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Give Daddy a Sprinkle of Peppa: The Untold Truth of Peppa Pig

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Give Daddy a Sprinkle of Peppa: The Untold Truth of Peppa Pig

Senior Project Submitted to

The Division of The Arts

of Bard College

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | | |
|------|-------------------|----|
| I. | Abstract..... | 5 |
| II. | Introduction..... | 6 |
| III. | Chapter 1..... | 10 |
| IV. | The Result..... | 14 |
| V. | Bibliography..... | 25 |

I. ABSTRACT

In 1996, six-year-old JonBenèt Ramsey was found strangled to death by a garrot in her family's Tudor-style mansion. Though suspicion followed the family for years, a perpetrator was never charged. After years of developing DNA sequencing, advanced crime technology, and the relentless court of public opinion that is social media, one might assume that a crime like this could never be covered up in modern day. However in 2020, Peppa Pig was pronounced dead under similarly suspicious circumstances. Her family was exonerated by the Scotland Yard, and yet their story is riddled with inconsistencies. For my senior project, I wrote a play to advocate for the voiceless, and shine a light on the predatory nature of child stardom, and the adultification that happens within pageantry and television. Together with my senior project partner Tim Halvorsen, we were able to create a film version of this play, and explore the dynamics of a family whose cartoon joy has been broadcast to many, but whose traumatic past remains under wraps.

II. INTRODUCTION - THE MURDERS OF JONBENÈT RAMSEY AND PEPPA PIG

I began writing “Give Daddy a Sprinkle of Peppa: the Untold Truth of Peppa Pig,” in a panic, because our original idea (a fairly straight-forward version of Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*) had been discarded due to the new Covid protocols, and I’d already promised Jonathan that I had something completely written. I’d learned early on in my Bard theater career never to lie to Jonathan Rosenberg, so I began mapping out all the subjects that had been consuming my thoughts at the time. Somehow in this disoriented state I meshed together two worlds, connecting the British television legend Peppa Pig and child beauty queen JonBenèt Ramsey. Both of these iconic young girls died from mysterious circumstances, and no perpetrators in either cases have been charged.

When Peppa Pig died in the early months of the 2020 quarantine, a statement in *The Sun* ran, citing her death to have been from her weak temperament. Daddy Pig and Mummy Pig had been quoted saying she had always been a frail girl, and that they’d had no choice but to euthanize her.¹ While this may have satiated the majority of Peppa’s audience, I was no fool. I’d spent many hours of my quarantine speculating on the odd behavior of the Ramsey family after JonBenèt’s death, as well as Madeleine McCann’s family similarly suspicious actions after her “disappearance.” While there is no correct way to act while grieving, there are various clues in suspected filicide cases that show that the parents know more than they’re letting on. Given the inept police work in the 1996 Ramsey and 2020 Pig case, I knew that I had to take it upon myself to find out the truth.

¹ Mustafa, Tanyel, “TELLING PORKIES: How does Peppa Pig die in the alternative backstory?” *The Sun*, November 11, 2020, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/tv/13166407/peppa-pig-death-alternative-backstory/>.

In this piece, I wanted to explore vital aspects of the JonBenèt case, such as: when the FBI ruled out a kidnapping and suggested the family check the house, why had John Ramsey immediately gone to the basement? How did he know he'd find his daughter's body in one of the locked rooms of the cellar? How did he know the body was in there when he'd called out, "she's here!" but flipped the light switch on *after* crying out? How did he know it was JonBenèt when her body was hidden under a blanket in a dark basement room? Did Patsy write the ransom note? Who was she arguing with at the end of the 9-1-1 call? What was the brother's involvement?

