrediting Gertrude's assertions Likens had been three months pregnant, [] a prostitute, and promiscuous. Moreover, all of Likens' fingernails were broken backwards [n 8] and most of the external layers of skin upon the child's face, breasts, neck, and right knee had peeled or receded.

In her death throes, Likens had evidently bitten through her lips, partially severing sections of them from her face. The official cause of Likens' death was listed by coroner Dr. Arthur Kebel as a subdural hematoma due to her receiving a severe blow to her right temple. Rigor mortis had fully developed at the time of the discovery of her body, indicating Likens may have been deceased for up to eight hours before she was found, although Dr.

Kebel did note Likens had been recently bathed — possibly after death — and that this act could have hastened the loss of body temperature and thus speeding the onset of rigor mortis. The service was officiated by the Reverend Louis Gibson, with more than mourners in attendance. Likens' gray casket remained open throughout the ceremony, with a portrait of her taken prior to July adorning her coffin.

In his eulogy, the Reverend Gibson stated: "We all have our time of passing, but we won't suffer like our little sister suffered during the last days of her life. Following this service, Likens' casket was placed by pallbearers in a hearse and driven to the Oak Hill Cemetery to be interred. This hearse was one of a vehicle procession to drive to the cemetery for Likens' burial. On December 30, , the Marion County grand jury returned first-degree murder indictments against Gertrude Baniszewski and two of her three oldest children, Paula and John Baniszewski Jr. Also indicted were Richard Hobbs and Coy Hubbard.

All were charged with having repeatedly struck, beaten, kicked, and otherwise inflicting a culmination of fatal injuries to Sylvia Likens with premeditated malice. Three weeks prior to the filing of the indictments against the five defendants, Stephanie Baniszewski had been released from custody upon a writ of habeas corpus bond, with her attorney successfully contending the state had insufficient evidence to support any murder or culmination of fatal injuries charges against her. Stephanie waived her immunity from any potential impending prosecution [] while agreeing to testify against her family and any other individuals charged with abusing and murdering Likens. At a formal pretrial hearing held on March 16, , several psychiatrists testified before Judge Saul Isaac Rabb as to their conclusions regarding psychiatric evaluations they had conducted upon three individuals indicted upon Likens' murder.

These experts testified that all three were mentally competent to stand trial. Initial jury selection began on this date and continued for several days. The prosecution consisted of Leroy K. New and Marjorie Wessner, who announced their intention to seek the death penalty for all five defendants on April They also successfully argued before Judge Rabb that all the defendants should be tried together as they were ultimately charged with acting "in concert" [] in their collective crimes against Likens and that as such, if each were tried separately, neither judge nor jury could hear testimony relating to a "total picture" of the accumulation of offenses committed.

Each prospective juror was questioned by counsels for both prosecution and defense in relation to their opinions regarding capital punishment being a just penalty for first-degree murder and whether a mother was actually responsible for the "deportment of her children. Nedder; John Baniszewski Jr. One of the first witnesses to testify on behalf of the prosecution was deputy coroner Charles Ellis, who testified on April 29 as to the intense pain Likens had suffered, stating that her fingernails were broken backwards, numerous deep cuts and punctures covered much of her body, and that her lips were "essentially in shreds" due to her having repeatedly bitten and chewed upon them. Although, he emphasized that aside from the extensive swelling inside and around her genitalia, [] Likens' body bore no evidence of direct sexual molestation. On May 2 and 3, Jenny



Likens testified against all five defendants, stating that each had repeatedly and extensively, both physically and emotionally, abused her sister, adding that Likens had done nothing to provoke the assaults and that there had been no truth in either the rumors she had been falsely accused of spreading or the slurs each had made against Likens' character.

During her testimony, Jenny stated the abuse her sister and, to a much lesser degree, she herself had endured began approximately two weeks after they had begun to live in the Baniszewski household, and that as the abuse her sister was forced to endure escalated, Likens had occasionally been unable to produce tears due to her acute state of dehydration. Jenny burst into tears as she recalled how, just days before Likens died, she had said to her: "Jenny, I know you don't want me to die, but I am going to die. I can tell it!"

Sections of Jenny Likens' testimony were later corroborated by that of Randy Lepper, who stated he had once witnessed Likens crying, but that she had shed no actual tears. Lepper also testified to having witnessed Stephanie strike Likens "real hard" after her mother had ordered her to remove her clothes in his presence. On May 10, a Baptist Minister named Roy Julian testified to having known a teenage girl was being abused in the Baniszewski household, although he had failed to report this information to authorities as, having been informed by Gertrude that Likens had "made advances to men for money," he had believed the girl was being punished for soliciting.

The same day, year-old Judy Duke also testified, admitting to having witnessed Likens once endure salt being rubbed into sores upon her legs until she screamed. The following day, Gertrude Baniszewski testified in her own defense. She denied any responsibility for Likens' prolonged abuse, torment, and ultimate death, claiming her children, and other children within her neighborhood must have committed the acts within her home, which she described as being "such a madhouse."

In response to questioning relating to whether she had physically abused the Likens sisters, Gertrude claimed that although she had "started to spank" Likens on one occasion, she was emotionally unable to finish doing so, and had not hit the child on any further occasions. Two days later, Richard Hobbs testified in his own defense, describing how Gertrude had called Likens to the kitchen on October 23 and stated to her: "You have branded my children so now I'm going to brand you. Although Hobbs testified this act of branding had brought blood to the surface of Likens' flesh and that Likens had begged him to stop, he remained adamant the section of branding he had inflicted had been light. When Marie Baniszewski was called to the stand as a witness for the defense, she broke down and admitted that she had heated the needle which Hobbs had used to brand Likens' abdomen.

Marie also testified as to her mother's indifference to Likens' evident distress in relation to the physical and mental abuse she had increasingly suffered, with her mother's full knowledge, stating that on one occasion, Gertrude had sat upon a chair and crocheted as she watched a neighborhood girl named Anna Siscoe attack Likens. Sargent testified Paula had finished her boasting by stating, "I tried to kill her! On May 16, a court-appointed doctor named Dwight Schuster testified on behalf of the prosecution. When questioned by Leroy New as to the exhaustive interviews and assessments he had conducted with Gertrude, Dr. Schuster stated that she had been evasive and uncooperative. Schuster testified as to his belief that Gertrude was sane and fully in control of her actions, adding that she had been sane in October, and remained sane to this date. Schuster was subjected to over two hours of intense cross-examination by Gertrude's lawyer, William Erbecker, although he remained steadfast that Gertrude was not and had never been psychotic.

Deputy Prosecutor Marjorie Wessner delivered the state's closing argument before the jury on behalf of the prosecution. As each defendant, except Richard Hobbs, remained impassive, Wessner recounted the continuous mistreatment Likens had endured before her death, emphasizing that at no point had Likens either provoked any of the defendants, or received any medical care beyond occasionally having margarine rubbed into scalded sections of her face and body. In reference to the premeditated nature of Likens' death, Wessner pointed the jury's attention to the notes Gertrude had forced Likens to write on October 24, stating: "[Gertrude] knew on [October 24] she was going to hold these notes until she and the rest of the defendants had completed the murder of Sylvia. William Erbecker was the first defense attorney to deliver his closing argument before the jury; he attempted to portray his client as being insane and thus unable to appreciate the severity or criminality of her actions, stating: "I condemn her for being a murderess, that's what I do, but I say she's not responsible, because she's not all here!"

She committed acts of degradation that you wouldn't commit on a dog She has to be crazy, or she wouldn't have permitted that. You'll have to live with your conscience the rest of your life if you send an insane woman to the electric chair. How sadistic can a person get? The woman [Gertrude] is stark mad! Forrest Bowman began his closing argument in an openly critical manner as he attacked the decision of the prosecution to seek the death penalty for juveniles, stating: "I would like to have an hour of [the jury's] time to explain why year-olds and year-olds should not be put to death."

George Rice began his closing argument by decrying the fact Paula and the other defendants had been tried jointly. Sidestepping the multiple instances of testimony delivered at trial describing Paula and her mother as by far the most enthusiastic participants in Likens' physical abuse, Rice claimed the evidence presented against his client did not equate to her actual guilt of murder. He then ended his closing argument with a plea for the jury to return a verdict of not guilty on a girl who had "gone through the indignity of being tried in an open court". James Nedder began his closing argument in defense of Richard Hobbs by referring to the loss of Likens, stating: "She had a right to live. In my own heart I cannot remember a girl so much sinned against and abused. Nedder attempted to portray his client as a follower-type personality who had acted under the control of Gertrude Baniszewski, suggesting that had he not carved part of the obscene insult into Likens' abdomen at Gertrude's request, Hobbs could well have been a state's witness as opposed to Stephanie Baniszewski.

He then referred to Jenny's overall failure to notify authorities of her sister's abuse until she had already died, describing her as "a sister who could limp three-and-a-half miles to a park but couldn't take two or three steps out into New York Street to beg for help! Nedder ended his closing argument by requesting a verdict of not guilty, stating Hobbs was "guilty of immaturity and gross lack of judgement", but not of the crime of murder. Leroy New rebutted the defense counsels' closing arguments by promising to "speak through the mangled and shredded lips of Sylvia Likens. I see her wherever I look". Now, let's look at some of the responsibilities here.

