

Volunteer's hunch uncovers child's body in Willowbrook

Await test to see if it is Jennifer

By GLENN CHAPMAN
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Acting on a searcher's hunch, a band of volunteers slipped into Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook last night and found a child's body buried in a shallow grave 50 yards from the campsite of Jennifer Schweiger's accused kidnapper.

The unidentified body was taken to the medical examiner's office in Manhattan in an Emergency Medical Service ambulance early this morning.

Police on the scene last night said the woods surrounding the gravesite would be "torn apart" section by section in an effort to find other evidence, as well as more bodies. Authorities said they were looking for four more bodies, three children and one woman.

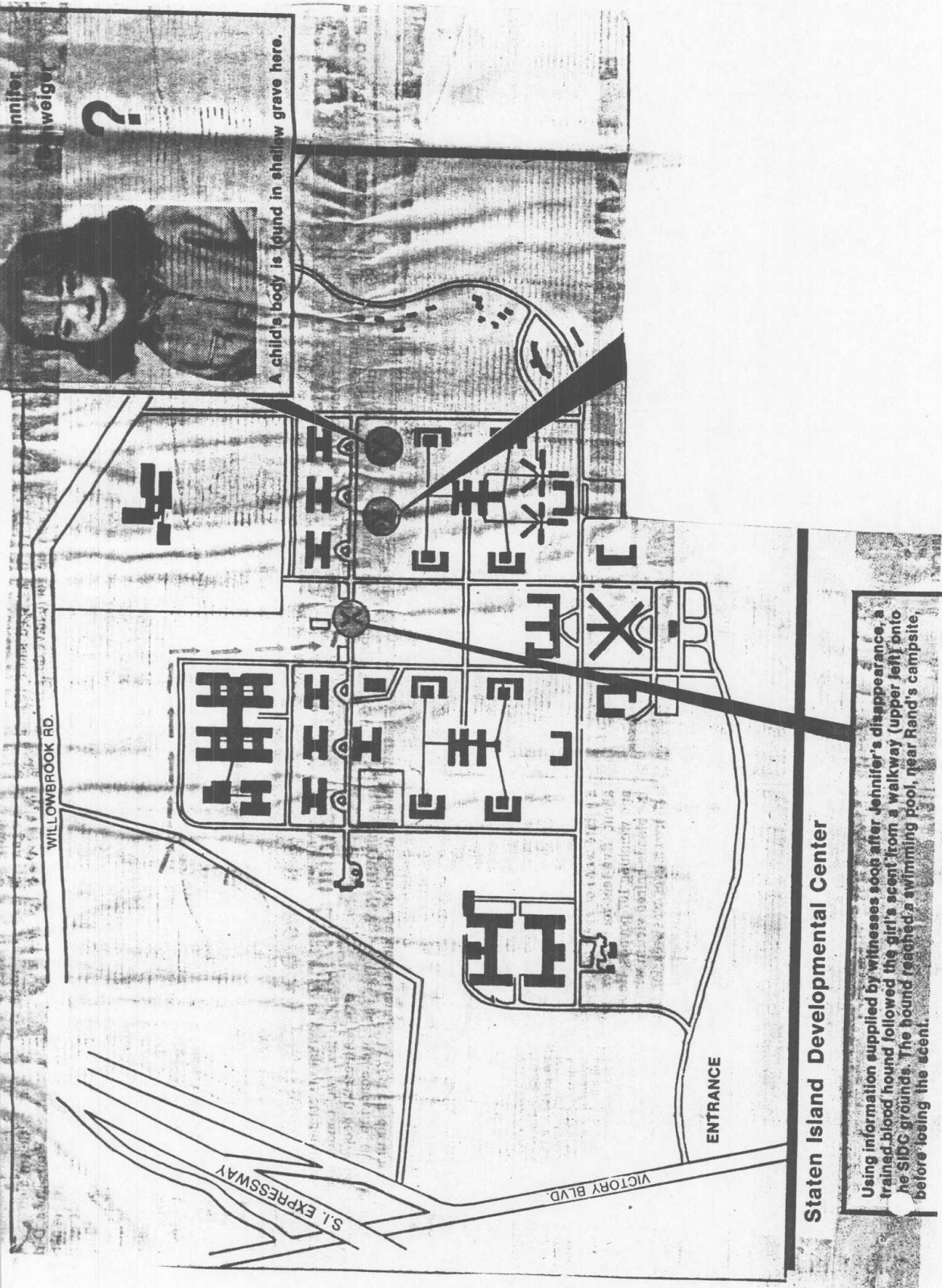
According to volunteers who made the discovery last night, the small body was missing part of its right pinky finger up to the first joint. Jennifer, the 12-year-old Westerleigh girl who has been missing since July 9, was also missing that part of her right pinky finger.

"Everybody screamed when they saw the feet," said a crying Donna Cutugno, one of a small group of veteran volunteers who defied SIDA security forces during an evening raid on the facility. "The tiny, little feet; the tiny, little hands; I know it was her."

