

‘Psychic Detective’ Noreen Renier: The Grinch Who Stole Christmas from a Grieving Family

Newly obtained recordings provide a unique opportunity to assess the sessions of a genuine “psychic detective” police case.

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August 12, 1989, was to be a joyous day for nineteen-year-old Kimberly McAndrew, a college student cashiering for the summer at a Canadian Tire store in the heart of the Halifax, Nova Scotia, peninsula. It was her boyfriend’s birthday, and he, along with her sister Heather, were to pick her up from work at 5 PM and begin the celebration. But Kimberly’s boss allowed her to clock out at 4:20, and though she presumably headed home—about a fifteen minute walk away—she remains missing to this day.

Six years and numerous dead-ends later, in October 1995 the Halifax Regional Police hired famed “psychic detective” Noreen Renier in the hopes that her paranormal abilities, endorsed by such notables as legendary FBI Special Agent Robert Ressler (coiner of the term “serial killer”), might lend some needed direction to their efforts. And if the *number* of directions in which she led them is any measure, they got their money’s worth!

In August 2015, during the course of research for a series of articles about the many long-unsolved murder cases in his city, *Halifax Examiner* editor Tim Bousquet obtained from Renier audio recordings of her three sessions (conducted by phone from her home in Florida) with Halifax Police Constable David MacDonald and sent them to me for comment. The opportunity for the public to hear and evaluate such a collaboration in its entirety is extremely rare, and I have made the recordings available at gposner.com/Renier-Kimberly.html. Since interested readers can listen for themselves, I will try to limit this discussion to the most salient highlights.

Renier’s specialty is “psychometry”—holding onto an item (having been mailed to her by the family or police) belonging to the missing person, from which she derives the ability to “become” that person. As she explains, “There will be times



Noreen Renier

I will be Noreen, so if you really want *Kimberly* to see something, you have to say, 'Now Kimberly, we want *you* to tell us.' ... It'll be a mixture, and I'll probably have the bad guy in there too occasionally."

The first session, which lasts just over an hour, has Kimberly's sister Heather and their mother on the line (they don't participate in the next two) with Constable MacDonald. Renier soon makes "psychic" contact and offers news that everyone has been waiting six long years to hear: "I have Kimberly here. ... She's going to show us pretty soon where she is." Yet matters quickly devolve into a protracted wild goose chase, starting at the very beginning with several serious stumbles. Kimberly (being channeled through Renier) declares, "I'm going to go out the south side of the building." But although that side does face the street, witnesses attest to her exiting the rear parking lot door, which is along the building's *north* side. And mere seconds later Renier tells us, "Her car is taken a short distance," though Kimberly did not drive to work that day.

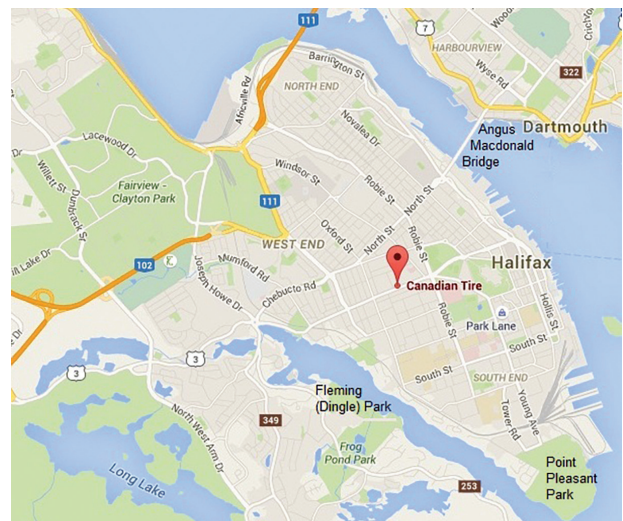
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Yet no one seems disillusioned by these "psychic" insights, which the constable and the family must have known were errant, or by any of the claptrap to come—not even when mired in a mumbo-jumbo directional clue such as, "I'm seeing a clock. I'm seeing a center [in] which I want to put Kimberly. I would put where I left work, it's either at 5:30, or just a little bit after, I don't know. Seven o'clocks are backwards, so it's either 5:30 or almost 6, or just a little before 6:00, but I don't know what side it's on, I really don't. Is it 5:30, or 7, 6:30?" There are numerous (though fruitless) coherent clues, such as the "I want to go south, maybe southeast" one that ultimately leads to the first new search site. Perhaps Renier's radar is hampered by a shortcoming that we learn about in a later session when she is asked to look to the south on a map: "I don't know which [way] is south. I really don't do maps."

