

IIG Special Investigation: Carla Baron, Psychic Detective?

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of an investigation into self-described “psychic detective” Carla Baron. It represents several months of research by members of the Independent Investigations Group in Hollywood, California. It attempts to answer the question of whether psychics assist the police in solving crimes. Details of fifteen cases are provided, along with their outcomes. The paper includes the addition of one new case since it was presented, and concludes with an update of events that have taken place as a result of the publishing of this report on the World Wide Web.

Introduction

The Independent Investigations Group (IIG) is a group of volunteers, established by Jim Underdown in early 2000 as an adjunct to the Center for Inquiry – *West*. The charter of the group is to investigate claims of the supernatural and paranormal and to disseminate the results to the public. The IIG offers a \$10,000 prize to anyone who can demonstrate such abilities under controlled conditions. The IIG also occasionally serves as the West Coast preliminary screening entity for James Randi and JREF’s \$1,000,000 prize. Members of the IIG consist of people from all walks of life: Engineers, scientists, doctors, entertainers, teachers, students, homemakers, and many others, but all having a logical and inquiring mind.

In 2003 the IIG began examining the claims of Carla Baron – a self-proclaimed “psychic detective.” Many “psychics” have made similar claims of helping police over the years, but most of them avoid providing specific details that would allow their claims to be verified. Ms. Baron became a candidate for an IIG investigation as a result of several factors. First, Baron is local to the Los Angeles area, right in the backyard of the IIG so to speak. Also around this time she was receiving a lot of media attention, in print as well as radio and TV broadcasts. She was also claiming to have solved fifty criminal cases in the past twenty years, an unambiguous statement likely able to be either verified or disproved. Finally, she had made very specific statements about her cases and the families she has been involved with.

The following is a quote from a course description for a seminar which she presented:

“Carla’s cases have included the O.J. Simpson case, the Elizabeth Smart abduction, and the Svetlana Aronov investigation in New York City.”

All these reasons contributed toward making her an excellent candidate for the IIG to investigate.

As part of the preliminaries, the investigation got up close and personal, with IIG members observing her techniques at her seminar in December 2003, and again in March 2004. At the first event, some IIG members received personalized readings from Baron. All her predictions were broad and vague, giving no indication of any paranormal abilities. As an example, one of our investigators was told he would get a new job at which he’d produce “a service or some kind of product.” Based on observing her performance at the seminar, we could confidently conclude that Baron was using “cold reading” -- a conjurer’s trick of simply making guesses, but making it appear they’re actually producing specialized knowledge by supernatural means. Of course this didn’t rule out the possibility of Ms. Baron having the abilities she claims, but there was nothing revealed in these seminars to show evidence of such powers.

INVESTIGATION METHODOLOGY

The IIG investigation got into full swing by compiling every claim made publicly by Baron about her involvement in criminal cases. This progressed to the more difficult task of researching each of the cases cited, to determine the facts surrounding them. This research included contacting the official police investigator assigned to the case when possible, also the friends and families of the victims, as well as reporters and other media professionals who had information about the cases and Baron’s involvement in them.

Most of the criminal cases Ms. Baron claims to have worked on involve either missing persons, or homicides with no suspect. Most of these cases involve a victim who is young and female, and typically Baron works directly with the

¹ Joint presentation of content at the meeting.

² Edited and updated content for these proceedings.

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family. While we were unable to get information on some of her claimed cases, every case we investigated was found to be either solved without Baron's assistance, or it remains unsolved. We will show that her claims of being a successful "psychic detective" aren't substantiated by the facts.

CASES

Following are details on fifteen cases with which Baron has claimed some kind of involvement. They're in chronological order, by date of the victim's murder or disappearance. Explicit and upsetting details of violent crimes have been kept to a minimum, and the names of individuals who have been accused of these crimes but haven't been charged as a suspect have been omitted.

NICOLE BROWN SIMPSON

35 years old at time of murder.

Location: Los Angeles, CA

Crime: Found murdered on June 12, 1994.

Suspect: Ex-husband O.J. Simpson

Family Spokesperson/Contact: Denise Brown, sister.

Investigating Officer/Agency: LAPD

Baron's Claim: Baron states in her publicity materials that she "worked on the O.J. Simpson Case." She has also said that she "did some channeling work"¹ on the case. When asked for specifics at a seminar on March 20, 2004, she said that she worked with the Brown family.

IIG's Findings: The IIG contacted Nicole's sister, Denise Brown, the primary family spokesperson during the trials, and now an outspoken advocate for battered women and victims of violent crime. When asked about Carla Baron, she unequivocally stated, "I've never heard of this person," and added that no one in her family had heard of her either. So whatever association Ms. Baron may have had with the case was not in connection with the family, as claimed.

Simpson was the only suspect ever seriously considered by the police, and he became a suspect within minutes of the discovery of the bodies of Nicole Simpson and Ron Goldman. Based on this time frame, it's difficult to imagine what useful information Baron imagines she was able to provide in this case. Useful contributions would have been to locate the murder weapon, the clothing worn by the perpetrator, or any other physical evidence. No clues to the location of these

items have been forthcoming from Ms. Baron or any psychic, and these articles have still not been recovered.

Case Status: The case is closed, although Simpson was acquitted at trial. Simpson was later found liable for Nicole's death in a civil trial.

JONBENET RAMSEY

6 years old at time of murder.

Location: Boulder, CO

Crime: Found murdered on December 25, 1996

Suspect: None.

Family Spokesperson/Contact: None.

Investigating Officer/Agency: Detective Tom Bennett, Boulder Colorado Police (one of many investigating officials).