SIDA was cordoned off by 8:30 p.m., and high-powered search lights dispelled the darkness as Emergency Services Unit officers carefully dug at the grave.

Medical Examiner Elliot Gross arrived on the scene less than two hours later. Along with a score of police officials, Gross was led

Lehninger



down the narrow path that led to the grave site.

Officers dug around the small body, leaving it encased in dirt so as not to damage it or destroy any evidence. The still figure was carefully lifted out of the three-foot deep grave and wrapped in a bodybag.

Officers, carrying the bodybag on a stretcher, loaded it into the waiting ambulance at 2:30 a.m.

More than a dozen plastic bags filled with dirt taken from the grave were also placed into the ambulance. EMS specialists Nick Catello and Andres Rodriguez manned the ambulance and received a police escort to the medical examiner's morgue in Manhattan.

Police at the scene said that because of the decomposition and the dirt, it was not possible to identify any of the child's features or even the sex.

The identity of the body and possibly the cause of death were expected to be available from the medical examiner's office late today, police said.

However, volunteers who found the grave said the hands and feet were undersized like those of a Down's syndrome child, and those interviewed by the Advance said they felt in their hearts that it was Jennifer.

Jennifer had Down's syndrome and was last seen walking on the SIDC grounds with Andre Rand, a 43-year-old drifter who has been arrested in connection with her disappearance.

The day after she vanished, a trained blood hound followed the girl's scent to an abandoned swimming pool on the SIDC grounds before losing her trail.

The pool sits only a few hundred yards from a makeshift campsite Rand had been using in a wooded area. Rand's campsite lies between the pool and the gravesite.

Rand was arrested Aug. 4 and charged with kidnapping Jennifer. He is undergoing psychiatric testing at Kings County Hospital. He is due to return to court Sept. 4.

Rand has a history of crimes against children which includes rape and kidnapping.

The commando-like raid that led to the body's discovery was prompted by off duty firefighter George Kramer, 58, of Great Kills. Kramer and his wife, Nancy, were taking part in a massive search of SIDC Saturday when something about a 15-foot wide span of earth that opened off a path through dense woods behind Building 27 struck him as

strange. The ground was smooth and slightly elevated, and reportedly Kramer was troubled by "balls of clay" strewn about the area.

Volunteers were ordered off the grounds by SIDC security before Kramer had a chance to bring in fellow volunteers to help dig up the spot, according to Mrs. Cutugno, co-ordinator of the Friends of Jennifer, a group that has searched daily for the missing girl.

Thoughts of the spot bothered Kramer for five days, and yesterday afternoon he sneaked onto the grounds alone and began poking around in the area. He dug a bit with a stick, and hit what he thought was a white plastic bag, volunteers said.

Kramer met the volunteer group when it gathered at Holy Family R.C. Church at 7 p.m., and pulled aside another veteran searcher, off-duty ESU Sgt. Ron Jacobs. Kramer told Jacobs, Mrs. Cutugno and other volunteers of his suspicions, and a "strike force" was assembled.

Mrs. Cutugno said the strike force consisted of the Kramers; AnneMarie Welch of Graniteville; Scott Peters of Tottenville; Richard Burdge of Westerleigh; Jacobs and his wife, Maureen; Joan Aust of Silver Lake; Peter Skorney and Christopher Pearson of Westerleigh; Mrs. Cutugno and her husband, Charles, and Robert Devine.

Jacobs made a telephone call to the 122nd Precinct stationhouse in New Dorp, and was soon met at the church by ESU Officers Raymond Smith and Brian McConville. Smith and McConville were about to go to dinner when they got the call for help.

Because security at SIDC reportedly did not want the volunteers roaming the grounds, the team slipped in through a rear entrance. Darkness was beginning to fall as Jacobs and the officers dug at the grave with their hands. Other volunteers held flashlights to help the officers see.

"It was a spot like 20 other spots, nothing special about it," Jacobs said while standing near the entrance to the path. "I'm surprised. The dogs have been over it, I've been over that spot numerous times."

According to Cutugno and other volunteers, once the surface of the ground was penetrated, the soil became loose. Tree roots ran through the dirt, and searchers said it seemed that the roots had been peeled back, then pushed back over the body to discourage

Handwritten scribble at the bottom of the page.

anyone from digging there.

First a pair of small feet, one crossed over the other, were uncovered. The dirt was cleared away from the legs. Eventually a child's hand, pressed against the upper thigh, was revealed.

The Rev. Henry Gentile of Holy Family Church, who had accompanied searchers into the woods for the first time in the 35-day-old search, said a blessing over the body as the officers dug.

"We were too afraid to dig anymore," Mrs. Cutugno said somberly while waiting on the SIDC grounds for some word of the child's identity last night.

"What got me was the silence of it," Skorney said as he recalled the hushed apprehension of the searchers during the digging.

Chief of Department Robert J. Johnston and a host of police captains, investigators, officers, and commanders soon flooded the scene and the grounds were sealed off.

