

Episode Five: Evil Woman
"Superstitious"
By: Amy Bartram
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Intro

"There is truly an epidemic of child witchcraft accusations going on right now in the Democratic Republic of Congo" ("Child Witches Accused in the Name of Jesus ABC News").

"I was convinced she had magical powers because Mom told me Grandma was a witch" (Hernandez).

"Binding spells are like any other spells so they're a symbolic action used to harness the powers of the imagination and achieve a tangible result" (Tucker).

"I had to kill her. She was going to kill both of us. She was so powerful. I had no idea. I had no idea that my mother was that powerful" ("A Witch EXPOSES Towns Satanic Activities on News").

"Before they threw her in the first time they said she that she said that she yelled at everybody, 'Before this is over you're all gonna get wetter than I am.'" (Wales).

"I stabbed her three times and she should've died. She was still breathing. She was the antichrist. She did not die" ("A Witch EXPOSES Towns Satanic Activities on News").

"[A] witch looks green. They have a pointy nose, and they have um, pointy ears and they have uh, dots. They ride brooms and they wear hats" (Kinney).

"Will you admit to being a witch" (Wales).

Halloween. It's an ancient Celtic holiday dating back almost 3,000 years. The celebration, called Samhain, was a transition from the time of harvest into the cold winters that often marked the deaths of many European inhabitants. The ancient Celts believed that this was a time in which the lines between the dead and the living became blurred (History.com Staff). They believed that the ghosts of the dead returned. However, these ghosts were thought of as useful, as they often brought with them predictions of the future. And these predictions were important; they gave the Celts a sense of direction and comfort as they prepared for the dead of winter. Every October 31st, before the New Year was to begin on November 1st, the Druids, or Celtic priests, would build large bonfires in order to burn crops, and sacrifice animals to Celtic gods.

It was during the celebration of Samhain that the Celts would dress in costumes and attempted to tell each others' fortunes (History.com Staff).

So, how did this ancient celebration transition from a fortune-telling party to something more sinister? The answer lies within the realm of Christianity. It is in the eighth century that Pope Gregory III decided to squash pagan beliefs and declared November 1st as All Saints Day. Paganism was seen as a threat that had to be dealt with, and over time, the church would insist that Halloween was something involving ghosts and fear. Ultimately, Halloween would be known as the devil's holiday. And since the witch was a symbol married to the devil, it is understandable that the witch would find its association with Halloween; a holiday steeped in myth. The witch would become one of the ultimate symbols for the superstitious...

Superstitious Intro

A General History: Europe to Salem.. and Beyond

We've been surrounded by stories of witches our entire lives. It is a witch in the folktale, "Hansel and Gretel" that lures the brother and sister to her gingerbread house in the woods. It is her goal to entrap them and eat them. There's also the all powerful sea-witch in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*. Wishing to be ruler of the ocean, the sea witch plots to destroy the Sea King. Witches can also be found in movies and television shows. From *Bewitched* to *The Blair Witch Project*, the witch is everywhere. But, why are they so intriguing? Why do we suffer from fear regarding witches? To have a better grasp, you have to take a deep look into the past.

When witches came onto the scene is unknown. However, witches and witchcraft are mentioned in the Bible. And by the time Christianity started to really take hold, something had to be done. If I ask you to tell me what a witch looks like, one of the first things you might tell me is that a witch is a woman. According to anthropologists, the early Christian church was a male dominated profession and women were not authorized by God to administer sacraments, much less anything else. However, the devil could give them permission to do so as a means of getting back at God. Therefore, any woman with an opinion outside of a man's would be born of the devil. A woman who spoke up; born of the devil. Any disobedient woman, you guessed it, born of the devil. It is in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, verse 34 that says, "Let your women keep silence [...] for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law" (*The Bible*). And you can also find condemnation of the woman in 1 Timothy, chapter 2, versus 11 - 13. "Let the woman learn

in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve" (*The Bible*). Yes, men would be persecuted throughout history as witches, but more women than men would die, all of them having one thing in common: They were different in some way; a way in which their respective communities did not like.

So the church had established women as lesser vessels, and you may be wondering: does the Bible give examples of witchcraft? The answer to that is, yes. In fact, you can find a witch story in 1 Samuel. In this tale, King Saul seeks out the magical aid of the Witch of Endor. He asks her to summon the dead prophet Samuel as a means of defeating the Philistine Army. But when the witch rouses Samuel, he prophesies the deaths of Saul and his sons. The next day, Saul's sons died in battle and the grief stricken Saul would commit suicide.