Baron's Claim: In one newspaper article she was quoted making statements which imply she may have been involved somehow in the JonBenet Ramsey case,² however in this particular case she avoided going on record with specific claims.

IIG's Findings: Although Baron's claim was non-specific, for the sake of completeness we contacted Detective Tom Bennett, who stated, "No psychic has provided any useful information," adding that he had never heard of Carla Baron.

Case Status: The case remains unsolved.

AMANDA "MANDY" TUSING

20 years old at time of murder.

Location: Dell, AR

Crime: Went missing June 15, 2000. Found murdered on June 19, 2000.

Suspect: None.

Family Spokesperson/Contact: Susan Tusing, mother.

Investigating Officer/Agency: Detective Gary Etter, Craighead County Police.

Baron's Claim: In January of 2004, Susan Tusing contacted Carla Baron and received a telephone reading. During this conversation, Baron provided a name for the man Baron claims was the killer.³ This is significant since Baron's claims are often vague.

IIG's Findings: The investigation into the murder of Mandy Tusing had been ongoing for years

without resolution. Family members and police investigators were very frustrated at this point and willing to try anything. Detective Etter talked to Carla Baron at Susan Tusing's request. The local media ran several stories on Baron's involvement when Detective Etter began communicating with her.

We talked to Detective Etter both before and after police interviewed the man fingered by Baron. After the interview, Detective Etter stated that there was "no way he could have done it." Media coverage of the case and Baron's involvement stopped after Detective Etter cleared the man of suspicion. Incidentally, this man was looked at years earlier, but the police determined he wasn't a viable suspect. They interviewed him again only at the urging of Susan Tusing.

In our interview, Detective Etter made it sound like Baron produced a letter of the alphabet and that Susan Tusing then volunteered the name. However, Detective Etter specifically said that Baron's conversation with Susan Tusing was not a "cold reading." Without a transcript, we cannot say for sure.

Etter still has a positive attitude about Baron's involvement. He says that she helped garner publicity for the case, which is true. The local press paid little attention to the case until they could print "Mother of slain woman finds comfort from psychic."⁴ For the most part, Detective Etter praised Baron, but he also opined that she wants to "gain media attention...". "She wants recognition" because "that's where you make your money." Nonetheless, he insists that Baron was "trying her best to help."

Case Status: The case remains unsolved.

TINA AND BETHANY SINCLAIR (Mother and Daughter)

TINA: 35 years old at time of disappearance.

BETHANY: 15 years old at time of disappearance.

Location: Chesterfield, NH

Crime: Missing since February 4, 2001, presumed dead.

Suspect: None, but a "person of interest" was named.

Family Spokesperson/Contact: Sharon Garry, Tina's sister and Bethany's aunt.

Investigating Officer/Agency: New Hampshire State Police.

Baron's Claim: More than two years after the Sinclairs disappeared, Sharon Garry called Baron after seeing her on Court TV's "Psychic Detectives" (see more on this under "**CINDY SONG**"). In a reading given around July 2003, Baron said that Tina and Bethany were "likely the victims of an angry, impulsive act," and that their bodies were now somewhere "dark."⁵

IIG's Findings: Following Baron's instructions, Garry led a search party to Mount Wantastiquet in July, 2003, and again the following month, where they combed an area that had already been thoroughly searched by police. During the searches, Garry retrieved innocuous articles, including someone's sock, a bucket, and a shovel, all turning out to have no connection to the victims or a suspect. Yet in describing these objects in interviews, Garry made statements seeming to validate them as being important. About the sock, she stated it was "unusual to be found in those areas."⁶ Ms. Garry said the bucket and shovel were found "where a psychic said it would be."⁷ However, the name of this psychic was not given. It wasn't made clear why a psychic would identify items not related to the missing women, or why those objects might be deemed useful to anyone.

The New Hampshire Attorney General had assigned Trooper Jayson S. Almstrom to be present during the search. Trooper Almstrom made it very clear that the police put "no weight into what Carla Baron had said." He says he was present in case the citizens searching the area uncovered something and to ensure their safety. However, many saw his presence as validating the search.

Baron has posted several articles about her involvement on her web site, and even issued a press release about it.

Case Status: The case remains unsolved.

BETHANY MARKOWSKI

11 years old at time of disappearance.

Location: Jackson, TN

Crime: Missing since March 4, 2001

Suspect: Unidentified white female with "a disheveled and unkempt appearance." She may have attempted to enroll Bethany in a public school under a new name on 7/23/2001.⁸

Family Spokesperson/Contact: Jonnie Carter, mother.

Investigating Officer/Agency: Lt. Mike Holt, Jackson Police.

Baron's Claim: Baron claims that Bethany is in a "forestry area. . . on a country road off a main highway. . . in some sort of ravine."⁹

IIG's Findings: Jonnie Carter had a telephone reading from Baron in September 2003, and says that Baron "told me things about [Bethany's] personality and wit that she couldn't have known."¹⁰

Lt. Mike Holt of the Jackson Police issued a general challenge to psychics: "Give me an address!" Lt. Holt said that the psychics call these mothers with "a good sales pitch", that "they ask you as much as they tell you;" and that they're "good investigators" who pick up information from the subject and "pair it with what they pick out of the news media."

Case Status: Baron may have provided some comfort to Bethany's mother, but the case remains unsolved.

RUTH AND ALEXIS "LEXI" TELLO

(Mother and Daughter)

RUTH: 37 years old at time of murder.

ALEXIS: 13 years old at time of murder.