The band of volunteers was ushered off to a temporary headquarters in Building 1. Devine and the

other volunteers, all filled with grief and anger, paced the hallway outside the security office in the building.

"We worked hard to find her, now we're going to work just as hard to make sure this guy doesn't get away with it," said a grim-faced Devine, the knees of his pants soiled with dirt from the gravesite. "We're not going to stop until we find all of the missing girls!"

Most of the searchers were then piled into a van and taken to the 120th Precinct stationhouse in St. George where they were interviewed by detectives.

"We just had this feeling tonight was going to be the night," Father Gentile said while waiting with the other volunteers.

Heavy-duty special operations trucks were brought in, and search lights were set up as officers used chain-saws to clear a path through the trees and open up the gravesite to the lights. At about 10:30 p.m., while officers were digging the child up, a bright shooting star arched overhead.

The Cutagnos and Skorney were waiting on the grounds of the facility when Jennifer Schweiger's father, Kenneth Schweiger, made his way past security guards bent on keeping him out. According to police Capt. Michael Julian, police wanted to save the father from the trauma of seeing the gravesite.

Schweiger, a large flashlight slung over his shoulder, had evidently been out searching himself when he received word of the discovery. The father sat in Building 1 with several close family friends and puzzled at how the spot could have been overlooked. The father, visibly shaken by the news, wondered aloud if his daughter might be dead.

A short time later, Schweiger went home to join his wife and detectives to await word of the identity of the child.

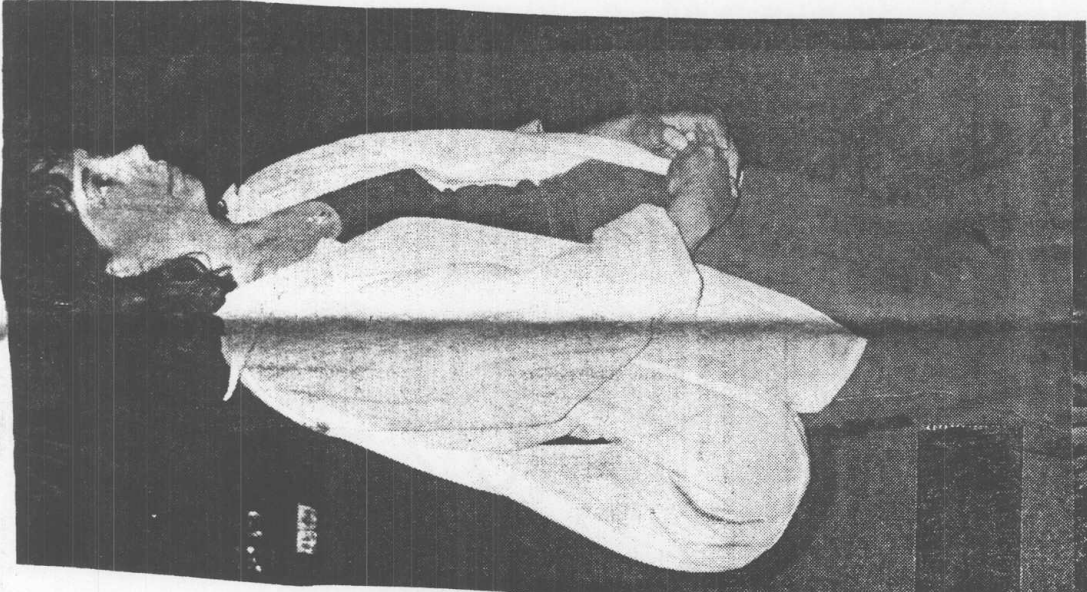
The missing girl's mother, Karen Schweiger, was joined there by family members and close friends as she continued into the early morning to hope that the body was not that of her daughter. Police officials returned to the

gravesite this morning to expand the search for evidence in the case, and to begin further digging operations.

"This place is going to be grass in about two to three days," said Thomas Tierny, Deputy Director of SIDC, referring to the currently overgrown area.

Searchers, specialized police teams and determined volunteers, first conducted a massive search of the SIDC grounds July 13, after Rand was questioned for two-days by detectives. The grounds of the facility have been gone over repeatedly by police, National Guardsmen, teams of trained dogs, and volunteers.

Rand, the man charged with kidnapping Jennifer, reportedly lived in a campsite in the woods at SIDC for years. Island police have targeted Rand as a suspect in the disappearance of 7-year-old Holly Ann Hughes in 1981; 10-year-old Tiahease Jackson in 1983; Alice Pereira, who was 5 years old when she disappeared in July 1972, and the disappearance of a hispanic woman who worked at SIDC.



Donna Cutugno watches police at the digging site. ADVANCE PHOTO/GLENN CHAF



Kidnap suspect Andre Rand had been living at a campsite here.



ADVANCE PHOTO/IRVING SILVERSTEIN

A group of volunteers who would normally be searching sit and wait.



ADVANCE PHOTO/IRVING SILVERSTEIN

Capt. William Wallace, left, chief of Island detectives, talks with Deputy Commissi if Richard J. Condon.

2 pages