

THE DOUBTS

DON'T DISAPPEAR

By Amy E. Schwartz

It's been three years since Joan Webster vanished. Her parents think her murderer is behind bars, serving a life sentence for another killing. Is that enough for them?

ON JULY 25, 1984, A 42-YEAR-OLD REvere resident, Leonard Paradiso, was sentenced to life imprisonment for the attempted rape and second-degree murder of 20-year-old Marie Ianzuzzi. The sentencing marked the end of a long drama—a murder unsolved since 1979, and an indictment and trial that had dominated the news for months. Yet nearly every story about the case began with a reference not to Marie Ianzuzzi but to another young woman linked to Paradiso's name: Joan L. Webster, a Harvard graduate student who disappeared from Logan Airport on November 28, 1981—just three years ago—and whose body has never been found.

Joan Webster's face—dark-eyed and smiling—became a familiar presence around Boston the winter she disappeared. For an entire year she appeared on innumerable posters and advertisements, all begging for information about her whereabouts. In a desperate attempt to keep her story in the public eye, her parents offered cash rewards and held repeated press conferences.

Three days after her disappearance, a fisherman dredged her handbag out of a marsh in Saugus, and her suitcase was eventually found in a locker at a Greyhound bus terminal. But nothing came to light about Joan's fate except what everyone knew from the posters: Joan Webster, 25, a second-year architecture student at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, a popular resident adviser in Perkins Hall, an honors graduate of Syracuse University, and a successful designer of building interiors in places as far away as Saudi Arabia, had gone home to her family in New Jersey for Thanksgiving. She had flown back to Boston the following Saturday night, November 28, 1981, to get some work done. She had been seen at Logan after leaving the

plane. Then she had vanished.

Two years later, testimony from two informants in the Ianzuzzi case began to suggest a link between the murder and sexual assault of the dark-haired, dark-eyed, petite Marie Ianzuzzi and Joan Webster's disappearance. Ianzuzzi's body had been found in the Saugus marsh 300 yards from where Webster's handbag had been dredged up.

Leonard Paradiso had been out on parole at the time of both incidents, having served 3 years of a 6-to-15-year term for the 1974 attempted rape of a third woman answering the same general description as that of Ianzuzzi and Webster.

There was much more evidence, and though all of it was circumstantial, it was enough to convince George and Terry Webster that Paradiso had somehow lured their daughter into his car at the airport, taken her to the piers behind Northern Avenue, and gotten her onto his boat, the *Malafemmena* (the "Evil Woman").

Paradiso won't be eligible for parole until 2019. For all intents and purposes, the Joan Webster case is closed. But for the Websters the story is far from over. In addition to the difficulty of returning to a normal life after three years of resolute self-exposure, they face some unique practical problems. Given the absence of Joan's body, when and how—if at all—should they declare her formally dead and hold a memorial service? And when and how—if at all—should they press for a further indictment and sentence against Paradiso for their daughter's murder?

STRESS RESEARCHERS SAY THE DEATH of a child is the most traumatic experience that can befall a parent. Terry and George Webster have intensified this trauma by publicizing their grief,



Joan Webster

believing, as they have been advised, that it is their only hope of obtaining information about their youngest child.

"They're brave people," says assistant district attorney Timothy Burke, the Suffolk County prosecutor who has been on the case since 1982. "When people have loved their children the way they have, and raised them the way they have, it's just torture."

Giving directions to their town, Glen Ridge—a well-to-do commuter suburb half an hour from New York City—Terry Webster is cordial and meticulous. She double-checks bus tickets and platform numbers so thoroughly as to bring to mind, uncomfortably, the traveler who didn't arrive. An active member of both the Glen Ridge Planning Board and the town's historical commission, she enthusiastically points out the town's architectural landmarks on the way to their home, then casually includes a drive past the high school "where Joan went."

Upstairs in the yellow Georgian house, she is about halfway through the slow job of sorting and storing the contents of her daughter's room, cataloging everything for possible legal use. In a jar on the bureau, she collects strands of her daughter's hair as she finds them.

Downstairs are pictures of a smiling Joan and of other members of the family; on the coffee table is an issue of *Survivors*, the newsletter of the support group Parents of Murdered Children. The clippings from the three-year search are collected in four enormous scrapbooks.

George and Terry Webster, both well-dressed and athletic-looking people in their fifties, sit and discuss Joan in voices that seldom quaver. They tell the story by turns, occasionally interrupting each other with corrections. On one point they emphatically agree: the Joan Webster case isn't over yet for them, and it's *certainly* not receding into the past.