When Renier channels Kimberly long enough for her to speak to her mom for the first time since having disappeared, her topic of choice isn't what one might expect: "What are you doing to your hair? I don't know what you've done, but it's not the same [as] when I was there. I don't know—it's different." And Kimberly's next (and last) such soliloquy

rings no truer: "You still have that picture up of me, don't you? [Mom: "Many pictures."] Yeah, well, that one I don't like. The one that was taken at school. I just never liked that thing; it looks so dirty. I don't like that one. I like the others, though. And it seems like there's new paint around there; I can smell some new paint."

Nor does Kimberly sound any more authentic when MacDonald asks her what her plans were when she headed out: "Well, I was going, it seems like it's either raining or it's wet, or whatever it is I feel wet around me. I don't know if I'm in water now or it was raining then. [Sorry, it sure wasn't.] But my plans, either it was just a little trip or a little getaway, or, I feel like it was planned, only I didn't get to the other end. I had something planned; there was something specific to do. I don't get there. I get waylaid." And when asked if she recognized anyone as she exited the store, Kimberly's answer is again reminiscent of Renier's own rhetorical style: "Yeah, I see a guy with a short name. He is slender. I feel more dark hair, maybe very thick, maybe some strong curl or wave in



it. Would have a very strong accent, but not your Canadian accent. It's even a different accent to me, maybe a little bit more Slavic." Though maybe not—Renier will later divine that the sole abductor was likely Kimberly's "blood relative," before she ultimately decides that *an alleged witness's* story about *three "native Indian" (First Nations) strangers* is correct.

But the first session does include one impressive-sounding possible "hit": "I saw a 'Ken,' or it started with a 'K-E-N' ... Now I don't know if this was Kimberly or who, but ... my knee ... it could be upper leg. ... I hurt so much there." MacDonald reveals someone named Ken to have been the principal case investigator at the time and that he "has a very bad leg." But could Renier have obtained that information by other means in the interval between her hiring and the day of this session? And note that it was MacDonald—not Renier—who says that the lead detective was named Ken and has a bad leg. And had that clue not struck any chord with MacDonald or the family, Renier could have replied that maybe it was "K-I-M" that she saw, and that *her* leg got hurt during the abduction or murder.

Constable MacDonald tries several times to get Kimberly

to name her abductor, with (of course) no success. She and her channeler instead lead him through a maze of ambiguities, such as, “If there’s a road or a street called ‘S’ there [to the southeast], something with an ‘S’ name,” and “I’m at work. It’s 4:20. I want to see [the] odometer. ... It could be 7.2 or 72. I feel a 7 and a 2 very strongly. And it could be seven-two, seven-three, could be a longitude or latitude.” And a moment later, “I’ve got a one-seven this time ... maybe 1.7. It’s by ... a park or parkway or park something, Park Road, but there’s something with a park involved in the area that she’s at.” This occurs about twenty-two minutes in, and Kimberly has still yet to simply, as advertised, tell them where she is.