It is also in Exodus chapter 22, verse 18 that states, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (*The Bible*).

The word *hysteria* was coined in 1801 as a nervous disease. The Greek *hystera* translates to "womb". Literally, the word was used to describe a neurotic condition caused by the dysfunction of the uterus. Therefore, you can think of the witch hysteria as tribes of dysfunctional women.

And that's what would happen. The witch craze would really grip Europe in the mid 1400s, and many witches during this time would confess to witchcraft under pain of torture.

By 1486 a book was published by two German Dominicans entitled the *Malleus Maleficarum*, also known as "The Hammer of Witches". In the text, authors Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger taught the fearful how to identify, hunt, and interrogate witches. After its publication, the book sold like hot cakes. For more than 100 years, the *Maleficarum* sold more copies than any other book in Europe except for the Bible (History.com Staff).

However, between the years of 1500 and 1660, those accused of witchcraft had much to fear. An estimated 80,000 people accused of witchcraft were convicted of the practice and were either hanged or burned at the stake (History.com Staff).

The fear of witches would spread like a plague, coming over to the American colonies with the Puritans. While the fear of witches was decreasing in Europe, Massachusetts found itself in a panic by 1692.

"In 1689, English rulers William and Mary started a war with France in the American colonies" (Blumberg). This war, also

known as King William's War to the colonists destroyed parts of Quebec, upstate New York, and refugees escaped to the county of Essex and Salem Village in the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Blumberg). Salem village felt the strain of taking in the displaced people, but they were also feeling the strain of having Reverend Samuel Parris as their ordained minister. The minister was disliked. He was greedy. He was unflinchingly rigid. The Puritan villagers felt as though the man caused a constant argument among the people. And any argument was the work of the devil.

By January of 1692, Reverend Parris' nine year old daughter, Elizabeth, and his 11 year old niece, Abigail Williams, were stricken down with "fits". They were seen contorting into strange positions, throwing things, and screaming absurdities. Another local girl, Ann Putnam, also age 11, caught the fits like a cold. She too, experienced the symptoms that the local doctor confirmed was caused by the supernatural. The girls, under pressure to name the cause for their afflictions, chose to label Tituba, Parris' Caribbean slave, as the cause. But they also pointed eager fingers at Sarah Good, a homeless beggar, and Sarah Osborne, an elderly woman (Blumberg). Osborne and Good professed their innocence, but Tituba confessed to signing the devil's book. Paranoia swept through Salem Village. After conducting several witch hunts, 20 people were convicted and sentenced to death between 1692 and 1693. The trials ended as quickly as they began in Salem, but the witch paranoia was not over in the United States.

The Witch of Pungo

Wales_My Sistah

"Hey, my sistah" (Wales).

That's Darin, a 2015 MFA graduate of Queens University of Charlotte. Darin has his degree in writing in stage and screen. He's the expert on Virginia's witch of Pungo.

Wales_ The Guy

"I am the guy, I, I know some stuff about it" (Wales).

Darin's graduating thesis screenplay and short film was on the witch of Pungo.

Wales_Time Period

"Well, the story is about a woman named Grace Sherwood, and this story takes place in the late 1600s, early 1700s when it all takes place. She was born uh, in 1680 and passed away in 1760. So, she lived til she was 80 years old" (Wales).

The Witch of Pungo is not as common a story as the Salem witch trials, and one can easily miss it . . . unless, that person happens to live where the story took place.

Wales_Discovery

"I used to live in Virginia Beach, Virginia, which is very near the place called Pungo where the -- this little farming village that's still there today. It's in the -- now it's inside the city limits of Virginia Beach, but still it's really outside in the country. Um, there was a road, and there still is a road in Virginia Beach called Witchduck Road. You know, W-I-T-C-H-D-U-C-K. Witchduck. And I had lived there for 10 years and never, for some reason, never had enough interest to figure out 'Why is this called Witchduck? What is a witchduck? What kind of duck is that? I don't know. I've never heard of a duck called a witchduck.' And then one day someone said, "You really ought to look into that, it's a really good story." So I started researching it and as I would research it more and more I thought, 'Oh my goodness, this is an incredible story! You know, it's not about a duck at all.' It's about a woman who was accused of being a witch and she ended up getting dunked--they called it 'ducking' back then--dunked in the water you know like, you know, if they put you in the water and if you survive you are a witch, and if you drown, oh, our bad, you weren't a witch but now you're dead. Kinda how it worked back then. So I started researching it and met a woman there who was a--an expert in it and she told me everything about the whole story, let me look at all of her research she had already done, 'cause she had everything there was on her, and so then I started writing a script about it. So it's just a very in-incredible story" (Wales).

