

**Movie:** Mr. Jingles (2006)

### **Synopsis**

After visiting the Amityville Horror house with the Warrens, we take a ferry ride across Lake Erie to visit the Wolverine State. The following synopsis reflects the 2006 horror movie as well as its sequel, *Jingles the Clown*, a 2009 reboot directed by Tommy Brunswick and written by Todd Brunswick.

Charles David Tanner is Mr. Jingles, a serial killer and the co-host of a children's television series. Mr. Jingles already tortured and murdered 31 people by the time he abducts the Nelson family, and forces nine-year-old Angela (Angie) to watch as he films himself murdering her parents and sister. The police arrive in time to rescue Angie. Instead of arresting Jingles, they execute him, disposing the body in the trunk of a police cruiser. As Angie is led away, Jingles winks at her. In true Pennywise fashion (see below), Jingles escapes down a septic tank.

In the 15 years that have passed, Tanner's home has become an urban legend for teens to dare to visit, and ghost hunters to investigate. The film depicts the events of Miranda and her cast of *Haunted Maniacs* who dare to investigate the truth behind the urban legend of Mr. Jingles.

### **How it relates to the field of psychiatry**

The archetype of the "killer clown" has its roots in both horror fiction and forensic psychiatry. Fictional accounts build on the universal fear; *coulrophobia*. In a more general sense, it's a twist on the double bind. A child receives two conflicting messages; a funny character whose behavior is entertaining, but whose thoughts are dark and sinister.

Angie Nelson's homecoming is homage to the "Losers Club" who as adults, return to their hometown of Derry, Maine in Stephen King's *IT*. Angie's dissociative amnesia prevents the film crew from finding the talisman needed to ward off Jingles. Cued by information in the case files, Angie recalls an old trunk in the attic which sets the scene for the movie's climax. Similarly, Stephen King's 1984 novel depicts five accounts of Dissociative Amnesia. In the second part of the book, the "five Losers" return to Derry with a collective inability to recall information about the traumatic events related to their earlier battle with Pennywise the clown. The protagonists' fight through their memory deficits pushes the narrative forward to the novel's climax deep in the sewers of Derry.

In addition to teaching points pertaining to Dissociative Amnesia, *Mr. Jingles* also allows for review of sociopathy. An alderman in Chicago, John Wayne Gacy, Jr. (aka the "Killer Clown") was convicted of murdering a minimum of 33 people in a series of killings committed between 1972-1978 (Charles David Tanner – ironically also of 3 names – murdered about the same number of people in *Jingles*). Gacy gained high status in community circles and joined a "Jolly Joker" clown club whose members would regularly dress as clowns and voluntarily entertain hospitalized children. Pogo was Gacy's alter ego whose sinister motives could be literally seen on his face in that his makeup created sharp points (painted smile). Conversely, clown makeup always creates curved or soft contours as a non-verbal extension of friendship to the children they entertain. Similar to Gacy creating his own performance character, "Pogo the Clown," Tanner co-hosted a children's television series as Jingles the Clown.

The roots of coulrophobia can be traced back to June 22, 1918, when 86 circus performers were killed and buried in a mass grave at Showman's Rest in Chicago. Clown scares in 1980 (Newark, NJ) and 1981

(Evil Phantom Clowns of Boston) rekindled cinematic intrigue that was reflected in *Poltergeist* (1982) and *IT* (1984). The clown hysteria came full circle with its return to Chicago with the Clown Panic of 1991 in Cabrini Green (“The Evil Homey”).

**Key Words:** Mr. Jingles, Jingles the Clown, Pennywise, Stephen King’s *IT*, Haunted Maniacs, killer clown, coulrophobia, double bind, Angie Nelson, Losers Club, dissociative amnesia, sociopathy, John Wayne Gacy, Charles David Tanner, Jolly Joker, Pogo, Showman’s Rest, Evil Phantom Clowns, *Poltergeist*, Cabrini Green, The Evil Homey

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