

Efforts by Determined Kin Rejuvenate Izak Murder Probe

By David C. Shampine

Times Staff Writer

A year after hiring a private detective, getting state police to revive their probe of a 30-year-old murder on Wellesley Island and consenting to an exhumation, a Pennsylvania family is still waiting for an arrest.

Believing the killer of Irene J. Izak still lives in Jefferson County, a sister of the victim is pleading to the person, "Please bring peace to yourself and to us."

"Make peace with God," Helen A. Ewasko said in a prepared statement to the Watertown Daily Times. "Bring justice for Irene," she said.

The exhumation of Miss Izak's remains Dec. 30 at Scranton, Pa., has developed new evidence, state police say.

But, "We have not established enough evidence to establish culpability to substantiate an arrest or to complete successful prosecution," said Senior Investigator Stanley E.



Irene J. Izak

Weidman with the state police violent crimes unit at the Oneida troop headquarters.

The investigation continues, he said, and he did not rule out the possibility of an arrest.

"Numerous" people have been interviewed, Mr. Weidman said, adding, "only one has declined to be interviewed and has sought the advice of counsel."

Mr. Weidman, a lead player in the renewed investigation, declined to discuss suspects.

Miss Izak, 25, Scranton, was found bludgeoned to death early the morning of June 10, 1968, in a ditch off Jefferson County Route 191, which was then the main road on Wellesley Island to the Thousand Islands Bridge. Trooper David N. Hennigan, now retired, reported that after he found her car abandoned, he discovered her body in the ditch, just past the entrance to DeWolf Point State Park.

With the murder never solved, and the investigation appearing to have become dormant, Miss Izak's survivors last July retained a pri-

private detective, Augustine Papay Jr., a retired New York City police detective. His findings were detailed by the family in a letter sent in early September to Gov. George E. Pataki, which was passed on to state police.

The exhumation at St. Vladimir Cemetery, Scranton, was conducted under the direction of Dr. Michael Baden, forensic pathologist for state police, to determine if skeletal remains show the nature of her injuries. Mr. Weidman disclosed no specific information gleaned from the exhumation, but sources have said that Dr. Baden, assisted at the exhumation by Dr. Lowell J. Levine, state police forensic scientist and doctor of dental surgery, found a previously undetected cause of death for Miss Izak.

"The autopsy results and further extensive forensics investigation have provided new and additional information," Mr. Weidman said. "Further tests are being conducted — it is a continuing process. The in-

vestigation is not coming to an end."

Dr. Baden was a defense witness in the Los Angeles double-murder trial of O.J. Simpson.

The Family Appeals

Mrs. Ewasko, Dalton, Pa., and another sister, Luba A. Boyko, Conklin, N.Y., on June 13 visited the site of Miss Izak's murder and placed flowers. It was Mrs. Boyko's first viewing of the site.

"It has been a painful place in my imagination all these years," Mrs. Boyko said. "Seeing it did not make it less painful, but somehow it felt like an end to a journey I had to make."

Mrs. Boyko said she can forgive her sister's killer, "but he has to ask my forgiveness."

"I don't have hate in my heart for him, and my heart aches for the person. He must have demons to live with."

Said Mrs. Ewasko: "We are **See Dogged** — Page A8

Dogged Pursuit of Justice Breathes Life Into Izak Probe...

►From Page A1

pleading with the person who brutally took the innocent life of our beloved, sweet, gentle sister. You have caused our family, especially our dear mother and father, indescribable anguish."

Mrs. Ewasko's daughter, Lisa Caputo, Scranton, who has pushed for the renewed investigation, offered more thoughts for the killer.

"Your actions have haunted me throughout my life, and continue to like a nightmare," she said.

The Road to Death

Miss Izak was en route to Laval University in Quebec for a job interview. The Ukraine-born woman, who had taught in Rochester and Binghamton-area schools, was driving at night so she could avoid traffic and make better time, friends and family have said.

According to notes made in 1968 by Dr. Richard S. Lee, late Jefferson County medical examiner, which have been obtained by the family through a Freedom of Information request, Miss Izak was halted at 1:15 that morning by Trooper Hennigan for speeding on Interstate 81, about 3 miles north of Watertown. He released her with just a warning.

