Henry Lee Lucas Biography

Henry Lee Lucas

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Biography

Henry Lee Lucas was the murderer portrayed in the controversial film, "Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer." Lucas was one of only a few men who allegedly murdered in tandem with another killer. His partner in crime was Otis Toole, a man Lucas met at a food shelter in Jacksonville, Florida. As portrayed in the movie, the two were drifters who traveled throughout the Midwest seemingly killing at random.

Born on August 23, 1936 in Blacksburg, Virginia to Viola Dison Wall Lucas, a domineering and severely abusive alcoholic mother who earned the bulk of the family's income by providing sexual favors to strangers, Lucas was subjected early to both physical and emotional abuse. Perhaps repeated blows to his head caused Lucas some form of brain damage, which may have been instrumental in his criminal behavior. The emotional and psychological abuse by his mother certainly shaped his later violence. The first person Lucas murdered was his mother, whom he stabbed to death in Michigan after an argument over his engagement to a girl known only as "Stella."

Subsequent to meeting Toole at a food shelter in Jacksonville, Florida, apparently the pair traveled at first on the east coast between Maryland and Florida and subsequently throughout the Midwest and west where they robbed and killed hitchhikers, store clerks, stranded motorists, and the like. While with Toole, Lucas was introduced to his niece Becky Powell whom he later killed after a violent argument. Lucas confessed that he stabbed Powell, had sex with her corpse, dismembered her, and finally stuffed her body into three pillowcases, which he left in an open field. Lucas is believed to have killed an elderly woman in Texas who had previously employed him as a housekeeper. Subsequent to Lucas' arrest in Texas, various estimates began to circulate about the number of murders for which Lucas was responsible. Based in large part on Lucas' own confessions, the number at one point was over 200, although most of the claims could not be substantiated. Although sentenced to die in Texas, in 1999 then Governor George W. Bush Jr. commuted the sentence to life in prison. Toole died of cirrhosis of the liver years earlier while serving his own prison sentence.