

## D22 Corresponding With “The Happy Face Killer” – A Case Study

*Lyndsie N. Schantz, BS\*, 700 Forbes Avenue, Apartment 1816, Pittsburgh, PA 15219*

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be introduced to a unique opportunity where Duquesne University Forensic Science and Law students corresponded with a serial killer for over a year.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by examining the psyche of a murderer as well as discuss the errors made by law enforcement and how these miscalculations affected this specific case.

The goal of this presentation is to introduce the members of the forensic science community to a unique opportunity where Duquesne University Forensic Science and Law students corresponded with a serial killer for over a year. Criminal Investigations, a two semester upperclassman course led by Former Pittsburgh Police Commander Ronald Freeman sought to initiate correspondence with the “Happy Face” Serial Killer, Keith Hunter Jespersen, in order to gain the perspective from the polar side of law enforcement. Jespersen is the subject of several documentaries and the book, I: The Creation of a Serial Killer by Jack Olsen. This presentation will impact the forensic community by examining the psyche of a murderer as well as discuss the errors made by law enforcement and how these miscalculations affected this specific case.

Keith Hunter Jespersen is accused of murdering eight women by means of strangulation. He committed these murders in numerous jurisdictions across five states. While he has confessed to all of them, he has not yet been prosecuted for every homicide. Jespersen’s familiarity with destroying the identification of his victims allowed him to elude arrest for years. However, the real twist of events came about when two other people were convicted of his first murder. Wrongful convictions have become a topic of great interest in the past few years. Jespersen himself was not the victim of a wrongful incarceration rather two other individuals who claimed to have knowledge of the murder were convicted for the murder. They were imprisoned for years until Jespersen was approached by the police regarding the death of his girlfriend, his final victim. During this period, Jespersen attempted suicide twice and then was arrested for killing his girlfriend. During one of the suicide attempts, he left a letter to his brother chronicling his murders. With his brother releasing this information to the police, Jespersen finally confessed to the killings and subsequently fought for the release of the two individuals who were wrongfully convicted.

The impetus for the project came about when the course instructor read I: The Creation of a Serial Killer, which is a narrative of Jespersen’s life. Mr. Freeman presented his idea of corresponding with Jespersen to his Investigations class. Three students readily volunteered to initiate the correspondence with the killer. There was a steady flow of letters exchanged on the order of once a week. Immediately, students perceived Jespersen’s need to control in his communication with the class. In addition to the letters, a one hour phone conversation allowed the class to hear the voice of a murderer.

Although it was the wrongful conviction that sparked the interest of the class, the correspondence with Jespersen taught the class so much more, including insight into the dark nature of humanity. The individuals in the class were exposed to the criminal mindset as well as the point of view of law enforcement due to the professor’s extensive knowledge from over three decades of working in the homicide division. This was an incredibly unique opportunity afforded to a group of senior Forensic Science and Law majors. Not only was this project a great learning experience, but it can be used in the justice system to help convict Jespersen of a prior murder.

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**Serial Killer, Wrongful Conviction, Criminal Mindset**