



MAY THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN: Kenneth and Karen Schweiger (center) join hands in prayer with family and friends outside court yesterday.

TONY PESCATORE DAILY NEWS

Court ordeal

Seeking light in darkness

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The family and friends of Jennifer Schweiger gathered on the lawn in front of the Staten Island Criminal Courthouse before 10 a.m. yesterday, joined hands and bowed their heads. Then, each recited the Hail Mary in turn.

Kenneth and Karen Schweiger, about to face the man who allegedly abducted their daughter, prayed to the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, for help in the search for the 12-year-old Down's syndrome girl.

"We had gone through the psychics," the Rev. Henry Gentile, the family's parish priest, said later. "The family decided that they needed God, a prayer, a little peace."

The peace was short-lived. A few hours later, Jennifer's parents watched in emotional turmoil as Andre Rand was led into a courtroom.

Link to a 2d missing girl?

Across the aisle, another couple waited for a look at Rand. Sven and Helen Cederholm also were hoping he would provide a clue to the whereabouts of a child, their granddaughter, Holly Ann Hughes, who has been missing since 1981.

Rand's name had come up repeatedly in the Hughes investigation. The Cederholms had heard of his arrest; they said they wanted to see what he looked like.

The Schweigers had been up all night, waiting for the same moment.

When it came, at 12:50 p.m., they clenched their hands and stared with eyes red and glassy.

"Take a deep breath," Kenneth murmured to his wife just before Rand was led in.

Wearing a plaid shirt, blue pants and black work boots, he stood before the judge and appeared not to listen as the charges were recited, decisions made and orders given.

It took all of four minutes. Yet long after Rand was led back out of the courtroom to undergo psychiatric examination, the Schweigers sat, staring straight ahead.

Even as the arraignment was in progress, volunteers again gathered, as they do every day, at the Church of the Holy Family to comb the Westerleigh area for Jennifer.

And 25 Emergency Service officers, six canine cops, five dogs, one lieutenant and five sergeants filled canteens, picked up walking sticks and searched the wooded acres of Latourette Park—far from the Schweiger home—for traces of the girl.

Sven Cederholm, who has lived his tragedy for six years, walked away from the courthouse, asking for prayers for both missing children.

"We had to see him," his wife said. "But it's very depressing coming here, when the realization hits you that this could be the one."