

## \$200,000 MISSING PERSON REWARD

Posted by Max Cannon

Jacqueline Levitz was last seen on November 18, 1995, by a store clerk at a business in Vicksburg, Mississippi. She bought wallpaper for her new house, then left the store and has never been heard from again. Two days later, on November 20, her disappearance was discovered when a relative went to her home to find out why she hadn't been answering the phone.

Jacqueline's front door was open. Her bedroom carpet was soaked in a blood and the mattress was soaked in it; someone had turned the mattress over to conceal the stains. The blood was Jacqueline's type. Signs of a fierce struggle, including torn-off fingernails, were scattered on the floor. Some valuable fur coats were left behind in Jacqueline's closet, a pair of diamond earrings was undisturbed on the windowsill, and more jewelry was in a safe. Only Jacqueline's purse and makeup bag were missing from her home; her cream-colored Jaguar was parked in the driveway. A glass with some water in it was found on the windowsill near the earrings. Jacqueline's loved ones say it would be uncharacteristic of her to leave the glass sitting out.

Jacqueline has been married three times; her latest marriage was to Ralph Levitz, co-founder of the Levitz Furniture empire. Ralph died in March 1995 and Jacqueline inherited his estate; its worth is estimated between five and fifteen million dollars. She had resided in Palm Beach, Florida but moved to Vicksburg five weeks before she disappeared to be nearer to her family. Jacqueline's house in Vicksburg was undergoing extensive remodeling in November 1995, but she was still living in it. There was almost no furniture in the house, only her mattress, some plastic lawn chairs, and a refrigerator.

She left behind a blood-soaked mattress, a small fortune and a raft of unanswered questions. Despite help from the FBI and a \$200,000 reward offered by Levitz's family, police have been unable to solve what they classify as a missing persons case, but most people assume was a violent murder.

Jacqueline's loved ones and the police believe she met with foul play. Her lawyer speculates that she was the victim of a botched kidnapping, probably at the hands of someone from outside the Vicksburg area. Police believe her body may have been disposed of in the Mississippi River which runs near Jacqueline's home.

Jacqueline was born in Louisiana. She was declared dead in 2000, but her presumed murderer(s) remain uncaught.

### Contact Agency

Warren County Sheriff's Office

601-636-1761

Vicksburg Police Department

601-636-2511

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Mississippi Office

601-948-5000

<http://www.rewardstv.net/missing-persons/2...rd-2/#more-1557>

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Federal Agents Join Search for Missing Heiress

AP (NYT) 451 words

Published: November 26, 1995

VICKSBURG, Miss., Nov. 25 - Dogs searching a wooded area today were unable to find the body of a missing furniture heiress, Jacqueline Levitz, who vanished more than a week ago, leaving signs of a violent struggle and blood in her one-story brick house here.

Mrs. Levitz's family offered a \$10,000 reward for information leading to any arrests in what is now being treated as a homicide.

Mrs. Levitz, 62, was last seen alive on Nov. 18, buying wallpaper for the house she had bought after moving from Palm Beach, Fla., last month. On Monday, a relative found the door to her house open. There was blood on a bedroom carpet and police found her mattress soaked with blood.

"This case is a little strange," said Sheriff Paul Barrett of Warren County. "We believe she is dead. In cases like this, we can't figure out why they would take the body."

Sheriff Barrett said the reward was posted by the Levitz family after a helicopter search on Friday of the area around Mrs. Levitz's home, on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River, had also turned up nothing. Foot patrols are scheduled to search an area near the river on Sunday.

Sheriff Barrett and Vicksburg Police Chief Robert Dowe Jr. said investigators were retracing Mrs. Levitz's steps in the past several weeks. Chief Dowe said the police would resume questioning construction workers and contractors who had been hired to remodel the house bought by Mrs. Levitz.

"We're just continuing to go through the very meticulous process of investigating every construction worker who was on the site," said Martin Pace, an investigator with the sheriff's office. "It's a very detailed process. We have to follow every tidbit."