"As far as the emotional and mental aspects, I think you work your way through phases," says George Webster, an executive with International Telephone & Telegraph. "I think the first several months, when we didn't really know what we had, what had happened, when we were energizing out in all directions and exploring all kinds of avenues, your adrenaline is pumping and you don't know what the outcome will be. And that's a form of anguish that's continual. And then there was a period when we were just throwing our hands up, saying, 'Well, where do we go from here?' And then, of course, when the scenario involving Mr. Paradiso developed, that became a focal point, and then you go into a different kind of, well, distress."

Part of the "continual anguish" of the first phase derived from the Websters' uncertainty about how to proceed just after they realized that their daughter was missing. Looking back, they constantly point to things they did wrong. They put Joan on the

plane in Newark Saturday night, but it was late Tuesday evening before Joan's friend David noticed her absence and called Glen Ridge.

"It sounds terrible now," Terry says, "but we didn't expect a check-in call; we knew she was very, very busy." When David did call, George was unreachable; he was on an airplane, flying back from a business trip to California.

"I knew right away how terrible it was—I knew it was very serious," Terry says. "So I started proceedings on reporting a missing person. I had to learn how to do it. When George walked through the door at midnight, there was a Glen Ridge policeman there, and we were up till 3 a.m."

There was so much to take care of procedurally that the Websters didn't get to Boston until Thursday. In the meantime Joan's

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older sister, Anne, who lives in the Boston area, moved into room 316 in Perkins Hall to use it as an information center. "Of course, we should have sealed it off—though it turned out not to matter," Terry says. "Anne phoned hospitals. I phoned morgues."

One of the first possibilities—that Joan hadn't been abducted but, rather, had freaked out or taken off on a spree—required an investigation of a particularly painful sort. Parents and siblings played the weekend back in their heads, hour by hour, hunting for some sharp word or incident that could have pushed Joan to anger or frustration. Nothing. What they found instead was her Christmas list, suggesting books and sweaters and other such presents—hardly, they point out, a note written by somebody planning to run away.

"We don't think—and we've said this many times—that this could have been what you might call a straight pickup," George says. The subject makes him lean forward and take off his horn-rimmed glasses, pain lines deepening. "If you knew Joan—she had several boyfriends. She wasn't in need of that kind of—of company. She was definitely going back to work. In fact, she called Boston Saturday

morning. She called one of the people she was meeting—she used this phone right here—to make sure they had materials. So that doesn't sound like someone who's getting ready to flip out, to take a lark."

That this point required a good deal of emphasis is clear from the good wishes Joan's maternal grandmother sent to Joan's classmates at the Graduate School of Design last spring, when they graduated and started a fund for the Joan Webster Memorial Garden. Georgia Selsam wrote: "Only you, her contemporaries, could have made it clear to reporters and law officers in the beginning of the search that she was dependable, clear-headed and oriented to a contributing career in our society."

THE "THROWING OUR HANDS UP" phase went on for quite a while; it was a year before the two informants were discovered. According to assistant DA Burke, Informant X initially met Paradiso when both were incarcerated in 1975. Paradiso was serving his sentence for attempted rape. They met again in July 1982, when Paradiso had been indicted but not yet tried in the Ianuzzi case. Informant X was also incarcerated on a murder charge (he claimed to be innocent), and the two had extensive conversations about their pasts. Some of these conversations involved Marie Ianuzzi. Others were allegedly about Joan Webster.

"Having heard Paradiso's situation," George Webster says, "this man was extremely upset that Paradiso was trying to lay his murder off on Marie Ianuzzi's boyfriend. So the inmate felt that, gosh darn it, I'm not going to see someone else go up for what he didn't do, like what's happening to me." And so Informant X began taking voluminous notes on his conversations with Paradiso. Informant X's testimony, Burke told the *Globe* last summer, was the key to Paradiso's conviction in the Ianuzzi case. (Informant X was convicted of his murder charge and jailed. The conviction has since been overturned and he's waiting for a retrial.)

Informant Y also met Leonard Paradiso in 1975. They became acquaintances, according to George Webster, because Informant Y—in for murder—had trained himself as a jailhouse lawyer and helped other prisoners. "Paradiso would talk to him about the law—'Must there be a body?'—that kind of thing," George says. "And a lot of things came out. You know, he would say, 'Next time I do time, next time I'm up, there won't be no body; I'll make sure there's no body.' All of that." Informant Y and Paradiso talked about the famous Webster case of 1850, which is the only case on the Massachusetts books where a verdict of guilty was returned although there was no body. (As Terry Webster points out, the situation isn't an exact parallel to their daughter's; in 1850 Dr. Webster had incarcerated his victim, but the teeth remained and were

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Six years later, in 1981, when both Paradiso and Informant Y were out of prison, the two met again. It was just a month after Joan's disappearance; Paradiso was on parole. They got into one of their old conversations about corpus delicti.