Location: Cathedral City, CA

Crime: Found murdered March 2001. "The torsos of Tello's wife and daughter were found on March 16, 2001, in the Edom Hill area of Cathedral City, near a dump site. In April 2001, skeletal remains, later determined to be theirs, were discovered off Interstate 10 near Chiriaco Summit."¹¹

Suspect: Rafael Tello, Ruth's husband and Alexis's father

Family Spokesperson/Contact: None (relatives have remained anonymous)

Investigating Officer/Agency: Officer Nick Chapman, Cathedral City Police.

Baron's Claim: On April 15, 2004, ABC ran a segment during their "Primetime Thursday" program suggesting that Carla Baron led police to the skeletal remains of Ruth and Alexis. The segment contains videotape footage of Baron working with an unidentified police officer whose face was blurred out. She is seen describing the crime to the anonymous officer, saying, "I'm going to a factory – because I am seeing these tall like pillars, smoky things, smokestacks... They're probably a 40-mile drive from where they were first dumped."¹² She also stated that the remains had been incinerated. The segment further contends

that partial skeletal remains were found 38 miles south of the Edom Hill dump site where the torsos were found; presumably this is the Chiriaco Summit area. The story further implied that Baron led investigators to the site.

IIG's Findings: Not so, says the investigating officer Nick Chapman. Not only does he insist that, to his knowledge, Baron had nothing to do with the case, but he says that ABC News was "very persistent" in trying to get a quote from him concerning Baron's claims. Furthermore, according to Officer Chapman, Ruth and Alexis' relatives did not want this story on television and Primetime violated their specific instructions not to air it.

More importantly, it has been documented that the missing skeletal remains were found by hikers, not police or psychics.¹³ There were no smokestacks at the actual site, and the bodies hadn't been incinerated, as Baron stated. Dallas skeptic Curtis Cameron mentioned this in an open letter to ABC. He said, "[Y]ou tried to make it appear that Ms. Baron got a "hit" by describing the smokestacks and saying that the body parts were incinerated. In the pictures you showed, the building didn't appear to have incinerator smokestacks, but things on the roof that looked like they could be ventilation, or possibly chimneys. And you glossed over the fact that the body parts weren't incinerated. So in light of this, how does this case support her abilities?"¹⁴

As for who is depicted in the videotape aired on "Primetime Thursday" and who recorded it, no one is identified. The IIG attempted to contact Michelle Webb, the producer of the segment, without success, so we can only guess about the source of the tape and whether it depicted actual events or was a staged recreation. The ABC program aired two years after Tello had already been tried and convicted, which allows the possibility of a recreation including details not known until later. So this was an important question that we would have liked to direct to Ms. Webb.

Case Status: Rafael Tello was convicted of the murder in April 2002 and sentenced to fifty years in prison. Carla Baron contributed nothing to this process.

HYUNJUNG "CINDY" SONG

21 years old at time of disappearance.

Location: Ferguson Township, PA (Penn State University)

Crime: Missing since November 1, 2001, after attending a Halloween party.

Suspect: None, but a “person of interest” was named.

Family Spokesperson/Contact: Bansoon Song, Cindy’s mother.

Investigating Officer/Agency: Detective Brian Sprinkle, Ferguson Township Police.

Baron’s Claim: Baron has received a great deal of exposure for her involvement in the investigation into the disappearance of Cindy Song. There is an episode of Court TV’s “Psychic Detectives” devoted to it, as well as a segment of “ABC Primetime Thursday.” Baron claimed to “see” Cindy being abducted by two men.

IIG’s Findings: The reason this case has gotten so much attention is that it’s the only case we found where the police called in Baron and are actively involved with her. Detective Brian Sprinkle called Baron around May of 2002 at the behest of Penn State’s “Paranormal Research Society.” Det. Sprinkle then had several phone consultations with Baron, and met with her in person in June 2002 for a taping of Court TV’s “Psychic Detectives.” They met again more than a year later in October 2003, for “ABC Primetime Thursday.”

In the Court TV segment, Baron wandered the railroad tracks of Center County, Pennsylvania. In the Court TV program, she was taken to a park and made the comment, “My God, it’s just like I saw it,” adding, “I was kind of surprised at *how much* these details matched” (her emphasis).¹⁵

In the ABC segment, she led Det. Sprinkle to another spot where she said Cindy’s body was dumped. In this segment Baron said that Cindy’s body will be found somewhere with “rocks.”¹⁶ When Det. Sprinkle drove her to an area underneath railroad tracks, she said, “that’s exactly what it looks like,” as if her psychic powers have been confirmed.

The significant thing here is that in both TV programs Baron described the location they went to matching the scene of the crime, however they are two different locations.

The ABC segment doesn’t show Baron having any actual success, though a narration at the very end of the show said, “A few weeks after our search, Detective Sprinkle said an informant gave details, possibly linking Cindy’s disappearance to the very area searched.” However in our interview with Det. Sprinkle, he denied making such a statement.

We interviewed Detective Sprinkle on April 20, 2004, the Tuesday following the ABC program’s airing. He described the statement quoted by ABC somewhat differently. He said he thinks this quote

is in reference to the State Police having an informant who believed Cindy was abducted by two men. If accurate this would confirm Baron’s claim that Cindy was abducted by two men, but Sprinkle noted that “nothing of that information from the informants has been proved or disproved.” Also Baron was given the name of two persons of interest by the police, so her claim that Cindy was abducted by two men hardly represents a surprising psychic prediction. Regardless, none of this does anything to validate either of the potential crime scene locations Baron pointed out. ABC’s claim that Baron’s information has been confirmed by a reliable source cannot be substantiated.