Each one of [the] five defendants had first and foremost the responsibility to leave Sylvia Likens alone; we had the responsibility to bring all the evidence we could find that could explain this crime. Referring to the sentimental closing arguments made by various defense counsels regarding reasoning and motivation for their clients' actions, their attempts to divert responsibility to other defendants or participants, and their clients' collective failure to either help Likens or to notify authorities, New added: "All we hear is whining appeal, anything but blame where the blame belongs.

I think she did not believe these people would do this and continue to do it. New concluded his closing argument by emphasizing the defendants' unison in their collective mistreatment of Likens, before asking the jury to dismiss arguments made by various defense counsels regarding who may have actually inflicted the "fatal blow" to Likens' head, stating: "Every mark on that girl's body contributed directly to her death, and that was testimony. The subdural hematoma was the ultimate blow.

This is the most hideous thing Indiana has ever seen and, I hope, will ever see. Will we shy away from the most diabolical case to ever come before a court or jury? If you go below the death penalty in your verdicts in this case, you will lower the value of human life by that much for each defendant. The blood of this girl will forevermore be on their souls. The trial of the five defendants lasted 17 days before the jury retired to consider its verdict.

Upon hearing Judge Rabb pronounce the verdicts, Gertrude and her children burst into tears and attempted to console each other, as Hobbs and Hubbard remained impassive. On May 25, Gertrude and Paula Baniszewski were formally sentenced to life imprisonment. In September, the Indiana Supreme Court reversed the convictions of Gertrude and Paula Baniszewski on the basis that Judge Saul Isaac Rabb had denied repeatedly submitted motions by their defense counsel at their original trial, for both a change of venue and separate trials. The pair were retried in Over the course of the following 14 years, Gertrude Baniszewski became known as a model prisoner at the Indiana Women's Prison. She worked in the prison sewing shop [] and was known as somewhat of a "den mother" to younger female inmates, becoming known to some within the prison by the nickname "Mom".

By the time of Gertrude's ultimate parole in, she had changed her name to Nadine Van Fossan a combination of her middle name and maiden name, and described herself as a devout Christian. News of Gertrude Baniszewski's impending parole hearing created an uproar throughout Indiana. The members of two anti-crime groups also traveled to Indiana to oppose Baniszewski's potential parole, and to publicly support the Likens family. Members of both groups initiated a sidewalk picket campaign. Over the course of two months, these groups collected over 40, signatures from the citizens of Indiana, [] including signatures obtained from outraged citizens who were too young to contemporarily recollect the case.

All signatures gathered demanded that Gertrude Baniszewski remain incarcerated for the remainder of her life. Within her parole hearing, Baniszewski stated her wish that Likens' death could "be undone", [] although she minimized her responsibility for any of her actions, [] stating: "I'm not sure what role I had in [Likens' death], because I was on drugs. I never really knew her I take full responsibility for whatever happened to Sylvia. Taking Gertrude's good conduct in prison into account, the parole board marginally voted in favor of granting her parole. She was released from prison on December 4, Following her release from prison, Gertrude Baniszewski relocated to Iowa.

Reflecting upon the news of Gertrude Baniszewski's death and the issues raised pertaining to her sanity at both of her trials, John Dean, a former reporter for the Indianapolis Star who had provided extensive coverage of the case, would state in "I never thought she was insane. I thought she was a downtrodden, mean woman. In reference to Gertrude Baniszewski's actual motive for tormenting and ultimately murdering Likens, attorney Forrest Bowman opined in "She had a miserable life. What I think this was ultimately about was jealousy. Following her parole, Paula Baniszewski assumed a new identity. She was fired in when the school discovered her true identity.

## **Gertrude Baniszewski | Murderpedia, the encyclopedia of murderers**

ISBN StarFiles: The murder of Sylvia Likens. It has been the most enduring nightmare in Indianapolis True Crime history -- the Oct. Other crimes have involved a greater number of victims, often including children, but the villains in those stories were hardened criminals or madmen, and their acts of violence played out rapidly within a span of minutes or hours. In the aftermath of grief and anger good people could at least comprehend the chain of events that had just unfolded.

On the surface, the Likens murder is not much different from any number of heinous crimes. It was a Cinderella story without the happy ending -- a teenage girl left under the care of a strict authoritarian whose idea of discipline is physical abuse that escalates until the abuse victim dies. If that was the extent of it, this case would likely have been lost to history long ago like so many other long-forgotten murders. This case was somehow more disturbing than other crimes, perhaps because: For weeks, even months, the torture of Sylvia Likens was casual entertainment, something to do in the afternoon before dinner and favorite TV shows. At least a dozen children participated or at least watched, and none felt sufficiently disturbed to tell their own parents.

None pushed to be sure she was safe. Neither said a word because, as Jenny would later explain, they thought it would only make things worse. Neither could conceive of the possibility that authorities would move to protect them, remove them from the house or arrest their tormentors. Arrests did come, but only after it was over. On Oct. New York St. Baniszewski told them the girl had been attacked by a gang of boys and she even produced a note written in Sylvia's own hand that seemed to confirm that story. But the cops could tell by the condition of the victim that this had been no single incident. Sylvia's body was malnourished and covered with sores, burns and bruises, many of them old. She had been branded in one spot by a hot metal object, and the words "I am a prostitute" had been etched on her stomach. Sylvia came from a large, poor family from southern Boone County, just northwest of Indianapolis. Her father, Lester Likens, had only an eighth grade education and worked a lot of different jobs to make a living.

He'd had a laundry route, worked in factories and had even owned a small restaurant, though unsuccessfully. He had also traveled with carnivals

selling food from a concession cart, and it was to this work to which he and his wife decided to return in the summer of That meant finding someone to watch four of their children. The oldest, Diana, was grown and married. The two boys, Danny and Bennie, were placed with their grandparents, and that left the girls, Sylvia and Jenny. Jenny was shy, insecure and limped from childhood polio. Sylvia was outwardly more confident and went by the nickname "Cookie". She was pretty, but always kept her mouth closed when she smiled because she had a missing front tooth. Gertrude was already caring for seven of her own children -- Paula, 17, John, 12, Stephanie, 15, Marie, 11, Shirley, 10, and James and Dennis, 18 months. The six oldest children all had the last name Baniszewski because their father was Gertrude's ex-husband John Baniszewski.

The youngest child, Dennis, had the last name of his father, Dennis Wright. Gertrude said he was in Germany serving in the Army. From the beginning there was a clash between Sylvia and Gertrude's year-old daughter, Paula, and this was the seed of what grew in that house during the months of July through October. Then one day the money order from Sylvia's parents didn't show up on the day Gertrude was expecting it. Gertrude was frail and underweight, but she had two weapons she used for corporal punishment -- a fraternity-style paddle and a thick leather belt left behind by her ex-husband, John Baniszewski -- an Indianapolis police officer.

Gertrude began using the paddle on Sylvia and Jenny for various offenses such as exchanging soft drink bottles for change at a nearby grocery. When she suspected Sylvia of stealing she used matches to burn the girl's fingers. Sometimes Gertrude felt too weak from her asthma to discipline the girls properly so year-old Paula helped. Neighborhood children began to crowd the home to participate in the torture. The children took turns practicing their judo on Sylvia, hurling her against a wall. Some began kicking and beating her. Others extinguished their cigarettes on her skin. As Gertrude and a gang of teen-agers watched, Sylvia was forced to undress in the living room and insert an empty Coke bottle into her vagina. After the beatings, Sylvia was forced into a scalding hot bath so she would be "cleansed of her sins."

Near the end, Sylvia was no longer permitted to leave the house. She was thrown down the cellar stairs and locked in, given crackers for food and refused the right to use a bathroom. Gertrude Baniszewski announced to her children that Sylvia was a "prostitute, and she's proud of it; so we'll just put it on her stomach. Richard Hobbs, a neighbor boy, finished the etching. When Baniszewski realized Sylvia might be dying, she forced her to write a note saying a gang of boys beat her. The plan was to blindfold her and dump her in nearby woods with the note. Sylvia tried to escape but Gertrude and one of the boys stopped her, beating her again and throwing her back into the basement.

Sylvia Likens died Oct. Cause of death was determined to be brain swelling, internal hemorrhaging of the brain and shock induced by Sylvia's extensive skin damage. Sylvia also suffered from extreme malnutrition. She was buried at Oak Hill Cemetery in Lebanon. The Baniszewski trial - May At her trial the following year, Baniszewski denied any knowledge of the torture, claiming the children must have done it all. She entered pleas of not guilty and not guilty by reason of insanity. On May 19, , a jury found Baniszewski guilty of first-degree murder while Paula Baniszewski was found guilty of second-degree murder.