And it really is an incredible story. Grace Sherwood knew the world around her. She was the type of woman who could get stuff done.

Wales_Witchcraft Accusation

"When she started being accused of being a witch, uh, was right around the end of the Salem witch trials in uh, Salem, Massachusetts. And so, that was kind of the thing around the Eastern seaboard. You know, people didn't want to have witches in their community so, anything that was strange someone easily got blamed for it because they're a witch or they're casting spells or something. And so, this Grace

Sherwood you know, she was a phenomenal woman. She was basically a Renaissance woman which is like at least 100 years ahead of her time. And I say that in that she lived in this little village of [...] Pungo, and she was married and she had three boys. But she was like an excellent farmer; better than most of all of the men farmers in the area and she was an excellent animal husbandry person, raising livestock. She could do that better than all the men in the area. Uh, she was fairly tall, and slender, and pretty good looking. She had red hair. You know, and so she was probably better looking than most of the women in the area. She was a naturalist; an herbalist. So, she made things, you know, out in her cauldron in her backyard. You know, making, they call them potions and it's just a combination of things. Cause there weren't really medical doctors back then. So she was making medicines per se, with all these herbs and stuff. So she did that a lot. And did I say she was good looking? All the men had noticed that she was good looking. Even though they knew she was a better farmer than them, and they didn't like that, they knew she was pretty good looking. Well, all the men's wives noticed that the men were noticing that she was good looking, so there you go. You get a perfect storm all set up. No one liked her because she was better at everything they did and better looking than all the women. And, on top of all that, she was fairly opinionated. She didn't mind telling you what she thought about stuff. You know, if you were a bad farmer, she would tell you that this is why you're horrible at farming because you're not doing this, this, and this. You know, she didn't mind telling people what she thought. So all that combination made everybody not like her. So, they began to, anything that went wrong in the area, she got accused of being a witch. Of casting a spell. Making my crops be obliterated, you know, making my bull get sick and die. You know, my baby was a stillborn, you must've put a curse on me. Blah, blah. All, everything! She got blamed for everything! You know, so... and on top of that her husband, anytime someone accused her of being a witch, he would take them to court for slander, or libel. Slander/libel, one or the other. He would take them to court and sue them for saying those things. You know, and other times, people would take her to court for [...] being a witch, so, you know, so she went to court 12 different times defending herself" (Wales).

Wales_Last Trial

"Finally went to the last trial that she went to. You know, it was only like eight or nine years past the Salem witch trials. So all of that combined -- either really thought she was a witch or they just wanted to get rid of her 'cause they didn't like her so that's kind of what it boiled down to" (Wales).

The magistrates in the town of Pungo had to make a decision. What should they do about Grace Sherwood?

Wales_Spectacle

"They put her in front of the church and you know, stainless steel, confess your sins. She says, 'I be not a witch, I be a healer.' And at that point they took her down to the Linhaven Inlet there outside of Virginia Beach, modern Virginia Beach, and uh, took her out in a boat. They cross-tied her, thumbs to big toes; they cross-tied her, put her in a canvas sack, and they put a rope around her and tossed her into the inlet. And you know, and she sunk and the deal was, you know, like I said earlier that you sink and drown uh, you weren't a witch, but if you floated you were a witch. So, they throw her in and she pops, up she's floating like oh no. So the magistrate who's in the boat, he pulls her back in and the priest was on the boat with him. He said, 'Hey, how much does your Bible weigh there?' He had a big Bible; ceremonial Bible. He said, 'What?' He said, 'How much does your Bible weigh?' He said -- I don't know how many stones, it was about 13 pounds. He said, 'Give it to me.' So he put that--wraps that around her neck and they throw her back in the water again, and so she sinks to the bottom this time. So they--I don't, I don't know if they really wanted her to drown. They just wanted to show that yeah, okay, she's not a witch. 'Cause she didn't escape, but we'll let her go anyway. So, they start to pull her up. They pull the rope up and she's not on the end of the rope anymore. She's--she's not there. They're like, 'Oh my gosh, what happened? She's not there whatever. All of the sudden she pops out of the water and starts laughing at everybody and points at the magistrates and pointing at the crowd--there's like 200 people on patrol watching this. And about that time this huge storm rolls in--just douses everybody. As a matter of fact, before they threw her in the first time, they said that she said she yelled at everybody she said, 'Before this is over you all are going to get a lot wetter than I am'. You know, and so, sure enough, this storm rolls in and she survives the ducking and everybody's like, 'She is a witch! She is a witch!' You know, they all freaked out. It was quite a spectacle" (Wales).

