



Selected articles from  
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## Noreen Renier and the Laci Peterson Case

by Gary P. Posner

Florida "psychic detective" [Noreen Renier](#) made a media splash on the night of April 29, getting some international face time on the Fox News Channel. [Interviewed for six minutes](#) by host Greta Van Susteren during her highly rated (for cable) program *On The Record*, Renier discussed her involvement in the Laci Peterson disappearance/murder case. Though we missed it, Renier also appeared on ABC-TV's *Good Morning America* to discuss the case.

Renier told Van Susteren that in late February, two months after Laci's disappearance and about 1-1/2 months before the discovery of her body and that of her unborn child, she had been hired by Laci's mother-in-law Jackie to find the missing woman. Describing herself as a "psychometrist," Renier held up for the camera a black Cal Poly sweatshirt that had allegedly belonged to Laci (see video frame on right). She explained that Jackie had mailed her the garment, but that she had been unable to read Laci's vibrations: "I didn't feel like it was enough of her energy into it. It was too clean. So I asked for them to send me something else, and they sent me a shoe." She then [held up the sneaker](#) for display as well.



Laci's husband Scott, the prime suspect in her murder, was the one who actually sent the shoe. As Renier recounted on Fox News Channel, while she was speaking into his mother Jackie's answering machine about the need for another personal item of Laci's, Scott picked up the phone, and they had a "very brief" conversation. "He said very little. I could just sort of feel like a protective shield all around him. . . . I just said I needed something more, that had more of Laci involved in it, and that's when he sent me the shoe. . . . He really said nothing except yes, we'll send you a shoe."

Renier said she did "three sessions, two [from the sweatshirt and the shoe] for [Jackie] and then one for my own self [in which I] touched [the envelope with the handwriting on it](#)" (presumably Scott's, since the name "S. Peterson" appears in the return address). She reported sensing "the rocks, the park, the bridge, the bumpy road, a bunch of numbers. I was trying to get longitude and latitude or map [coordinates] for them as well." Sadly, reported Renier, "I knew she was dead [as soon as] I started on the case."

Renier is known for getting inside the bodies of both the victim and the murderer in cases where the trail is long "cold," and for then describing the killer in great detail for the police (as she has done [on CBS TV's 48 Hours](#) and elsewhere). Given the "hot" nature of this case, surely Renier would find it infinitely easier to recognize the perpetrator, both through his wife's eyes and from within his own soul, if he turned out to be Scott. And if the murderer was not Scott, it should be equally easy for Renier to clear him, even if specifying the precise identity of the killer proved more difficult. Here's what this world-famous "psychic sleuth" saw:

I didn't want to see who killed Laci. . . . But it just sort of popped up right in the beginning. And I sort of pushed it back because I was horrified at what I was seeing, and I didn't want to see that. But I saw someone, a male, hitting her on the head. And I could see a door there. And I knew that a rug was missing, and also whatever he hit her with on the head of course was missing as well.

When asked by Van Susteren what she did with this information, Renier said, "I didn't tell the Petersons [what I saw], but I did give the whole report to the police."

A May 1 article by Rachel Harris in the *Stuart News* and the *Fort Pierce Tribune* said that Renier "guessed" that the man "might be" Scott, but that she "pushed the thought out of her mind" because Scott's mother was paying her fee. One can only wonder how Renier could, in good conscience, deliberately fail to identify the killer.

Despite the above, according to the [May 1 Gainesville Sun article](#) by Douane D. James, Renier claims that "she may have had a role in the [police's] focus on Scott Peterson as a suspect," though the Modesto (California) Police refused to discuss the matter with James. Although she didn't tell the following to Van Susteren, the *Sun* reports that "Renier said she picked up the strongest sense from the [Priority Mail envelope](#) that she said [Scott] had written on." Said Renier, "It was like having him there at the sessions." Renier told the *Sun* that she discounted \$200 from her normal \$650 fee because "I really wanted to work on the case."

After mentioning the credit Renier received from the Williston, Florida, police a few years ago (see *TBS Report* [Fall 1996](#), [Winter 1996-97](#), [Summer 1997](#)), the *Sun* notes that "Renier acknowledges that she has her skeptics." The article then concludes with mention of the [chapter on Renier](#) in the book *Psychic Sleuths*, though the reporter contacted and quotes the book's editor, Joe Nickel, rather than yours truly, the author of the chapter. No matter. Joe certainly got the job done: "No psychic found Laci Peterson [she washed up on the shoreline]. . . . I find it astonishing that [Renier is] getting this kind of press coverage, and no one is bringing up her failures. . . . [Psychics] thrive on an uncritical media giving them attention."

## TBS Booth Action at the Atheist Alliance International Convention

by Rani Kottiath and Dana Smith

The Tampa Bay Skeptics made no mistake when deciding to have a display at the [Atheist Alliance International Convention](#), which took place in Tampa over Easter weekend. One might have expected a rowdy group of irate "non-believers" with a platform of God-hating -- that bickering and griping about religious fundamentalists would be the sole issue.

In fact, we found that these non-theists were quite the skeptical bunch. With the help of Jack Robinson and Gary Posner, TBS prepared a booth at the convention and observed what else the atheists were skeptical of.

Aside from the pamphlets and newsletters that TBS offered [at the booth](#), we conducted three different "Skep Tests." The first examined the accuracy of astrology. We read two horoscopes (courtesy of [astrology.com](#)) to each subject, one of which was their correct sign. Of course, we didn't inform them which one was theirs prior to the reading, and we deleted words that would give them unfair hints. Despite society's relative belief in astrology, virtually all of the conference subjects furrowed an eyebrow at the idea.