In their online article summarizing the segment, ABC modified this quote slightly, reporting that “an informant has given details possibly linking Song’s disappearance and the area where Baron says she got the strongest vibes,”¹⁷ but leaving out the reference to Det. Sprinkle. We attempted several times to contact the segment producer, Michelle Webb, to clarify this statement, but she didn’t return our calls.

Detective Sprinkle was very honest and open during our conversation. He stated that none of Baron’s information had been confirmed by any other source. He said he was impressed by Carla’s track record, but was unable to cite any specific case she had worked on that impressed him. In the end, he praised her for “her dedication; the fact that she, you know, she took the case personally.”

Cindy’s mother, Bansoon Song, has been quoted in newspaper articles and television reports, but has said nothing on the record about Carla Baron.

Case Status: The case remains unsolved. We’d like to draw attention to Baron’s remarks in the Court TV segment, recorded in June 2002. She said, “I think we’re going to solve this. I think it’s soon. I think we’re coming to a completion here.” The family has now been waiting more than three years for this prediction to be fulfilled.

SVETLANA ARONOV

44 years old at time of death.

Location: New York City, NY

Crime: Missing since March 3, 2002. Body found in East River, May 6, 2002. Whether the death was an accident, homicide, or suicide is unknown, however there’s no evidence to suggest foul play.

Suspect: None.

Family Spokesperson/Contact: Dr. Alexander Aronov, husband.

Investigating Officer/Agency: NYPD

Baron's Claim: Baron's publicity materials claim this is among the cases she has worked on. Baron has stated, "[Svetlana] jumped into the East River to flee an obsessed kidnapper."¹⁸

IIG's Findings: Baron apparently counseled Svetlana's widower, Dr. Alexander Aronov. We haven't been able to further research this case, because Dr. Aronov has said so little, and we were unable to reach anyone at the NYPD who would comment.

However Melanie Lefkowitz wrote a comprehensive article on the subject for New York *Newsday* debunking Baron's claims. Because this article is posted on the website run by Svetlana's friends and family, we assume they endorse Lefkowitz's point of view. The article quotes friends of Aronov decrying Baron, and the police denouncing her psychic vision as "far-fetched."

Baron's failure did not stop her from heavily publicizing her "work" on the case. In fact, at her Los Angeles seminars, she lists Svetlana Aronov after O.J. Simpson and Elizabeth Smart under "cases include."

Case Status: The case remains unsolved.

ELIZABETH SMART

14 years old at time of abduction.

Location: Salt Lake City, UT

Crime: Abducted June 6, 2002. Found alive March 13, 2003.

Suspect: Cult leader Brian David Mitchell – known to his followers as "Emmanuel", and his wife Wanda Ilene Barzee..

Family Spokesperson/Contact: Ed Smart, father.

Investigating Officer/Agency: Salt Lake City Police.

Baron's Claim: On March 13, 2003, Carla Baron appeared on Los Angeles radio station KOST's "The Mark & Kim Morning Show" to announce that she had correctly predicted that Elizabeth Smart was alive.¹⁹ In addition, in this interview and in other statements she claims that Elizabeth's father, Ed Smart, received information directly from her, albeit via a tip hotline operator. Baron says that on July 9, 2002, she called the 1-800 hotline set up for information about Elizabeth's disappearance, spoke to a "Melinda," and gave her

a reading. Baron further contends that Melinda passed the information directly to Ed Smart. Baron's publicity materials include this among the cases she has worked on.

IIG's Findings: We couldn't find any evidence of this call to the hotline. It's strictly Baron's assertion that she called and spoke to someone named Melinda. Nor have we been able to contact Ed Smart. However, he is quoted by a Florida television station as saying that "the family didn't get any valuable information from any psychics."²⁰

Baron has stated several times that she is the *only* psychic who predicted that Elizabeth Smart was alive. Not so, says Salt Lake City Police Chief Executive Officer Lieutenant Chris Burbank. Lt. Burbank says that of the 18,000 specific tips the department received on Elizabeth Smart during the nine months she was missing, half of them, or about 9,000 -- came from either proclaimed psychics or people using psychic-sounding language (e.g., "I had a dream," "I had a vision", etc.). While Lt. Burbank couldn't give an accurate number of how many of these people predicted Elizabeth Smart was alive, he knows there were a number of them, because many of them called back after Elizabeth was found to say, "I told you so."

In any case, assuring a family that their child is alive isn't a tremendous feat requiring psychic ability – undoubtedly many friends and family of the Smarts also provided these same reassurances to the family, to help them maintain a hopeful outlook. And even if Baron *did* make a call to the hotline with this prediction, its usefulness is doubtful. She had a 50/50 chance of being correct in this prediction. In fact she could have easily guaranteed she would be 100% correct on this one by simply calling the hotline a second time and predicting the child wasn't alive. In short, Baron's information was just as useful as that received from the other 9,000 psychics, that is, of no value whatsoever.

Lt. Burbank added that it is "more difficult to focus your efforts" with all these kinds of phone calls that require "many police hours" to field and follow up on. Needless to say, this leads to wasted police effort at taxpayer's expense.

Elizabeth Smart was actually found by two couples in Sandy, Utah, who had seen her story on the "America's Most Wanted" TV show. Both couples independently spotted her walking down the street with her captors, and notified police. Psychics were of no help.

Case Status: The suspect Mitchell and his wife were arrested and charged with several felonies in

connection with the kidnapping of Elizabeth. In July 2005, a judge ruled Mitchell incompetent to stand trial and confined him to a mental institution. As of September 2005, Wanda Barzee's mental competence had yet to be established, her attorneys have challenged a requirement that she be forced to take anti-psychotic medication in order to be competent to stand trial. The police consider the case closed.

SARAH AND PHILIP GEHRING (Brother and Sister)

SARAH: 14 years old at time of murder.

