

# Searchers

## find smudge ... blood?

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ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Police searching the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) for a 12-year-old Westerleigh girl missing for nine days have discovered smudges that resemble bloodstains in an abandoned building on the grounds, a detective said yesterday.

Detectives are looking into the possibility that Jennifer Schweiger, who was born with Down's syndrome, fell prey to one of several vagrants who live in SIDC's empty buildings, according to Lt. Louis Fiore.

"We're talking to people who do not work there but live in buildings without authorization," he said.

Fiore said, however, that detectives have no firm evidence linking anyone to the child's disappearance, and he would not confirm reports that one suspect stands out among the rest.

Shortly after Jennifer's disappearance from her Wardwell Avenue home on July 9, witnesses reported she had been walking with a mildly retarded man who had occasionally collected returnable bottles in Westerleigh.

The blood-like smudges were discovered Friday in SIDC's Building 2 as some 300 police officers scoured the grounds and abandoned buildings for signs of the child. They also searched underground tunnels vagrants may have used to move unnoticed through the largely abandoned complex.

Detectives are awaiting laboratory results due tomorrow that will ascertain whether the smudges are blood and determine whether the blood-type matches the child's, Fiore said.

The stains were found in one of several hundred rooms in the massive seven-story building, Fiore said. They were accompanied by writing scrawled on the walls. The lieutenant was unable to say what words were printed in the room.

But another source, who declined to be identified, said police found the words "Jennifer" and "Allison," a possible reference to Dorothy Allison, a noted psychic from Nutley, N.J., who has participated in the search.

The grim disclosures came as more than 100 searchers continued scouring a two-mile corridor of woods and open space comprised of the SIDC grounds, Willowbrook Park, and Sea View Hospital and Home.

Leaders of the mostly volunteer force vowed to keep searching until Jennifer is found, but even the most optimistic among them said hopes were dimming with each passing day.

"Hope springs eternal, but the flame is flickering," said George Cerasuolo, a New York Telephone Co. volunteer searching the SIDC grounds.

On Thursday, some 300 officers descended upon SIDC to search dozens of abandoned buildings and cover hundreds of acres of land in what officials say was perhaps the largest police search ever assembled on Staten Island.

By yesterday the force had dwindled to 15 police officers and three sergeants focusing mainly on Willowbrook Park, according to Police Capt. Thomas Laresca. Volunteers were assigned to search woods on the SIDC and Sea View Hospital grounds.

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# Search

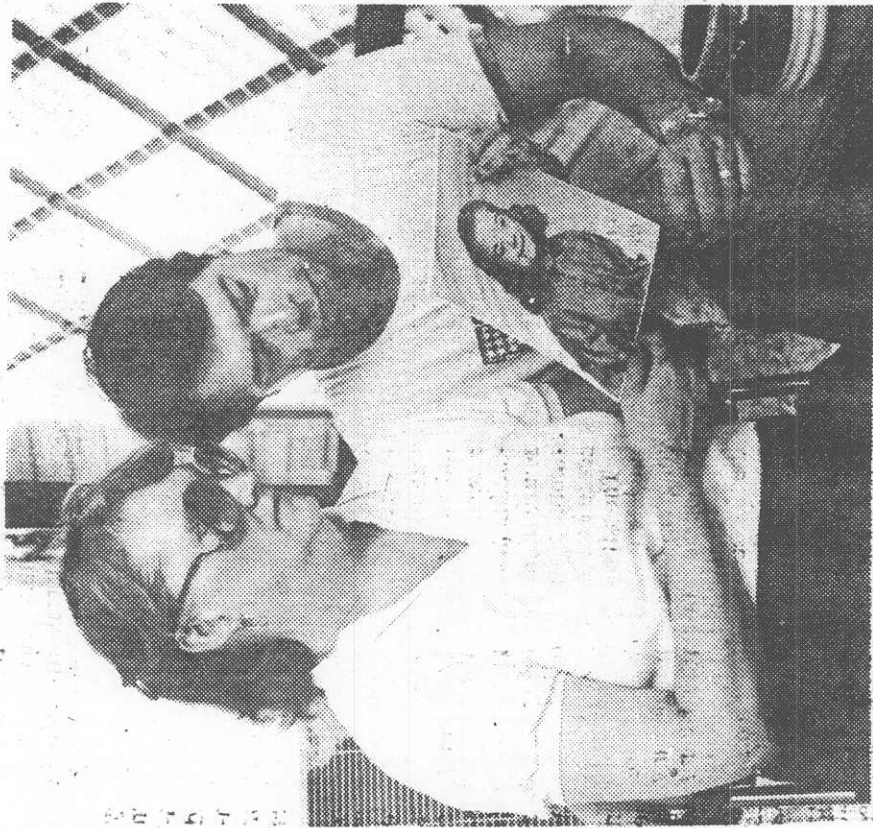
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At the time of her disappearance, Jennifer was wearing a pink "Sesame Street" T-shirt and pastel shorts, and had a yellow pocketbook.

The child is 4 feet, 3 inches tall, weighs about 65 pounds and has brown hair and hazel eyes. She has been described as having the mentality of a 7-year-old but could recite her telephone number and address.

