

Wednesday, November 15, 1988

25 yrs. in S.I. death

By MARY ENGELS
and JOSEPH McNAMARA

Daily News Staff Writers

As the parents of 12-year-old Jennifer Schweiger wept, drifter Andre Rand was sentenced yesterday to 25 years to life in prison for kidnaping the girl whose murder shocked Staten Island.

"No crime has been so horrendous," Staten Island Supreme Court Justice Norman Felig said, telling Rand, "I sentence you for the rest of your natural life, not to be less than 25 years."

Kenneth and Karen Schweiger hugged each other as sentence was rendered in the July 9, 1987, kidnaping of their daughter, a Down's syndrome victim. The girl's body was found that Aug. 12 some 500 feet from Rand's makeshift camp on grounds of the old Willowbrook Hospital. But he was not convicted of killing her.

Rand, 44, who has five arrests dating back to 1969, some for sex offenses, showed no emotion.

Before sentencing, Felig read a letter from the Schweiger family that detailed their pain.

An ordinary day

"A day which started out as an ordinary summer day, a child wanting to go out and play because it was summer vacation, turned into a 16-month nightmare with a lifetime of loss," it read.

It told of how each member of the family was shattered by the slaying. The letter continued:

"Having a handicapped child is at first an adjustment. But once you accept this fact and start to learn about your child, as all parents do, your heart grows with them.

"Jennifer generated love, she was pure of heart and pure of love. What greater gift could a family share? . . . Andre Rand took all this away from us!"

The judge noted that Rand has expressed no remorse.

Outside court, Ken Schweiger, who has moved his family to Lakewood, N.J., said, "I'm glad it's over. Now we can put this horrible thing behind us and get on with our lives."

Donna Cutugno, who started the group Friends of Jennifer, said, "Now we have one less monster on Staten Island."

Defense attorney Jerome Giovinazzo called the sentence excessive and said he would appeal it. He acknowledged that kidnaping is a serious crime, but noted that no death threats were made, no ransom demanded and there was no rape or sexual molestation.

"Her death was not even determined and we don't know what happened," Giovinazzo said. He insisted that Rand still says he tried to help Jennifer.