Even after the double ducking of Grace Sherwood, she would come out victorious. The magistrates did throw Grace into jail for a few years, but she would ultimately get out and live to be 80 years old.

On July 10, 2006, 300 years after Grace's ducking, Virginia's governor, Tim Kaine cleared her name. Grace was no longer a witch to be preserved as such in the annals of American history.

The First Witch Trial in North Carolina

The state of North Carolina was part of the original 13 colonies, and would find itself in the midst of its own witch trial.

In 1703, on the coast of North Carolina in Albemarle County, a man by the name of Thomas Bouthier, marched to the courthouse and filed a complaint against a woman. Thomas's wife had recently died, and he knew the cause. Her name was Susannah Evans, and Thomas knew she had been led by the hand of the devil to cause egregious pain to his now deceased wife, Deborah. It was known to Bouthier that Susannah Evans was not a god-fearing woman.

Thomas explained to the magistrate the affliction spread through his servants like wildfire until eventually, the pains seized his wife. According to Thomas, that July 24th, his wife came down with severe pains in her feet. Pains in which she said felt like "a thousand nails piercing her skin" (Hope). Deborah tried soaking her feet for 24 hours. The good news was her feet no longer hurt, but now the pain had traveled up to her stomach. On her death bed, Deborah told her husband that this was the bewitching of Susannah Evans, begging him to have her investigated. But the investigation of Susannah Evans would not occur until after Deborah's passing.

Thomas held true to his word. He filed the charge and the case went to trial.

One Captain Corneilus Jones served as the foreman of the grand jury. As he was a ship captain, he had traveled the coast of America and had heard about the witch trials in Salem. During the trial, the captain realized that no concrete evidence of witchcraft had actually been presented; Susannah Evans couldn't possibly be responsible for the death of Deborah Bouthier. Captain Jones convinced the rest of the jury -- witchcraft was just not possible in this case.

On October 27, 1703, Susannah Evans was cleared of all charges.

Witches Castle, Utica, Indiana

Witches and witch trials are not simply limited to the eastern seaboard. In fact, there's a frightening story about witches in Utica, Indiana. Perhaps this is legend, or perhaps there's some truth to be had.

In southern Indiana, right on the border of Kentucky, a piece of land exists, both beautiful and cursed. The town of Utica was established in 1795 by one James Noble Wood. A Revolutionary War man, Wood had taken this piece of land as

his own, claiming himself to be a war hero. He was taking what he felt was his prize. However, according to local legend, Wood had an issue. Three sisters, living on the land, did not want to give up their home and fought Wood to keep it. Wood, not a man to be taken over by women, decided it would be in his best interest to gather a vigilante group of men who ultimately helped Wood capture the women. The three were tied to a raft and sent over the falls of the Ohio river, floating perilously to their deaths. It is said that the women were quite a spectacle as they screamed out of fear, cursing the town. Forever. The three were dubbed witches.

And the town of Utica has never escaped the curse.

Eventually, a dam was built in the town, and three more sisters would call Utica their home. The sisters lived in what is now called Witch's Castle, a stone shack in the woods. They often kept to themselves, coming out to venture primarily at night, were accused of keeping strange baskets of plant roots, animal bones, and geodes around their property. To keep from having unwanted guests around their castle, the sisters also posted an amalgam of "No Trespassing" signs around the property. Needless to say, the group had been shunned by the community as the local folk were frightened by their strangeness. And a rumor quickly drifted through the town: These sisters were witches. But something would occur in the town that nail the lids on their coffins. Children started disappearing; five to be exact. And while the people of the town suspected the witches, it wasn't confirmed until later when a visitor on the property found what he believed to be human skins hanging from a makeshift clothesline. The community had had enough; something had to be done. The sisters' house was raided, and they, like the sisters before them, were tried on the spot. It's said they were hanged in their home and the house was set on fire.

The home was rebuilt in the 1950s but shortly thereafter abandoned when the home caught fire again. No one wanted to rebuild or have anything to do with the area once visitors started seeing the ghost of a young, faceless girl with long black hair and wearing a white dress wandering through the woods. Could she have been the victim of witchcraft? No one knows. But the strange circumstances surrounding Witches' Castle was not over yet.