Investigators are scheduled to meet on Monday with agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation about the case.

Sheriff Barrett said help had been sought from the F.B.I. because investigators felt that they needed that agency's longer reach.

"They can help us. They can talk to people in Florida and in California that we can't talk to and we need to talk to," he said.

Mrs. Levitz is the widow of millionaire Ralph Levitz, who built his Levitz Furniture company into a chain with stores in more than 20 states. He died in March and left his wife the bulk of his fortune, estimated in excess of \$15 million.

Mr. Levitz had one son, Phillip, who is next in the line of inheritance. The company is now publicly held.

Photo: Jacqueline Levitz vanished from her house in Vicksburg, Miss., more than a week ago. Law-enforcement officials said they found signs of a violent struggle. (Associated Press)

New York Times

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## **CASE OF THE MISSING HEIRESS: Who killed Jacqueline Levitz?**

**By Harriet Ryan**

**Court TV**

Every so often, the phone rings in the detective squad of the Vicksburg, Miss., police department and someone, usually a psychic but sometimes just a person who says they have a gift for these things, tells Lt. Billy Brown about a Jacqueline Levitz vision.

Brown is not a believer, but he's a patient man and he wants to find out what became of Levitz, a striking 62-year-old millionaire who vanished in 1995, so he listens.

"It's always the same thing," said Brown, who estimates he's received 100 such calls in the seven years since the heiress vanished. "They see a large body of water. She's in it or near it. And I say, 'Well, yeah.'"

In Vicksburg, the thundering waters of the mighty Mississippi define the city's geography, economy, culture and history. Saying the vast river, a mile and a half wide below the bluff where Levitz lived, may have played some role in her disappearance is saying exactly nothing.

"It's like if you lived in Arizona and someone says she was in the Grand Canyon," said Brown.

On a November weekend almost exactly seven years ago Jacquie Levitz, the glamorous widow of furniture chain founder Ralph Levitz, went missing from her home. She left behind a blood-soaked mattress, a small fortune and a raft of unanswered questions. Despite help from the FBI and a \$200,000 reward offered by Levitz's family, police were unable to solve what they classify as a missing persons case, but most people assume was a violent murder.

A Florida court declared Levitz dead two years ago and dispersed her estate, estimated between \$5 to \$8 million. Detectives in Vicksburg and the Warren County Sheriff's office say they remain confident the mystery can be solved and point to new forensic techniques that may shed light on the perpetrators. For now, however, much of the case remains as murky as the river that Levitz adored.

Just five weeks before she disappeared, the thrice-married Levitz left a high society existence in Palm Beach, Fla. and moved into a 2,900-square-foot red brick ranch-style home with panoramic views of boats working the muddy waters and the vaulting bridge connecting Mississippi with Levitz's native Louisiana.

The farmer's daughter who made good was getting back to her roots and closer to her siblings and their families. When I get done renovating this house, she told people, it's going to be a showplace and the home base for the entire family.

Levitz hoped to double the size of the house to 7,000 square feet and decorate it in high style in time for a huge Christmas celebration with her kin. She didn't even make it to Thanksgiving.

On the morning of Monday Nov. 20, 1995, Levitz's brother-in-law, James Earl Shivers, went to see why Levitz hadn't answered her phone since the day before.

When Shivers approached the house, he immediately noticed that Levitz's car, a cream-colored Jaguar, was parked out front. The door to the house was unlocked and when Shivers ducked inside he saw signs of what police would later call a "violent struggle." The torn tips of fingernails were scattered on the floor and when Shivers summoned police officers, they flipped over Levitz's mattress and found it stained with a large quantity of blood that matched her type.

Nearby, fur coats hung untouched in a closet. A pair of diamond earrings rested undisturbed on a window seat. The only thing missing, her sister Tiki Shivers determined, were two bags — a small purse containing her wallet and a bigger tote filled with make-up, hairspray and other items the sisters jokingly referred to as "first aid."