"At first Informant Y thought Paradiso was talking about the 1850 *Webster* case, which they'd discussed before," George Webster says. "But the way the conversation evolved, Informant Y suddenly realized he was talking about the Webster-the-Harvard-coed case"—which, at the time, was very much in the public eye. And later he, too, never having met Informant X, gave testimony.

From these men's accounts comes the scenario investigators have tentatively pieced together, and which the Websters say they believe:

Paradiso somehow picked Joan up at the airport. Informant X's testimony states only that he "met her" there. Paradiso may have been legitimately driving a cab, picking her up randomly from the line of passengers; or he may have sought her out because, as established in the Ianuzzi trial, she had the particular look of his victims. She probably intended to take a cab; her parents had given her a \$20 bill just to make sure she did.

Once she was in the cab, "he turned left, not right, out of the Sumner Tunnel, we think," George says. "He told her he had to stop and pick something up at his office. 'Course, if I was Joan, I'd have been nervous," her father says. "But what do you do? Everything still seems okay. Then once he gets down beyond Anthony's Pier 4—you know, it's pretty deserted where he had the boat at Pier 7—he's got her suitcase in the trunk, and she may have panicked but not known quite how to respond. What happened from that point on is anybody's guess, but he's got her in his control."

Terry and George don't go into detail about "anybody's guess," but Burke can quote testimony from the same two informants that appears to fill the gap. Much of the testimony concerns Paradiso's alleged boasting to the informants about the things he did to Joan once he got her onto the boat. One can also extrapolate from the kinds of things Paradiso allegedly did, or threatened to do, to the various women who testified against him in pretrial hearings. A former girlfriend testified that he had been a hit man, cutting up bodies, weighing them down, and throwing them overboard, and that he had told her he particularly liked to "do women" this way. Regardless of what happened on board, the testimony from Informant X alleged that Paradiso sank the *Malafemmena*, claimed it was stolen, and collected on the insurance.

Raising the *Malafemmena* in September 1983 did more than corroborate such accounts. Finding the boat was a "work of art," George Webster says, and Burke expresses a certain amount of pride in the op-

eration. Burke and his assistants got a geodesic chart of the basin and sent skin divers down wherever the bottom might consistently be muddy. An MIT professor pitched in with a sonar scanning device of his own invention. And the operator of the dry-dock apparatus at Pier 7 said the machinery was sticking on the way down, as if something was blocking it.

Sure enough, there was the *Malafemmena*, right where Informant X had told authorities that Paradiso said he had sunk it. George Webster says some of the objects found on board are now being tested in forensic laboratories.

THE IRONY THAT LEONARD PARADISO was on parole when he killed Marie Ianuzzi is lost on neither the Websters nor Burke. After all, Paradiso served only 3 years of his 6-to-15-year sentence for attempted rape.

That case reveals something of the defendant's style and his skill at evading charges. Police had come upon him zipping up his pants while a woman, battered and bleeding from the mouth, ran toward them asking for help. Court records say Paradiso immediately told the police he had parked the car to urinate and had found the woman lying hurt on the dirt road; he said she told him she had been beaten and robbed by two kids. Another unsavory practice that came out in the Ianuzzi trial was Paradiso's apparent repeated practice of torching cars, sinking boats, and then collecting on the insurance.