The castle, now in ruin, still had sinister tricks to play. In 1992, another witchcraft happening would take place there when four teenage girls kidnapped 12 year old Shanda Sharer. Luring the pre-teen to the Witches' Castle, Sharer was tied up and brutally beaten. It's here that an attempt to set Sharer on fire occurred, but this was not to be. The 1992

kidnappers, now dubbed witches, would ultimately move Shanda Sharer to another location alongside the Ohio River. However, the group was successful in their endeavor this time. The burned Sharer alive.

Not much is left of the Witches' Castle in Utica, Indiana. And although much of the occurrences in Utica are left in the realm of the superstitious, few people are bold enough to return to visit the site.

The Witches of Red Bluff, California

There's a small beachfront in Red Bluff, California, in a quiet residential neighborhood. It's called Reeds Creek and the area has never seen any strange happenings. . . until recently. Something is changing where the Sacramento meets the Reeds. Historically, little can be found that would suggest anything sinister, but visitors of the area have reported seeing a trio of women. Some see them rising from the water, and some see them rising from the water, but the water has turned to blood. Other witnesses are bold enough to see the witches at a close enough range to notice blood dripping from their eyes, ears, and mouth.

But one thing occurs from all of the sightings: the witches speak. Rather, they chant some sort of unknown language. Those that have had the misfortune of hearing the chanting, have said that the three will rise up into the air, make a bonfire from nothing and float naked around the flames. Many witnesses can only watch the spectacle for a short amount of time before being spooked away. One woman claims to have been chased by one of the witches for a half mile. Regardless of the story's authenticity, one thing is true: witches and their supernatural powers thrust us into fear.

Wales_Unknown

"I think people are scared of them because if they, if they don't have a strong, uh, Christian relationship with God then I think people leave themselves wide open to spiritual influences that are not from God. Regardless, I thin people are scared of them because they're the unknown" (Wales).

Witch Testing

At this point, you may be wondering what elements might constitute a witch. You may be wondering if you might have been considered a witch during the late 1600s. Today, in the spirit of Halloween, I am providing the tool, to gauge whether or not you could be a witch around the time of the Salem witch trials.

1. You're a woman.
2. You're rich and financially dependent.
3. You're poor and cannot financially support yourself.
4. You have women friends and you've had an argument with at least one of them.
5. You are a midwife.
6. You have exhibited some kind of strange or stubborn behavior.
7. You have a mole, birthmark, or third nipple.
8. You've had sex out of wedlock.
9. You've tried to predict who your future husband is.
10. You've broken any rule from the Bible, binding you to the devil.

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, more than likely, you would have been accused of witchcraft during the early days of witchcraft.

Ultimately, so many of us still believe in witchcraft. We see this on a daily basis, and it's one of the things plaguing our nation today; a superstition involving the things we do not like or understand.

Wales_Fake News

"Especially in modern times, you know, it's all the politics going. People are always, you know how people talk about fake news and stuff. People make up stories about other people to make them look bad. Whether it's a Democrat or Republican or vice versa or somewhere in between. People are always doing this. Like, you can't always believe what people say" (Wales).

Idioms for Idiots

Each episode of Superstitious features a segment called "Idioms for Idiots". In this episode, we delved into the superstitious realm of witches. I asked, and you voted for this week's catchy phrase: "witch hunt".

It is probably no surprise that the term witch hunt dates back to the 1600s, and it literally means to hunt witches. During a time when fear of black magic and the unknown roamed Europe and later, America, witch hunts were believed a must for survival. They were a part of the devil and had to be extinguished.

Although the phrase was popular throughout Puritan America, the phrase "witch hunt" would stick. However, the phrase

would morph over time. Eventually, the phrase would come to be associated with the political world. Today, the phrase means "the searching out and deliberate harassment of those with unpopular views" (Merriam-Webster). For example, in today's world, such witch hunts tend to include those who identify themselves as 'trans', or someone "whose gender differs from the one they were given when they were born" (BeLonGTo.org). Groups of people seek out those who are trans, committing heinous crimes against them, including murder. Other witch hunt atmospheres have been attributed to immigrants, politicians with differing opinions, and those who commit sex crimes.

While the term "witch hunt" has changed over time, and people no longer deliberately seek out witches to harvest, the phrase still stakes its claim in fear and superstition.

Conclusion

This episode of Superstitious is dedicated to Sam and Roman. Sam, you are always giving the Superstitious podcast great feedback, fun interviews, and interesting tidbits for the show. And Grandma was never a witch, but a fairy princess. Roman, you are my one and only Halloween baby. Happy Birthday.

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"Superstitious" is available on iTunes and Stitcher, so if you enjoyed the show, make sure to subscribe and rate; it would be greatly appreciated!

Join me for the next episode of Superstitions on Monday, November 13!

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