Aside from her clothes and some valuable jewels that had remained secure in a safe, there was very little in the house to begin with. Levitz was "camping out" — her term for living with only a few amenities — until construction was done. She was making do with a mattress and a refrigerator and a few plastic lawn chairs.

As Shivers looked around the empty house, however, something caught her eye. A glass filled with a small amount of water sat on the window seat near the diamond earrings.

"Believe me, if she had finished that glass, she would have taken it to the kitchen and washed it. She would never have left an empty glass sitting out," Shivers said.

From Cotton to Balls

Her older sister, after all, was a perfectionist. Jacquie Levitz earned a good living making things just so. She bought fixer-uppers and turned them into dream homes. She met Ralph Levitz, her third husband, while redecorating his mansion and she felt comfortable in the wealthiest of social circles in Washington, D.C., California and Florida. But there was nothing tony about her upbringing.

Levitz was one of nine children raised on a cotton farm in Oak Grove, La.

"She was not a Southern belle. It was a working farm and she worked," said Shivers. It was before mechanical cotton pickers were invented and it was not uncommon for Levitz or one of her siblings to pick 300 pounds a day.

Levitz eventually left Louisiana and moved to Texas to attend secretarial school. She married Walter Bolton Jr. and bore him one son, Walter III. The marriage didn't last and she moved north to the Washington, D.C., area. There she began working in real estate and married a prosperous restaurant owner named Banks L. Smith. After his death, she relocated to Florida.

She became Levitz's sixth wife in 1987 and they renewed their vows two years later at an elaborate ceremony in the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach. At first, the Levitz's were staples of society pages, attending charity balls and entertaining in their \$3.9 million oceanfront palace.

"She was a butterfly. She was very well liked. Men admired her, women envied her," said Barbara Norcross, a Florida psychic who counted Levitz as both a client and good friend.

Robert Marschall, the Levitz's attorney for 15 years, said people were drawn to Jacquie's effervescence and down-home sensibility.

"She has the reputation of being a Palm Beach socialite, which she was, but she was also very friendly and lots of fun," Marschall recalled.

In the last five years of his life, Ralph Levitz suffered a series of strokes and the couple curtailed their public life.

"She was a very lonely gal," said Norcross. "We'd sit and talk to Ralph over dinner and then go out back and sit around the pool. She was a great one for vodka and apple juice. She'd have her limit of two and then we'd just talk."

In 1995, Ralph died, leaving his wife a trust fund of several million dollars. Upon her death, the money would pass to his grandchildren from previous marriages. Jacquie Levitz, a multimillionaire in her own right, began making plans shortly to move to Vicksburg. Four of her siblings lived within 50 miles of the city.

Ralph's illness, according to Tiki Shivers, "made her realize that the same thing could happen to her and who would take care of her, that blood runs thicker than water."

Levitz bought the home on the river bluff from Betty Moody and her husband. Moody, a retired realtor who developed a fast friendship with Levitz, said she was stunned when Levitz explained that she was going to expand the three-bedroom ranch into a sprawling seven-bedroom home.

"I think for her it was not the house so much as the location, location, location," said Moody. Levitz wanted to be close to town, her siblings in Louisiana, the airport, the riverboat casinos and of course, the river.

"She just loved looking at the boats," recalled Moody. The day before Levitz vanished, she called Moody to gush over a particularly beautiful boat navigating the river. Moody made a mental note to give Levitz a pair of binoculars as a gift.

In Vicksburg, Levitz adapted to a lifestyle quite different from her Palm Beach days.

Levitz still wore heels, but she also dressed in turtlenecks and Capri leggings and wore her blond hair pulled back. When her sister talked about buying some cheap dresses for her granddaughters to play dress-up, Levitz volunteered her evening gowns.

"I said, 'Jacquie, I'm talking about \$5 dresses, not \$5000 gowns' and she just said, 'I don't ever plan to put on another one anyway,'" recalled Shivers.

She spent her days supervising a construction crew that sometimes grew to 40 men. She made them coffee and joked with them, but she also wore a hard hat and inspected their work closely.