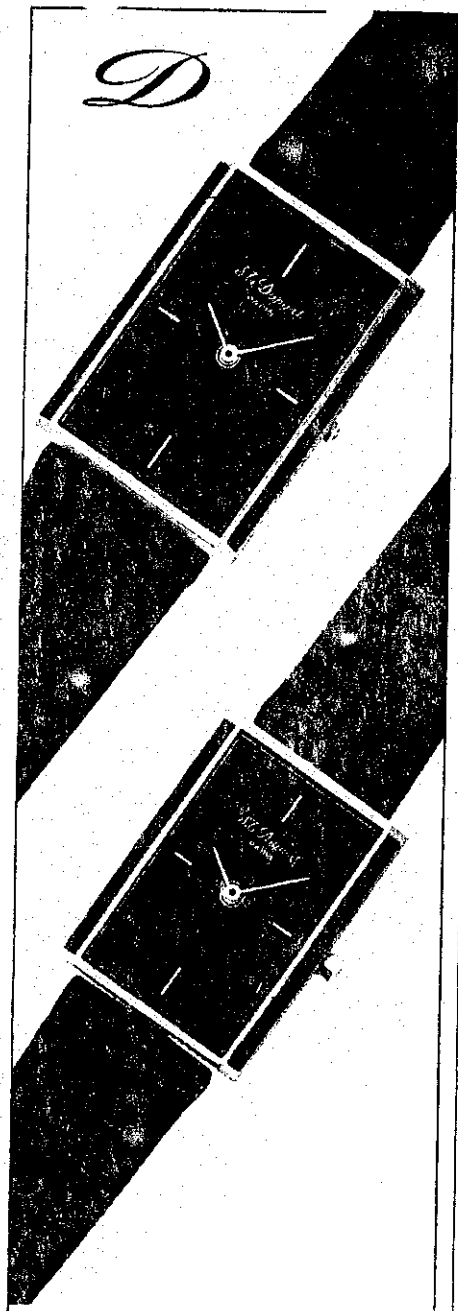
Such information about Paradiso's past—and the knowledge that that background was not enough to keep him off the streets—preys on the Websters' minds. In some ways it has made them more eager to publicize their case. But it has also made them pessimistic about a system that seems to favor the defendant.

"In the Ianuzzi pretrial hearing—which we didn't go to," George says, "there were women coming forward to testify, a series of people, about attacks on them, and some of these cases had never been brought to trial. And whether or not some of these things have been proved, you have here a history of a very disturbed individual, a real Jekyll-and-Hyde individual, who just flips out with women, who just all of a sudden grabs them and attacks them and whatever, and seems to be unrepentant about it, and talks about how the next time he does it he'll make sure there's no body. Which takes you around to revolving-door justice: Somebody goes in for a rape for six years, gets out in three, and he's wandering around, and he goes on. And if he'd been caught and convicted of some of these other things, he might have been—this might never have happened to Joan."

Terry adds, "That's what I feel, particularly about the Ianuzzi case. If they'd really done their homework, thoroughly, in the jurisdiction where it occurred, it might nev-

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er—" She stops herself. "But I guess that's the case with all murdered people. Or many of them. If they'd just gotten the person on a preceding charge."

In the Ianuzzi case, Burke's strategy was to draw a picture of a modus operandi in Paradiso's sexual assaults on five women between 1971 and 1981—Joan being the last. He demonstrated a similarity in the women's physical types. But because 10 years had elapsed between the first case and the last, this evidence was disallowed. The law, Burke explains, "prevents the use of evidence that merely shows the defendant's propensity to commit a crime he's charged with." According to Burke, because of the extent of the time gap, a true modus operandi could not be demonstrated in this case.

In practical terms, what that means is that much of the evidence Burke painstakingly

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acquired about Paradiso's past will be useless in the Webster case. Such a limitation inevitably lessens the Websters' eagerness for a trial, despite their main reason for wanting one: the further exposure they know such a trial would bring, with the attendant possibility that a new witness might come forward. Both of them remain sure that "there's somebody out there who knows something." But the real possibility of an acquittal should the case go to trial is discouraging.

The legal problems Burke would face (the decision to indict is essentially his) go beyond the mere inadmissibility of evidence. Not having a corpse is a major problem, and Burke says he doubts the body will be found "unless the killer tells us where it is." Another difficulty is picking a jury; the defense would most likely veto any juror who had heard of the case. Considering the enormous publicity the case has had from the start, this factor—as in the Big Dan's rape trial last year—might limit Burke to "jurors who have no access whatsoever to news media. Do I want to argue before people like that?" And finally, such built-in handicaps could make the case attractive to a top-notch defense attorney.

BURKE SHRUGS WHEN HE'S ASKED how much time he's spent working on the Joan Webster case. He calls its problems "fascinating" from a legal point of view, but admits that there's more: "I think there are certain cases where it's really important for the people on them to make a personal commitment."

For George and Terry Webster, the desire for a trial—for "some kind of legal end to it"—comes mostly from their need for some external resolution. Lacking it, they are reluctant to impose the closure of a memorial service. "We know we can't let this drag on and on," George says. "Life goes on; we're pursuing other things, getting ourselves back into the mainstream." Still, "Joanie" is an insistent presence; they still get upset when they drive past her architectural firm's Park Avenue office. And last fall, when they took family pictures with Anne, now 29, and Steve, 31, Terry compared the new pictures with the older ones, the foursome with the quintet: "I suddenly realized—that's our whole family."

The Websters are nowhere near agreeing on the question of the memorial service. Terry would like to wait, certainly until after a trial, possibly for the full seven years until the statute of limitations expires: "I don't really see any hurry, that's all." George speaks more urgently of the need for arriving at some resolution.

