



Selected articles from
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Noreen Renier / Williston "psychic detective" case follow-up report

by Gary P. Posner

Subsequent to the publication of our two-part report on Florida "psychic detective" Noreen Renier's involvement in the Williston, Florida, case of missing person Norman Lewis (see Fall '96 and Winter '96-97 issues), several additional items remain in need of attention.

In stark contrast to A&E's coverage of the case on the January 9 edition of *The Unexplained* (rerun several times since), which was appropriately balanced due to my own participation on the program, the Sci-Fi Channel's November 15th *Sightings* included no skeptical input. The *Sightings* narrator asks, but is unable to answer, the question, "Why did Norman disappear?" No mention is made of Investigator Brian Hewitt's May 12, 1995, report (two months prior to Renier's reading) in which he had detailed Lewis' "rock pit" suicide scenario, as related to him by a friend of Lewis (see Winter issue). But in fairness to *Sightings*, this information had also been withheld by the police from the A&E producer.

Renier performed a re-creation, for the *Sightings* cameras, of her original "psychic" reading. In doing so, she appears to have strayed from her reading with regard to her "21" clue, so as to now associate the number "21" with "miles." (After Lewis' body was found, the police credited the "21" clue as remarkably accurate because the body was recovered exactly "2.1 miles" from Lewis' home.) Says Renier on *Sightings*, eyes closed, feigning a trance-like state, "Numbers -- 21. I feel miles."

But as previously reported (Winter), an edited audiotape of Renier's reading, obtained from the police file, contains only the following reference to mileage: "Speedometer is zero in front of the house. . . . Maybe 4, maybe 5. If it's 45 miles, if it's 4.5 miles. . . ." On that edited tape, there is no mention of "21" in any context, but there is the following: "One point, or one-one point two. I see two-two-I [the letter 'I']." Neither is there a "21" clue on the edited videotape (to be discussed later). But Hewitt's five-page, handwritten summary of Renier's reading includes a string of numbers and letters

resembling a "stream of consciousness" clue, with no particular regard to mileage, in the midst of which the number "21" appears: "221 22 21 2I H EML E 11.2."

The "45 miles" clue is puzzling, as Renier has been credited with correctly determining that Lewis would be found a short distance from his home. From her *Sightings* re-creation: "I'm driving for a short distance, and then something happens, and I see him in the air, going downward." And from the videotape of her original reading:

Norman's house is here [gesturing to the right with her right arm]. Here's the road [gesturing straight ahead with her left arm]. We go this way [pointing straight ahead with her left hand]. . . . But we don't go very far that way, we're going to veer off here [pointing left with her left hand] . . . towards the river. And for some reason the river is down below [as if describing Lewis' arrival at the pit/quarry's sheer cliff].

This passage on the videotape appears to be a "smoking gun" with regard to the body of water to which Renier's directions actually lead. As I postulated in the Fall *TBS Report* -- before we had received any of the police reports or tapes -- Renier's clues (as I then understood them to be) seemed to lead not to the Whitehurst pit (located just a *few degrees east of due north* of Lewis' home) where the body was ultimately found, but rather to another rock pit much closer to, and just a *few degrees south of due east* of, his home.

During two visits to Williston in regard to this case (accompanied both times by fellow TBS member Glenn Thompson, who videotaped them), I viewed the Lewis residence, located at 752-A N.W. 7th Blvd. With the home on the *right* side of the street, proceeding straight ahead (as per Renier's "psychic" vision) leads *southeasterly* for approx. one-third mile, at which time the road curves *left* to a *due east* bearing, until N.W. 7th Blvd. ends at its intersection with U.S. 41, approx. one-half mile from the Lewis home. Another quarter-mile or so due east, dead ahead (no pun intended), is a massive rock quarry, the most prominent feature on my Williston roadmap.

Summarizing Renier's role, the *Sightings* narrator says, "Investigator Hewitt put all of Renier's clues together, used some gut instinct of his own, and came up with one word -- 'Quarry.'" As alluded to earlier (and as reported upon more fully in our Winter issue), Hewitt had actually learned *two weeks earlier* of Lewis' plans for ending his life in a quarry. In the video of Renier's actual reading for the police, she refers to the body of water as a "river" (although she seems puzzled as to why it goes "down" such a sheer cliff). But the word "quarry" is uttered once on the video, *not* after Hewitt has a chance to digest all of Renier's clues and apply his "gut instinct," but in the midst of the session by an unidentified male questioner present with Hewitt in Renier's living room: "Now look at that quarry. As you're looking at it and looking at it from the entrance there . . ."

