

BLOOD MONEY

Christa Pike slit her leg, smeared the blood on her lips and planted three grisly kisses at the top of a letter she sent from her Death Row cell at the Tennessee Prison for Women. For 50 bucks, it's yours.

Pike also autographed a silky red thong, accompanied by this message: "As long as you have a face, I'll have a place to sit" (originally \$500, now \$350).

Douglas Clark, the Sunset Strip Slayer who kept the head of one of his victims in his freezer, sent a prison-yard picture and a lock of his hair (\$35).

Gainesville serial killer Danny Rolling wrote a letter in which he advised controlling mood swings through bike rides and jogging (\$100).

Charles Manson Family member Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme wrote a brief lecture on the dangers of smoking (\$100). And Phillip Jablonski, convicted of raping and mutilating five victims, sent outlines of his left palm with a shorthand description of how he killed his fourth wife in 1991: "Means of dead. Gun shoot behind her right ear. Knife slide up her pussie and anal hole. Stabbed in stomach and silicone tit. Duct tape wrapped around her face" (\$100).

Jablonski also sent an autographed picture of himself — a bald old man in prison blues — with this inscription, "Dedicated to my sweet, sexsie tramp and best friend Eric" (\$35).

Eric and Jessika Gein are a real Jacksonville husband and wife who sell killer collectibles on their website SerialKillersInk.net, but "Gein" is not their real name.

Gein isn't afraid of the necrophiliac, cannibalistic, Satan-worshipping, gay-murdering, women-torturing killers with whom he maintains a regular correspondence. "It's not the serial killers I'm afraid of," he explains. "It's the victims' families."

Although they've been quoted and identified as the "Geins" in some 22 television and newspaper stories, Eric explains they adopted the pseudonym in a kind of homage to murderer and grave-robber Ed Gein, whose crimes inspired the characters of Norman Bates in "Psycho," Buffalo Bill in "The Silence of the Lambs" and Leatherface from "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre."

Eric Gein says he can't use his real name when discussing the business of Serial Killers Ink. He says his family would disown him. He claims he promised his parents he would use a pseudonym, to prevent his work from causing problems at their church. He's also deferential to his mother's illness. Gein says she's suffering from stage 3 cancer. Pleading for continued anonymity, the 41-year-old graphic designer and member of Robert E. Lee High School's 1987 graduating class, implores like a child: "Please, please, please, please, please."

It does seem prudent to protect one's identity after building a friendship with a psychopath like Jablonski. After his release from prison in 1991 for the murder of his

For Jacksonville-based murderabilia vendor Eric Gein, there's money in mayhem and madness. By Susan Cooper Eastman. Photos by Walter Coker



All in the Family: Eric Gein defends the murderabilia racket, saying it's not the killers who profit. It's businessmen like him.

first wife, Jablonski sexually assaulted and sadistically murdered *one of his prison penpals*.

But it's not Jablonski that Gein fears, or any other of the necrophiliac, cannibalistic, Satan-worshipping, gay-murdering, women-torturing killers with whom he maintains a regular correspondence.

"It's not the serial killers I'm afraid of," he explains. "It's the victims' families."

He continues without a hint of irony. "I would honestly get death threats. I'm hiding my last name because I want to be safe, and I want my family to be safe."

Eric Gein is seated in the kitchen of his mother's Westside home, next to a dinette table covered with some of the murderabilia he's collected over the last 15 years. It's a collection borne of deliberate effort, long hours and an obsessive interest in the dark world of serial killers. Depending on whom you ask, his booty is either of great or questionable value: semi-literate letters, locks of hair, paintings and greeting cards belonging to some of the most notorious butchers in history.

Gein takes a seat on a stool at the kitchen breakfast bar. He's dressed in a blue oxford shirt, untucked, and jeans. He's trying to look professional, but he's twitchy and nervous and craving a smoke. Later, when he changes into a

In addition to managing the website's store, the Geins post treacly Q&As with killers. Asked his favorite flavor of ice cream, Florida murder convict Bernard Giles responds, "Moose Tracks." Asked what he'd do differently if he could go back in time, he says, "Body disposal, I guess."