The “psychic” takes a cruel turn after asking Heather if she writes down the details of her dreams about her sister. When

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the answer comes back “No,” Renier tells her, “Well, I try to recall [my dreams] as much as I can because I think there’re even clues in the dreams. [Kimberly] just finally gave up on you.” But Heather apparently keeps her composure and even becomes the first to garner a seemingly solid clue, asking her sister if she is in a familiar place. Kimberly answers, “Yes ... someplace popular. ... We [the family] went there more for a holiday, I think, one time.” And a bit later: “There’s a well. There’s a big body of water [but] I’m not there, I’m in the well.” Renier suggests, “OK, let me go to the future and see when you find her. ... I would say, if it’s not this month it’s next month. ... I have no doubt that you’ll find her.” She adds (brags?), followed by two chuckles, “Some people have to wait three or four months, a year.” She also predicts that when she channels Kimberly again, “It won’t be hard for me to see who did it.” I’m tempted to say “famous last words,” but those are hardly her last!

Before the first session concludes, Renier mentions going over a bridge that “has an alphabet or numbers or something but not really a name.” Though that clue wouldn’t apply, based on the totality of Renier’s others so far, we learn two weeks later, at the beginning of the second session, that Mac-

Donald made Point Pleasant Park, which occupies nearly 200 acres at the southeast tip of the peninsula, his first search priority (see map). But he says they surveyed “all known wells and whatever and had no success.” Yet Renier still sees the image of a “cylinder shape,” and MacDonald presses Kimberly for confirmation that she is in that park. “Yes, I am. I’m there. You all maybe came within ten to twelve yards.” But instead of hanging up at that point and marshalling a more thorough exploration of the park, he asks Kimberly to better describe that bridge. “The metal bridge is over ... swift-running water. It is quite a ways down there. A lot of boaters, rafters.” MacDonald: “Could it be the Angus L. Macdonald Bridge?” Kimberly answers, “Sure.” But as Constable MacDonald then points out, “The only problem with that, Kimberly, is the Macdonald Bridge leaves Halifax and goes to ... the city of Dartmouth.” (But remember, Renier said the bridge doesn’t “really [have] a name”!) Renier’s comeback: “I could be seeing this in another stage of her life.” But the only problem with that, Noreen, is that he was conversing with *Kimberly*, not you!

Kimberly also reveals that there is “some other stuff in here with me,” to which Renier adds, “He’s not just hiding a body; he’s hiding a body and evidence. ... And I think this is why we haven’t found him yet.” Discussion ensues about Point Pleasant Park’s three points of entry, and Renier selects the one at the park’s eastern border just north of Black Rock Beach. MacDonald is directed to enter through the gate “and then we’ll hang a right. It might be two rights in a row.” When he asks if “old Chain Rock Battery” means anything to her, the response is, “Yeah ... on one side is water. Yes, yes, and it’s got a very, brick, gray, that gray is there” (those were some earlier clues). They agree to check that part of the park next, even though it is at the far west end, and hanging a right upon entering that eastern gate would take you due *north*. Nonetheless, confidence abounds as Renier half-jokes, “If we find her, can I come up and say hi to you all? ... And make plane reservations [for me]; that’s how confident I am.”

So why, one minute into yet *another* (the third and final) psychic session, does Renier advise MacDonald to “shove it all out the door” (referring to all the information she provided in the first two sessions) and “just sort of start with a fresh picture”? The second search of the park had yielded nothing, and now a jailed convict in Halifax is claiming to have seen two associates murder and bury Kimberly. MacDonald says that according to this source, “Not too far after ... they cross the [Angus Macdonald] bridge ... supposedly that’s where she’s murdered.” (I can’t help but wonder if MacDonald had leadingly suggested that particular bridge to his source like he had to “Kimberly.”) Continuing, “And then they come back across the bridge to Halifax” before burying her in Fleming (sometimes called “Dingle”) Park, which is “across the [water] from [the west end of] Point Pleasant Park.” Renier wonders if maybe she had selected Point Pleasant “because of me touching it so much” (on some printed matter). But recall that it was not Renier, but the channeled Kimberly, who had earlier declared that she was there, just yards from where searchers had been looking. Renier can’t keep her personas straight.