PHILLIP: 11 years old at time of murder.

Location: Concord, NH

Crime: Missing since July 4, 2003, bodies found Dec. 2, 2005.

Suspect: Manuel Gehring, the father of the children confessed to the crime on July 30, 2003, and told police he buried the bodies somewhere in Ohio.

Family Spokesperson/Contact: Terri Knight, mother.

Investigating Officer/Agency: Concord Police and FBI.

Baron's Claim: Carla Baron claimed in a press release that the "bodies are likely to be near New Hampshire,"²¹ "It's not as certain that they're in Ohio, Indiana, or Illinois," Baron said. "He doesn't want those bodies found. He knows exactly where they are. I feel Gehring is leading investigators on somewhat of a wild goose chase." In her press release on this case she added in the third person, "Ordinarily, Baron does not offer unsolicited advice, but is making an exception in this case because her vision had such clarity and force."

IIG's Findings: Neither the police, nor a family member or friend of the victims were working with Baron as of her December 6, 2003 seminar, when she claimed that she was "working on the Gehring case". This changed on May 20, 2004, when the children's mother and Manuel's ex-wife, Terri Knight, contacted Carla Baron.²² It's not known to us if Baron produced any new information during this conversation, but Sarah and Phillip remained missing for another year and a half.

Although in his confession Gehring provided a description of some of the features of the area where he buried the bodies in Ohio, he was unable or unwilling to furnish specific information that would allow them to be found. Baron didn't trust him, deciding the bodies were "near New

Hampshire". Call us skeptical, but we didn't think "near New Hampshire" was a particularly impressive or clear prediction of a location, or represented useful information. Baron's claim was that the bodies were "near" an area approximately 190 miles long by 70 miles wide and covering 9,351 square miles. This was typical of many of Baron's cases, in that her information didn't lead to any concrete results or even any progress toward locating the children. What is atypical is that Baron admitted that her involvement was completely unsolicited.

The children's bodies were found in December 2005 by a woman who had been methodically searching for them in Ohio for 5 months, based on the landmarks described in Gehring's confession to police.²³ Information from psychics played no part in leading to the discovery of the site.

Case Status: The case is closed. Gehring committed suicide in jail on February 19, 2004 after confessing to the murder. There was never any doubt that he committed the murders, the focus of the investigation was on locating the bodies.

KATIE AND JAYDEN KENNEY (Mother and Son)

KATIE: 18 years old at time of disappearance.

JAYDEN: Less than one year old at time of disappearance.

Location: Brattleboro, VT

Crime(?): None. They were reported missing July 13, 2003, and found alive on August 19, 2003.

Suspect: N/A

Family Spokesperson/Contact: Kathy Kenney, mother.

Investigating Officer/Agency: Brattleboro police.

Baron's Claim: Baron had been in touch with Katie's mother, Kathy, and consoled her with the knowledge that her daughter and grandson were alive. Baron said, "Psychics aren't always harbingers of doom... I just told her what I saw."²⁴ Shortly after trying to capitalize on the return of Elizabeth Smart, claiming that she "got it right," Baron tried to reinforce this notion by announcing that she "gets it right once again" on Katie and Jayden Kenney.

IIG's Findings: In fact, no one actually involved with the case ever thought anything had happened to Katie and Jayden. Captain Eugene Wrinn of the Brattleboro Police said this was never a missing person's case. They simply wanted to do a "welfare check" on the two, since Kathy had lost touch with

them. Capt. Wrinn stated that there was “no reason to believe that they were missing against their will.”

Based on Captain Wrinn’s interview and Baron’s press release, it seems apparent the Kenneys were never missing at all; they were simply out of contact with the young woman’s mother. We can understand why a mother would be worried, but there was no “rescue” here. The police simply located them and got them in touch with Kathy.

Case Status: There was no case filed here – a big non-event.

TREVOR ISRAEL

25 years old at time of death.

Location: Shelbyville, IN

Crime: Went missing August 12, 2003. A body was found in a cornfield on March 10, 2004, and identified as Trevor Israel on March 29, 2004. He had committed suicide.

Family Spokesperson/Contact: Lloyd Israel, father.

Investigating Officer/Agency: Detective Dave Tilford, Shelbyville Police.

Baron’s Claim: When Trevor Israel went missing, Lloyd Israel got in touch with Carla Baron, who told him that his son had committed suicide. Baron said that the body would be found “up a slight incline in a cornfield, with a wire fence and a telephone pole nearby.”²⁵

IIG’s Findings: Baron’s description matches an immense portion of the state of Indiana, a state that’s 36,000 square miles in size. That didn’t stop the Shelbyville News from reporting that Trevor’s body was found “exactly” where Baron said. On the ABC Primetime Thursday segment, they also stated the body was “exactly” where Baron said.²⁶

Another thing that the Shelbyville News and the ABC account have in common is that they make it sound like there was a big mystery about the death. However, from the beginning, the police believed that the young man had taken his life and that his body lay concealed in a large cornfield.

The corn was six feet high during the search that took place on August 13-14, 2003, preventing both people and hounds from navigating the field. A few months later, the whole area was covered in snow. In an objectively unfair piece of reporting, ABC showed a picture of the cornfield in March after the stalks had been razed and the snow had melted, and

they said it was “hard to understand” how the police could not find the body.²⁷

The truth is that Detective Dave Tilford didn’t even know about Baron’s “vision” until March 18, 2004, eight days *after* he found Trevor’s body. ABC correctly reported this, while the Shelbyville News stated there was a second search conducted by the police based on Baron’s information. This doesn’t fit into the time line given by Det. Tilford, and we have been unable to discover the source for the Shelbyville News claim. Baron did not lead investigators to the body, and in fact contributed nothing to the case.