Hobbs, along with Baniszewski's son John and another neighborhood boy, Coy Hubbard, were convicted of manslaughter. The boys were sentenced to two-toy year terms at the Indiana State Reformatory in Pendleton. In , the Indiana Supreme Court granted Gertrude and Paula Baniszewski a new trial due to "prejudicial atmosphere", but Gertrude was again convicted of first-degree murder on Aug. Paula pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of voluntary manslaughter and served about two years in prison. The three boys were released on parole for good behavior in , after serving about two years each of their sentences. In September , Gertrude Baniszewski was released on parole. She changed her name to Nadine Van Fossan and moved to Iowa where she lived in obscurity until her death from lung cancer on June 16, Paula married and moved to a farm in Iowa. John became a lay minister in Texas and counseled children of divorced parents. Hobbs died of cancer at the age of 21, four years after being released from the reformatory.

Hubbard has had several brushes with the law. Lester and Betty Likens divorced. Betty remarried and died in at age Jenny Likens Wade died in at age When she was convicted of first-degree murder in , the case was called "the single worst crime perpetrated against an individual in Indiana's history". In , Baniszewski witnessed her father's death from a sudden heart attack. Five years later, she dropped out of school at the age of 16 to marry year-old deputy John Baniszewski, with whom she had six children. Although John Baniszewski had a volatile temper, the two stayed together for 10 years before divorcing. Gertrude, then 34, moved in with a year-old Dennis Lee Wright, who abused her. She had one child, Dennis, but after his birth Wright abandoned Gertrude and disappeared. The Likens sisters attended high school and social functions with the Baniszewski children, as well as church with Gertrude Baniszewski on Sunday.

Shortly thereafter the girls were beaten for having candy that Baniszewski accused them of stealing. Thus began a regular pattern of child abuse. In August , Baniszewski began to verbally and physically abuse Sylvia Likens, allowing her older children to beat her, and push her down stairs. Baniszewski also accused Likens of being a prostitute, and delivered "sermons" about the filthiness of prostitutes and women in general. After the Likens sisters reportedly accused Baniszewski's daughters Paula and Stephanie of being prostitutes, Stephanie Baniszewski's boyfriend, Coy Hubbard, and several other classmates and local boys were brought in to assist Baniszewski in beating Sylvia Likens. Baniszewski even forced Jenny Likens to hit her sister. Likens became incontinent; as a result, Baniszewski locked her in the basement. Baniszewski then began a bathing regime to "cleanse" Sylvia, involving dousing her with scalding water and rubbing salt into the burns.

She was often kept naked and rarely fed. At times, Baniszewski and her twelve-year-old son John Jr. Sometime around this period, Jenny Likens managed to contact her older sister, Diana Likens, outlining the horrors that the two sisters were experiencing, and asking Diana to contact the police. Diana Likens ignored the letter, believing that Jenny was simply displeased with being punished and that she was making up stories so that she could come live with her. Shortly after this, Diana Likens came by to visit her sisters, but Baniszewski refused to allow her into the home. The elder Likens then hid nearby the house until she spotted Jenny outside, and then approached her. Jenny Likens told her older sister that she was not allowed to talk to her and then ran away. Concerned, Diana Likens contacted social services and informed them that Baniszewski told her that Sylvia Likens had been kicked out of the house for being physically unclean and a prostitute, and that she had since run away.

When a social worker showed up at the Baniszewski home inquiring about Sylvia, Baniszewski told Jenny Likens to lie to the social worker about Sylvia's whereabouts, threatening her that if she did not, she would get the same treatment as Sylvia. Terrified of what Baniszewski might do to her

if she told the truth, Jenny told the social worker that Sylvia had indeed run away. The social worker returned to her office, where she filed a report stating that no more follow-up visits needed to be made to the Baniszewski home. On October 21, Baniszewski instructed John Jr. The next morning, Baniszewski, enraged that Sylvia had wet the bed, again forced her to insert a Coke bottle into her vagina, before beginning to carve the phrase "I'm a prostitute and proud of it" into her abdomen with a hot sewing needle.

When Baniszewski was unable to finish the branding, she enlisted Ricky Hobbs to finish. The next day, Baniszewski woke Likens, and then dictated a letter to her, intended to look like a runaway letter to her parents. After Likens finished the letter, Baniszewski began formulating a plan to have John Jr. When Sylvia overheard this, she ran down the stairs attempting to escape, but was stopped by Baniszewski as Likens stepped out the front door and onto the porch. Baniszewski then pulled Sylvia back inside the house and again threw her down the basement steps and kept her there.

On October 24, Baniszewski came down to the basement and attempted to bludgeon Likens with a wooden paddle, but missed her and accidentally struck herself. Coy Hubbard stepped in and viciously beat Likens on the head repeatedly with a broomstick and left her unconscious on the basement floor. In the early evening of Tuesday October 26, Baniszewski told the children she would give Likens a bath, in lukewarm water this time. Stephanie Baniszewski and Richard Hobbs brought Likens upstairs and placed her in the bathtub fully clothed; as they took her out shortly thereafter and laid her on a bare mattress on the floor, they realized she was not breathing. Stephanie Baniszewski frantically attempted to resuscitate her, but by then, Likens was already dead.

Stephanie Baniszewski, panic-stricken, told Hobbs to call the police. When they arrived, Gertrude Baniszewski gave them the letter she'd made Likens write. In the midst of the commotion, Jenny Likens whispered to one of the policemen, "Get me out of here and I'll tell you everything". An examination and autopsy of Sylvia Likens' body revealed numerous burns, bruising, muscle and nerve damage. Her vaginal cavity was nearly swollen shut, although an examination of the canal determined that her hymen was still intact, discrediting Baniszewski's assertions that Sylvia was a prostitute and her insistence that she was pregnant.

The official cause of death was brain swelling, internal hemorrhaging of the brain, and shock from severe and prolonged damage to her skin. Baniszewski was found guilty of murder in the first degree. She was sentenced to life imprisonment. Baniszewski appealed and was granted a new trial by the Indiana Supreme Court largely for reasons of a prejudicial atmosphere due to heavy news media publicity before and during the trial. A new trial was held in , and Baniszewski was again found guilty and sentenced to life in prison. Over the course of the next 14 years, Baniszewski became a model prisoner, working in the sewing shop and becoming a den-mother to younger female inmates; by the time she came up for parole in , she was known by the prison nickname "Mom". You can't get married now. What are you going to do? That night, Sylvia confided to her sister: "Jenny, I know you don't want me to die, but I'm going to die.

I can tell it. The following day, Gertrude Baniszewski woke Likens, then forced her to write a letter as she dictated the contents, which were intended to mislead her parents into believing their daughter had run away from the Baniszewski residence. The content of this letter was intended to frame a group of anonymous local boys for extensively abusing and mutilating Likens after she had initially agreed to engage in sexual relations with them before they inflicted the extreme abuse and torture upon her body. After she had finished writing the letter, Likens was then again tied to the stair railing and offered crackers to eat, although she refused them, saying: "Give it to the dog, I don't want it.

On October 25, Likens attempted to escape from the basement after overhearing a conversation between Gertrude and John Baniszewski Jr. Likens was then given toast to eat but was unable to consume the food due to her extreme state of dehydration. Gertrude forced the toast into her mouth before repeatedly striking her face with a curtain rod until sections of the instrument were bent into right angles. Coy Hubbard then took the curtain rod from Gertrude and struck Likens one further time, rendering her unconscious. Gertrude then dragged Likens into the basement. That evening, Likens desperately attempted to alert neighbors by screaming for help and hitting the walls of the basement with a spade. One immediate neighbor of the Baniszewskis would later inform police she had heard the desperate commotion and that she had identified the source as emanating from the basement of East New York Street, but that as the noise had suddenly ceased at approximately a.

By the morning of October 26, Likens was unable to either speak intelligibly or correctly coordinate the movement of her limbs. Gertrude did move Likens into the kitchen and, having propped her back against a wall, attempted to feed her a doughnut and a glass of milk, although she threw Likens to the floor in frustration when Likens was unable to correctly move the glass of milk to her lips. She was then returned to the basement. Shortly thereafter, Likens became delirious , repeatedly moaning and mumbling. When Paula asked her to recite the English alphabet, Likens was unable to recite anything beyond the first four letters or to raise herself off the ground.

In response, Paula verbally threatened her to either stand up or she would inflict a long jump upon her. Gertrude then ordered Likens, who had defecated, to clean herself. That afternoon, several of Likens' other tormentors gathered in the basement. Likens jerkily moved her arms in an apparent attempt to point at the faces of the tormentors she could recognize, making statements such as, "You're Ricky" and "You're Gertie" before Gertrude tersely shouted, "Shut up! You know who I am! Your front tooth was knocked out when you were seven. In an attempt to wash Likens, a laughing John Baniszewski Jr. In response to this effort, Gertrude stamped upon Likens' head before standing and staring at her for several moments.