Both the trooper and Miss Izak continued driving north, and Dr. Lee's notes indicate Miss Izak left the bridge's toll booth at 2:10 a.m.

"She was edgy, nervous," when she talked to the toll collector, retired state police investigator Raymond O. Polett told the Times on Thursday. Mr. Polett, who was the lead investigator in the case until he retired in 1977, told the Times in June 1998 that Miss Izak asked the toll collector, the late Clifford F. Putnam, about police tactics in New York, and pointed to Trooper Hennigan's unmarked patrol car as he crossed the bridge.

Miss Izak drove across the span, then proceeded onto County Route 191, which was then the main road to the bridge to the Canadian border and Hill Island. She didn't reach the border.

At 2:35 a.m., according to Dr. Lee's notes, Trooper Hennigan reported finding her still-warm body.

Her head had been bludgeoned with rocks. It appeared to be a slaying

without motive. She was neither robbed nor sexually molested, police said.

When interviewed last year for a story in the Times, Mr. Polett made his first public statements regarding suspicions about Trooper Hennigan.

"There were certain things in his account that we were not satisfied with," Mr. Polett said. He did not understand how the trooper could have covered his patrol area, as outlined in the trooper's statements, in only 20 to 25 minutes, Mr. Polett said.

And he did not understand why Trooper Hennigan handled the woman's body in the manner the trooper described.

Mr. Hennigan, 60, who retired from the state police in 1983 and has been a deacon for the past 18 years at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church, Watertown, has continually declined comment to the Times.

Detective Hired

After her family waited many years and nothing happened, Lisa Ewasko Caputo started asking questions. She said she tried for four years to get answers from state police, with little luck. After reading Mr. Polett's comments, she went to the Internet, seeking a private investigator.

Mr. Papay, Chester, Pa., answered Mrs. Caputo's call and met with the family on July 4, 1998. Ten days later, he drove to Watertown, then to Wellesley Island to visit the murder site.

Thus began the revived effort to identify the killer of Irene Izak.

Mr. Papay made at least four more trips to Jefferson County. His investigation took him to St. Lawrence County and to spots in Pennsylvania to interview retired state police investigators and others connected with the case.

He filed a Freedom of Information request with state police, seeking details from the case file. His request was denied, but in September, Capt. John E. Wood, Oneida, was appointed as state police liaison to Mr. Papay.

Mr. Papay said Capt. Wood never returned his calls, and they never spoke. He said he has had conversations with Mr. Weidman, however.



Luba Boyko, left, and Helen Ewasko, right, sisters of Irene Izaks, are still waiting for justice in their sister's 31-year-old murder.

Later in September, the detective and the Ewasko family wrote a five-page letter to Gov. Pataki. They told the governor of certain suspicions they had, and complained that it appeared no action was being taken.

The governor's office forwarded the family's letter to Superintendent James W. McMahon, and on Oct. 13, a meeting was held in Albany to discuss the case. Among those attending were Dr. Baden, Mr. Weidman, Inspector Lloyd Wilson, Albany, Senior Investigator Richard H. Ladue, Watertown, and retired Senior Investigator Robert S. Cooke of Watertown, according to the family.

A week later, on Oct. 20, Lt. Thomas P. Connelly, then with the Bureau of Criminal Investigation, Oneida, but now captain in charge of the Watertown state police zone, visited the Ewasko home with two other state police investigators. They met with approximately 16 members of Irene Izak's family and Mr. Papay.

Helen Ewasko said the meeting appeared to be more for the purpose of apologizing for keeping the family in the dark over the years, and less to give details of the investigation.

Some of their plans for the probe

were discussed, she said, including the exhumation.

After all the brothers and sisters of Irene Izak signed consents, state Supreme Court Judge Hugh A. Gilbert in Watertown issued the exhumation order Dec. 10.

The order, requested by then-District Attorney James T. King, authorized exhumation "for such physical, chemical or other examination or analysis as they (state police) may deem appropriate, with cost to be borne by the New York State Police."