But the story doesn’t end there. The Associated Press reported that Baron “helped lead police to finding the body of a man who had committed suicide in a cornfield in the Midwest.”²⁸ The Portsmouth-Herald²⁹ and the Caledonian-Record³⁰ reported the same thing verbatim. On that same day, the Boston Globe reported that Baron “led investigators directly to victims,”³¹ without specifying a case, and then on April 16, 2004, they reported, “She has aided numerous police departments in missing persons and homicide cases.”³² On May 20, 2004, the Eagle Tribune reported that “she recently helped find the remains of Trevor Israel, who had been missing for seven months, in a cornfield outside Indianapolis.”³³ All of these statements are unequivocally false and without merit.

The vague statements from Baron didn’t add anything material to this case that wasn’t already known (in fact she may have obtained the information about his body being in the cornfield from the news accounts already published).

Case Status: The case is closed. It’s a very sad situation when a distraught person takes their own life, but there was never any mystery or case to solve, other than exactly where he did it. Baron wasn’t any help.

MARISOL “MARI” HERNANDEZ

32 years old at time of disappearance.

Location: San Antonio, TX

Crime: Missing since January 16, 2004.

Suspect: None.

Family Spokesperson/Contact: Gabby Reyes, sister.

Investigating Officer/Agency: San Antonio Police.

Baron's Claim: No specific information from Baron has become available.

IIG's Findings: Mari's sister, Gabby Reyes, contacted Baron after seeing her on ABC's Primetime Thursday segment. Her actual reading was not available to us at the time of this report's publication. However San Antonio news services reported that Baron "said some things that weren't public knowledge,"³⁴ and "she gave me information that only I and my family knew."³⁵

Case Status: The case is unsolved, Mari is still missing.

MAURA MURRAY

21 years old at time of disappearance.

Location: Haverhill, NH

Crime: Missing since February 9, 2004.

Suspect: None.

Family Spokesperson/Contact: Fred Murray, father.

Investigating Officer/Agency: Lieutenant John Scarinza, New Hampshire State Police Lead Investigator.

Baron's Claim: Maura "hitched a ride with 'a clean-cut looking man,'" Baron further contends that "Clean-Cut Looking Man" was a serial killer, and that he buried Maura's body "in a sparsely wooded area."³⁶

IIG's Findings: The way the media reports it, Maura Murray had it all. She was a nursing student at University of Massachusetts at Amherst, a track star, and she had a boyfriend and a bright future. Then, one day she packed up all of her belongings and left school. Worse yet, she crashed her car at 3 o'clock in the morning, came home, withdrew money from her bank account, and the next day headed to Vermont. Baron's feeling that she hitched a ride with a stranger is unlikely, since it's known that she earlier refused a ride offered by a bus driver. He spotted her on a remote road in New Hampshire and called the police. Maura was never seen again.

Maura's father, Fred Murray, contacted Baron sometime in March 2004. It's worth noting that Maura's mother rejected Baron's help, saying simply "I don't believe her... I don't believe in [psychics] at all."³⁷ Maura's boyfriend, Bill Rausch, stated in an interview with the online support group, the Child Seek Network, "To involve additional assistance such as a psychic, I personally cannot fathom how that could be of

help."³⁸ The Child Seek Network doesn't endorse the use of psychics in missing persons' cases.

In April 2004, Baron had a conversation with Lieutenant John Scarinza, at the prompting of Fred Murray. (Note: We've noticed that, with the major exception of Det. Brian Sprinkle, the police never initiate contact with or talk directly to Ms. Baron unless urged by a family member or friend of the victim). In any case, Lt. Scarinza told us, simply, "The information provided [by Baron] did not produce any new leads in the investigation as to why [Maura Murray] disappeared, or what happened to her."

Case Status: The case remains unsolved.

TIMOTHY STONE

17 years old at time of death.

Location: Chidester, Arkansas

Crime(?): Died 23, 2003 (ruled an accident at the time)

Suspect: None.

Family Spokesperson/Contact: Renata Balleza, Mother.

Investigating Officer/Agency: Sheriff Paul Lucas, Ouchita County Deputy Coroner Richard Milner, State Police Investigator Terry Smith, Trooper Scott Ellis, and Prosecuting Attorney Jamie Pratt.

Baron's Claim: Baron believes Tim was murdered, and that the murderers made their crime look like a car accident. Baron said, "I knew right away that something was wrong with the police report. I knew that the way the body was lying in my mind alongside the vehicle... I said, 'There's no way the body was ejected from this vehicle.' It was placed there. It was staged there. That was the first word I got. It was staged. It was placed there. I could tell by the way the arm was. I could tell by how it was laying (sic) right alongside. It was too perfect. They didn't mess it up enough. If they were going to make it a good attempt, they should have messed it up more."³⁹ In a press release, Baron stated, "all of [her claims] have been proven to be correct."⁴⁰

IIG's Findings: Note that in the above quote, Baron said, "...in my mind." She was never at the crime scene. As best we can determine, she was never even in Arkansas. There's no record of her even seeing photos of the accident site. In other words, this scenario, which would sound impressive coming from a TV detective, is apparently something Baron made up. The idea

that Tim was murdered was actually developed by Tim's mother, Renata Balleza, long before her initial "reading" from Baron in April 2004. Even if Ms. Balleza's conspiracy theory is correct, Baron can take no credit for it.

