

Cops focus on string of mysteries

By GLENN CHAPMAN
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Rand was held without bail and ordered to undergo psychiatric testing to determine if he is fit to stand trial on charges he kidnapped and unlawfully imprisoned Jennifer Schweiger, the missing 12-year-old Westerleigh girl.

Jennifer's mother, Karen Schweiger, flushed when Rand was ushered into a courtroom in Stapleton Criminal Court yesterday afternoon. Rand, his head down and spittle running down his chin, was trance-like and unresponsive as his Legal Aid lawyer, Howard Rentel, contended that his client was not psychologically fit to stand trial.

Rand was arrested Tuesday night by Detectives Ralph Aquino and Robert Jensen on charges he kidnapped Jennifer from the street near her Wardwell Avenue home July 9. Police said Rand was seen walking with the girl on the grounds of the Staten Island Developmental Center the day she disappeared.

"I'm hoping information in the community that has not been forthcoming because no one was charged may now be forthcoming because we have someone under arrest," said Staten Island District Attorney William Murphy.

Rand was arrested because witnesses placed him with the girl the day she disappeared and because an alibi, that he had been in New Jersey on the day Jennifer disappeared, did not check out, according to a police spokesman. Police dogs also detected Jennifer's scent at Rand's makeshift campsite on the grounds of the SIDC, according to one report.

On advice from the district attorney, police have refused to release further information on what led to Rand's arrest or even where he was apprehended.

"We want people to be assured that when information is given in confidence to police, it will remain in confidence," Murphy said yesterday.

Workers at the headquarters of a volunteer group known as the Friends of Jennifer yesterday received numerous calls from people claiming to have seen Rand and the girl after Jennifer's disappearance. The new callers said seeing pictures of Rand caused them to remember the sightings.

Rand was the last person witnesses saw with Jennifer. A bloodhound and a massive search followed the girl's trail to SIDC, where it ended. An ongoing police and volunteer search has turned up no trace of the girl, according to Assistant Chief Samuel Marino, commander of Staten Island's police force.

Criminal Court Judge Alan Meyer ordered Rand taken to Kings County Hospital for psychiatric evaluation and set Sept. 4 as the date the 43-year-old transient must return to court to answer the charges.

Members of Jennifer's family and concerned volunteers and friends listened nervously during the brief proceeding.

Sven Sederholm, the grandfather of another missing girl, Holly Ann Hughes, half stood as he strained to hear the subdued dialogue between the justice and the defense attorney.

"That name (Rand) came up a lot during Holly Ann's investigation," said Sederholm's wife, Helen. "They (police) interviewed him, but he didn't say anything. It's scary. I just wanted to see what he looked like."

Holly Ann Hughes was 7 years old when she vanished from the street near her Port Richmond home in 1981. A massive search was conducted, but no trace of the child has ever been found.

Holly Ann's family continued to search for years, even hiring a private investigator at one point, Mrs. Sederholm said yesterday. Westerleigh residents who have been working for weeks to track down clues to Jennifer's disappearance and any possible connection to Holly Ann said Rand reportedly lived in a car across the street from the Port Richmond girl when she vanished.

Patricia Lonzello, Holly Ann's aunt, joined in the volunteer search for Jennifer several weeks ago.

"If he (Rand) is the man, I don't want him on the street," Kenneth Schweiger said outside the courthouse. "I don't want anything done to lose this case."

Marino and other police authorities have so far refused to officially comment on any link between Rand and other missing children on the island. Earlier in the investigation, authorities said Rand was targeted as a suspect in the Holly Ann disappearance and that of 10-year-old Tiahease Jackson of Mariners Harbor in 1983.

"I can't comment on that," Murphy said yesterday. "We are working on the Schweiger matter."

The district attorney cited a code of professional responsibility and the ongoing police investigation when he refused to comment on any psychological and criminal background Rand may have.

Murphy added that because Rand is refusing to be fingerprinted, prosecutors have not been able to get recent computerized criminal information on him. A suspect can legally refuse to be fingerprinted but such refusal slows the judicial process to the point where he could be held indefinitely.

