



Selected articles from
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Noreen Renier's latest "psychic sleuth" triumph

by Gary P. Posner

Florida "psychic detective" [Noreen Renier](#), whose involvement in the Williston Police case made national news in 1996-97, has surfaced again in the media. This time, although the local police would not work with a "psychic," the family of a missing Houston, Texas, man has credited Renier with providing the clues that led to the recovery of his remains.

Though their reports are terribly sketchy and somewhat disparate, the June 8 editions of the *Gainesville Sun* and *Houston Chronicle* recounted some of the events surrounding the November 1998 disappearance of 74-year-old Phillip Lester and the discovery of his body on June 6.

Suffering from a degenerative brain disorder, Lester wandered away from his family's church-group outing last November 30, and the subsequent week-long investigation by authorities failed to yield any results. Family members, assisted by friends, continued to search, with no better results. In February, the exasperated family, described as ready to try anything, was referred to Renier by a police sketch artist who had worked with her in the past.

Reporter Stephen Johnson's version of Renier's involvement, as reported in his [Chronicle article](#), sounded quite spectacular. Lester's daughter, Theresa Akins, was quoted, "We sent [Renier] some maps at first but they were too large and she asked for smaller ones." *The Chronicle's* account continues: "Renier finally received a detailed map of the general area where Lester had disappeared and provided verbal instructions as to where searchers should look for Lester's remains, since it had become painfully clear that he had probably died."

The daughter then relayed Renier's directions to a family friend, Jinese Troup, who wound up along a drainage ditch near a wooded area two miles from where Lester had last been seen. Her boyfriend found some of the missing man's business cards scattered on the ground. The date was May 17.

The Sheriff's Department was notified of the find, and deputies scoured the area for two days, without success. Finally, the Harris County Precinct 4 Constable's Office initiated its own search on June 6, and two hours later Lester's remains were discovered in heavy brush about 40 yards from where his business cards had been found.

The *Chronicle's* account would seem to imply that the family simply provided Renier with a detailed map of the area, and Renier then pinpointed the correct location.

Now residing in Williston, a tiny town just southwest of Gainesville, Renier is a local celebrity. Although both reporters interviewed Renier as well as Lester's relatives, it is only natural that in her *Gainesville Sun* article, Karen Voyles (who also interviewed me) would rely more heavily upon Renier's recollections, much as Johnson did with the Houston family members.

But upon reading [the Sun account](#), one might draw a quite different inference from that imparted by the *Chronicle*. Absent "psychic" power, one would never have guessed from the *Chronicle* article that Renier had been in regular communication with the family for weeks, providing worthless clues, before finally hitting the bull's eye.

Long before the triumphant map scene was played out, "I had them send me a brush and a comb and a shirt of his," Renier is quoted as having told Voyles. Reading the victim's vibrations from his personal effects (the purported psychic power known as "psychometry"), Renier attempted to discern where the body could be found. As Voyles reports, "Then, by telephone over five Sunday afternoons, Renier explained where she believed the family should look for Lester." But all the leads were dead ends. Perhaps that is why, according to the *Chronicle*, Renier "knocked \$150 off her \$500 fee."

Renier explained the reason for her failure: "[T]hey didn't seem to be understanding [my clues] very clearly so they [ultimately] sent me an aerial map." The bull's eye scenario is then said to have ensued.

But let's go back to the *Chronicle* article. According to the family's version of events, they sent Renier not *one*, but a series of maps, the first ones having turned out to be unsatisfactory ("too large"). How many additional dead-end clues did Renier offer, based upon those maps, before finally scoring her newsworthy "hit"? And by that time, after 5 1/2 months of searching, there may have been few "wooded near water" hiding places (the psychics' favorite terrain) yet unaddressed.

No matter. Noreen Renier's "psychic sleuth" cap has now been graced with still another feather. Whether the feather more closely resembles that of an eagle, or a pigeon, is in the eye of the beholder.

TBS Executive Council Statement on Noreen Renier and "psychic" power

(This item is posted [here](#))

Ad hominem attack on TBS at national MUFON conference

by Gary P. Posner

This year, I decided to time a visit back home to Baltimore to coincide with the national [Mutual UFO Network](#) (MUFON) conference being held over the July 4 weekend in Washington. Part of the allure of the stopover in D.C. was the anticipation of the fireworks display. I got more than I bargained for.

Most readers are probably not aware that [I grew up with an active, even activist, interest and belief in UFOs](#). In fact, Baltimore's secondary newspaper at the time, *The News American*, carried [an item on March 30, 1966](#), about my appointment to the Youth Council of the now-defunct National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), then the most respectable of the nation's pro-UFO organizations. NICAP's assistant director, and editor of its major work, *The UFO Evidence* - my "bible" as an impressionable youth -- was [Richard H. Hall](#).

My *TBS Report* credentials got me into the MUFON press conference that preceded the presentations. There I had an opportunity to pose a pertinent question -- not impertinently, I might add -- to several of the speakers, one of whom was Richard Hall. Although I had never before met him, I certainly remembered our past association as, it turns out, had he. During our good-natured banter, I mentioned (for the benefit of the others present) that I had once been a NICAP activist before I "saw the light." Hall retorted that obviously I was "blinded by the light," generating a good laugh in the room. Fine by me.