In her press release, Baron wrote: "The coroner had just one thing to say after hearing the results of Carla Baron's session with Renata. He exclaimed, 'Well, she's exactly right! The position of the body was NOT consistent with an accident...'"⁴¹ This statement implies that Baron and the coroner came to the same conclusion independently of each other. In actuality, she and the coroner got the homicide idea from the same source: Ms. Balleza.

In two interviews with the IIG, the coroner involved, Richard Milner, said he was friends with the family before and after the accident, and he had officially signed on to the homicide theory well before Baron first talked to Ms. Balleza. He also implied Stone may have been intoxicated at the time of his death. Milner insists that his report stating that Stone was murdered, was written because the physical evidence supported it, but nonetheless admitted that the homicide idea "originated with the family."

Milner is the coroner for Ouchita County, however it was the state police who were responsible for the case. They concluded, "no evidence was found that Stone died from foul play."⁴² It was only after prodding from Ms. Balleza that the state police reopened the case.

The re-opening of the case caused a new explosion of publicity in September of 2004. Baron promoted the idea that she somehow provided the pivotal piece of information for a would-be homicide investigation. She states that she gave Ms. Balleza "certain specifics of the accident that had not yet been disclosed, along with other information that seemed somewhat 'confusing' at the time." This "confusing" information (quotation marks supplied by Baron) consists of a mark on the bumper, the nature of the contusions on his body, and the position of Stone's arm. Baron extrapolates from these factors that Stone was forced off the road, dragged from the car, beaten, and his body positioned not too cleverly and left for dead. She went on to say, "These psychic utterings made much more sense as the investigation continued to unfold."⁴³

Even if the homicide theory is proven correct, this doesn't support Baron's claim of psychic powers. However, the homicide theory is extremely shaky when scrutinized. Sadly, Ms. Balleza points to many unsubstantiated claims of evidence and conspiracies to try to prove that her son's death

was not caused by his intoxication and an unfastened seat belt. Ms. Balleza, in speaking of her insistent pleas to the authorities, wrote, "Thank you Carla. I will say that if it were not for you, I would have not had the motivation ... [you] have become a friend that I will have for life."

Ms. Balleza's obsession, aided by Baron's "psychic" endorsement of her suspicions, has wasted countless police man-hours. She's lost a lot of money herself. She has paid a private investigator, Townshend Investigations, over \$11,000 to further look into her suspicions surrounding Tim Stone's death. "Just think what would have been if I didn't have the money to put out on PI's. I'm broke but I am a step ahead now with my son's killers,"⁴⁴ she writes.

Case Status: The case continues to drag on, the death of Timothy Stone in limbo somewhere between ruled an accident and a homicide. Meanwhile the anguish of the family continues, waiting for some kind of resolution and closure to this case. To date, Baron hasn't helped to provide closure to the case.

ANALYSIS SUMMARY

Summary of Carla Baron cases:

Number of "cases solved" by Carla Baron (according to her)	50
Number of Baron's cases with sufficient details to investigate	15
Number of those cases with criminal convictions due to Baron	0
Number of those cases with arrests due to Baron:	0
Number of missing persons found by Baron	0
Therefore, number of cases actually "solved" by Baron	0
Police man-hours wasted on investigating Baron "tips"	hundreds
Police man-hours wasted on following up info from psychics	thousands

From the 15 cases that Carla Baron promotes as her best work, we must conclude she is neither a 'psychic', nor a 'detective' according to the conventional definitions of those words. But do the police utilize *any* psychics? From our investigations into the cases summarized here, it became clear to us that the larger police departments avoid them – in many departments they've had sufficient experience with

psychics to establish official policies against their use – they don't want the distractions. Unfortunately, the police must still talk to anyone contacting them with information, regardless of who they are or how trivial the information is – they can't afford to pass up something that might be a legitimate tip.

The cases and departments actually welcoming psychics, shown on television programs such as those on Court TV, are invariably small, rural departments with insufficient resources to deal with a high-profile murder or missing person case. They also haven't yet had sufficient experience with psychics to realize the "warm, fuzzy" feelings they provide don't lead to any concrete results. However, there are two alternate theories that are so widely promulgated that we feel we must address them as well.

Alternate Theory #1:

Some say the police *do* use psychics but keep the whole affair secret. If so, the negative responses we got from the police detectives we interviewed could be discounted as covering up, jealousy, or the denials of what an anonymous Baron fan has called "an antiquated patriarchy." But is this consistent with the behavior of police professionals? If you look at any major breakthrough in forensics, such as fingerprinting, DNA, or behavioral profiling, police quickly embrace them and openly praise these techniques as soon as they are determined to be useful.

Are police secretive? Clearly, when a case is still ongoing it's often necessary to keep certain details about the crime from the public. There are several reasons for this practice. Withholding specific details can make it possible to determine if the same perpetrator is involved in similar, subsequent crimes. Also, some details are very grisly and not fit for public consumption. Finally, it's not unusual for innocent people to confess to the crime for reasons known only to them. Keeping some key details secret is a way of exposing false confessions.

However, it isn't in the nature of police departments to be secretive about cases that are closed. Once the case is solved, there's usually a trial, and the investigators couldn't very well keep information obtained from a "psychic detective" a secret, given the transparent nature of our legal system.

Alternate Theory #2:

Some may say that Baron provides "closure" to the friends and family members she counsels, or offers some kind of vague but very positive assistance. This idea is supported by the fact that so many of the grieving parties with whom she corresponds report on her favorably. If this argument were used to justify her "services," it would be inappropriate, or perhaps even cruel, to focus on her failure to provide anything tangible to the investigation.