Charlie Manson T-shirt to show off his tattoos for a photo — goats' heads, pentagrams, piles of skulls — he's palpably more comfortable. A smoke break helps, too.

Gein is proud of the friendship he built with Danny Rolling, "the Gainesville Ripper," who was executed on Oct. 25, 2006. That relationship yielded a fairly valuable "get": a detailed and carefully executed painting by Rolling of himself and his mother, titled "Fallen Angels" (\$800, marked down from \$1,000). In the interest of commerce, Gein even sought advice from Rolling about his own bouts of anger and depression — a line of inquiry that prompted the \$100-mood-management letter from Rolling.

Gein has been a persuasive friend in other ways. He asked Jablonski to paint clowns in the style of child-killer John Wayne Gacy, because Gacy's clowns are the iconic symbols of murderabilia. Jablonski complied, and Gein

now offers a brightly colored Pogo the Clown painting by Jablonski (\$100, marked down from \$150).

Gein's efforts have allowed him to create a world of grim profitability. The screensaver on the computer in his parents' Florida room is a snapshot of Gein's website, Serial Killers Ink. The chair cushion is molded to the shape of someone's rear end, attesting to many hours at the monitor. Gein says that he realized about five years ago that there was money to be made in the trophies he's collected, but he insists money wasn't his first motive. In an interview with the webzine, "Beyond the Dark Horizon," he explained that, in high school, he felt like he shared some of the tendencies of serial killers. "I was into violent music, violent friends, and had violent teenage years," he told the publication. "It seemed that all that was around me was death, violence and hate. It grew on me."

Gein began writing to people like Richard "the Night Stalker" Ramirez, Rolling and others because he wanted to find out "what made them tick." Now 41, he says it's become a business. But after writing to some inmates for 12 years or more, he's also developed what he views as real friendships.

To keep the flow of merchandise coming in, Gein immerses himself in his macabre enterprise, spending two hours a night, five nights a week, writing letters to Death Row inmates. On weekends, he sometimes accepts collect calls from them. Managing the website alone is an almost full-time job, he says. Serial Killers Ink posts several hundred items for sale, almost all things that Gein or Jessika personally received from inmates. In addition to updating and managing the website's store, they post treacly Q&As with 26 killers. Asked his favorite flavor of ice cream, Florida convicted murderer Bernard Giles responds, "Moose Tracks." Asked what he'd do differently if he could go back in time, he says, "Body disposal, I guess."