SIDC authorities reported that Rand worked as a physical therapy aide in Staten Island Developmental Center, known then as Willowbrook State School, between 1966 and 1968. According to SIDC officials, Rand used the last name Bruchette when he worked there.

In October 1968, Rand reportedly applied for a job as an investigator with a private detective agency. About five years ago, Rand was said to have been a bus driver for a Marshall School, now closed, on Staten Island.

Rand has a criminal record of incidents involving children. He was arrested on May 25, 1969 in the South Bronx and charged with the kidnapping and attempted rape of a 9-year-old girl, police Capt. Michael Julian said. Rand pleaded guilty to a sexual abuse charge and spent a year and four months in jail, according to authorities. He was released in January 1972.

Police officials said Rand and a woman lured the 9-year-old girl into a car by telling her he lost money and asking her to help find it.

On Jan. 9, 1983, Rand loaded 11 Staten Island children into a van and, without their parents' knowledge, took them to a New Jersey fast-food restaurant and to Newark Airport, where they watched planes take off and land, according to Advance records.

He was arrested when he returned to the Island with the children after five hours. None of the children were harmed. He was convicted on charges

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of unlawful imprisonment and sentenced to 10 months in prison.

In between those convictions, Rand was reportedly arrested for three minor crimes, including burglary.

Volunteers and Westerleigh residents who said they have dealt with Rand in the past described him as clever and seemingly helpful. Many North Shore residents who filed into the courtroom yesterday said Rand's catatonic-like behavior was quite out of character for the man. They said he was usually alert and active.

Marino yesterday said Rand was "no dummy" and that he had held jobs and composed music. Investigators involved with the case viewed Rand's behavior as an orchestrated performance intended to help his defense.

Murphy said John Loughrey, the assistant district attorney prosecuting Rand, was preparing the case for presentation to a grand jury.

"We are being cautious and patient," the district attorney yesterday. "We don't have to rush on an indictment."

Volunteers sticking with the search for Jennifer yesterday said they joined the district attorney and detectives in the hope that Rand's arrest would lead to new information.

"People are angrier now — they feel it is time to really do something about this," said Donna Cutugno

of the Friends of Jennifer. "We are really going to rip the Island apart. Now that people see a face, they can relate more."

According to Mrs. Cutugno, callers providing new leads have been contacting police and the group, and all the information is being followed up.

While the volunteer effort was temporarily put aside, overshadowed by Rand's arraignment, specialized police teams continued searching in the Greenbelt during the day.

Last night, volunteers, undaunted by the rain, scoured lots and wooded areas near South Avenue in Mariners Harbor and Goethals Road North in Graniteville. Volunteers also searched around LaTourette golf course, woodlands behind shopping plazas at the foot of Platinum Avenue in New Springville and terrain around Front and Bay streets in Stapleton.

Murphy said that if found mentally incompetent, Rand could be committed to a state psychiatric facility for a maximum of 25 years. If convicted on the felony kidnapping charge, Rand would face a maximum prison sentence of 25 years, the district attorney said.