If the Ramsey family were not endowed with endless connections and a multi-million dollar fortune, the police work in these cases would not be so suspiciously spotty. After all, DA Mary Lacy exonerated the Ramseys early on in the investigation, though there was still a lot of suspicion surrounding the family's actions. This decision came with a lot of speculation by the media, since prosecutors typically exonerate someone when they are charging someone else, not when a case is as open-ended as JonBenèt's. Lacy also sent the family a long letter of apology for even considering them as suspects - odd behavior for a prosecutor.²

The first suspicious behavior of the family was the "ransom" note that Patsy found at the scene. It had similar handwriting to Patsy Ramsey, used many words from her lexicon (such as "hence" and "attaché"), and was written with a sharpie marker and stationary that was taken from the Ramsey home. Investigators concluded that the ransom note, which was three pages long, would have taken at least twenty-one and a half minutes to transcribe (not even accounting for the time it would take to think up the contents -- much of which was copy-pasted from movies like *Dirty Harry*, *Ransom*, and *Speed*.)³ Only a completely inept kidnapper would break

² McKinley, Carol, "Ex-Da Opens Up About Why She Cleared the Ramsey Family of JonBenèt's Murder," *ABC News*, October 28, 2016,

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/da-opens-cleared-ramsey-family-jonbenets-murder/story?id=43106426>.

³ McClish, Mark, "JonBenèt Ramsey Murder - The Ransom Note," *Statement Analysis*, July 2001, <https://www.statementanalysis.com/jonbenet-ramsey-murder/ransom-note/>.

into a home to snatch a child, decide to write a ransom note on the spot -- and spend over twenty valuable minutes writing it. Another strange part of the ransom note was that it asked for \$118,000 -- the exact number of John Ramsey's Christmas bonus. They must have either been close to the family or the father's business to know his exact bonus, and yet they identify as a "small foreign faction" that apparently has no relationship with either. And the Ramsey family had millions of dollars, so why not ask for more? Kidnappers have the advantage of being in possession of something a parent would pay any amount of money for: their child. They could have demanded any amount.

What seals the deal of my suspicion is that police noted that when they arrived at the scene and began searching the premises, the time allotted on the ransom note for the kidnappers to call and work out the money delivery details (between 8 and 10 am) came and passed, and the Ramsey family didn't even notice. Ordinarily in a hostage case, the family would be emphatic about the timing and details of the transactions, and making sure not to do anything that might compromise the safety of their child (that is, unless they already know their child isn't alive . . .) The police voiced their suspicion over this, and the ransom note in general, but of course the DA's office had their hands very deep in the Ramsey family's pockets.

Obviously, in the short time allotted to a senior project, we wouldn't have time to explore all of these questions and suspicious behaviors. So I consolidated them into a narrative that fit both Peppa Pig's story and Jon Benèt's. I was interested in the element of both of them being "prized piggies." Beauty pageant toddlers and child stars often have a unique trauma bond with their parents. Child pageant queen competitions, much like T.V. shows that star child dancers (such as *Dance Moms*, *Toddlers in Tiaras*, etc.) are essentially pedophile bait. At the age of six, JonBenèt had countless grown men who claimed they were in love with her. She was stalked,

harassed, and preyed upon by predators, but that didn't stop her parents from putting lipstick on her and dressing her up like a miniature Marilyn Monroe. I think parents that force their young daughters into the spotlight in revealing costumes and teaching them grooming behaviors often are able to block out the grotesque reality of what they're doing. That's an angle we wanted to explore with Mummy Pig in our piece, inspired by research done on Patsy Ramsey.

Using the characters of Peppa Pig, Daddy Pig, and Mummy Pig, we were able to delve deeper into the twisted relationship between a child star and her predator father and complacent mother in this project, and shine a light on what goes on behind the scenes of a picture-perfect television family.

III. CHAPTER ONE - THE INITIAL IDEA, AND HOW IT FELL APART

When I first began brainstorming for my senior project, I imagined it being another one-woman show, much like my moderation. I love working by myself for most things, because I don't have to worry about being in charge of anyone else, and I get overwhelmed with lots of details like scheduling conflicts and budgets. When I'm alone, I can work at my own pace and be responsible for everything.