The next day, just moments before his talk, Hall noticed me and we again exchanged a few jovial words. (For the record, my question to him at the press conference had been more of a request -- that he provide the press with a list of what he considered the one/two/three best UFO cases that reporters should investigate in order to possibly expose the alleged government coverup. Hall declined, instead referring the reporters to the myriad books on the subject. Perhaps his non-response was partly responsible for the lighthearted tone of the next day's *Washington Post* article, which Hall decried in his talk.)

In the published *MUFON Symposium Proceedings*, available for \$25 at the conference, the text of Hall's prepared remarks included the following:

I have concluded that the skeptical view espoused by the Committee [for the] Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal ([CSICOP](#)) is not only wrong, but *profoundly* so. And, by the way, they are neither "scientific" nor do they "investigate." Instead, they do the honorable tradition of philosophical skepticism a disservice; they are not skeptics but debunkers who "trash" evidence with little or no actual investigation, because "it has to be wrong."

One wonders how he can square this judgment with the voluminous published investigations of [Philip Klass](#) (chairman of CSICOP's UFO Subcommittee), and [Robert Sheaffer](#) and [James Oberg](#) (co-vice chairmen). But the man is entitled to his opinion.

However, in his spoken remarks, Hall strayed from his prepared text and accused CSICOP of blatant

"dishonesty." Further, to my astonishment, his accusation of "dishonesty" was broadened to include "the Florida skeptics' group." And according to my scribbled notes (I can't independently recall it now) he specifically referred to "the skeptic at yesterday's press conference" (Phil Klass had been there as well, but asked no questions).

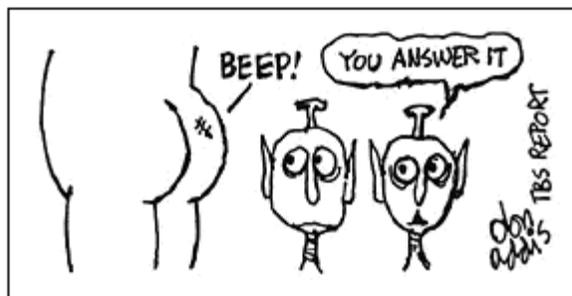
As Hall left the conference room, I followed him into the corridor and let him know that I wished to speak with him for a minute. He seemed obliging enough. I began by saying that although he is certainly entitled to his opinion, to publicly proclaim that skeptics -- including myself -- are "dishonest" is to commit a slander. Hall responded, correctly, that he had not mentioned me by name. But since I was apparently the only known skeptic (other than Phil Klass) attending MUFON's press conference and/or symposium, there was no ambiguity regarding to whom Hall had referred. When I pointed this out, Hall told me that he considered my position on UFOs to be "outrageous. Have you ever investigated a UFO case?" Then the fireworks really ensued. Hall added, "I think you're full of shit!" To which I replied: "And you're certainly entitled to *that* opinion. But to declare it in public is a slander." Hall's parting shot, as he turned and walked away into the crowd: "Well, you can sue me." [Late note: On [this archived web page](#), Hall accuses *me* of initiating the threat to sue him! Claims Hall, "[A] couple of years ago . . . Gary Posner, barely noted CSICOP debunker, threatened me with a lawsuit after I publicly (knowingly in his presence) criticized CSICOP's unscientific behavior." That doesn't even qualify as a half-truth. And Jerome Clark's similar accusation, later on the same page, is addressed at length by me in [this article](#).]

Well, I suppose I could sue. But, to prevail, I'd have to show monetary damages. So I'd rather just briefly pan his presentation. But before I do, let me enumerate the many writings by myself, and by others (as published in our "Florida skeptics' group" newsletter), which could reasonably be construed as "dishonest." . . . Done.

During his talk, Hall singled out three UFO cases for discussion -- perhaps the result of my previous day's question, as they were not mentioned in the published *Symposium Proceedings*. One involved an airline pilot (Capt. William Nash) who, in 1952, reported seeing a formation of UFOs pass beneath his plane. Whether his report was accurate or not, there is no way now to prove that his UFOs must have been a formation of ET craft. The second was the Socorro, New Mexico, case of 1964, which is covered extensively in Phil Klass' *UFOs: Identified* (1968) and *UFOs Explained* (1974). The incident, involving policeman Lonnie Zamora's reported sighting of a landed craft, occupants wearing white space suits, and scorched "landing pad" marks in the brush, seems a likely hoax to Klass (and to me). The third case was the infamous 1966 high-speed "UFO chase" across the state of Ohio and into Pennsylvania by Deputy Dale Spaur. As [Robert Sheaffer](#) documented in his 1981 book, *The UFO Verdict* (recently updated and re-released as *UFO Sightings*), no matter in which direction Spaur's patrol car turned, the "UFO," which continued to pace the car, appeared in precisely the spot occupied by the brilliant planet Venus.