"I try to resolve it for myself this way," he says. "Sure, it's a terrible thing that she died—not just that anyone would die, but this girl who was a real star, who had everything: talent, a career, friends. But maybe you can look at it another way: at least those 25 years she had, those were good years. We gave her all we could. She had friends, she had boyfriends, she did great in school; she spent two years living with her friends in the city, she saw Europe. So to whatever degree, that helps. She could have died at 10 or 11, I guess. She could have missed more."

"I don't know," Terry says slowly, looking at him. "I think men are better at resolving these things, maybe. This is what I tend to think: She was the child, out of our three children, who was most likely to be around—to come home, to drop by. She had summer jobs near here, and then the two years in New York. She came and visited a lot, and we had a good time—she liked it around here. Our other children live farther away. That's the only thing."

"I don't know, either," George says. "I don't know about resolution, either. You can say the person we're convinced did it is in for life—so why a trial, why more resolution than that? But in the final analysis, a crime was committed. And it ought to be adjudicated, brought to justice."

As he says "crime," his eyes turn briefly to the picture of his daughter. It is one of those rare moments when the meaning of a word can be fully grasped. □

Author targets Harvard

Police investigators rap methods, dismiss controversial book

By ERIC FEHNSTROM

A HARVARD University lecturer has found himself the subject of a controversial new book about the Zodiac murders that claimed the lives of at least six people in California.

Michael Henry O'Hare, 44, of Brookline said he has not even read the recently published book that uses an unorthodox mathematical method to make connections between him and the West Coast serial killings of 20 years ago.

"I'm happy to tell you I had nothing to with those homicides or any other homicides, period. I have no idea of where this stuff comes from," O'Hare said.

But O'Hare said he was reluctant to discuss the conclusions of "Times 17," a self-published book by freelance writer Gareth Penn, who lives in San Rafael, Calif.

"It's a bottomless pit. If you get me to respond to one thing, then it's, 'Oh, well, what about this,' and then you'll think up 12 more questions for me to answer."

A public policy lecturer at the Kennedy School of Government, O'Hare's academic credentials include a doctorate in engineering and applied physics.

He also worked for the state's Executive Office of Environmental Affairs as an assistant secretary for policy, and has a master's degree in architecture and bachelor's degrees in engineering and architectural science.

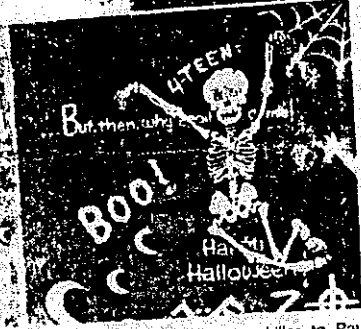
In boastful, taunting and cryptic letters mailed to the press, the Zodiac, who killed six people from 1966 to 1969, claimed to be revealing himself in a code.

In his book, Penn translated the language of the letters into binary notations with Morse code. He then manipulated the results using cryptographic techniques to produce clues that he said point to O'Hare as the author.

When the code is approached in this fashion, Penn alleges the killer's letters reveal details unique to O'Hare, such as "the name of his father, mother, his mother's monogram, his own given name O'Hare and other various personalities that could not fit anybody else."

The book also in-

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GRUESOME: Postcard sent by Zodiac killer to Paul Avery of the San Francisco Chronicle, who wrote news stories about the murderer. Avery interpreted words and phrases on the card as a threat against him.

"I'm happy to tell you I had nothing to with those homicides or any other homicides, period. I have no idea of where this stuff comes from."

— Michael Henry O'Hare

"Frankly, I can't solve (murder cases) with numerology and astrology and what have you. I prefer to work a case with solid facts and go from there."

— Police Capt. Ken Narlow

cludes personal biographical data that the author claims implicates O'Hare in connection with a particular Zodiac document sent to the press.

The document, a postcard mailed to the San Francisco Chronicle in 1971, depicts an artist's rendering of a condominium project proposed for construction by the Boise Cascade Corporation on the shore of Lake Tahoe.

According to Penn, O'Hare was assigned to the San Francisco of-

fice of the Arthur D. Little Company during the late 1960s to assist the Boise Cascade Corporation on the Lake Tahoe condominium project.

While he acknowledges once being assigned to Arthur D. Little's San Francisco office, O'Hare told The Herald he was not working on the Boise Cascade project.

After six years of research, Penn's unconventional detective work has not impressed law enforcement off-



MIT Professor Michael O'Hare in 1971. He was then assistant professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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