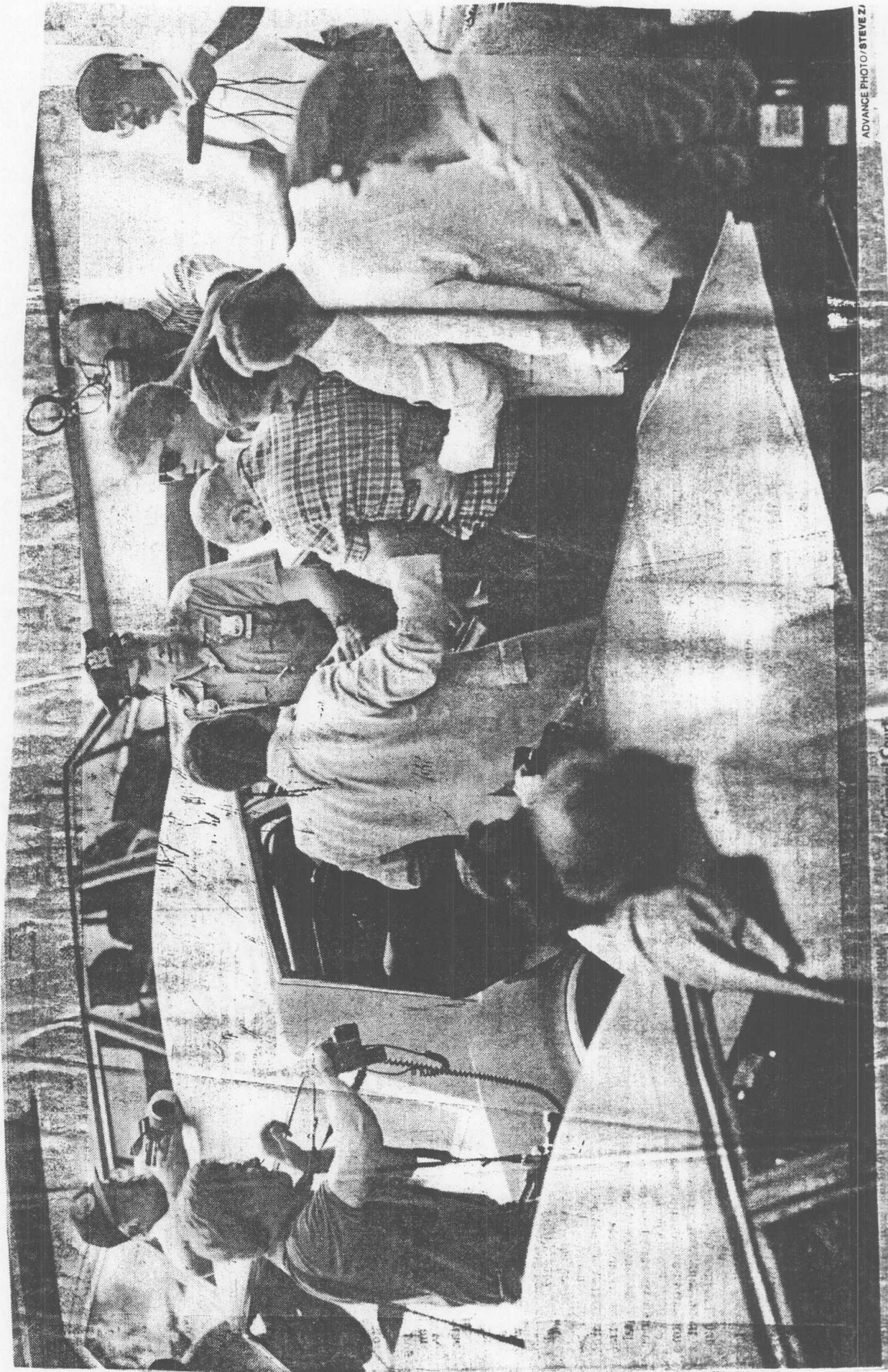
Volunteers continue to meet daily at noon and 7 p.m. at Holy Family Church to search for traces of Jennifer. Anyone with information about the girl's disappearance is asked to call police at a 24-hour hotline number, 447-4168.



