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## **Noreen Renier's "psychic" reading leads Williston police to missing body -- Case to be featured on A&E**

**by Gary P. Posner**

On April 5 the Associated Press reported that, as per the headline of the [story in the St. Petersburg Times](#), "Psychic tip leads to missing man's body." The tipster was none other than Orlando "psychic detective" Noreen Reiner, who claims a history of great success in assisting police investigations into unsolved homicides and missing person cases, and whose assistance in this case is being touted by police and Navy personnel.

Seventy-six-year-old Norman Lewis, along with his Chevy S-10 truck, had been missing for two years from the tiny Florida town of Williston, located just southwest of Gainesville. According to contemporaneous newspaper accounts, on March 24, 1994, Lewis had driven off for a brief jaunt, leaving behind his wallet and respiratory inhaler, and was never seen again. In its April 11, 1994, edition, the Ocala Star-Banner quoted Williston Police Chief Olin Slaughter as observing, "It's like he fell off the edge of the earth." [Wink, wink. Hint, hint.]

After more than a year, with the Williston police following-up on "hundreds" of leads and conducting numerous aerial searches, all to no avail, the Lewis family suggested that a "psychic" be called in. Investigator Brian Hewitt, having previously been impressed by a Renier retroactive-crime-solving demonstration of the sort described in our last issue's lead story ("Noreen Renier 'Put to the Test' -- Hollywood Style"), and aware of her other credentials, passed along her name to the Lewis family, which reportedly provided the \$650 fee for her services (the police department did not have the funds).

Approximately three weeks after Hewitt called Renier to set up the appointment at her home, Renier performed her "psychic" reading. According to published accounts, it included a number of specific

"clues" to help lead the police to Lewis' body (Renier is refusing to allow the public to see the videotape). The Williston Pioneer (on April 4 and June 27, 1996) quotes Chief Slaughter as saying that Renier said Lewis had traveled *east* from his home to an area where there is . . . water in something like a pit." (Emphasis added.) The Chiefland Citizen (April 11, 1996) quotes Slaughter: "She could see he was surrounded by metal. . . . She could see a cliff wall, and loose bricks, a railroad track, and a bridge." The numbers "45" and "21" were also offered as helpful clues.

A subsequent look into several bodies of water proved as fruitless as the earlier searches. But because of Renier's reading, the police called in a team of Navy divers from Jacksonville to search one particular limestone quarry. Although about eight months elapsed before the divers could arrive, on this past April 3, with the assistance of a \$70,000 detection device, they did indeed locate the missing truck, containing Lewis' skeletal remains, submerged in twenty feet of murky water.

Almost immediately after the Williston police announced that the case had been solved, largely as a result of Renier's "psychic" clues, the story quite naturally captured the attention of the media. In addition to newspapers and local TV, national radio icon Paul Harvey reported upon it, and the TV show *Sightings* will open its new fall season with this case. It may even have inspired what sounds suspiciously like a copy-cat "psychic" prediction that has persuaded authorities in Graniteville, Missouri, to drain a 3-million-gallon quarry in search of a girl missing from that town for seven years.

My involvement in the case began on May 7, when I received a telephone call from Maria Zone, a researcher for Towers Productions, based in Chicago. Towers is producing a series of one-hour documentaries for the A&E Network, tentatively called *Unexplained*. I was advised that one of the programs, presently scheduled for airing next January, will be devoted to several "renowned psychic detectives," including Renier, and that this case will be featured. I was then invited to prepare a response for what is promised by John McCarthy, the series' senior producer, to be a balanced, if not downright skeptical, presentation.

On June 27, a Towers producer, Judy Cole, with TV camera crew in tow, arrived in Williston (she would interview Renier in Orlando the following day). After first visiting with the police, she interviewed me (this was my second trip to the area, accompanied both times by TBS member Glenn Thompson, who recorded the action on videotape for TBS's archives). By then, thanks in part to materials provided by Zone and by TBS member and Williston resident Warren Gammel, I had accumulated a number of relevant newspaper articles and maps and, based upon the material available to me, had come to a provocative conclusion: Norman Lewis' remains had been found not because the police had the Navy divers search the body of water best fitting Renier's "psychic" clues, but because they had the Navy search the wrong watery pit!