Shortly after p. He slipped on the wet basement stairs and fell heavily to the floor of the basement to be confronted with the sight of Stephanie crying and cuddling Likens' emaciated and lacerated body after she had been ordered by her mother to clean Sylvia. Stephanie and Richard then decided to give Likens a warm, soapy bath and dress her in new clothes. They then laid her upon a mattress in one of the bedrooms [90] as Sylvia muttered her final wish that her "daddy was here" and that Stephanie would take her home. Stephanie then turned to her younger sister, Shirley, exclaiming, "Oh! She'll be alright! When Stephanie realized that Likens was not breathing, she attempted to apply mouth-to-mouth resuscitation as Gertrude repeatedly shouted to the children in the house that Likens was faking her death. Gertrude Baniszewski initially beat Likens' corpse with a book, shouting "Faker! When police arrived at her address at approximately p.

She also claimed she had been "doctoring" the child for an hour or more prior to her death, having applied rubbing alcohol to Likens' wounds in a futile attempt at first aid before she had died. She added that Likens had earlier run away from her home with several teenage boys before returning to her house earlier that afternoon, bare-breasted and clutching the note. Clutching a Bible, [95] Paula Baniszewski, having stated to all present in the household that Likens' death was "meant to happen," then glanced in Jenny's direction and calmly stated: "If you want to live with us, Jenny, we'll treat you like our own sister.

As previously instructed by Gertrude, Jenny Likens recited the rehearsed version of events leading to Likens' death to police, before whispering to the officers: "You get me out of here and I'll tell you everything. Baniszewski on suspicion of Likens' murder within hours of the discovery of her body. The same day, Coy Hubbard and Richard Hobbs were also arrested and charged with the same offenses. All were held without bail pending trial. Initially, Gertrude denied any involvement in Likens' death, although by October 27 she had confessed to having known "the kids," particularly her daughter Paula and Coy Hubbard, had physically and emotionally abused Likens, stating: "Paula did most of the damage," and "Coy Hubbard did a lot of the beating. She became evasive when one officer stated the likely reasons Likens had become incontinent were her mental distress and injury to her kidneys. Lacking any remorse, Paula signed a statement admitting to having repeatedly beaten Likens about the backside with her mother's police belt, once breaking her wrist on Likens' jaw, and inflicting other acts of brutality, including pushing her down the stairs into the basement "two or three times," and inflicting a black eye.

John Jr. He admitted to having burned Sylvia with matches on several occasions, adding that his mother had repeatedly burned the child with cigarettes. The autopsy of Likens' body revealed she had suffered in excess of separate wounds across her entire body, in addition to being extremely emaciated at the time of her death. Her injuries included burns, severe bruising, and extensive muscle and nerve damage. Her vaginal cavity was almost swollen shut, although an examination of the canal determined that her hymen was still intact, discrediting Gertrude's assertions Likens had been three months pregnant, [ ] a prostitute, and promiscuous. Moreover, all of Likens' fingernails were broken backwards [n 8] and most of the external layers of skin upon the child's face, breasts, neck, and right knee had peeled or receded. In her death throes, Likens had evidently bitten through her lips, partially severing sections of them from her face.

The official cause of Likens' death was listed by coroner Dr. Arthur Keibel as a subdural hematoma due to her receiving a severe blow to her right temple. Rigor mortis had fully developed at the time of the discovery of her body, indicating Likens may have been deceased for up to eight hours before she was found, although Dr. Keibel did note Likens had been recently bathed — possibly after death — and that this act could have hastened the loss of body temperature and thus speeding the onset of rigor mortis. The service was officiated by the Reverend Louis Gibson, with more than mourners in attendance.

Likens' gray casket remained open throughout the ceremony, with a portrait of her taken prior to July adorning her coffin. In his eulogy, the Reverend Gibson stated: "We all have our time of passing, but we won't suffer like our little sister suffered during the last days of her life. Following this service, Likens' casket was placed by pallbearers in a hearse and driven to the Oak Hill Cemetery to be interred. This hearse was one of a vehicle procession to drive to the cemetery for Likens' burial. On December 30, , the Marion County grand jury returned first-degree murder indictments against Gertrude Baniszewski and two of her three oldest children, Paula and John Baniszewski Jr. Also indicted were Richard Hobbs and Coy Hubbard. All were charged with having repeatedly struck, beaten, kicked, and otherwise inflicting a culmination of fatal injuries to Sylvia Likens with premeditated malice.

Three weeks prior to the filing of the indictments against the five defendants, Stephanie Baniszewski had been released from custody upon a writ of habeas corpus bond, with her attorney successfully contending the state had insufficient evidence to support any murder or culmination of fatal injuries charges against her. Stephanie waived her immunity from any potential impending prosecution [ ] while agreeing to testify against her family and any other individuals charged with abusing and murdering Likens.

At a formal pretrial hearing held on March 16, , several psychiatrists testified before Judge Saul Isaac Rabb as to their conclusions regarding psychiatric evaluations they had conducted upon three individuals indicted upon Likens' murder. These experts testified that all three were mentally competent to stand trial. Initial jury selection began on this date and continued for several days. The prosecution consisted of Leroy K. New and Marjorie Wessner, who announced their intention to seek the death penalty for all five defendants on April They also successfully argued before Judge Rabb that all the defendants should be tried together as they were ultimately charged with acting "in concert" [ ] in their collective crimes against Likens and that as such, if each were tried separately, neither judge nor jury could hear testimony relating to a "total picture" of the accumulation of offenses committed.

Each prospective juror was questioned by counsels for both prosecution and defense in relation to their opinions regarding capital punishment being a just penalty for first-degree murder and whether a mother was actually responsible for the "deportment of her children. Nedder; John Baniszewski Jr. One of the first witnesses to testify on behalf of the prosecution was deputy coroner Charles Ellis, who testified on April 29 as to the intense pain Likens had suffered, stating that her fingernails were broken backwards, numerous deep cuts and punctures covered much of her body, and that her lips were "essentially in shreds" due to her having repeatedly bitten and chewed upon them.

Although, he emphasized that aside from the extensive swelling inside and around her genitalia, [ ] Likens' body bore no evidence of direct sexual molestation. On May 2 and 3, Jenny Likens testified against all five defendants, stating that each had repeatedly and extensively, both physically and emotionally, abused her sister, adding that Likens had done nothing to provoke the assaults and that there had been no truth in either the rumors she had been falsely accused of spreading or the slurs each had made against Likens' character. During her testimony, Jenny stated the abuse her sister and, to a much lesser degree, she herself had endured began approximately two weeks after they had begun to live in the Baniszewski household, and that as the abuse her sister was forced to endure escalated, Likens had occasionally been unable to produce tears due to her acute state of dehydration.

Jenny burst into tears as she recalled how, just days before Likens died, she had said to her: "Jenny, I know you don't want me to die, but I am going to die. I can tell it! Sections of Jenny Likens' testimony were later corroborated by that of Randy Lepper, who stated he had once witnessed

Likens crying, but that she had shed no actual tears. Lepper also testified to having witnessed Stephanie strike Likens "real hard" after her mother had ordered her to remove her clothes in his presence.

On May 10, a Baptist Minister named Roy Julian testified to having known a teenage girl was being abused in the Baniszewski household, although he had failed to report this information to authorities as, having been informed by Gertrude that Likens had "made advances to men for money," he had believed the girl was being punished for soliciting. The same day, year-old Judy Duke also testified, admitting to having witnessed Likens once endure salt being rubbed into sores upon her legs until she screamed. The following day, Gertrude Baniszewski testified in her own defense. She denied any responsibility for Likens' prolonged abuse, torment, and ultimate death, claiming her children, and other children within her neighborhood must have committed the acts within her home, which she described as being "such a madhouse."

In response to questioning relating to whether she had physically abused the Likens sisters, Gertrude claimed that although she had "started to spank" Likens on one occasion, she was emotionally unable to finish doing so, and had not hit the child on any further occasions. Two days later, Richard Hobbs testified in his own defense, describing how Gertrude had called Likens to the kitchen on October 23 and stated to her: "You have branded my children so now I'm going to brand you. Although Hobbs testified this act of branding had brought blood to the surface of Likens' flesh and that Likens had begged him to stop, he remained adamant the section of branding he had inflicted had been light.

When Marie Baniszewski was called to the stand as a witness for the defense, she broke down and admitted that she had heated the needle which Hobbs had used to brand Likens' abdomen. Marie also testified as to her mother's indifference to Likens' evident distress in relation to the physical and mental abuse she had increasingly suffered, with her mother's full knowledge, stating that on one occasion, Gertrude had sat upon a chair and crocheted as she watched a neighborhood girl named Anna Siscoe attack Likens. Sargent testified Paula had finished her boasting by stating, "I tried to kill her!" On May 16, a court-appointed doctor named Dwight Schuster testified on behalf of the prosecution. When questioned by Leroy New as to the exhaustive interviews and assessments he had conducted with Gertrude, Dr. Schuster stated that she had been evasive and uncooperative. Schuster testified as to his belief that Gertrude was sane and fully in control of her actions, adding that she had been sane in October, and remained sane to this date.