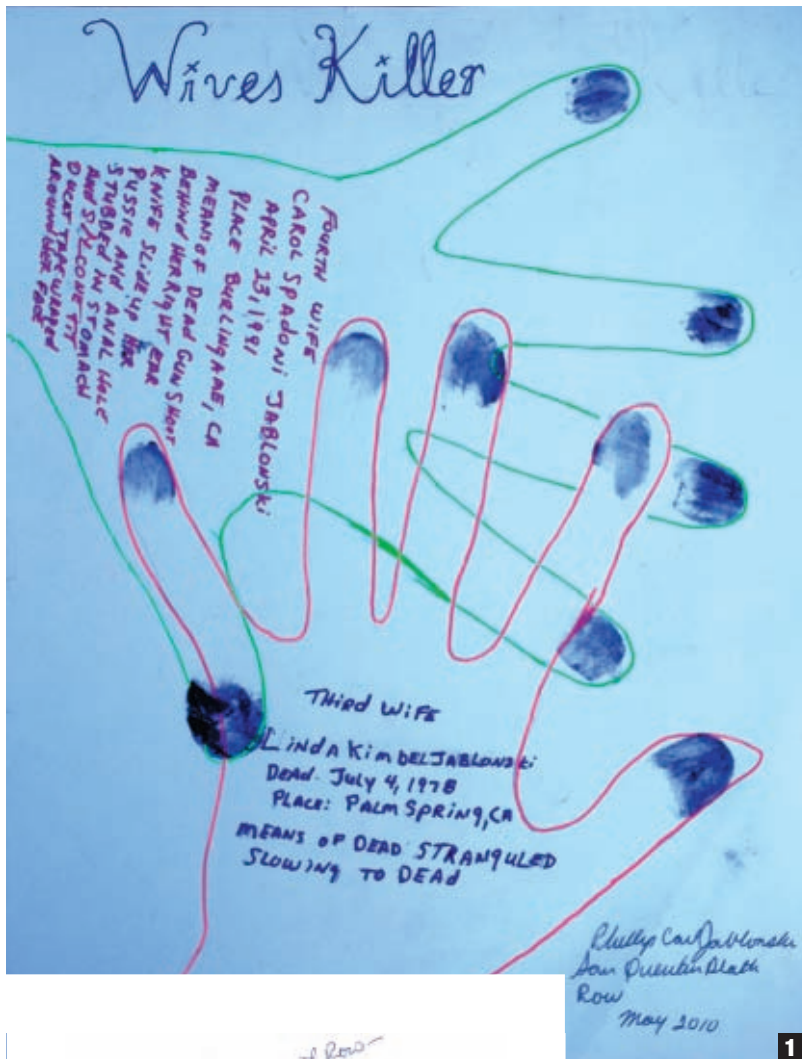
The couple also posts audio from telephone interviews with serial killers, provides their prison contact information and manages a discussion forum on the site. Recently, Gein ranted on the forum about "newbies" who write to people like Jablonski and beg for artwork. (If they want art, he advises them to buy it from Serial Killers Ink.) And he routinely heaps scorn on anyone who criticizes the murderabilia business. Gein usually starts

his replies by letting the commentator know that he knows what town they live in by their IP address. If they find the site distasteful, he notes, they don't have to visit it, but sneers that many people *obviously* find it interesting. He boasts that even negative press brings customers. The business has generated at least 22 stories in the past year and revenue is up; Gein says he's earned \$3,000 since January.

"It's not a huge business," he adds, "[But] there is definitely a demand for it, and I'm definitely making money. That's why I keep doing this."

It's not clear that the Geins' family business is viable in the long term. The reason for most of the media attention the company has enjoyed of late has stemmed from federal legislation introduced in June whose primary purpose is to put the Geins and other

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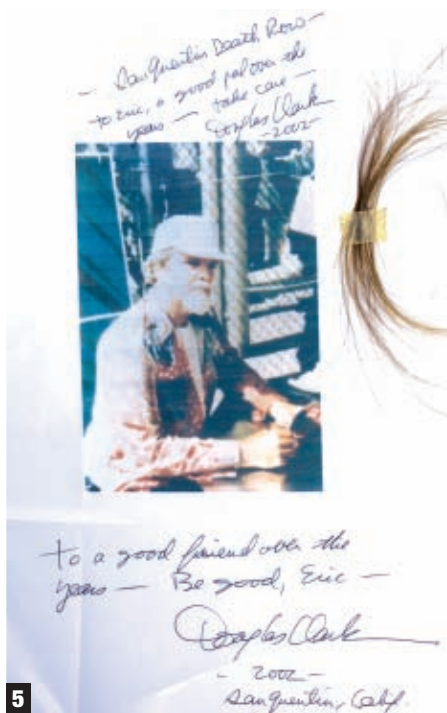
1. Philip Jablonski sent Gein his handprints, and a grisly description of how he killed his third and fourth wives.

2. Gainesville serial killer Danny Rolling painted this piece of himself and his mother, titled "Fallen Angels."

3. Gein encouraged killer Philip Jablonski to mimic the style of child-killer John Wayne Gacy, whose clown portraits are iconic murderabilia.