However, I really liked the idea of using Luma, because of its great acoustics and space, and I wanted to be in the festival to get that built-in audience and sense of comradery with the other festival projects. Also, the technical aspects of lights and sound really stress me out, and I knew from working on Sofia and Sarah's project my sophomore year that the Fisher Center takes care of a lot of those details. The Old Gym is a nice space, but I've done the majority of my shows there and I find it incredibly frustrating how the space eats sound. You have to scream to get anyone in the back rows to hear you. At first I thought about petitioning the Fisher Center to allow me to be in the festival as a one-woman show. However, I thought it might be good for me and my control issues to allow others into my creative process, and learn how to collaborate. I've only ever acted for other people, or directed myself, so the idea of directing someone else or writing for someone else seemed fairly terrifying, but terrifying in a way that you know it's ultimately good for you.

I was thinking about working with Tim for a while, just because I'm a Capricorn sun and he's a Taurus moon, so our compatibility meant that we'd be great collaborators. We decided on *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* because Albee has a humor that we both loved, and the intensity

of the relationship with Martha and George gave us a lot to work with. We enlisted the help of Andrew Crisol and Emma Sandman to play Nick and Honey, and Brian Watko to be our director. We planned on filming it at my house in Tivoli and screening it during the festival, since at the time the Covid guidelines said we wouldn't have to wear masks if we were filming off-campus. I really loved the dynamic we all had as a cast, and the read-through of the piece was really exciting. Everyone was trying different things for their characters, and while reading through the whole play took nearly three hours, the time didn't drag at all. It was while we were working on cutting the play down to twenty-five minutes that we were informed about the new Covid guidelines. Now we could no longer film together unmasked if we were from different households. We considered going rogue and doing it anyways (since there's absolutely no point in acting if you can't see half your face), but decided ultimately to create a completely different project with just our household -- Tim, Gavin and I.

Though it was daunting to throw everything away and start completely fresh, I actually think it was the best thing that could have happened to our project. Performing as Martha felt like playing in my mom's closet as a kid and trying on her huge dresses and shoes. It didn't feel natural, and it didn't feel funny. It felt old, tired, forced, and a little embarrassing. Even before the newest Covid guidelines hit, I had been having doubts about our decision to put on this play. While it was fun to read through it as a group, I wasn't excited by the prospect of putting it on -- just stressed. In contrast, when thinking about writing something funny and pulling it out of nowhere, I felt almost manic with excitement. I had wanted to make a theatre piece about Peppa Pig for a long time, and it felt great to work with a small group of people that I trusted the most.

The largest obstacle in this process was getting people to answer my emails. We sent our new project proposal to both the Fisher Center staff and Emily McLaughlin to get approval in

late February, as soon as we'd received word of the freshly-instated protocols. These protocols insisted that even if you film off campus, you must be masked, so we argued in our new proposal that since Tim, Gavin and I all live together, we should be able to film off-campus without masks. Since it was stated explicitly in the Covid protocol email that we were not allowed to start work until we got approval, we waited for nearly three weeks to get any response, until Jonathan told us we might as well start working. It would be a week into planning that we would finally hear back from Emily and the Fisher Center. I sent countless emails to Sarah Jick and Moe, asking about the budget, about what pieces were available in the costume shop. The next step was asking the film department for a computer to edit on, which of course meant many more unanswered emails. It wasn't until I learned a trusty trick - people will only respond to your email if you CC someone they're scared of -- that I finally saw some responses. After that, I CC'd anyone with authority - Jonathan, occasionally Lynn, even my own mother. That was a miraculous fix. I immediately began receiving emails that all started the same way, "Oh, I thought I'd responded to this email, it must have been in my drafts . . ."