Staring at the 1994 Bowden Custom Maps [roadmap of Williston](#), the most immediately striking feature is the blue body of water just a few degrees south of due east and less than one mile away from Mr. Lewis' home. This limestone quarry, when approached from the west, is located adjacent to the intersection of U.S. 41 and state route 121. Flipping the map over, one can see that U.S. 41 is also known in Williston as state route 45. In other words, if Mr. Lewis had indeed traveled east from his home to a watery pit, as Chief Slaughter says Renier had seen in her "psychic" vision, he would have encountered such a quarry just east of the junction of state routes 45 and 121. Renier's two numerical clues were reportedly "45" and "21" -- had she offered "45" and "121," someone might have cynically accused her of having used the approximately three weeks available to her to research the case and

consult a map!

Perusing the [U.S. Geological Survey's "Williston Quadrangle" map](#), one may observe this clearly marked "Quarry" area in more detail. Of note is the Seaboard Coast Line's north/south railroad track 3/4 of a mile east of the quarry's eastern circumference, with a branch directed westward into the heart of the quarry area. One of Renier's clues was "railroad track."

Neither map reveals a "bridge" in the area, or any other "metal" structure, as Renier predicted. But where there is water, it is logical to assume that a bridge, if only a footbridge, may be nearby. And it had been widely reported (and probably directly told to Renier) that Mr. Lewis had disappeared in his "metal" truck. It is also logical to assume the presence of a "cliff wall" and "bricks" at a quarry, two more of Renier's clues.

As I told Judy Cole on camera, I cannot know if Renier's clues, intended to help locate Mr. Lewis, were the result of "psychic" power, or of some other, more prosaic, process. But, as I said to her, if I were desirous of having others believe, mistakenly, that *I* possessed psychic power, and if *I* had been approached by the police to assist in this case, *I* might have provided them with the *very same clues*. I added, "They're all right here," pointing to my smattering of newspaper articles and maps.

I elaborated: Forget about "psychic" detectives for a moment. Let's just employ "ordinary" detective-style reasoning and common sense. Considering the fact that the intensive ground and aerial search had turned up nothing, *if* Mr. Lewis and his truck *were* somewhere within the potential reach of the Williston authorities, where could they *possibly* be? In the middle of an extremely densely wooded area? In an abandoned building? (Either, perhaps, if only a body was missing. But a truck?) Only one possibility even comes to mind -- submerged under water.

Chief Slaughter, it seems, had had the right idea all along, even if he was not consciously aware of it. It appeared, indeed, "like [Lewis] fell off the edge of the earth" -- and into a bottomless, or at least murky, pit. A quick glance at the Williston roadmap revealed an obvious potential site, and the U.S.G.S. map confirmed that this was just the sort of pit/quarry that fit the bill.

One minor problem. The "logical" site -- the one that Renier's "psychic" clues seemed tailored to -- the limestone quarry less than a mile east of Lewis' home, at the junction of state routes 45 and 121, serviced by a railroad track -- was not where Mr. Lewis' truck and remains were ultimately found! Rather, with the Navy's assistance, the truck containing the remains was located in a *different* limestone pit, just a few degrees east of *due north* from Lewis' home, and *more than twice as far away!* The recovery site, known as the Whitehurst pit, is also located adjacent to state route 45, but not route 121.

Renier's "21" clue, in fact, played no beneficial role whatsoever in assisting in the location of Mr. Lewis' body. Yet, this clue has been hailed by the authorities as perhaps her most eerily precise of all. Why? Because, *after* Mr. Lewis' body had been recovered, it was realized that he had been found "2.1" miles from his home!