4. Sean Sellers, convicted of killing his parents in 1985, gave this painting to Gein in 1998.

5. "Sunset Strip Slayer" Douglas Clark sent Gein a letter and a lock of his hair.



murderabilia dealers out of business. U.S. Rep. John Cornyn (R-Texas) and Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) filed the "Stop the Sale of Murderabilia to Protect the Dignity of Crime Victims Act of 2010" in both the House and Senate. The bill would make it illegal for prisoners to use the U.S. Postal Service to mail items across state lines to be put up for sale. The bill would also give victims the power to file suit to block the sale of murderabilia and to sue for damages and attorneys' fees.

The legislation is the latest push by Andy Kahan, director of the Houston-based Mayor's Crime Victims Office, to shut down the trade he dubbed "murderabilia" back in 1999. Kahan pressured eBay to ban the sale of murderabilia

for two years before the auction site finally capitulated in 2001 (probably prompted, says Kahan, by a planned segment on the ABC news show "20/20"). Kahan also helped five states craft legislation against the sale of killer collectibles. But those laws haven't stopped the commerce in killers, and now he thinks that federal legislation is needed.

"It's blood money," says Kahan. "The only way to crush this insidious and despicable industry is through federal legislation."

Kahan says many people are under the mistaken assumption that a federal Son of Sam law prohibits criminals from profiting from their crimes. Several states followed New York's lead when it adopted a law in 1977 that made it

illegal for criminals to profit from their crimes (a measure prompted by rumors that publishing companies were offering David "Son of Sam" Berkowitz large sums for the rights to his story), but the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the New York law in 1987 on First Amendment grounds. A Son of Sam law in California was struck down in 2002. In Florida, prisoners cannot earn money on anything directly related to their own crime, but they can sell unrelated material like poems and art, with the permission of prison officials.

If the federal legislation passes, Gein acknowledges it would put him out of business. But he thinks civil libertarians will join the fight against the legislation, and he expects the

law would be overturned in court. "It gets into First Amendment issues," he says. "I totally understand their outlook about an inmate making money. Somebody should not be able to profit out of their crimes." But he points out that the inmates who provide him with material aren't profiting. He is.

"This industry may be controversial and some may view it as downright tasteless and that is their right," Gein wrote in a statement posted on Serial Killers Ink. "But that does not constitute making it illegal and in the process violating our rights an [sic] American citizens. This bill is an anti-civil liberties bill, plain and simple." He explains that buying murderabilia is buying a piece of history. It's no different than



Gein received a treasure trove of murderabilia, including this pair of red panties, from convicted killer Christa Pike when the two were engaged.

visiting The Lizzie Borden Bed & Breakfast, he says, or the National Museum of Crime and Punishment. “What we choose to sell is a part of history,” he writes, “and WE profit, not the inmates.”

But Serial Killers Ink is more than a business. Gein considers his penpals as friends and says he wants to protect them from exploitation — something he says has become commonplace now that writing to serial killers has become kind of trendy. One guy pretends he’s female, and asks serial killers to write their sexual fantasies on index cards for her masturbatory pleasure. When he gets a response, he sells it. Some women send scantily clad pictures of themselves in order to secure exclusive friendships with the killers, when in fact their real goal is a book or movie deal. But Gein says his friendships are on the level and genuine. “I give a shit about these guys, you know? Becoming friends with them, I can’t help but to give a shit about them,” he says. “And when somebody f*cks them over or does these guys wrong, it pisses me off. As weird as it sounds, these guys are friends.”

Gein points out that despite the horrific sadism of his crimes, Phillip Jablonski always asks how he is doing and asks about his family. “Because of the brutality of the crimes, people see these guys as monsters,” says Gein, “and for the most part, they are, and they did some horrible things. But the television shows and the books and the movies don’t show a side of these guys that I get to see. They are human.

“I guess it is touching, that even though these guys did some pretty brutal, nasty things, they can still be caring,” Gein continues. “When they are polite and nice and kind and ask how my family is doing, that means something to me.”