Following Renier's reading, did the police zero-in on one quarry to which Noreen's directions pointed? Hewitt says on *Sightings* that he "walked around probably 30 quarries" before deciding that the Whitehurst pit most closely matched the totality of Renier's clues. That may indeed have been his reason for calling in the Navy divers to scour that one pit, which did result in Lewis' body and truck being recovered. But his initial rationale for concentrating on the Whitehurst pit was described this way in his 7/21/95 report, six days after Renier's reading: ". . . the Whitehurst pits are an obvious first impression because of there [sic] location, being the closest and the most accessible from the Lewis residence." [The pit to the east is actually about twice as close.]

As for this "eastern" pit to which Renier's directions actually seem to point, a person with some inside knowledge about the police investigation (who allowed me to tape our conversation but requests anonymity) has told me that the police had planned to do, and may have done, some "exploratory diving" in this pit. "This was the prime target for the investigation after the [reading]," says my source. "They didn't know there was a [railroad] track" at the Whitehurst pit ("railroad tracks" was one of Renier's clues, as detailed in our Fall issue). At the eastern pit "the water drops straight off . . . 40-50 feet [deep]."

At the conclusion of the *Sightings* report, the narrator explained how Renier's "22" clue had also been remarkably accurate: When Lewis' body was recovered, it was noted that "the calendar date on Norman's diving watch was stopped on the number 22." For the record, he had disappeared and presumably committed suicide on the 24th of March, 1994. [I suspect that the "22" really represented the number of barnacles affixed to the truck.]

How the Renier police tapes (albeit edited) were obtained is an intriguing story in itself. On July 17, 1996, a Tampa attorney (who desires no publicity) made a Public Records Request of the Williston Police Department (pursuant to Chapter 119 of the Florida Statutes) requesting their complete file on the case, explicitly mentioning "all videotapes [and] audiotapes." When a copy of the file arrived in late August, there was no video or audiotape, even though the press had reported that the session had been recorded in both manners. During subsequent conversations with Hewitt, the attorney reiterated his request for the tapes, and was belatedly advised that an audiotape did in fact exist in the file and would be provided. As for a videotape, on September 3 Hewitt wrote: "As I have advised you in several telephone conversations, the only [video]tape contained in the requested file . . . is of the recovery, which you indicated you did not want."

When even the promised audiotape failed to arrive, the attorney wrote to Hewitt again on October 28, threatening to file a lawsuit "if a copy of the [audio]tape is not presented to us within seven (7) days." It was apparently the Police Department's position that the *video* of Renier's reading was the private property of the Lewis family (who paid for her services) rather than part of the official police file, and thus was not covered by the Public Records Act. The audiotape was finally mailed by Hewitt on October 30.

Because the edited tape runs for less than six minutes, the attorney wrote back on December 9 requesting "a complete copy of the audiotape." Hewitt responded with a letter explaining that the tape "is the only audio tape I have regarding Noreen Renier's session [and] was expressly made [from a more lengthy original] for field use with regard to the location of Mr. Lewis." Most curiously, the letter continued: "You are requesting additional material. . . . We are under no obligation to provide you with any material without prepayment. Therefore, with your payment of [an additional \$14.00] . . . I will forward to you the only remaining tape I have regarding this case."

Although assuming that the "only remaining tape" was a video of the recovery of the truck and body (as Hewitt previously contended), the attorney nonetheless forked over the \$14.00. Incredibly, on January 27 he received from Hewitt a videotape of Renier's reading which, despite having been crudely edited down to about 14 minutes, still contained the "smoking gun" sequence.

In an accompanying letter dated January 14, Hewitt informed the attorney that he had "filed for

mediation with the State Attorney General's office . . . to assure you [that] we are in full compliance under the Florida Public Records Act." Through the mediator, the attorney has since posed several questions, including these: "Why did the police department initially deny having a videotape and thereafter send us one?" "One map . . . depicts an area labeled 'Noreen's quadrant.' Who drew this quadrant on the map?" [As reported in our Winter issue, on the tapes Renier describes a "quadrant from 9 to 12" (which would not encompass either of the two pertinent rock pits), yet the map's quadrant runs from 11:00 to 2:00, with the Whitehurst pit right in the middle.] "What is the personal relationship, if any, between Detective Hewitt and Noreen Renier?"

