

## Genie Case Study

Excerpts from an Article in *The Guardian*

# the guardian

### Starved, Tortured, Forgotten:

### Genie, the Feral Child Who Left a Mark on Researchers

Written by Rory Carroll

She hobbled into a Los Angeles county welfare office in October 1970, a stooped, withered waif with a curious way of holding up her hands, like a rabbit. She looked about six or seven. Her mother, stricken with cataracts, was seeking an office with services for the blind and had entered the wrong room.

But the girl transfixed welfare officers. At first they assumed autism. Then they discovered she could not talk. She was incontinent and salivated and spat. She had two nearly complete sets of teeth - extra teeth in such cases are known as supernumeraries, a rare dental condition. She could barely chew or swallow, and could not fully focus her eyes or extend her limbs. She weighed just 59lb (26kg). And she was, it turned out, 13 years old.

Her name – the name given to protect her identity – was Genie. Her deranged father had strapped her into a handmade straitjacket and tied her to a chair in a silent room of a suburban house since she was a toddler. He had forbidden her to cry, speak or make noise and had beaten and growled at her, like a dog.

She was a prize specimen for having grown up without language or social training. Could she now learn language? Jostling for access, they took brain scans and audio recordings, performed countless tests, compiled reams of data, published papers. By the late 1970s, Genie had vanished back into obscurity. As she was a ward of California, authorities housed her in state-run institutions, her location secret. Four decades later, she apparently remains in state care.

“I’m pretty sure she’s still alive because I’ve asked each time I called and they told me she’s well,” said Susan Curtiss, a UCLA linguistics professor who studied and befriended Genie. “They never let me have any contact with her. I’ve become powerless in my attempts to visit her or write to her. I think my last contact was in the early 1980s.”

#### Reference

Carroll, R. (2016). Saved, tortured, forgotten: Genie, the feral child who left a mark on researchers. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jul/14/genie-feral-child-los-angeles-researchers>