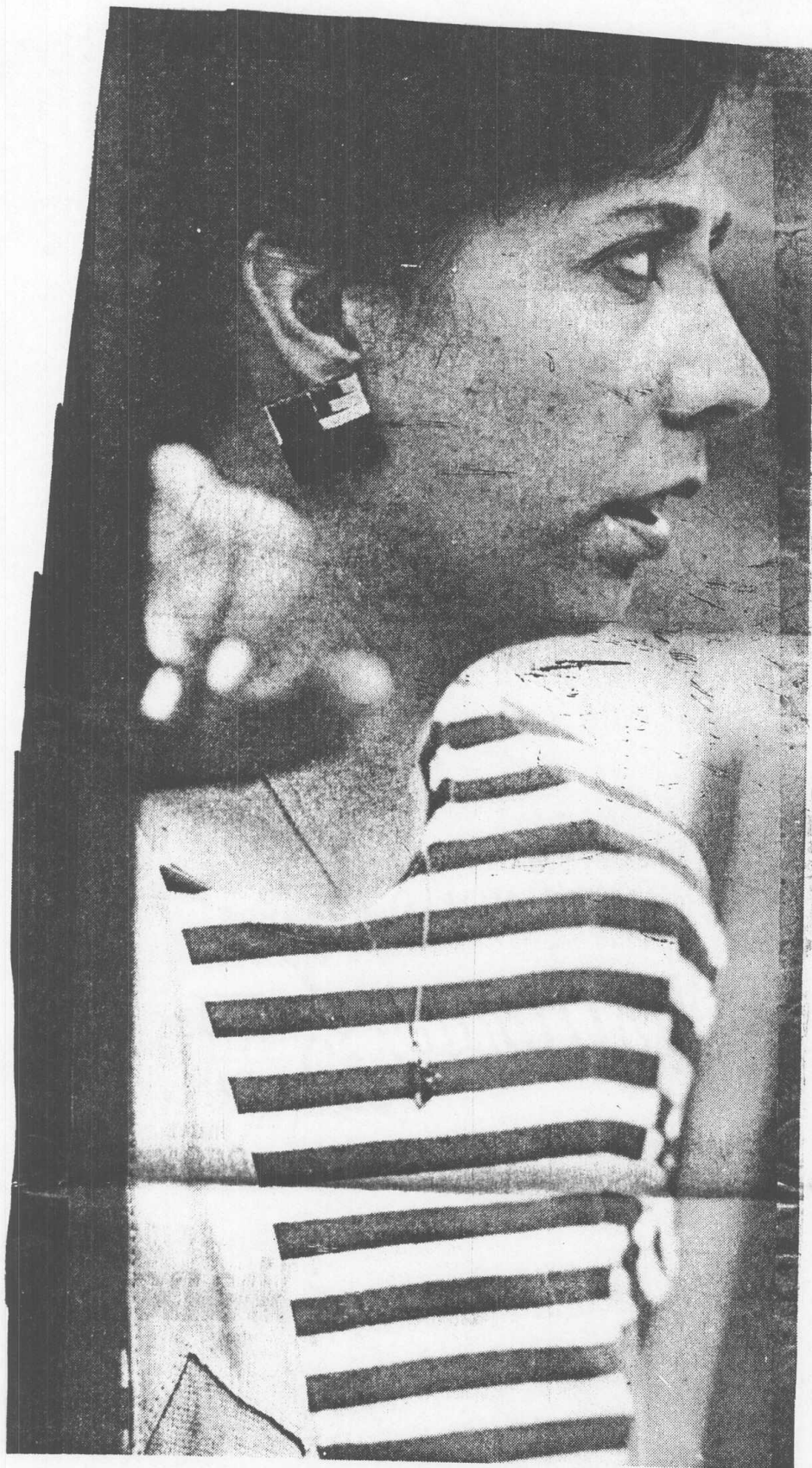
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The grandparents of Holly Ann Hughes, Sven and Helen Cederholm, arrive at Criminal Court.