This third question was prompted by two peculiar circumstances -- the apparent initial withholding of information by Hewitt, and a stunning move by Renier: After living in Orlando for more than 20 years, she has now packed her bags and relocated to Williston!

Additionally, an item contained in an undated police report, filed by Hewitt sometime after his session with Renier, does not appear to comport at all with her reading, at least as it is excerpted on the tapes. Writes Hewitt, "She picked out CR 501 on local map which I provided, indicating it was the road Lewis had traveled after leaving his residence, in a northerly direction." The attorney has amended his question list to include one about this item.

But we will probably have to do without the answers to these questions. The mediator has written back informing the attorney that the Public Records Act does not compel Hewitt to respond. And the attorney has now also heard from the Williston City Attorney: "[Y]ou have [already] received all public records in possession of the City relating to [this] investigation."

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

by **Terry A. Smiljanich**

High-Tech Toys

When the 39 bodies were found at Rancho Santa Fe, each person had spending cash and a carefully packed bag of extra clothes and personal belongings. They each fully expected that the UFO following Comet Hale-Bopp would pick them up and carry them away to Paradise. Their work here on Earth, creating web pages for internet sites, was over. Thus ended the story of Heaven's Gate, the "cybercult" darling of the media. A made-for-TV movie, *The 40th Victim*, is already in the works. Check your local listings, as they say, for time and station.

The *New Yorker*, meanwhile, reported on a camera shop in Southern California that had sold an expensive 3 1/2" Questar Maksutov-Cassegrain telescope (a favorite of amateur astronomers for decades) to two of the Heaven's Gate cult members, who said that they wanted to see the UFO following Hale-Bopp. They came back weeks later to return the telescope, disappointed that it could not reveal the UFO and was thus obviously a defective instrument.

All of this nonsense about Hale-Bopp (a lovely gossamer sight in the Northwestern skies throughout April and May) started when Chuck Shramek, an amateur astronomer in Houston, took a CCD image

of the comet last November when it was still far from the Sun (a CCD camera uses video technology to capture digital images of astronomical objects). He saw what he thought was a "Saturn-like object" near the comet which he could not find on his star chart software, and immediately informed the national Art Bell radio talk show. Art Bell broadcast the exciting news and touted it on his World Wide Web page, where it was picked up by, among others, the gullible members of Heaven's Gate. Little did it matter to this crowd that the strange object was nothing more than an insignificant eighth-magnitude star with typical diffraction patterns creating spikes.

Isn't it amazing how far our technology has come and how little we as humans have progressed? We are surrounded by the products of 20th century physics. These products allow us to watch on live TV as astronauts fix the Hubble Space Telescope, and allow us to access scientific data from around the world via the Net. Yet how many people have even a vague idea of how a television set works, or how it even creates the illusion of moving pictures? How many people think of their computers as magical black boxes? We are indeed surrounded by incredible technological marvels, but we treat them as toys. Television becomes a way to waste an evening watching mindless sitcoms or, worse, viewing a pseudoscientific show about the extraterrestrials who built the Great Pyramids. The Internet becomes a vast marketplace of nonsense, pornography, chat rooms, and miracle cures. I assure you that for every website such as the Tampa Bay Skeptics, there are five psychic network sites, UFO sites, etc.

Our ability to probe the depths of quantum behavior or explore the vastness of the universe is far exceeded by our tendency to succumb to our fear of death or an indifferent universe. So we turn our technology into a means to satisfy our "spiritual" needs. Three hundred years of the Scientific Revolution, and we are still groping for supernatural answers to the tough questions posed by life.

20,000 years ago, in Italy, a Paleolithic man was buried with ivory pendants, bracelets, a pet dog, and assorted other possessions, presumably to accompany him in his journey to the hereafter. Even older Neandertal burials indicate similar evidence of ritual and burial artifacts. The 39 members of Heaven's Gate, with their packed bags and spending money, show us that technology's toys are in the hands of Stone Age minds.