Yet Renier is skeptical of the jailbird's story: "I don't buy it. I just don't buy it." She instead recommends going "the opposite way from where he was showing you," and so they look northeastward again over the bridge into Dartmouth, after which there's "a right turn or right road that we would take," which MacDonald advises her would lead southward. Trying to fathom exactly "where [Kimberly] was put," Renier is reminded of her earlier "cylinder" clue, and now also perceives a "very deep" gulley. MacDonald tries to assist: "You're on the number 7 highway (heading southeast just over the bridge as per the map). Would this lead to this gulley that you're seeing?" Renier answers in the affirmative, and moments later, "I feel in the gulley. ... I just feel [we will find her soon], before Christmas."

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But *where*? In this gulley across the bridge to the *east* of the Halifax peninsula? In a well within Point Pleasant Park, as "Kimberly" herself insists? Or where MacDonald will now again focus Renier's attention, across the water to the *west* of the peninsula, in the park fingered by his alleged witness? Upon viewing pictures of that park, Renier exclaims, "It's got brick! ... It's got lots of things! Yes, yes, yes!" MacDonald tells her that his source "says that they dug a hole in the ground, very shallow, in that Dingle Park." But Renier again expresses distrust: "That's B.S., total B.S. ... There's no way. ... These guys aren't the ditch-digging type, OK? They didn't do that." But when she envisions herself "inside that park ... [t]here's the overhang. I can see the overhang." MacDonald asks if by "overhang" she is referring to "that gulley you were looking down on" a little while earlier. Renier immediately exclaims "Yes!" Except that in all the excitement, they must have forgotten that the gulley she envisioned Kimberly being tossed into was across the MacDonald Bridge in the *opposite direction*!

Yet Renier likes a particular area of this park where MacDonald says "there are two [manmade] ponds [and] this little stone bridge going over one of them." Did "Kimberly" mistake this pond for a well? And this tiny stone structure for the nearly mile-long "metal bridge" she had earlier identified? He further notes that "those ponds in August [the month in which Kim had disappeared] are basically dry, and they would look like a little depression in the ground ... a little gulley." But though this is miles from the "very deep" gulley and also contradicts her "They didn't do that [digging]" remark, Renier agrees and further rationalizes that the "cylinder" shape could represent what Kimberly's body "was wrapped [in]" rather than a well, and she soon becomes so excited that "I'm sort of jumping up and down here! ... I'm just going crazy because you know where it is! It's there! And he *was* right! ... And the reason you can't find [the grave] is it's covered up with water!"

So, the wild goose having been chased down, all that remains in finding Kimberly's remains is deciding which of the two ponds to drain. "Do the one with the 'R' ... I feel 'R' ... That 'R' is going to be somewhere." (I suspect there could be more "rubbish" nearer to one than the other.) And as an afterthought, "Oh, I didn't tell you before; I got the name 'Jimmy.' ... So is there anybody in our cast of characters named 'Jimmy'?" When MacDonald tells her that his source's name is "Jamie [or] James," Renier asks (though with the inflection of a declarative statement), "Oh, I didn't know that, did I?" MacDonald replies, "Yeah, actually you did" and Renier responds, "Oh, darn." But perhaps, MacDonald suggests, she can identify "these other two [First Nations] characters, like if you can maybe see something [else] about them that you can describe or Kimberly could describe." Renier says, "I would have to have the man's hair." (But she wouldn't need to get into *Jamie's* mind in order for *Kimberly* to describe them!) MacDonald even tells her that Jamie "told us who they are ... where we can find them and everything. They're very well known to the police." But Renier doesn't even try, though as to motive she offers, "[Kimberly to them] was ... blond ... or the Anglo Saxon ... enemy. I feel that they were drunk, on drugs, or whatever."

Whatever. It should be only a matter of days now anyway before the pond is drained and that hidden evidence—enough to put the perps away for decades—is recovered, along with the remains of young Kimberly McAndrew. And moments before they say their farewells, Renier assures MacDonald, "You'll, you'll, you'll, you'll find her before Christmas. ... A nice Christmas present for everybody." But Christmas never arrived that year for the grieving McAndrew family, nor has it in the two decades since. ■



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