Schuster was subjected to over two hours of intense cross-examination by Gertrude's lawyer, William Erbecker, although he remained steadfast that Gertrude was not and had never been psychotic. Deputy Prosecutor Marjorie Wessner delivered the state's closing argument before the jury on behalf of the prosecution. As each defendant, except Richard Hobbs, remained impassive, Wessner recounted the continuous mistreatment Likens had endured before her death, emphasizing that at no point had Likens either provoked any of the defendants, or received any medical care beyond occasionally having margarine rubbed into scalded sections of her face and body. In reference to the premeditated nature of Likens' death, Wessner pointed the jury's attention to the notes Gertrude had forced Likens to write on October 24, stating: "[Gertrude] knew on [October 24] she was going to hold these notes until she and the rest of the defendants had completed the murder of Sylvia.

William Erbecker was the first defense attorney to deliver his closing argument before the jury; he attempted to portray his client as being insane and thus unable to appreciate the severity or criminality of her actions, stating: "I condemn her for being a murderess, that's what I do, but I say she's not responsible, because she's not all here! She committed acts of degradation that you wouldn't commit on a dog She has to be crazy, or she wouldn't have permitted that. You'll have to live with your conscience the rest of your life if you send an insane woman to the electric chair. How sadistic can a person get? The woman [Gertrude] is stark mad! Forrest Bowman began his closing argument in an openly critical manner as he attacked the decision of the prosecution to seek the death penalty for juveniles, stating: "I would like to have an hour of [the jury's] time to explain why year-olds and year-olds should not be put to death.

George Rice began his closing argument by decrying the fact Paula and the other defendants had been tried jointly. Sidestepping the multiple instances of testimony delivered at trial describing Paula and her mother as by far the most enthusiastic participants in Likens' physical abuse, Rice claimed the evidence presented against his client did not equate to her actual guilt of murder. He then ended his closing argument with a plea for the jury to return a verdict of not guilty on a girl who had "gone through the indignity of being tried in an open court". James Nedder began his closing argument in defense of Richard Hobbs by referring to the loss of Likens, stating: "She had a right to live.

In my own heart I cannot remember a girl so much sinned against and abused. Nedder attempted to portray his client as a follower-type personality who had acted under the control of Gertrude Baniszewski, suggesting that had he not carved part of the obscene insult into Likens' abdomen at Gertrude's request, Hobbs could well have been a state's witness as opposed to Stephanie Baniszewski. He then referred to Jenny's overall failure to notify authorities of her sister's abuse until she had already died, describing her as "a sister who could limp three-and-a-half miles to a park but couldn't take two or three steps out into New York Street to beg for help!

Nedder ended his closing argument by requesting a verdict of not guilty, stating Hobbs was "guilty of immaturity and gross lack of judgement", but not of the crime of murder. Leroy New rebutted the defense counsels' closing arguments by promising to "speak through the mangled and shredded lips of Sylvia Likens. I see her wherever I look". Now, let's look at some of the responsibilities here. Each one of [the] five defendants had first and foremost the responsibility to leave Sylvia Likens alone; we had the responsibility to bring all the evidence we could find that could explain this crime. Referring to the sentimental closing arguments made by various defense counsels regarding reasoning and motivation for their clients' actions, their attempts to divert responsibility to other defendants or participants, and their clients' collective failure to either help Likens or to notify authorities, New added: "All we hear is whining appeal, anything but blame where the blame belongs.

I think she did not believe these people would do this and continue to do it. New concluded his closing argument by emphasizing the defendants' unison in their collective mistreatment of Likens, before asking the jury to dismiss arguments made by various defense counsels regarding who may have actually inflicted the "fatal blow" to Likens' head, stating: "Every mark on that girl's body contributed directly to her death, and that was testimony.

The subdural hematoma was the ultimate blow. This is the most hideous thing Indiana has ever seen and, I hope, will ever see. Will we shy away

from the most diabolical case to ever come before a court or jury? If you go below the death penalty in your verdicts in this case, you will lower the value of human life by that much for each defendant. The blood of this girl will forevermore be on their souls. The trial of the five defendants lasted 17 days before the jury retired to consider its verdict. Upon hearing Judge Rabb pronounce the verdicts, Gertrude and her children burst into tears and attempted to console each other, as Hobbs and Hubbard remained impassive. On May 25, Gertrude and Paula Baniszewski were formally sentenced to life imprisonment. In September, the Indiana Supreme Court reversed the convictions of Gertrude and Paula Baniszewski on the basis that Judge Saul Isaac Rabb had denied repeatedly submitted motions by their defense counsel at their original trial, for both a change of venue and separate trials.

The pair were retried in Over the course of the following 14 years, Gertrude Baniszewski became known as a model prisoner at the Indiana Women's Prison. She worked in the prison sewing shop [] and was known as somewhat of a "den mother" to younger female inmates, becoming known to some within the prison by the nickname "Mom". By the time of Gertrude's ultimate parole in , she had changed her name to Nadine Van Fossan a combination of her middle name and maiden name , and described herself as a devout Christian. News of Gertrude Baniszewski's impending parole hearing created an uproar throughout Indiana. The members of two anti-crime groups also traveled to Indiana to oppose Baniszewski's potential parole, and to publicly support the Likens family. Members of both groups initiated a sidewalk picket campaign. Over the course of two months, these groups collected over 40, signatures from the citizens of Indiana, [] including signatures obtained from outraged citizens who were too young to contemporarily recollect the case.

All signatures gathered demanded that Gertrude Baniszewski remain incarcerated for the remainder of her life. Within her parole hearing, Baniszewski stated her wish that Likens' death could "be undone", [] although she minimized her responsibility for any of her actions, [] stating: "I'm not sure what role I had in [Likens' death], because I was on drugs. I never really knew her Mickenzie Jensen rated it liked it Sep 20, Amy D. Jenkins rated it it was amazing Mar 19, Jan Schweikert rated it did not like it Jul 29, Trudy Yeske rated it liked it Mar 30, Cindy Moscato rated it liked it Nov 11, Cleo Masur rated it liked it Dec 22, Olivia rated it it was ok May 29, Misty Collard varnedore rated it did not like it Oct 19, Leanna J Johnson rated it liked it Aug 15, Donald S.

DaSilva rated it did not like it Mar 20, Apr 17, Bettye McKee rated it really liked it Shelves: true-crime-books. A most horrible torture of a year-old girl When Sylvia and Jenny Likens's father left them in the care of Gertrude Baniszewski, it would be the biggest mistake of his life. Gertrude , her children, and neighborhood boys, beat, burned, starved, kicked and otherwise tortured Sylvia until she died. In my opinion, none of Sylvia's torturers was sufficiently punished. I think Gertrude Baniszewski should have died in a prison cell. Victoria jean stanyer rated it it was amazing Sep 25, Michelle rated it it was amazing Oct 02, Jessie Hunter rated it liked it Dec 17, Peggy Smith marked it as to-read Mar 18, Sharon marked it as to-read Mar 22, Melissa Grayce marked it as to-read Mar 25, Debra added it Mar 27, Tracey Lalena Tabers added it Apr 01, Ms Tammy Louise Broyles added it Apr 09, Rhonda Bragg added it Apr 25, Kelli Santistevan marked it as to-read May 18, Anna Guerrero is currently reading it May 18, Teresa Leombruno added it May 19, Lisa Fedel is currently reading it Jun 20, Jace marked it as to-read Jul 05, Marti added it Jul 19,

## **The Most Evil Woman Ever : The True Story of Gertrude Baniszewski by Olivia Watson**

She became pregnant by him twice, suffering one miscarriage possibly as the result of an assault by Wright and giving birth to one child. This child-Dennis Jr. Shortly after Dennis Jr. She was left essentially destitute, as Wright had been supporting her financially; she was now forced to support herself and 7 children on occasional child support payments from the unreliable John Baniszewski, and by performing odd jobs around town such as babysitting and doing other people's laundry for them. Financial problems were quickly exacerbated when Baniszewski discovered that her 17 year old daughter, Paula, was 3 months pregnant after a fling with a middle aged, married man.

Around this time Baniszewski's health declined considerably; she was chronically ill with a number of unidentified illnesses, ceased practicing proper hygiene, and barely ate; eventually, these factors began to affect her outward appearance, resulting in a receded hairline, sunken eyes, and an overall skeletal appearance. Baniszewski began to present herself as "Mrs. Wright", claiming that she had in fact married Dennis before he abandoned her, which allowed her to keep up a veneer of respectability. In July, Paula Baniszewski met up with a friend of hers, Darlene McGuire, who introduced her to two new neighborhood girls, Sylvia Marie Likens, 16, and Sylvia's younger sister, Jenny, 15, who was required to walk with braces due to polio.

Paula took the girls back home to East New York Street, where they drank soda and listened to records. The Likens' girls mother, Betty, was at the time in county jail after having been arrested for shoplifting, which left Sylvia to care for her sister; Betty had abandoned Sylvia's father, Lester, and effectively kidnapped their two daughters. When Paula heard of the girls' circumstances, she offered to let Sylvia and Jenny spend the night. The next day, Lester Likens arrived in town, having tracked down his wife.