My household -- Tim, Gavin and I -- weren't strangers to making short films together. In fact, we often liked to stay up late making lip syncing music videos in the quiet streets of Tivoli. Our lip sync to "Memories" by *Cats* had garnered some rave reviews. Since Tim and I had experience acting on different student film sets, and Gavin had both crew and editing experience, we made a very cohesive team. I asked my film major friend Kate McClelland, whose senior project I was in, to help us rent equipment and teach us how to use it correctly, and then we got to work. My parents had sold their house in Tivoli a month before, but they allowed us to use the empty house for filming for a day, since the new owners still hadn't signed the closing. We wanted to use the creepy, vacant atmosphere of the house to represent Peppa in an afterlife.

Gavin was able to create a sort of soft-light filter while editing to show this in contrast to the scenes with Peppa and her parents, and Daddy Pig by himself - which were all shot in the house Gavin and I rent in Tivoli.

Tim and I went thrifting together to piece together the costumes of Peppa, Daddy, and Mummy Pig. I had envisioned Daddy Pig giving off creepy 90's dad energy, which is why I was very emphatic about him having those thick, clear glasses. His brown suit and brown tie pulled this look together. Peppa's look was inspired by the iconic photo of JonBenèt in her white dress and big blonde curls. We couldn't find an adult pageant dress, but I found a child's Easter dress and an adult wedding dress and veil and decided to make it work. Mummy pig's costume was a blue checkered shirt that matched the tablecloth - keeping her closely tied in with the domestic sphere. We wanted her one scene in the film to be her getting Peppa into the wedding dress, showing how she gave Peppa away to Daddy Pig like a child bride, and said nothing. Though we weren't experts on costuming, this is how we worked with the budget.

The last few weeks after filming were spent editing in Avery with Gavin, where we played around with sound and color-correcting to give each scene a different tone. We wanted to balance a peaceful atmosphere of Peppa in heaven with a constricted, tense tone of Daddy Pig and Peppa together, as well as placid sadness of Peppa and Mummy Pig together. The most difficult part of this was looking at our footage for hours on end, and becoming confused about whether we'd created something that made no sense at all, or something great. In the end, I'm still unsure of whether it only makes sense in my head.

IV. THE RESULT

GIVE DADDY A SPRINKLE OF PEPPA:

THE UNTOLD TRUTH OF PEPPA PIG

By Avis Zane

Disclaimer: All actors involved in this play are human actors, posing as pigs. No animals were harmed in the making of this production. The contents of this play are speculation and are in no way intended to hinder the ongoing investigation.

SCENE 1.

[PEPPA PIG sits alone on the carpet. She has a large paper before her, which she is decorating with finger paints. She is dressed in a white dress, with big curls and a pageant crown. It is like putting lipstick on a pig. The unseen NARRATOR can be heard from above. He talks in a soothing British accent.]

NARRATOR: Peppa was always a sickly child.

PEPPA: Oh no, I was a sprightly piggie. Mumsy always said I had a pep in my step.

NARRATOR: She spent most of her days in hospital.

PEPPA: I was like all the other piggies. I liked to play and roll in the mud.

NARRATOR: When the results of the autopsy came back, Mummy Pig disputed their findings. Peppa had had asthma, and was always very sensitive, she said. She insisted there was no foul play involved.

PEPPA: The coroners said it was asphyxia by strangulation associated with craniocerebral trauma.

NARRATOR: Mummy and Daddy Pig were adamant that it was a natural death. No one would want to hurt little Peppa. There could be no other way. She was always a frail, sickly girl, after all.

PEPPA: [*brightly*] He'd used a garrote.

SCENE 2.

[PEPPA is sitting on one end of the couch, and DADDY PIG sits on the other. They are watching TV. DADDY PIG is eating pork rinds. As they speak, the camera frames their faces in intimate, individual close-ups.]

DADDY PIG: My little porkchop.

PEPPA: Daddy always said the same thing when he came home from work: “Give Daddy a sprinkle of Peppa.” And so I did.

DADDY PIG: Give Daddy a sprinkle of Peppa.

[PEPPA gives DADDY PIG a kiss on the cheek.]

PEPPA: 3 months before my disappearance, there were rumors at school about what had happened to my friend, Suzie Sheep.