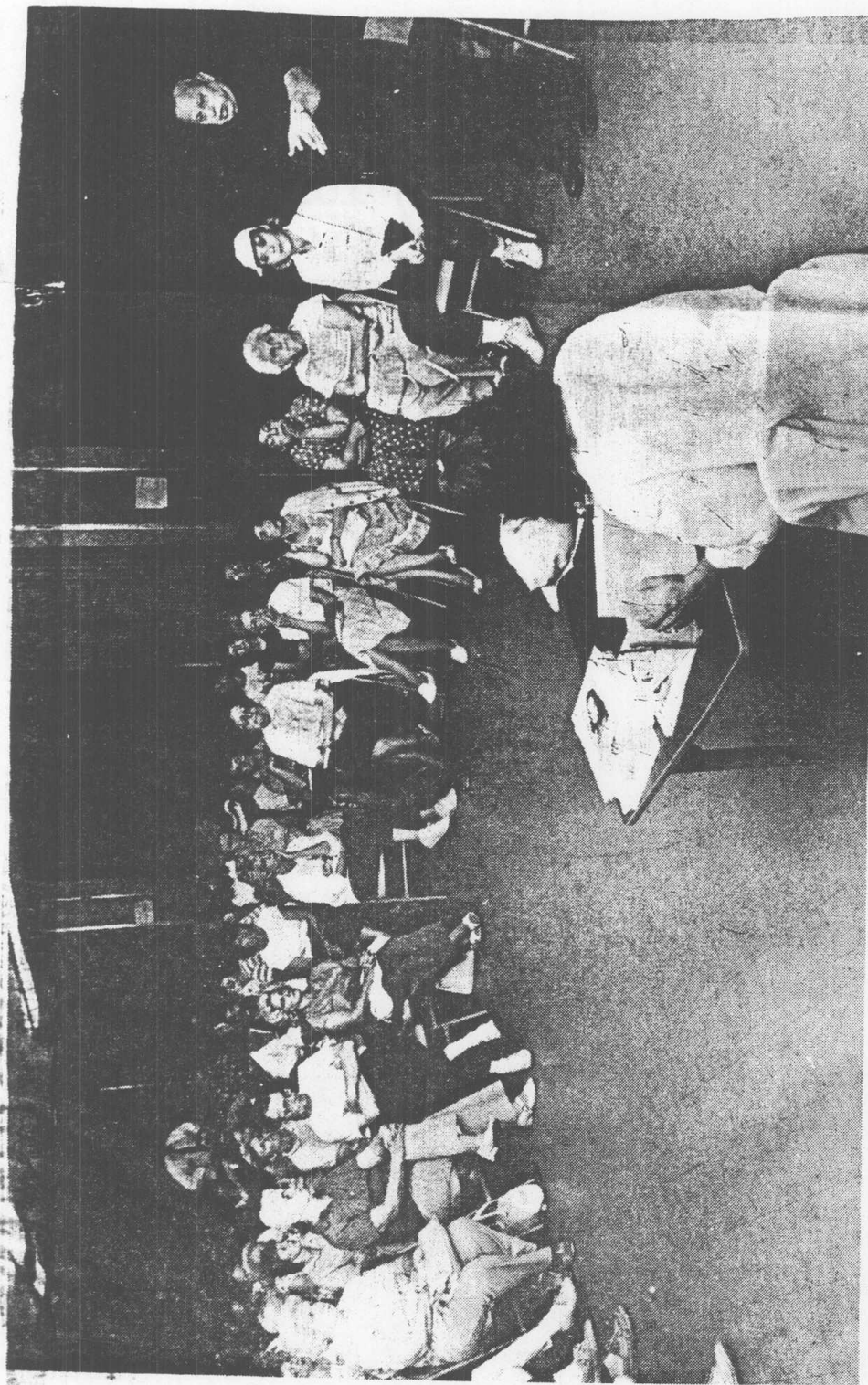
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ADVANCE PHOTO/STEVE ZAFFARANO
Donna Cutugno, civilian coordinator of Friends of Jennifer, leans against a pole as she waits outside Criminal Court.



Rev. Henry Gentile, right, associate pastor of Holy Family R.C. Church, Westerleigh, talks to search volunteers. (AP Wirephoto)

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ADVANCE PHOTO/STEVE ZAFFARANO

Karen Schweiger, Jennifer's mother, leaves court with a detective.

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Debbie Ornstein and James Burris of REACT await Rand's arraignment.



ADVANCE PHOTO/JIM SULLEY

A crowd gathers at the entrance to Criminal Court.