He ran into McGuire, who recognized the description Lester gave of his daughters, and she directed him to the Baniszewski home. When Lester Likens arrived, Baniszewski introduced herself as "Mrs. The two struck up a conversation, over the course of which the idea came up that Gertrude might take in Sylvia and Jenny as boarders; he had spoken with his wife at the county jail, where they had reconciled and agreed to travel the United States carnival circuit as carnies. Lester did not inspect the home before leaving; had he have done so, he would have discovered that Gertrude's home had no stove or microwave; that there were only enough beds for half the people in the house; that the only things Gertrude kept in her pantry were bread and crackers; that most of the surfaces in the home were caked with thick layers of dirt; and only enough plates and eating utensils for 3 people.

The first week of Sylvia and Jenny's lives at the Baniszewski home went relatively well. They attended high school and attended teenage social functions with the Baniszewski children as well as church with Gertrude Baniszewski on Sunday. Shortly thereafter, Lester and Betty Likens came into town to check on the girls; neither of them made any reference to the beatings, presumably under threat from Baniszewski. The next week, Sylvia and Jenny went through the neighborhood garbage, collecting old Coca Cola bottles to sell in order to get money for candy. When they

came home with the candy, Baniszewski accused them of stealing; when Sylvia explained how she had gotten the candy, Baniszewski accused her of lying and made her bend over her bed as before while she beat her across the buttocks with a paddle. Shortly thereafter, the Baniszewski children came to Gertrude Baniszewski after a church social and told her that they were disgusted with the amount of food they had seen Sylvia eating.

Baniszewski told Sylvia that she was angry that Sylvia would do something to ruin her physical appearance, and forced the girl to eat a hot dog piled with condiments; when Sylvia vomited, Baniszewski forced her to scoop the vomit up and devour it. Soon afterwards, Lester and Betty Likens again came into town to check on the girls; per Baniszewski's instructions, Sylvia made no reference to the vomit eating incident. The incident which appears to have either precipitated, triggered, or coincided with the sharp decline of Baniszewski's mental stability occurred in August of when she overheard Sylvia remark that she had once allowed a boy to feel her up.

Baniszewski inexplicably burst into a fit of obscenities, accused Sylvia of being a prostitute, and informed the rest of the house that Sylvia was pregnant because she had let a boy touch her vagina. Baniszewski then attacked Sylvia, repeatedly kicking her in the crotch. When Sylvia attempted to sit down afterwards, Paula threw her out of the chair and informed her, "You ain't fit to sit in chairs. From there on, Baniszewski only allowed Sylvia to sit in a chair with permission. Around this time, Baniszewski also began allowing her older children to use Sylvia as a sort of living "play thing", with the "games" ranging from beatings to being pushed down the stairs.

Why Sylvia's story so enraged Baniszewski is still uncertain. It has been theorized that she saw in Sylvia the beauty and opportunity for happiness that had long ago escaped her, and so encouraged and participated in Sylvia's degradation and torture as an act of self loathing. Others have theorized that Baniszewski's hard life and current living conditions resulted in a mental break. Still others have theorized that the violence against Likens was an extreme form of domestic abuse, in which Baniszewski directed her rage onto Sylvia. Whatever the case, Baniszewski manifested this rage by justifying her attacks by accusing Likens of being a prostitute, and delivering bizarre "sermons" to her children and Sylvia about the filthiness of prostitutes and women in general.

The day after Baniszewski kicked Sylvia in the crotch, according to Jenny, as an act of vengeance, Sylvia and Jenny told their classmates that they had seen Paula and Stephanie Baniszewski's second oldest daughter having sex with boys in exchange for money. When Stephanie's fifteen-year-old boyfriend, Coy Hubbard, discovered what Sylvia and Jenny had said, he came to the Baniszewski home and beat Sylvia.

From then on, Hubbard, encouraged by Baniszewski, made frequent visits to the Baniszewski home, during which she would instruct the boy to practice his judo on Sylvia. Also around this time, Baniszewski got Sylvia's best friend, a thirteen year old named Anna Sisco, alone long enough to convince her that Sylvia had been telling boys at school that Anna's mother was a whore. When Baniszewski took Anna to see Sylvia, she directed Anna in a violent attack on the girl.

Soon after, Baniszewski told one of Paula's friends, a girl named Judy Duke, that Sylvia had been spreading rumors about her mother, and pitted the girls against each other in a fist-fight. During the fight, Baniszewski instructed Jenny to punch Sylvia. When Jenny refused, Gertrude began to beat her in the face with her fists, until Jenny finally agreed to punch Sylvia. In August of , the vacant house next door to the Baniszewski residence was purchased by a middle-aged couple named Phyllis and Raymond Vermillion.

Phyllis, seeing the number of children Baniszewski cared for, believed that Baniszewski would make a good babysitter for her two young children, and that she would also be helping Baniszewski out by paying her for her services. The Vermillions arranged a backyard barbecue so that the two families could get to know one another. During the course of the barbecue, Phyllis noticed Sylvia wandering around the yard with a pronounced black eye; Paula proudly announced to Phyllis that she was the one who had given it to her.

Then, under Baniszewski's supervision, Paula approached Sylvia with a glass of steaming water and threw it in Sylvia's face. Neither of the Vermillions reported this incident to the authorities. Two months later, Phyllis went to the Baniszewski home to borrow something. Over the course of the few minutes she was there, she noticed Sylvia wandering around as in a daze with swollen lips and a black eye that had swollen shut.

To demonstrate how this had happened, Paula took her belt off and began to beat Sylvia with it in front of Phyllis. Phyllis again neglected to report anything to the authorities. Around the time that Phyllis Vermillion witnessed Paula beat Sylvia, Sylvia came home from school and told Baniszewski that she needed a sweat suit for gym class. When Baniszewski told Sylvia that they could not afford one, Sylvia stole one from the school.

Baniszewski questioned Sylvia about her new gym outfit, eventually coercing Sylvia into confession. Baniszewski inexplicably segued from the topic of Sylvia stealing into the topic of Sylvia being a prostitute, and threw Sylvia onto the ground, where she repeatedly kicked her in the crotch before once more returning to the topic of theft; to "cure" Sylvia of her "sticky fingers," Baniszewski burned the tips of each of Sylvia's fingers with a lit cigarette. Afterwards, she made Sylvia bend over while she whipped her with a belt. After this incident, the smokers in the Baniszewski home began arbitrarily putting their cigarettes out on Sylvia's body as a reminder for her not to steal. Sometime later, Likens went out again to sell old soda bottles for money. When she returned home, Baniszewski accused her of prostitution. Baniszewski took her into the living room of her home and forced Sylvia to strip naked in front of her sons and several neighborhood boys, on the threat of beating Jenny.

Once Sylvia was fully naked, Baniszewski handed her a glass Coca Cola bottle, and forced Sylvia to masturbate with it for the boys. Following the Coke bottle incident, Sylvia became incontinent; as a result, Baniszewski decided that she was no longer fit to live with humans, and locked her in the basement. The lack of a toilet in the basement forced Sylvia to defecate and urinate on the floor. When Baniszewski saw this, she began a "bathing regime" to "cleanse" Sylvia, whom she began calling "dirty girl. The "regime" consisted of filling Gertrude's claw-footed bathtub with scalding water, binding Sylvia's wrists and ankles, and then dunking Sylvia into it. The regime was administered arbitrarily, sometimes once or many times a day, some days not at all. Following the baths, Paula Baniszewski would rub handfuls of salt over Sylvia's nude body. During this period Baniszewski took on 14 year old Ricky Hobbs, a neighborhood boy, as her "personal assistant" when dealing with Sylvia.



Hobbs, an honor student from a middle class family with no previous legal trouble, experienced a sudden shift in personality upon becoming Baniszewski's assistant, blindly following whatever orders she gave him; crime reporters have since speculated that Hobbs was Baniszewski's lover, and that she had seduced the boy into becoming her henchman. Baniszewski's children turned Sylvia into a money-making opportunity, charging neighborhood children a nickel to gawk at the nude Sylvia or to push her down the stairs to the basement, where she was now kept when not being bathed or put on display.

She was kept constantly naked and rarely fed; when she was allowed to eat, it was in some bizarre fashion such as the instance in which Baniszewski insisted that she eat soup with her fingers. Often, Baniszewski and her twelve-year-old son John Jr. Sometime around this period, Jenny managed to send contact to her and Sylvia's older sister, Diana, who was married and had a family of her own. Jenny outlined the horrors that she and Sylvia were experiencing, and instructed Diana to contact the police to come rescue them. Diana ignored the letter, believing that Jenny was simply displeased with being punished and that she was making up stories so that she could come live with her. Also around this time, one of the neighborhood children who had been by to see Sylvia, a twelve year old named Judy Duke, went home and told her mother "they were beating and kicking Sylvia.

