

Rand: A complex, often baffling collection of contradictions

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He could enchant his teenage companions, singing and accompanying himself with a three-string guitar as they sat in the stillness of a storefront church in West Brighton. He could talk entertainingly with them.

But is he an ogre, capable of ending the life of a 12-year-old girl with Down's syndrome who captured the hearts of those with whom she came in contact with her trusting nature, friendliness and seemingly perpetual smile?

Is he an "oddball," a term used by his lawyer, a man who might sleep in cemeteries or wooded areas such as the campsite he maintained on the grounds of the former Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook?

And is he the same man who authorities say was a suspect in the still unsolved disappearances of at least three children on Staten Island, dating back to 1972? Is he the man who kept "popping up" in each investigation — a fact not overlooked by authorities when a man fitting his description was reported to have been with Jennifer Schweiger when she disappeared on the afternoon of July 9, 1987?

He is the same man who authorities said served 16 months in prison after pleading guilty to a sexual abuse charge in connection with the attempted rape of a 9-year-old Bronx girl in 1989.

He also is the same man who was sentenced in 1983 to 10 months in jail on an unlawful imprisonment charge for loading 11 West Brighton children into a van and driving them to the Elizabeth-Neuwark area without telling their parents.

But does an ogre treat his young prisoners at a fast-food restaurant and spend hours watching airplanes take off and land before returning the children unharmed to Staten Island?

One source described him as a slightly retarded schizophrenic.

His face appears to be formed from granite, and he is powerfully built, capable of scaling an eight-foot wall or a tree with ease. He has a flair for selecting and wearing clothing, sometimes even theatrically. He seems to take pride

in selecting the best clothing available in the city penal system for court appearances. His smiles are rare, and even at these times there are those who feel he is unaware he is smiling. Could it be because of the lonely existence he has chosen for himself?

He is the same person whom people described as "eedy," and unkept.

Yet he is the same man who police say kept a tidy campsite no matter where he bedded down. No where could even an empty can or scrap of paper be found about his camps. He is the same person who a witness said would appear in a laundromat for three or four hours, putting coins in machines as he would wash the same load two or three times, usually with a disinfectant.

He is the same man who identi-



Andre Rand during his recent concluded kidnap-murder trial.

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fied himself to a neighborhood resident as a "caretaker" at the developmental center and then scolded her for walking her dog on the center's grounds. When she replied that she cleans up after her dog, he asked her if she also cleaned up after walking her dog in the woods. He suggested that she walk her dog where she resided. He complained that it taken him 15 minutes to clean dog excrement from his bicycle's wheels.

He is the same man who showed teen-age friends his "home" in the woods at the developmental center and encouraged one to climb a tree with him so he could recover possessions from the roof of a nearby building.

He is the same man who authorities said was usually seen riding a bicycle and deliberately sought to be hit by a bus or a car in the hope of bringing a lawsuit or getting a settlement from an insurance company.

He is believed to have survived on public assistance and maintained a post office box in the

main Post Office in Castleton Corners to get his mail.

He is a prolific writer and has done oil paintings, on occasion reportedly exhibiting them at the annual outdoor art shows on the fence at Snug Harbor Cultural Center. He has worked as a house painter and a sign painter, reportedly excelling in the latter. For nearly two years, beginning in 1966, he had worked as a physical therapy aide at the developmental center before submitting his resignation.

He is known to have only a small group of close friends, homeless people like himself, perhaps two or three. He also has made at least casual friendships with supermarket workers and others.

Often he would stop at lunch during his daily meanderings about the Island for a free meal at the Salvation Army branch in Port Richmond as he rode about on his bicycle.

His father died when he was 14 and his mother was reported to have suffered a nervous break-

down. He lived with an aunt when he enlisted in the Army in 1962, serving for two years, including a month in a paratroop unit. He was honorably discharged. He never left the United States. He then moved to Staten Island, living with his mother and aunt. He never married.

The man had been known as Frank Rushan, but in 1979 he had his name legally changed to Andre Rand, the name by which he is known today.

As with every individual, there are many facets to Andre Rand, of which this attempt at a profile contains some.

It remained for an observer in the Supreme Court to perhaps best describe what has befallen Rand. While questioning, as many have during the trial, the quality of the evidence presented against Rand, the speaker took a hard look at Rand's austere, rugged face and remarked, expressing an opinion shared by many: "Even if he didn't kidnap the girl, he should be convicted if only because he looks like he might have done it."

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