Nor was her "railroad track" clue of any value in deciding which quarry to search. Although the U.S.G.S. map clearly shows an "abandoned" track traversing the Whitehurst quarry east/west, the police did not become aware of its presence until a portion of the buried track was unearthed *after* the

divers had already been called in. [**Late Correction:** Though that was the timeline per the *Gainesville Sun's* article of 4/4/96, and was reiterated in the below-mentioned WTVT-TV 13 report of 4/19/96, Detective Hewitt's handwritten report dated 8/17/95 includes the following: "Today located a set of railroad tracks in woods and followed along to shoulder of access road at Whitehurst pits. Tracks are partially buried in some places and completely buried in others." And his letter to the Department of the Navy requesting their assistance in the search is dated 9/27/95. So he discovered the tracks *before* calling for the Navy divers. But was Renier's "railroad track" clue indicative of "psychic" power, or a vivid imagination? See my 4/21/11 entry on [this page](#)]

Nor did her "bridge" clue offer any assistance in targeting this particular pit, or in helping narrow down the search area within the 30-acre quarry. But, as reporter Dave Monsees explained on a WTVT-TV 13 (Tampa) newscast of April 19, "Another clue that amazed [Chief] Slaughter was that the psychic saw a bridge nearby. Turned out he'd passed it countless times and never saw it -- on the access road to the quarry, an old, wooden truck scale that smacks for all the world of a bridge, if you take the time to stare at it." [**Late Clarification:** Though Detective Hewitt is now deceased, Chief Slaughter disputes this as well, claiming to have spotted the bridge/scale *before* calling for the Navy divers.]

If ever there was a case in which simple common sense and "retrofitting" -- transforming ubiquitous clues into valuable "hits" after the fact -- seemed to account for the miraculous success of a piece of "psychic" detective work, this appears to be one for the books.

Renier had apparently proven herself to the police and family not merely with her clues, but with her knowledge of details about Lewis' life (for instance, that he was retired from the military). But such information appeared in newspaper accounts during the search period, which are available to anyone interested enough to seek them out.

Judy Cole, after interviewing the police, informed me that Renier had sketched several lines for them representing a "quadrant" that appeared to encompass both the northern and eastern quarries. Cole also said that when some bricks were spotted at the northern pit, the police apparently decided to zero in on that one. Perhaps the A&E program will better explain why the divers were asked to search only that one quarry. Had they instead searched the one that seems a better match to Renier's clues, Mr. Lewis would have never been found, and Paul Harvey would have found something else to talk about. But perhaps the Graniteville, Missouri, authorities, and the family of that missing girl, might have been spared a lot of unnecessary hard work and heartache.

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## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

by Terry A. Smiljanich

### Life on Mars

The news that some scientists believe they have uncovered evidence suggesting the existence of life on Mars has received much deserved publicity in the media. The reports indicate that examination of a 13,000-year-old meteorite found in Antarctica reveals the presence of carbon compounds associated with biological activity. There are even some tantalizing structures hidden deep within the meteorite that might represent fossilized archaic bacteria. The best evidence indicates that the meteorite comes from Martian rock 4.5 billion years old, with the carbonates in it aged 3.6 billion

years.

This hoopla has been hailed as one of the biggest stories of the twentieth century. In typical fashion, the media have hyped the story with little regard for the admittedly tentative nature of the claims being made by the scientists, but it is a big story. The report in the peer-reviewed journal *Science* was the result of two years of detailed study and analysis, and the evidence for the conclusions is laid out in substantial detail so that other scientists can examine it themselves. Indeed, many skeptical scientists, while admitting that the evidence is substantial, have weighed in with possible objections to these claims.

Compare this to the breathless reports by pseudoscientists regarding extraterrestrial life! [Richard Hoagland](#) has produced books, videos, and held press conferences claiming that a human face exists on Mars amidst pyramids and cities. Bob Guccione, publisher of *Penthouse*, has just published photographs, of an alien from the Roswell UFO crash, which he purchased from the daughter of a deceased "government scientist" (both unnamed). Careful analysis, detailed reporting of all facts (pro and con), consideration of alternative theories (the "alien" photo has turned out to be the "dummy" on display at a Roswell UFO museum!), peer review by respected scientists, and other hallmarks of legitimate science are all missing.