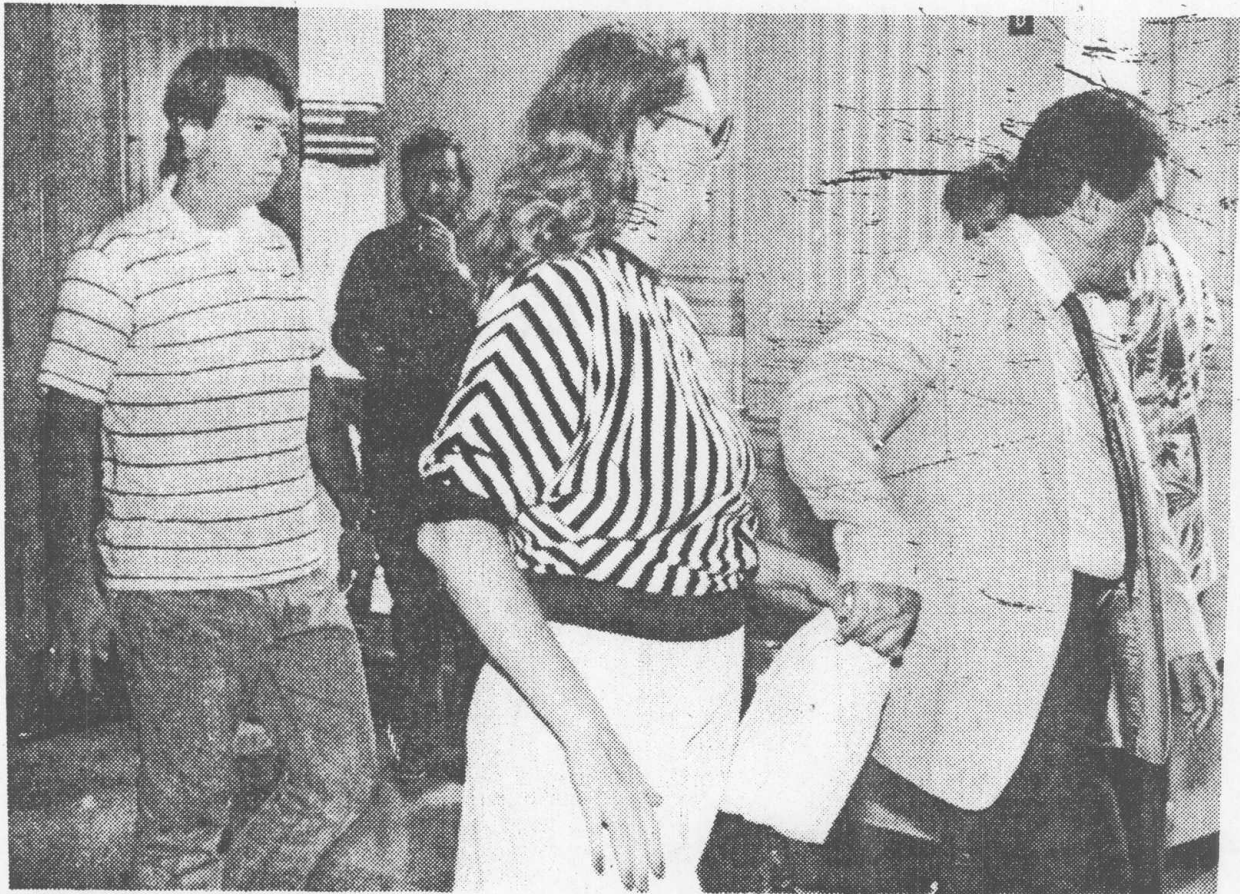


A handcuffed Andre Rand is led from Criminal Court after his arraignment.



ADVANCE PHOTO/TONY CARANNANTE

Wes Schulz, a security officer at the Pathmark supermarket on Forest Avenue, says that Andre Rand often frequented the Port Richmond store late at night.



ADVANCE PHOTO/STEVE ZAFFARANO

Kenneth Schweiger, left, follows his wife Karen out of Criminal Court building after Andre Rand's arraignment.