Randi on cult suicide, UFOs, and media complicity

We've recently seen another example of organized madness, with the mass suicide of thirty-nine Heaven's Gate cult members in California. . . . Certainly, the need to "belong" drives cult members together, but the bizarre ideas that then separate them from society needed to have been encouraged and cemented into place.

How to do that? Judging from other "successful" cults such as Jim Jones and his Peoples' Temple -- another such suicide crowd -- and from the recent Solar Temple suicides, heavy preaching of nuttury does the job. And any support that can be obtained through the media is eagerly sought and embraced. The strange notion that media and media personalities would not give attention to worthless ideas seems to persist; exactly the opposite is true.

We're told that the Heaven's Gate cult embraced the stupid assertion that comet Hale-Bopp is

accompanied by a huge UFO, to which these dupes thought they could migrate by killing themselves. Strange, weird notion. But it was invented, promoted, and encouraged by two men who I believe should now be confronted with the result of their callous "joke." Ed Dames, a would-be "remote viewer" who has peppered the media with outright lies about my long-standing challenge to "psychic" powers, and who has said that I've refused to test his wondrous powers, came up with the Hale-Bopp/UFO farce, and may have given the deluded Heaven's Gate people the final item they needed to convince them that suicide would deliver them to Nirvana. Behind Dames, feeding off his nutty notions, is radio personality Art Bell. Bell proudly claims that he's heard nightly on 400 stations across the USA. And to hold onto that audience, he unconscionably promotes every sort of stupidity that he can attract.

I've been advised by a colleague that it was actually a Chuck Shramek who first came up with the absurd claim of a "Saturn-like object" supposedly following Comet Hale-Bopp around. Not to our surprise, he was quickly put on the air by Art Bell to spin his fantasies. Bell knows how to pander to silly folks.

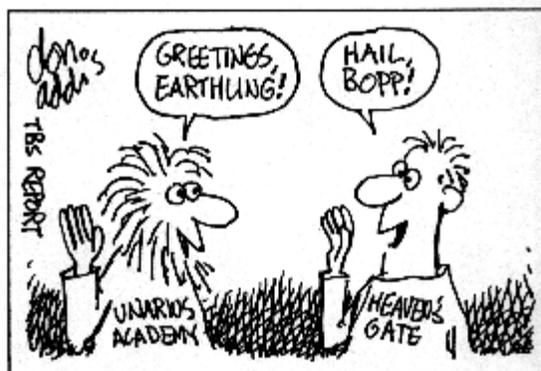
And a former "student" of Ed Dames, Courtney Brown, of the Farsight Institute (maybe that should be Farside"?), says he dispatched a team of Remote Viewers to go off into space and see this Hale-Bopp companion close-up. Had we watched, we might have seen the Tooth Fairy and Easter Bunny in that giddy group.

I understand that Brown and Dames aren't speaking now. Brown had the nerve to offer remote-viewing videotapes for sale, the same as his mentor is doing. A nut breaking off from the tree.

Dames and Bell, j'accuse. You've giggled at those who have been terrified by the lies, and you've chosen to ignore the possibility that suggestible people would accept those lies, and might act on them. And I'm sure you have no trouble sleeping.

--[James Randi](#) (via e-mail "Hotline")

Snippets



According to cult expert Janja Lalich, Heaven's Gate is just the tip of the iceberg. "It's not a question of what's out there, but what isn't out there," says the 52-year-old escapee from a 1970s San Francisco

commune. Members of the Garbage Eaters Brotherhood, led by Jim Roberts, wander the west coast rummaging for sustenance, while blaming their tummyaches on Satan rather than on Brother Jim. A former French race-car driver, now known as Rael, preaches to his flock that humans were created in alien laboratories. Just outside San Diego, a 76-year-old retired psychology professor named Charles Spiegel, who believes he was Cardinal Richelieu in a former life, heads the Unarius Academy of Science, which has determined (scientifically, no doubt) that 1,000 humanoids from the planet Myton will arrive on earth in the year 2001 (give or take), landing their 33 spaceships upon Atlantis (which will simultaneously arise from the Carribean) and bringing with them a cure for cancer. And followers of Dorothy Martin, who before her death channeled messages from Commander Sananda, are still waiting patiently for Sananda to pick them up in his/her/its spaceship.

(St. Petersburg Times, April 4)

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