DADDY PIG: Pull me off a piece of that. *[Snort]*

PEPPA: Her mummy wouldn't let her come to my house anymore. And Suzie didn't talk to me, not even in maths class.

[DADDY PIG is overcome by a fit of snorts. Pork rind crumbs fall out of his mouth.]

PEPPA: Mumsy never told me what happened. But I suspected. Suzie had become a bedwetter, just like me.

DADDY PIG: Lamb chops, pork chops. All tastes the same. *[Slimy snort]*

SCENE 3

[DADDY PIG sits at the kitchen table. He is eating a big plate of ribs. He is wearing a suit and tie with a napkin tied around his neck. As he eats, he smears barbeque sauce around his mouth.]

DADDY PIG: I don't know what everyone's looking at me for. I had nothing to do with it. I don't even know why I checked the basement first. I guess I just had a premonition. A hunch. A daddy always knows his piggies. A daddy can always sniff out his piggies. No piggie can hide from this daddy. I guess I could hear her down there, her little voice or something. Snorting, oinking, calling out for her daddy. A ghost or something. I blame myself. I didn't do it. But I feel guilty. I blame myself. Sometimes I ask for a sprinkle and sometimes I pour on a little too much. I think I did that with Peppa. I think I poured myself into her, put all my time and energy into one little piggie, and she just couldn't handle it. I think that's what it was.

[DADDY PIG should have finished ribs by the end of the monologue. Pause while he licks his fingers.]

DADDY PIG: Sometimes there's too much daddy for one little piggie. Sometimes a piggie is too little and has a weak heart. She was always a sickly little girl, my Peppa. And that's the way the piggie crumbles.

SCENE 4

[PEPPA is drinking tea out of a mug with a British flag on it.]

People never want to see a little piglet star succeed. I had been working since I was puny porkchop, and I never got my due from the critics until after my death. They called me the best actor of our generation. They called me an iconic sex symbol. They called me a feminist icon.

[She turns to face the second camera.]

But really, I was only a pig.

SCENE 5

[PEPPA sits at the kitchen table in a wedding dress, while MUMMY PIG brushes her hair with a fork. MUMMY PIG should be played by the same actor who plays Daddy Pig, only with a cheap blonde wig. She should look like a pig in a wig.]

PEPPA: At first, it was that I was sick. That's what they told the media, anyways. That I was the runt of the piggy litter, and I was weak and I couldn't breathe right and so it was my own bloody fault that I was dead. I guess that might have been true.

MUMMY PIG: You were a bedwetter after all.

PEPPA: I was.

MUMMY PIG: And you were always getting yourself into trouble.

PEPPA: I guess that's true.

MUMMY PIG: I don't know how you got a hold of it. But I wasn't surprised you managed to hurt yourself with it.

PEPPA: Me either.

MUMMY PIG: That wasn't the way I raised you. I didn't raise my prized piggie to give up so easy. And such a shameful way to go.

PEPPA: Sorry Mumsy.

[MUMMY PIG *picks up the veils and begins to insert it into PEPPA's hair.*]

PEPPA: [*With genuine curiosity*] How did I do it, though, Mummy, with the blanket? How did I cover my own dead body?

[MUMMY PIG *takes a pause to deliberate.*]

MUMMY PIG: You must have done something very naughty and tricked it to fall on you at the exact right moment.

PEPPA PIG [*acquiescing*]: That basement floor *was* very cold.

SCENE 6

[DADDY PIG is wearing his suit. He is standing in the basement, and he holds a candle.

PEPPA's wedding veil sits at his feet.]

DADDY PIG: She was an angel gone too soon. Except she was a pig. She looked beautiful in her little coffin. She always had the most perfect smile. When I was a wee Daddy Piglet I used to pray I'd have a little girl. I wanted someone to look after. I wanted someone to dress up. I wanted to mold her into the perfect piggie. Mummy Pig and I were so lucky to have little Peppa. She was like an angel, except she was a pig.

[Credits roll to the "Peppa Pig" theme song.]

FIN.

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