For all Gein’s attestations to true friendship, there is an undercurrent of perversity in some of the mail. In letters, Jablonski calls Eric his “pet” and signs his name as “master.” Gein says that Jablonski fantasizes that he and Jessika and Eric will all be married some day in some crazy slave/master triad. He acknowledges that the people he writes to are *sick*, and they misinterpret offers of friendship, but says he

cuts off those who get too wrapped up in a fantasy world. That said, he’s still corresponding with Jablonski, who sent this Valentine’s message to Gein: “I am deeply in love with my special pet. And would love to give him a nice hard Valentine candy to suck on and swallow the cream filling. Love, Master. Bugs Hugs.”

Gein plans to travel to San Quentin to visit Jablonski on Death Row soon. Other inmates, Gein says, he and Jessika have cut off. Both school shooter Michael Carneal and serial killer Harrison Graham professed love for Jessika. They thanked her for pictures of herself that she purportedly sent. Gein says they put an end to the correspondence when the men’s fantasies became overheated. But he admits that if someone sends a sexually graphic letter, it still means bank. “It will be sold,” he says.

To secure the loyalty of his penpals, Gein is not averse to feeding their sickness a little. He downloads pictures of women in bikinis from Google Images and sends that to several of his correspondents. Richard Ramirez likes Asian women in bikinis and pictures of feet, he says. “Toolbox murderer” Roy Norris, so-called because he and his partner tortured women by showing ice picks into their ears and tearing off their nipples with pliers, asked for pictures of Pamela Lee Anderson and of girls on the beach. The two men were known for preying on young beach-going girls along California’s coastal highway. “I’ve known him for a very long time,” Gein says of Norris. “Yeah, if he wants pictures, I’ll send him a package of printed-out pictures. I send him bikini pictures and stuff like that. No nudes.”

But Gein’s business can create its own dark eddies. He was so desperate to score something from the BTK Killer Dennis Rader, he delved into dark subjects he thought Rader — whose self-appointed moniker stands for Bind, Torture, Kill — would find engrossing. Gein wrote a letter telling Rader that he was into bondage and bloodplay, which he explains is when a couple cuts each other and rolls around in the blood while having sex.

“I was telling him things I thought he wanted to hear,” explains Gein. The effect wasn’t what he’d hoped for. Instead of taking up a correspondence, Rader turned Gein’s letter over to police. Federal investigators paid Gein a visit,

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interrogated him for an hour, asking if had handcuffs, questioning him about fetishes, asking if he liked bloodplay.

Not that he regrets the effort.

“If I can get one letter from him, that’s \$300 for a 44-cent stamp,” Gein says. “Yeah, I wrote a bizarre letter, but this guy jerked off while he hung a girl. I thought, ‘I can say anything to this guy.’ But, no. He turned it over to the feds.”

Gein had more luck with Christa Pike, the youngest woman to be sentenced to death in the U.S. when she was convicted and sentenced on March 30, 1996, for murdering a woman she saw as a romantic rival. Pike’s victim, 19-year-old Colleen Slemmer, was from Orange Park. In 1995, Slemmer and Pike both attended a Job Corps program in Knoxville, Tenn. There, Pike, her boyfriend and another girl lured Slemmer to a wooded area where they taunted her, slit her with a box cutter and carved a pentagram into her chest. Pike killed her by smashing her skull with a large piece of asphalt. Pike then retrieved a fragment of Slemmer’s skull as a souvenir. All three were arrested after Pike showed up at Job Corps the following day.

Gein describes Pike as a narcissistic, ice-cold sociopath who feels nothing for anyone and shows no remorse for her crimes. But despite her inability to feel for others, she and Gein developed a deep, heated relationship. The pair were even engaged at one point and Gein says he drove 900 miles each year to see Pike. Gein says he wanted to marry her after her execution date was set in 2002, so he could obtain the rights to her life story. He says she wanted him to be at her execution. Despite letters in which Pike declares her love for him, Gein says Pike knew that they were only very good friends.