On July 9, witnesses reported seeing the child walking with a man described as about age 60, about 5 feet, 11 inches tall with a slim build. He reportedly had a bald spot on the back of his head.

The child's disappearance prompted a massive search involving bloodhounds, helicopters and hundreds of police officers and volunteers. In addition, fliers with the girl's picture asking "Have You Seen Jennifer?" have been posted on utility poles and storefronts around Staten Island.



Jennifer's parents, Kenneth and Karen Schweiger, wistfully look at a picture of their daughter.

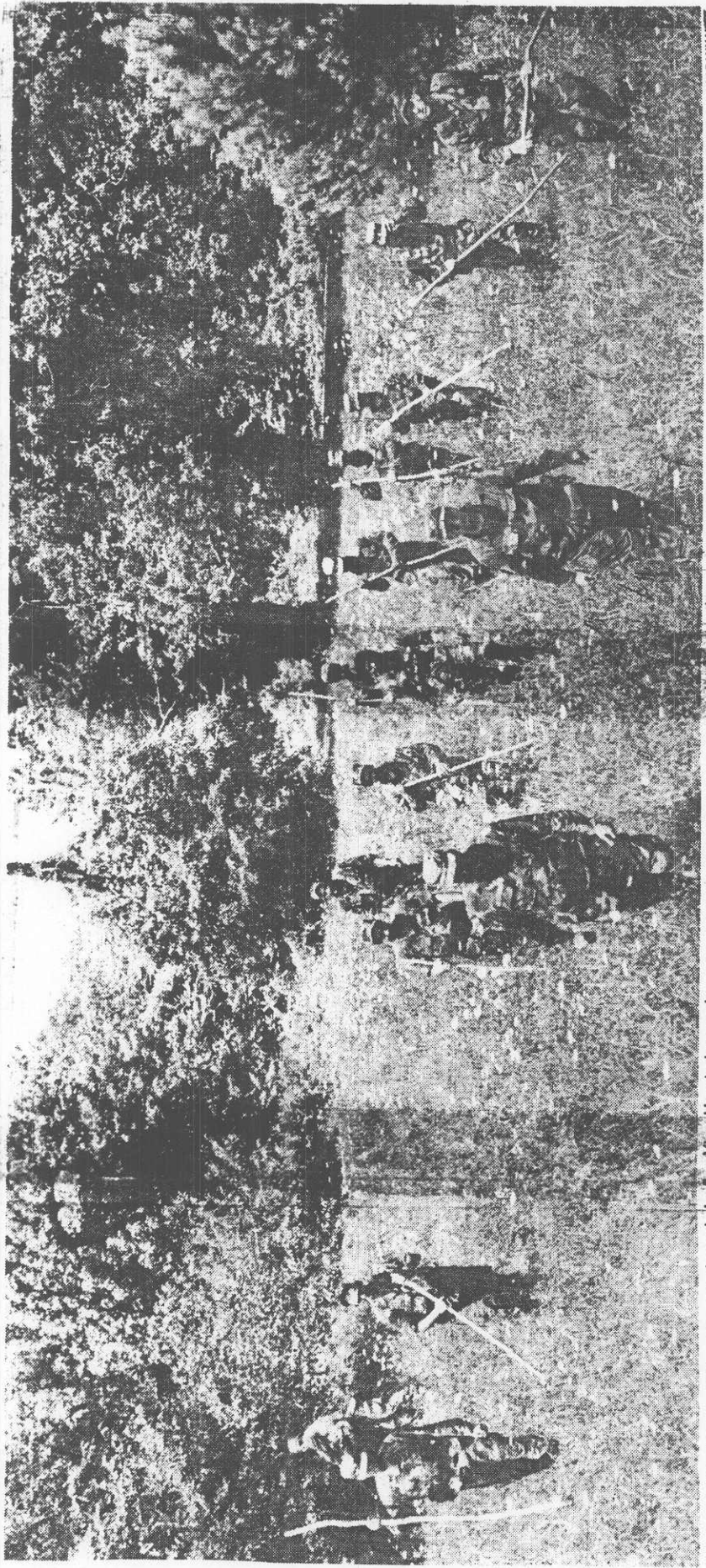
Police opened a temporary headquarters in the firehouse at 875 Jewett Ave. a day after the disappearance while officers canvassed dozens of homes in the neighborhood surrounding Wardwell Avenue.

Police scuba-diving teams dragged the pond at Willowbrook Park, and officers searched garbage that had originated at SIDC at the Fresh Kills landfill. Staten Island's Radio Emergency Associated Citizens Team (R.E.A.C.T.) patrolled streets boroughwide.

Yesterday, 75 volunteers assembled by New York Telephone Co. scoured the SIDC woods in groups armed with walking sticks and insect repellent. The volunteers were joined by the child's parents, Kenneth and Karen Schweiger, and three psychics, including Ms. Allison.

Meanwhile, 16 National Guard volunteers searched the sprawling grounds of Sea View Hospital and Home, which was being investigated for the second day. The guardsmen said the going was rough.

"All this is pretty well overgrown," said Major Maurice Watson. "It's like a jungle."



Members of the National Guard sweep through the Sea View Hospital grounds.

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