One parting shot at Hall's presentation: Unlike any of the others, his ended with a good (poor choice of wording) 15 minutes to spare. And a final shot at Hall personally, although I won't offer an opinion as to what *he's* full of. I had occasion to dine at the convention hotel with several local and regional MUFON officials. They laughed knowingly when I told them my story about Hall, confirming my suspicions about his tolerance of the views of others (even his fellow believers who may differ a bit about a specific case). I'm sure glad I finally "saw the light" and resigned from NICAP those many years ago.

Snippets



Fact: In a statement issued by a United States Attorney in response to a Massachusetts federal judge's order, Donald Stern refused to deny U.S. government knowledge of alleged "alien implants."
 Context: The judge had actually ordered the government to reveal whether or not the D.E.A. had implanted a "bugging" device in the buttock of Vincent "Gigi Portalla" Marino, a mobster whose racketeering trial begins this fall. Marino claims that a D.E.A. agent had told him of the device. Stern's actual comment: "We can confirm that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration did not implant a tracking device in defendant[']s . . . buttocks. But we cannot speak, however, for any extraterrestrial beings."

(A.P. via *Tampa Tribune*, June 16)

Detective Barbara Bergen received a tip from a caller advising that a retention pond near Disney World be searched. As a result, an SUV, containing the bodies of three thirty-something Massachusetts men missing for nine months, was found. Just who was this prescient prognosticator? No, not [Noreen Renier](#), although psychics from three states (including Florida) had contacted family members with various suggestions as to where to look, including a storage facility in northern Florida, a remote wildlife area in central Florida, and a marshy area in southern Florida. The tipster was just a dentist who, says Bergen, was "driving along talking to his wife when he realized he'd missed the turn and nearly skidded over the curb and into the pond." Having heard the news about the missing men, "He suggested we search the pond," where a number of drivers failing to negotiate a sharp left turn had previously met their doom over the years, until a restraining wall was just recently erected.

(*Boston Globe* via *St. Pete. Times*, June 23;
Orlando Sentinel, June 22)

Letters to the Editor

Editor: I write a column called "Ask Sherry" for *Tampa Bay Magazine*. I have been asked if there is any truth to the claims in Captain Bill Miller's book, *Tampa Triangle -- The Dead Zone*. I am wondering if The Tampa Bay Skeptics have done any research on this. If so, what were your findings?

Of course, I am on deadline and would appreciate any comments you may have as your earliest convenience.

Thank you.

--Sherry Babbitt
shebab@mindspring.com

The following was the editor's prompt e-mail reply:

Sherry:

I have not read the book itself, but I have read its promotional literature on the internet. I will query our TBS membership to see if any of our members have read it.

The parallels to the Bermuda Triangle myth are strong, and that myth has been thoroughly debunked in books such as "[The Bermuda Triangle Mystery Solved](#)" by Larry Kusche. I have no reason to believe that the myths about the so-called "Tampa Triangle" are any more genuine.

According to the book's promotional literature, ships' engines abruptly stop, electric motors suddenly fail, freak rain squalls develop, UFO abductions occur, people spontaneously burst into flame, etc.

No "paranormal" occurrences of any kind have ever been confirmed by skeptics under proper observing conditions. Since 1989 Tampa Bay Skeptics has offered \$1,000 to anyone able to successfully demonstrate or document anything paranormal to us. The [James Randi Educational Foundation](#) offers \$1,000,000.

Due to the semi-tropical nature of our climate, it may very well be that the danger of sudden, severe storms is greater here than in New York Harbor. But to ascribe "paranormal" explanations to tragic events, without concrete scientific evidence that can withstand critical scrutiny, is a leap of faith.

The modern myth of "alien abductions" has been debunked on PBS's "NOVA" and in books such as "UFO Abductions: A Dangerous Game" by Philip Klass. The classic cases of "Spontaneous Human Combustion" have been thoroughly explained by researchers such as Joe Nickell and John Fischer (see [here](#) regarding a famous St. Pete. case) -- there is no credible evidence that such cases are "spontaneous" or paranormal in any way. Nor is there credible evidence that "ghosts" or "ancient curses" are genuine. (And see [this entry](#) in "The Skeptic's Dictionary.")

See [this Snippet](#) from our newsletter for some information about the so-called "chupacabra," as well as [this entry](#) from "The Skeptic's Dictionary."

If you need more information, please let me know.

--Gary Posner

Editor: I heard a story recently on "All Things Considered" on NPR. It concerned the state of science in Russia. As one might have expected, many young scientists have moved to the west and there is lots of concern both there and elsewhere about the future of science and scientific training. One researcher talked about the importance of a "scientific culture" there, the need for continuing opportunities for undergraduate and graduate training in scientific research, etc. A U.S. scientist

discussed his impression that science in Russia is on "life support."

The situation there is not unique. It is being played out in other former Soviet bloc countries as well. I am also reminded of correspondence I've received from scholars in Iraq, where e-mail is virtually unheard of and scientific journals and books are rare.

I would be interested in others' thoughts about these situations and what, if anything, we might do about them.

--Judith Becker Bryant, Ph.D.
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