Still, Pike plied him with plenty of material. She sent the letter with the bloody lip prints, a bloody palm print with a pentagram drawn on it and a bloody heart, among many expressions of love. She recorded audio tapes for him about her life in prison. In one letter, she specifically instructs him to keep her letters *just between them*. After Pike’s execution was postponed and the engagement called off, Gein says they kind of drifted apart.

But he insists they are still good friends. Today, everything she sent him is on the website’s market, from her underwear to her rants against him for not writing. One letter for sale is a Christmas card that the site says was addressed to a former guard at the prison, but which is addressed to “Eric.” In it, Pike writes, “Christmas is about blessings. I guess some people consider it a blessing to go through life with total disregard for the feelings of others.

“To be able to lie about love, commitment and life in general without looking back must be wonderful.

“So Eric, I’m sure you’re living a very happy life. I wouldn’t know anything about that, since the life you told me about was all one big lie. Still, everything I ever said was true. Merry Christmas, asshole,

“Christa.”

One man’s trash is another’s treasure, but there’s always room for negotiation. Gein originally priced Pike’s panties at \$500. He has since marked them down to \$350, but the highest bid to come in for them at the

murderabilia auction site murderauction.com is for \$140. Although Gein told Folio Weekly the market for murderabilia is hot, there were only three items of the more than 600 listed on murderauction.com with bids recently, and those bids totaled a measly \$201.

And it’s not clear that those dollars are pure profit. Gein insists that the inmates he corresponds with aren’t paid for their work and specifically told Folio Weekly that he doesn’t have a business deal with Jablonski to produce art. But that claim is contradicted by a screed he wrote on July 7. Upset that a woman had written to Jablonski asking for a Pogo picture, he wrote:

“Just to set the record straight, we and Jablonski have a working business and he is compensated for the items he sends us. The people who beg for art, give him nothing in return [sic], and then turn around and talk shit about him, is stepping on my toes. I don’t mean to be a dick about it, but it is what it is, and we’ve had it with these parasites.”

After posting that message at 11:01 p.m., he added this at 11:39 p.m.: “For the record, it’s not about compensating him. ... I have a business deal with him. I pay him up front and make sure he is taken care of. When he sends out big pieces of art, that is f*cking me over. I pay him for his items up front, and we have an understanding.

“I do have clout and when I make business deals with people, that’s just what they are, business deals.”

Asked about these postings, Gein explains that when he says “pay,” he means that he sends Jablonski care packages of stamps, art supplies, construction paper and non-perishable food items.

“I don’t write him a check and say, ‘Here’s \$300,’” he says. “It’s illegal for them to profit from their crimes, although every time that’s been brought up, it gets struck [sic] down every single time. If I sent them money, they could get in trouble, get put in the hole. I wouldn’t get in trouble for it.

“But the prisons, they don’t really care about that law [the Son of Sam law]. It’s the victims’ advocates and the victims. I think those laws are just to pacify the victims’ advocacy groups.”

On July 4, 2009, Jacksonville’s First Coast News did a segment on Serial Killers Ink for which it contacted Colleen Slemmer’s mother, May Martinez, who still lives in Orange Park. Martinez said she was “blown away” by the things Gein had for sale from her daughter’s killer.

“The fact that somebody was going to try to make money on this, with the fact of her name, of her death,” she said. “That’s just wrong.” Martinez called Gein to tell him how she felt. “I asked him, I’m the mother of the child that was killed. I said, ‘I need to know why you did this.’ This hurt the family.”

Gein told First Coast News reporter Jackelyn Barnard that the phone call touched him, and that he didn’t want to cause anybody pain. Contrary to what he told Folio Weekly, Gein told Barnard he made hardly any money from the site. He said it was more for educational purposes. He told Barnard he would take the pictures down, and promised they wouldn’t be put back up for sale.

As of Aug. 11, 2010, Gein had 21 items from Christa Pike for sale on Serial Killers Ink. Her underwear had been marked “sold.” □

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