Here for all the world to see is the stark contrast between *real* science and pseudoscience. Science proceeds cautiously, with a built-in mechanism for self-correction. Evidence of earthly contamination of the meteorite, for example, was carefully considered, and the possibility has not been ruled out. Pseudoscience, on the other hand, takes a few unexamined facts and concocts a mountain of speculation based on that flimsy foundation. Science thrives on criticism of its conclusions, and considers skeptical comment to be part of the continual testing of those conclusions. Pseudoscience considers any criticism of its fantastic theories to be narrow-minded bigotry, perpetrated by a cabal of sinister scientists and government agents. Pseudoscience seeks only confirmation, not falsification.

In addition, evidence of ancient life on a semi-hospitable planet is consistent with current scientific knowledge regarding the origins of life on Earth. Pseudoscientific "evidence" of ancient civilizations on Mars does not, however, fit within any known science. Anything is possible, but belief, in the absence of compelling evidence, is called *faith*, not knowledge.

If possible evidence of fossilized bacteria on Mars is the biggest story of the century, imagine the supposed discovery of pyramids and faces on Mars! To call that the news event of the *millennium* would be a vast understatement! Aliens in New Mexico? Right up there with faces and pyramids! Alien abductions and sexual experimentation? The Nobel Prize would not be good enough!

Skeptics are often met with the argument by believers in pseudoscientific theories that the skeptical, scientific world is constrained and boring as compared to the marvels of crystals, faces on Mars, etc. Isn't the opposite conclusion quite obvious? I leave it with the reader as to the more exciting and interesting prospect: 1) A piece of Mars was blown off the planet billions of years ago, orbited the Sun, crashed into the Earth, was discovered on an ice cap, and reveals chemicals consistent with ancient life; or 2) Something that looks sort of like a face showed up on a photograph of Mars, but might turn out just to be an interesting mesa when higher-resolution photographs become available.

Ah, the wonders of pseudoscience!

## Snippets

Aside from the Buccaneers, perhaps the greatest source of pride for residents of the Tampa Bay area is the Home Shopping Network. Recently, HSN settled with the Federal Trade Commission regarding charges of deceptive advertising during appearances by former actress Ruta Lee. While neither HSN nor Lee's production company had to admit guilt or pay damages, both agreed to cease airing unproven health, dietary and smoking claims, under penalty of \$10,000. During a series of 1993 appearances, Lee had touted the Lifeway Health Products line, claiming its Anti-Oxidant Spray prevents facial lines and helps prevent infectious diseases, its Vitamin B-12 Spray cures hangovers and increases energy, its Vitamin C and Zinc Spray prevents colds and heals skin lesions, and its Smoke-Less Nutrient Spray enables smokers to quit without any physical or psychological consequences.

(*St. Petersburg Times*, July 12)

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"I'd be crazy if I went public with something like this without being certain about what's going on." Never has a more truthful and accurate sentence been uttered. In this instance, the utterer is Emory University's Courtney Brown, a fully tenured professor of political science who adds, "I was a fellow at the Carter Presidential Center. I've worked at UCLA. All the prestige that I've got is resting on whether there is anything in this. . . . I'd be dead as an academic. I couldn't even get a letter published in Dear Abby."

(*Kansas City Star* via *Tampa Tribune*, June 22)

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My psychic power tells me that I left something out of the previous item. Sorry about that! No, Prof. Brown was not alluding to mere speculation about the health of Russia's Boris Yeltsin, or the advisability of improving U.S. relations with North Korea. You see, Brown has successfully harnessed the proven technique of "remote viewing" to travel through space and time (even to another galaxy), and to speak with Jesus. As for Mars, forget about that fossilized bacteria mumbo jumbo from NASA. Brown has determined that there are presently colonies of Martians barely surviving there in underground shelters, and that a small colony has come to Earth and lives in a canyon below New Mexico's Santa Fe Baldy mountain. But hope is on the way: The Grays (you know -- the alien race that abducts humans for genetic experimentation) are working to save the Martians from extinction. And the late Gene Roddenberry, who is credited with creating *Star Trek*, turns out to be a plagiarizer! The *aliens* (the Grays, I suppose) actually came up with the idea! And if you don't believe *me*, you can find the truth in Prof. Brown's new book, *Cosmic Voyage* (Dutton, \$23.95).

(Ditto)

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