Being the most time-consuming and least popular of the tests, we received the fewest subjects for this one -- only six gave it a shot. Surprisingly, however, the majority correctly guessed their horoscopes. Perhaps the number of successes could be due to random chance or lack of controls. Or, perhaps horoscopes are real and skeptics are just a bunch of fuddy-duddies.

The next experiment was the most popular: the "Psychic Challenge." We drew 10 cards from a shuffled, standard deck and requested that the subject guess the suit. We generously allowed the use of telepathy and remote viewing. Since there are four suits, the expected results for a non-psychic subject should be 2-1/2 "hits" out of 10 cards. By the end of the experiment, almost everyone had guessed correctly less than that, with the exception of [James "The Amazing" Randi](#), who "remote viewed" an incredible 8 out of 10 (a 1 in 2,400 chance)! Despite Randi's status as a world-renowned magician, we determined that he possesses psychic powers and considered offering him [our \\$1,000 prize](#), as well as his own [\\$1,000,000 prize](#)!

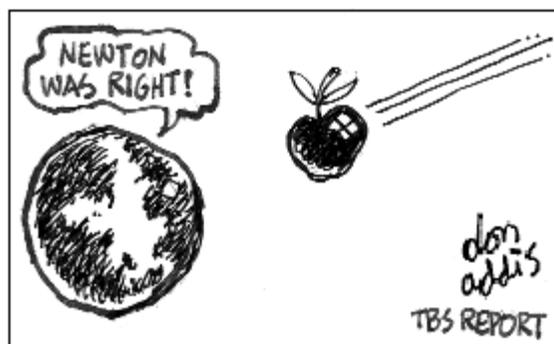
Our last experiment was presented under the guise of an impassioned petition to ban dihydrogen monoxide. Most of you probably know this chemical by its common name: water. We informed the subjects that dihydrogen monoxide causes billions of dollars of property damage each year, is the cause of many deaths and a major component of acid rain, and is a threat to rational thinking, as excessive intake can cause severe brain damage. We also offered an 8-page report on the adverse effects and uses of dihydrogen monoxide (courtesy of [DHMO.org](#)).

While around 85 percent of folks in our society would be expected to sign a petition in vehement opposition to dihydrogen monoxide, under half of the convention-goers actually put their names

down. What is better yet, the majority that didn't sign were not even aware of what dihydrogen monoxide is, but wanted to inquire more into the subject before drawing a conclusion.

Aside from being a skeptical crowd, the tone of the conference was one of vitality and positive spirit. We imagine that many infer the primary requirement of skepticism to be a kind of insecure joy derived from "raining on everyone's parade" and "kicking dirt on one's cherished beliefs" -- why else would anyone want to be a skeptic? We think that the Atheist Alliance International Convention captured what skepticism really means when it comes down to living. The more accurately we understand the world, the better world we can make.

## Snippets



Don't be alarmed, but the world will end in 2060. This is the conclusion of Sir Isaac Newton based upon his study of biblical passages, according to a BBC documentary producer who claims that a Canadian researcher found Newton's handwritten prediction in a Jerusalem archive. We'll learn more in the upcoming [Newton: The Dark Heretic](#). By the way, Newton did gravitate (thank you) toward the Bible, having written extensively on related subjects.

(*St. Pete. Times*, Feb. 24)

He is certainly "Nobody's Fool," as the title of the *Tampa Tribune's* article shouts. Subtitled "James Randi, debunker of psychics and faith healers, has \$1 million for anyone who can prove a paranormal phenomenon," this profile of the "Amazing" one occupies the majority of the "Baylife" section's front page (mostly a large photo of Randi with a suitcaseful of cash) with spillover onto another. Timing the article to precede the following weekend's [Atheist Alliance International Convention](#), reporter Philip Morgan mentioned that one of the event's highlights would be "a Good Friday field trip to the [Virgin Mary 'apparition'](#) on a Clearwater building."

(*Tampa Tribune*, April 14)

## James Randi and Michael Shermer seen with Kathy Fountain

No, not another media sex scandal. James Randi, head of the [James Randi Educational Foundation](#), and Michael Shermer, founder and director of the [Skeptics Society](#), were Kathy Fountain's guests on her April 18 *Your Turn* program on WTVT-TV 13. Both were in town for the 2003 [Atheist Alliance International Convention](#), which was hosted this year by Atheists of Florida. Topics that came up for discussion included why people believe weird things (the title of one of Shermer's books), faith healing, talking to the dead, the harm of false belief systems, UFOs, psychics and psychic detectives, atheism, and Ouija boards.

Superimposed on the TV screen throughout, as the theme of the program, was the phrase, "Skeptics Say It's Fraud." As a general rule, we *don't* say outright that it's "fraud" (though Shermer did on one occasion). Doing so can expose one to the possibility of a libel suit, since to allege "fraud" is to allege criminal activity. As I recounted extensively in [my chapter about Noreen Renier](#) in *Psychic Sleuths*, Renier once won such a lawsuit against a skeptic for having done just that.

In fact, Randi even resisted the moniker "debunker" when called such by Fountain, insisting instead upon "investigator," though he acknowledged that his investigations have "always" found no evidence whatsoever of the reality of the alleged paranormal phenomenon.

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