Shortly thereafter, the Baniszewski's reverend, Roy Julian, visited them as part of a program he had set up to see each of his parishoners at their homes. While he and Baniszewski drank coffee, she complained to him that Sylvia had been an intense burden on her, claiming that the girl was a prostitute who had been servicing married men and had gotten pregnant. Although at the time Paula Baniszewski was several months pregnant, Gertrude Baniszewski insisted that her daughter was a virgin and that Sylvia was attempting to pass off her own misdeeds onto the pure Paula. Baniszewski and the reverend prayed for Sylvia's salvation before the reverend left. When the reverend returned again a few weeks later, Paula told the reverend during prayers that she had "hatred in [her] heart" for Sylvia, to which Baniszewski interjected that the opposite was true.

Shortly after this, Diana came by to visit her sisters. Baniszewski refused to allow her into the home, at first telling her that Lester had contacted her and instructed her not to allow Diana into the home. When Diana questioned this, Baniszewski threatened to call the police and have her arrested for trespassing. Diana hid nearby the house until she spotted Jenny outside, and then approached her.

Jenny told her older sister that she was not allowed to talk to her and then ran away. Concerned, Diana contacted social services. When a social worker arrived at the home, Baniszewski informed her that she had kicked Sylvia out of the house for being physically unclean and a prostitute, and that Sylvia had since run away. Baniszewski then managed to get Jenny alone long enough to inform her that if she told the social worker the truth, Jenny would join her sister naked in the basement. Jenny then told the social worker that Sylvia had indeed run away. The social worker returned to her office, where she filed a report stating that no more calls needed to be made to the Baniszewski home. On October 20th, Gertrude called the police to come arrest a boy at her home.

Robert Bruce Hanlon was a local youth who claimed that the Baniszewski children had stolen things from his basement. He had come to the home earlier in the evening demanding that Baniszewski return his things; when she refused, he attempted to sneak into the home to take them back. Phyllis Vermillion witnessed Hanlon being put into the back of a squad car and approached the police to speak on his behalf, as she had earlier overheard the argument between Baniszewski and Hanlon over the stolen goods.

Vermillion made no mention of Sylvia during her conversation with the police. On October 21st, Baniszewski instructed John Jr. When Baniszewski checked Sylvia the next morning and discovered she had wet the bed, Baniszewski made her dress, then took her into the living area, where she was once again forced to perform a striptease for her sons and the neighborhood boys, again climaxed by Baniszewski forcing Sylvia to masturbate with a Coca Cola bottle.

When Sylvia was finished, she was allowed to dress. After a few moments, apropos of nothing, Gertrude brought up Sylvia's lies about Paula and Stephanie, and declared, "You have branded my daughters so I will brand you! When the needle was orange, Gertrude used it to carve and burn the letter "I" and part of the letter "M" into Sylvia's stomach. At one point Hobbs stopped and asked Baniszewski in a confused manner to spell "prostitute" for him. When the process was finished, the tattoo - consisting not only of the actual carving but third-degree burns left behind by the heat of the needle - was such that modern plastic surgery would have been unable to correct it.

Satisfied, Baniszewski left the room, leaving Sylvia tied, gagged, and naked. At this point, Ricky, Paula, and Baniszewski's ten year old daughter Shirley decided to give Sylvia another tattoo, an "S" in the middle of her chest; the three would later become confused as to whether they had intended the "S" to stand for "Sylvia" or "Slave," though the latter explanation was the one which was leaned towards as being correct. Ricky burned the bottom curve of the "S" into Sylvia; he then either choked, or changed his mind, because he then ordered Jenny to come over and carve the top half. Although threatened, Jenny refused; Ricky relented, and ordered Shirley to finish the tattoo. The eleven year old choked and accidentally carved the curve backwards, so that the numeral "3" appeared on Likens' chest.

Baniszewski re-entered the room at this point to address the still bound and gagged Sylvia: "What are you going to do now, Sylvia? You can't get married now, you can't undress in front of anyone What are you going to do now? Sylvia was un-gagged to address Baniszewski. She replied: "I guess there's nothing I can do. It's on there. Hubbard then took Sylvia back to the basement, where he used her for judo practice for a period before returning home. In the middle of the night, Jenny Likens sneaked into the basement to visit her sister, where Sylvia told her, "I'm going to die. I can tell. Shortly after Jenny's visit, Baniszewski inexplicably went into the basement and brought Sylvia upstairs, and allowed her to sleep in one of the beds. She was allowed to sleep until noon of the next day, October 23, when Baniszewski woke her; once Sylvia was awake, Baniszewski and Stephanie took her into the bathroom and gave her a warm, soapy bath.

After the bath, Baniszewski and Paula dressed Sylvia, and then dictated a letter to her, intended to look like a runaway letter to her parents. For reasons unknown, Baniszewski dictated that Sylvia open the letter "Dear Mr. I went with a gang of boys in the middle of the night. And they said that they would pay me if I would give them something so I got in the car and they all got what they wanted And they also put on my stomach, I am a prostitute and proud of it. I have done just about everything that I could do just to make Gertie mad and cause [sic] Gertie more money than

she's got. I've tore up a new mattress and peaced [sic] on it.

I have also cost Gertie doctor bills that she really can't pay and made Gertie a nervous wreck and all her kids. Just as strangely as Baniszewski's insistence on the formal salutation, she instructed Sylvia not to sign it. After Sylvia finished the letter, Baniszewski began formulating a plan to have John Jr. When Sylvia overheard this, she ran for the front door, but in her emaciated and mutilated state moved so slowly that Baniszewski was able to grab her just as she reached the front door and drag her back into the house. Once Baniszewski settled Sylvia down, she took her into the kitchen and made her some toast. Sylvia attempted to eat it but then said she couldn't swallow; Baniszewski took down the curtain rod in the kitchen and beat Sylvia in the mouth with it. John then took Sylvia into the basement and tied her up while Baniszewski prepared a plate of crackers for Sylvia. When she offered the crackers to Sylvia, Sylvia replied, "Feed it to the dog."

It's hungrier than I am. On the next day, October 24th, Baniszewski came into the basement and, attempted to bludgeon Sylvia; first she tried to hit her with a chair, but missed and broke it against the wall. Next she tried to beat her over the head with a paddle, but swung in such a wide arc that it came back against her own face, blacking her eye. To stop the strange show, Hubbard stepped in and beat Sylvia unconscious with a broomstick.

Over the course of that night, and into the morning hours of October 25th, Sylvia beat the basement floor with the scoop portion of an iron shovel. Nextdoor neighbors would later report considering calling the police, but chose not to. On October 26th, Baniszewski voiced her intentions to give Sylvia a warm bath. Stephanie and Ricky brought Sylvia upstairs and laid her in the tub fully clothed; they took her out shortly thereafter when they realized she was not breathing. Baniszewski instructed her children to take Sylvia's body to the basement and strip it naked. She then told Hobbs to go to a nearby payphone and call the police her house having no working telephone.

When the police arrived, Baniszewski gave them the letter she'd made Sylvia dictate; in the midst of the commotion, Jenny Likens whispered to one of the police, "Get me out of here and I'll tell you everything. Other neighborhood children present at the time - Mike Monroe, Randy Lepper, Duke, and Siscoe - were arrested for "injury to a person. Baniszewski, her children, Hobbs, and Hubbard were held without bail pending their trials. Charges against Siscoe, Duke, Monroe, and Lepper were dismissed. Stephanie's lawyer got her a separate trial; before it was able to begin, the district attorney dropped the murder charges. Meanwhile, an autopsy of Sylvia Likens turned up over cigarette burns on her body, in addition to various second and third degree burns, severe bruising, and muscle and nerve damage.

In her death throes, Sylvia bit through her lips, nearly severing each of them. Her vaginal cavity was nearly swollen shut, although an examination of the canal determined that her hymen was still intact, largely discrediting--along with a lack of any ripping or tearing to the rectum-- Gertrude's assertions that Sylvia was a prostitute and completely disproving her insistence that she was pregnant. The official cause of death was brain swelling, internal hemorrhaging of the brain, and shock. The case of the State of Indiana v. Gertrude Baniszewski, John Baniszewski, Paula Baniszewski, Ricky Hobbs, and Coy Hubbard commenced in May of ; the prosecution sought the death penalty for all involved, including John and Hobbs, who were thirteen and fourteen at the time, respectively. Paula's time in court was interrupted when she was rushed to the hospital to give birth to the child that she and her mother had insisted she wasn't carrying; in a show of solidarity, Paula named the child Gertrude.

Baniszewski and the children's cases were exacerbated by the fact that they were being represented by four different attorneys--one for Baniszewski, one for Paula, one for Hobbs, and one for Coy and John--all of whom worked against each other and attempted to shift blame against the other defendants, even though they were all being tried together.

Baniszewski's attorney attempted to shift blame onto the children, portraying her as weak, chronically ill, and incapable of preventing or perpetuating any of the abuse. The children's attorneys attempted to shift blame onto Baniszewski and the other children. Some of the most damaging testimony against Baniszewski was due to her own self-incrimination; she recounted bizarre tales of Sylvia Likens being a neighborhood prostitute and of her trysts with middle aged, married men, as well as accusing her of frequently starting fights in the home. To corroborate Baniszewski's testimony, eleven-year-old Marie was called to the stand. Initially, Marie backed up everything her mother had said, until, during cross examination, she suddenly screamed "God help me! The young girl's shocking turn against her own family was largely responsible for the eventual verdict: Baniszewski was found guilty of murder in the first degree.