There was to be a children's room with kid-size furniture for her grandnieces and nephews, a den with comfy recliners for her brothers-in-law to watch sports, and a master bedroom with a safari theme for her son. Walter Bolton still lived near Washington, D.C. He had never married and according to Moody, Levitz was trying to get him to move to Vicksburg.

Levitz's world in Vicksburg was fairly small.

"She had not really started to socialize. She went to one little Mary Kay party — just to meet her neighbors. She would never wear Mary Kay," said Shivers of the makeup line popular in middle-America.

## The Investigation

In the days after Levitz's disappearance, local authorities determined she was last seen late Saturday afternoon, picking at wallpaper samples in Vicksburg.

Because the case was a potential kidnapping with interstate implications, the FBI joined the investigation. Agents fanned out across California, Florida and Washington, D.C., combed through Levitz's business and legal files and interviewed her family and acquaintances.

"We just cooperated fully," said her lawyer, Marschall. When asked who gained from her disappearance or death, the lawyer answered, "No one as far as I could tell. Obviously her son is a beneficiary, but he's not and has never been considered a suspect. He was physically thousands of miles away when this happened."

According to relatives, Bolton is in poor health. He inherited about \$4 million when his mother was officially declared dead, five years after her disappearance.

Sheriffs officers and police interviewed scores of locals, in fact anyone who knew she was in Vicksburg.

"Not too many people knew. I sure didn't. I'd never even heard of Levitz furniture before this," Brown said.

Each member of the construction crew was questioned, but everyone cooperated and there were no obvious threats to Levitz.

"There were no police reports to indicate she had been followed or threatened or anything like that," said Warren County Sheriff Martin Pace, the lead investigator in the case before he was elected to his current post.

From time to time, detectives would receive tips, often someone spotting a body in the river. But the Mississippi is too deep and too wide to drag, and Brown estimates that a corpse dumped in the strong

current near Vicksburg has a 50 percent chance of making it clear to the Gulf of Mexico without washing ashore.

Meanwhile, those close to Levitz developed their own theories. Her lawyer, Marschall, thought it might have been "a botched kidnapping that went terribly wrong." Moody, a 32-year resident of Vicksburg, couldn't fathom a local harming Levitz.

"Whatever happened had to be from her past," she said.

Norcross, her psychic, had a vision of two killers. She told the tabloid the National Examiner that the men raped and killed Levitz at the direction of a former business associate and even provided a sketch of one killer. The body, she concluded, was dumped in the river.

Norcross visited her friend's home in Vicksburg after the disappearance.

"I picked up a great deal there. There were cigarette butts outside the window. But they wouldn't let me inside the home. They are very, very, very backwards there."

In a bizarre twist, Norcross filed a federal suit which suggested Levitz's family was involved in her death. She maintains her lawyer concocted the allegations in the suit, which was thrown out as baseless.

And Levitz's sister focused on the glass on the window seat. Levitz made a habit of sitting by that window in the afternoons and staring at the river. The glass, Shivers thinks, indicates she was interrupted during that period of afternoon relaxation.

"I think that someone locally saw her coming from Wal-Mart or saw her in the neighborhood and just followed her home. It would be hard not to notice her. She was very beautiful, very striking. She walked in to a room and people would turn their heads," said Shivers, adding that her sister's romantic view of her new home might have made her an easy target. "She remembered the South as a child when nobody ever locked their doors. People are evil here the way they are the whole world over."

Shivers says the bewilderment and pain has lessened over the years, but she still is desperate for an answer.

Police are too, Brown says. The state crime lab is now processing evidence they collected in Levitz's home using techniques that did not exist when she vanished.

"There are technologies available that were not even thought of in 1995," said Sheriff Martin Pace.

Pace and Brown will not discuss the specific evidence, but about a year ago, their offices along with the FBI began looking at the case anew. They assigned new detectives to the file and began reinterviewing those close to Levitz.

These days when he gets calls on the Levitz case, Brown hopes the caller is a lab tech, not another psychic with a vision involving water.