This theory, however, is completely refuted by the simple fact that Baron isn't calling herself a grief counselor. We

haven't been able to discover such training or credentials in her background, and we maintain she may be doing more harm than good in this arena. Besides, how could she be providing closure when she hasn't brought anything to a close? As far as we can determine, her "assistance" consists of soothing language and nebulous affirmations. Surely it doesn't require psychic powers to provide a few kind words to the suffering.

Anyone who believes Baron is some kind of humanitarian should consider this: she charges about fifty dollars per person for her seminars, and two hundred dollars an hour for a personal reading. She attracts people to these events with claims of solving cases. Publicizing these cases also benefits her career as a television personality; she has appeared on several television shows as a psychic, and gets paid, just like any other performer. So her psychic detective career serves as a publicity device.

Carla Baron herself issues press releases about many of the cases with which she claims involvement. This shows exactly how she uses these cases as a publicity device. Publicity has a cash value; that's why for-profit public relations firms exist. Baron's claim that she doesn't charge for missing persons cases may be technically true. However she also widely promotes herself, and profits heavily from these activities with the publicity they create for her, which as we've shown in the news articles cited here, is ample.

Because of her celebrity resulting from her involvement in these cases, Ms. Baron has been able to finagle her own radio and television programs. In response to the news of Baron obtaining a lucrative TV contract, the administrator of Carla Baron's official chat board wrote the following:

"Let's promote this far and wide, people ! ... You know how it works. NOW GET OUT THERE PROMOTING ON YOUR OTHER BOARDS !!!"⁴⁵

Family members like Renata Balleza are being taken advantage of, a sad memorial to their departed loved ones.

CONCLUSION

One cannot blame Renata Balleza, or other family members of victims for holding onto hope that the death or disappearance of a loved one wasn't a cosmic fluke. It's understandable that they wouldn't want the universe to be so cruel. Most of us would be more attracted to the notion that agents of evil took our loved ones away, rather than admit that life is random, and sometimes bad things happen to good people for no reason, or even due to their own carelessness or negligence.

According to her official website, "Ms. Baron tirelessly dedicates herself to 'honing' her skills in order to provide assistance to those individuals and organizations who seek 'the truth'." Please note that the quotes around 'the truth' are exactly as they appear on Ms. Baron's website. Baron

herself has characterized the role of a psychic in criminal investigations as follows:

“Psychics don’t solve cases. They assist in providing the unknown, the missing piece of the puzzle.”⁴⁶

“[P]sychic flashbacks don’t solve the cases, but they certainly add new layers of insight and information.”⁴⁷

“[P]sychics are not meant to solve cases. They’re meant to ‘help connect the dots.’”⁴⁸

“I don’t think it’s about the accuracy. I think it’s about the assistance that I give.”⁴⁹

But how can you assist people with incomplete or inaccurate information? Doesn't providing the “missing piece of the puzzle”, or “insight and information,” or “connecting the dots” suggest the eventual reaching of a solution? Implicit in the claim of being a “psychic detective” is the assumption that you provide accurate information that leads to the successful resolution of a mystery. Imagine if a police detective said, “police detectives don’t actually solve the case, they just try to come up with ideas, reassure the victims, and hope for the best.” Such a statement wouldn’t generate much confidence in police procedure, and rightly so.

This is what psychics do – give vague information and let you fill in the details. The idea of ambiguous information making more sense as time unfolds is a powerful narrative device. Religious texts use prophecy, and modern fiction uses foreshadowing. But this isn’t how real criminal investigations proceed.

If you take a close look at all the cold cases currently in America, things certainly look bleak. But what about the other side of the coin? What about the *solved* cases? If you leave a fingerprint at the crime scene, technology can identify you. If you leave a drop of blood, a piece of skin, or a hair, more likely than not, you will be caught. If a child is abducted in a town like Los Angeles, motorists in the area are alerted by “Amber Alerts” on our electronic billboards. Cable TV viewers are notified by a “crawl” on every channel displaying the type of car and a physical description of the suspect. Television shows viewed by millions are dedicated to finding missing children, and grieving families support each other on internet sites. None of this existed just a few years ago; a missing person was pretty much a lost cause. *That* was a time when things were bleak.

Why do we have this powerful infrastructure for locating missing and abducted persons? Because we are fundamentally a caring society. We have dedicated enormous amounts of our collective resources to protecting each other, and we do it quite well. Forensic science was developed out of compassion. “Psychic Detectives” claim to have compassion, but they can’t produce the consistent results that science-based procedures do, so it’s a hollow claim.

Unfortunately, forensic science cannot be utilized when the perpetrator leaves no clues behind, and that’s the distressing situation faced by many of the family members profiled in this report. We don’t have the answers for them, and we recognize this is a central element of their grief – the lack of answers. The only advice we can offer to someone in that position is this: it would be very easy for someone to take advantage of your confusion and grief, but don’t let them. This does nothing to honor the memory of your lost loved ones, and if they were here, they would want to protect you from this as well.

EPILOGUE: What the IIG Accomplished

Since a preliminary version of this report was published on the IIG website in late 2004, several events have transpired:

- We’ve received ‘thank-yous’ from legitimate missing persons organizations and families of victims.
- A few missing persons organizations previously had links to psychics and psychic-friendly sites on their own web pages, those links were removed after we provided them a copy of this report
- Some of these organizations have replaced the psychic links with links to IIG’s site.
- Other websites showcasing our report:
 - Skeptics Dictionary
 - Church of Critical Thinking
 - Fallacyfiles.com
 - Badpsychics.co.uk (plus an audio interview)
- IIG members have been interviewed on radio programs.

And probably most importantly:

- If you now Google Carla Baron, the link to this IIG report is third on the list of returned hits.

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For more information: [The JonBenet Ramsey Case on CNN](#)
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