Dr. Baden and Dr. Lewis performed their work at Moses Taylor Hospital, Scranton. With the family's consent, they retained the skull for additional work and returned other remains to the cemetery the same day.

It was not until Feb. 17, Mrs. Ewasko said, that she was informed by Lt. Connelly that the autopsy had provided "interesting" results.

And there may be other findings that state police are not disclosing, to protect the "integrity" of their investigation for the day they arrest a suspect.

Reporter's note: Late Times reporter Larry Cole assisted in research for this report. Mr. Cole died March 27 of a heart attack.

Izak Family Turns to P.I. For Answers

By David C. Shampine
Times Staff Writer

Lisa Ewasko Caputo was only 4 at the time, but she has never forgotten that day 31 years ago when her father brought home the grim news that her Aunt Irene had been murdered in Northern New York.

Mrs. Caputo's questions over the past five years about the probe into Irene Izak's murder on Wellesley Island have energized the investigation.

It was about midday, June 10, 1968, that Paul Ewasko made an unexpected return from work to his Dalton, Pa., home. He sent Lisa and her

See Family — Page A8

Family Turned to P.I....

►From Page A1

twin sister, Kathy, outdoors, then approached his wife, Helen, an older sister of Ukrainian-born Irene Izak.

"I could tell by his face when he walked in the back door that there was something terribly wrong," Mrs. Ewasko said in a recent interview at her home.

Outside, "We heard our mother screaming and crying," Lisa Caputo said.

"All I could think," Mrs. Ewasko continued, "is my poor sister, poor Irene. She's there all by herself. She shouldn't be alone."

"And then I thought, 'my God, my poor parents!'"

As weeks grew into months, the family received briefings from the lead investigator, Raymond O. Polett. "He would tell me that they were doing everything that they could," Mrs. Ewasko said.

The months became years, and the investigation seemed to become dormant. So in 1984, Z. George Izak, one of Irene's brothers, hired the first private detective to look at the case. The detective called an unaware Father Izak, a Byzantine Rite Catholic priest, with a question.

Father Izak "got upset and stopped it right there," Mrs. Caputo said. From then on, family discussion about the slaying was quashed in deference to Irene's ailing parents.

"Nobody talked about it in front of us, either," Mrs. Caputo said. "Her picture was on the dining room wall in the rectory, and we'd just stare at it."

She and Kathy, always referring to their lost aunt as "Lyalya" (Ukrainian for "Little Doll") would occasionally sneak into a closet to read a detective magazine's account of the murder, Mrs. Caputo said.

After Father Izak's death in 1988 and the 1991 death of his wife, Maria, the family renewed conversations about the unsolved murder, and it was discussed more with the twins, Mrs. Caputo said. She became an avid follower of television detective shows and crime books, and she suggests that gave her the initiative in November 1994 to write a letter to New York State Police.

Lt. Thomas P. Connelly, Bureau of Criminal Investigation, Oneida, telephoned her, but all he could tell her was "nothing new," she said. There were follow-up calls and letters by



Augustine Papay Jr.

Lisa, and she succeeded in getting police to release from evidence Irene's class ring in February 1995, and her watch in April 1998.

Then, on June 10, 1998, the Watertown Daily Times ran a 30th anniversary story about the murder. The story prompted Lisa Caputo to seek help on the Internet. She put out a request for any information about how to get state police to open their files to the family. She was answered by a private detective living only about 90 minutes away from Scranton in Port Jervis, on the New York-Pennsylvania line.

Augustine "Gus" Papay Jr., a retired New York City internal-affairs and homicide detective, was retained by the family.

Mr. Papay, 48, who operates Inter-Pro Investigations in Chester, said he specializes in unsolved murders and police brutality cases. He concluded a 20-year police career in January 1994. He worked internal affairs from 1982 to 1984, and was on a homicide task force in Bronx for the last four years of his career.

He was profiled in an October 1992 New York Magazine feature about how he and another detective solved a serial killer case with the arrest of Alejandro "Alex" Henriquez. The case was the subject of a made-for-television movie which aired on CBS.

Mr. Papay said another retired New York City police officer, Raymond M. Pierce, has assisted him as a consultant in the case. Mr. Pierce is a specialist in criminal personality profiling.