

A suspect speaks to The News

DAILY NEWS

Monday, August 17, 1987

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Breaking his silence for the first time, murder suspect Andre Rand said yesterday he did not kill 12-year-old Jennifer Schweiger and bury her body in a shallow grave near his Willowbrook campsite.

"The only time I ever saw her was when (police) showed me her picture," Rand told the Daily News in an exclusive interview at the psychiatric ward of Kings County Hospital. "When I heard she was found dead I cried. I just broke down."

Authorities say Rand, a 43-year-old convicted sex offender, is a shrewd Pied Piper who only feigns severe mental illness. The one-time attendant at the Willowbrook state mental facility also is a suspect in the disappearance of three other Staten Island girls.

Described as a slightly retarded schizophrenic, Rand was arrested on Aug. 4 for kidnaping Jennifer and was ordered to undergo 30 days of psychiatric tests at Kings County.

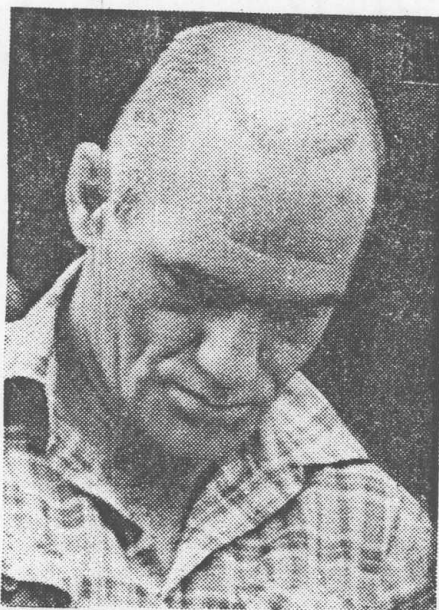
Seated in the drab sixth-floor visitors' room, Rand, dressed in dark green hospital garb and slippers, spoke of his lonely, failed life.

He said he tried to kill himself last week by tying his shirt around his neck and hanging from a bar in his cell. He said correction officers found him in time.

Suicide watch

Lowell Goldberg, Kings County associate hospital director, would not comment on Rand's suicide-attempt remarks. Authorities have said, however, that Rand has been on a suicide watch.

"I wasn't planning on anything like



ANDRE RAND after his arrest in the death of Staten Island girl Jennifer Schweiger.

this to happen," he said, his voice a steady monotone, his large eyes staring straight ahead. "It just happened out of the clear blue. I'm sure in my mind and heart I had nothing to do with (Jennifer's killing).

"I do know, however, that if the police wouldn't have become directly involved in this, I think the girl might have been alive right now. That's my opinion."

Asked what he meant, Rand appeared not to hear the question and added: "It's the way they found her. They found her dead and buried."

Seen walking with Jennifer

The tall, muscular Rand was seen walking hand-in-hand with Jennifer July 9, the day the friendly girl with Down's syndrome disappeared near her Staten Island home. After an extensive search, Jennifer's body was unearthed last Wednesday, about 150 yards from Rand's campsite.

Rand told The News that once police started to question him in connection with Jennifer's disappearance, he planned to kill himself by going into the woods to down a bottle of sleeping pills.

He said he did not want to go through the ordeal police put him through in 1969 when he pleaded guilty in the attempted rape of a 9-year-old girl in the Bronx.

Rand also is a suspect in the disappearances of Alice Pereira, 5, last seen in 1972; Holly Ann Hughes, 7, who vanished in July 1981, and Tiahease Jackson, 10, last seen in August 1983.

Asked if he knew their whereabouts, Rand replied: "I really can't say. They could be anywhere."

As for Jennifer, the sweet-smiled little girl who will be put to rest in a private cemetery today, Rand said, "I really wanted them to find her alive."