To the shock of the citizens of Indianapolis, she did not receive the death penalty, but rather life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. Paula Baniszewski was convicted of second degree murder; she appealed and was granted a new trial, but before it began, she struck a plea bargain and plead guilty to voluntary manslaughter. She served three years in prison and was then paroled. John Baniszewski, Hubbard, and Hobbs were each convicted of voluntary manslaughter and sentenced to eighteen months in a juvenile detention facility. By the time the now seventeen year old Hobbs was released, the severity of his crimes had sunk in, and he suffered a nervous breakdown; he began a regime of heavy-chain smoking which had severely decayed his lungs by the time he was twenty.

By the time he was twenty-one, he was dead of lung cancer. Baniszewski appealed, was granted a new trial, and was again found guilty, though this time she was sentenced to eighteen years to life. Over the course of the next eighteen years, Baniszewski became a model prisoner, working in the sewing shop and becoming a den-mother to younger female inmates; by the time she came up for parole in , she had earned the prison nickname "Mom. The news of Baniszewski's parole hearing sent shockwaves through the Indiana community. Jenny Likens and her family appeared on television to speak out against Baniszewski; the members of two anti-crime groups, Protect the Innocent and Society's League Against Molestation, travelled to Indiana to oppose Baniszewski's parole and support the Likens family, beginning a sidewalk picket campaign. Over the course of two months, the groups collected signatures from the citizens of Indiana demanding that Baniszewski be kept behind bars.

In spite of all this, Baniszewski was granted parole. During the hearing, she gave the following confession:". I'm not sure what role I had in it I never really knew her I take full responsibility for whatever happened to Sylvia. Baniszewski walked out of prison on December 4, , and travelled to Iowa under the name Nadine Van Fossan. She died there of lung cancer in The fates of Baniszewski's children remains largely unknown. Paula Baniszewski moved to Iowa and assumed a new identity; internet rumors claim that she is still alive and lives on a farm somewhere in the Iowa

countryside. Stephanie Baniszewski became a school teacher and assumed a new name.

John Baniszewski changed his name to John Blake and worked as a truck driver before becoming a real estate agent and lay minister; he was never arrested again. Before I begin I have to warn you that the details in this case are very disturbing and involve child abuse, neglect, torture, violence and murder. There were points during my research when I had to stop and take a breath because I just couldn't believe what I was reading. Another note, before I start, If you enjoy my weekly true crime posts, please consider supporting my work by donating a coffee for a small fee here. I've also created a new account on Instagram. You can find me at: KittysOnTheCase. Gertrude Nadine Baniszewski is a name that people who know about her would like to forget.

She's had various nicknames over the years but the one that seems to have stuck the most is "The Torture Mother". When I'd finished my research into the case these were the first words that popped into my head when thinking of a title. I added a question mark because I'm sure there are other female murderers out there who are just as worse and even more so than her but she is definitely evil. Gertrude Van Fossan was born in and was the third of six children. Not much is known about her childhood except that she was extremely close to her father but didn't bond so well with her mother. At the age of 11, Gertrude's beloved father had a heart attack and died in front of her. As anyone could imagine, this would be quite a traumatic thing to happen for a fully grown adult to witness let alone a child who wouldn't be psychologically capable to deal with the situation. Losing someone you love so suddenly in quite a shocking way right in front of you and feeling powerless to help must have been very traumatic for young Gertrude.

Instead of her father's death bringing Gertrude and her mother together in their grief, they further drifted apart and arguments between the pair became a regular occurrence. Gertrude went off the rails and dropped out of school at the age of 18. She married her 18 year old boyfriend, John Baniszewski and started a family. She would go on to have four children with him. The marriage was a violent one with Gertrude often starved of affection and during discussions, her husband would hit her if she dared to argue or disagree with him. John Baniszewski was a police officer who upheld the law in public but didn't seem to do so behind closed doors with his wife. Despite the rocky marriage, it lasted for 10 years before they divorced and Gertrude gained custody of all four children. Being an attractive woman at the time, it didn't take Gertrude that long to become involved in another relationship despite being a single mother of four children which was frowned upon by some people back in those days.

She got together with a man called Edward Guthrie and after a brief romance, got married. The marriage was short lived and only lasted three months as Edward quickly grew tired of the family life and became fed up of being responsible for Gertrude's children. A short time after this, John Baniszewski came back on the scene again and Gertrude and John rekindled their romance. Despite their previous experience of being married to each other being a total disaster, they decided to try again and re-married.

They managed to stay together for seven years before divorcing a second and final time in Gertrude won full custody of their children. Gertrude began an affair around this time with a younger man called Dennis Lee Wright who was 23 years old. This was another relationship which proved to be violent with Dennis raising his hand regularly to Gertrude. She fell pregnant twice during the relationship with her suffering from a miscarriage with her first one to Dennis which was speculated to be due to his violent assaults. The second pregnancy lasted full term and she gave birth to her final child, Denny Lee Jr, in Dennis Sr walked out on her and his newborn son leaving Gertrude struggling to make ends meet whilst trying to take care of her baby and 6 other children.

By the time rolled around, Gertrude's years of hardship, bad relationships and financial struggles were starting to take a toll on her health and appearance. She had lost a lot of weight and struggled with asthma as well as other ailments.

### **True Crime With Caledonian Kitty: The Most Evil Woman Ever? | Gertrude Baniszewski: part one**

Siscoe ultimately married. She died on October 23, 1968, at the age of 44, already a grandmother. Lepper—who had visibly smirked [] as he testified to having hit Likens on up to 40 separate occasions—died at the age of 56 on November 14, 1968. The couple had two children, although she remained traumatized by the abuse she had been forced to watch her sister endure. For the remainder of her life, Jenny was dependent upon anxiety medication. At the time of her death, Jenny resided in Beech Grove, Indiana.

Fourteen years prior to her death, Jenny Likens Wade had viewed Gertrude Baniszewski's obituary in a newspaper; she clipped the section from the newspaper, then mailed it to her mother with an accompanying note reading: "Some good news. Damn old Gertrude died. Ha ha ha! I am happy about that. Elizabeth and Lester Likens died in and respectively. In the years prior to her own death, Jenny Likens Wade had repeatedly emphasized no blame should be placed upon either of her parents for placing her and Sylvia in the care of Gertrude Baniszewski; stating all her parents had done was trust Gertrude's promise to actually care for them until their return to Indiana with the traveling carnival. The house at East New York Street in which Likens was tortured and murdered stood vacant for many years after her death and the arrest of her tormentors.

The property gradually became dilapidated. Although discussions were held in relation to the possibility of purchasing and rehabilitating the house, and converting the property into a women's shelter, the necessary funds to complete this project were never raised. The house itself was demolished on April 23, 1968. The site where East New York Street once stood is now a church parking lot. In June 1968, a six-foot-tall 1. This dedication was attended by several hundred people, including members of the Likens family. The memorial itself is inscribed with these words: "This memorial is in memory of a young child who died a tragic death. As a result, laws changed and awareness increased. This is a commitment to our children, that the Indianapolis Police Department is working to make this a safe city for our children.

Sylvia Likens' death is credited with the adoption of Indiana's mandated reporter law, and with an increased understanding of the investigation and recognition of abuse. The law states that should a member of the public suspect a child is suffering abuse or neglect, the citizen suspecting this abuse has a legal obligation to report the abuse to authorities. On October 26, 1968, numerous Indianapolis citizens, including Likens's older sister, Dianna Bedwell, gathered in Lebanon, Indiana to honor Sylvia Likens, to reflect upon her life upon the fiftieth anniversary of her death, and to honor all children who lose their lives to child abuse. At this memorial service, Dianna informed those present that Sylvia's legacy "must always be

remembered. Sylvia's tragic murder and abuse must always be remembered".

Founded in Lebanon, Indiana, and initially named the Boone County Child Advocacy Center, this non-profit organization was renamed in Likens's honor in , with the executive director stating: "The most important thing that we can do is tell kids they are hurt and we are listening. Her family is thankful, though, it doesn't have to be that way anymore This child advocacy center was formed with the objective to assist child victims of abuse and neglect, to minimize the ongoing traumatic effects experienced as a result of their ordeal, and to undertake a "relentless pursuit" to prevent child abuse in both Boone and Montgomery County.

Staff also conduct forensic interviews and provide assistance with legal procedures, as well as mental and medical health referrals. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Murder of American teenager in Indianapolis, United States. Lebanon, Indiana , U. Indianapolis, Indiana , U. Subdural hematoma Shock Malnutrition. Crime in Indiana Herd mentality List of child abuse cases featuring long-term detention List of murdered American children Psychological abuse. As such, she was forbidden by her parents to initiate contact with her younger sisters. Jenny insisted these rumors were false accusations spread against Sylvia. She named her child Gertrude in honor of her mother.

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