

# NATIONAL POST

Thursday, October 25, 2007

## Kidnap victim relives Buenos Aires ordeal

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Published: Thursday, October 25, 2007



Peter J. Thompson, National Post

**TORONTO** - It was the last day of a five-week tour of [South America](#) when a young [Toronto](#) woman on her way to the [Buenos Aires](#) airport was hijacked by gunmen.

For 29 hours, six men held her captive for ransom in abandoned construction sites while her family in [Canada](#) tried to secure her release.

Sitting in her home yesterday two weeks after her return, she wanted to share her story as a cautionary tale to other travellers but insisted on anonymity while her case is being investigated.

The Canadian government, which would only say yesterday that it was contacted regarding the kidnapping of a Canadian woman in [Argentina](#) and that consular assistance was offered, warns visitors to [Argentina](#) about "express kidnappings" in large cities such as [Buenos Aires](#) where kidnappers randomly pick victims from the street and demand a ransom or force them to withdraw money from ATMs. The victims are usually quickly released once the ransom is paid.

The [Toronto](#)-born woman, who is in her twenties and is well-travelled, left to explore [Peru](#), [Bolivia](#), [Brazil](#) and [Argentina](#) on Sept. 1.

After seven days in [Buenos Aires](#), her favourite city of the trip, she told her travel companion that she needed to pick up a pair of custom-made leather loafers from a local boutique shop and would meet him at the airport.

She hailed a taxi from the shop. On a long stretch of highway, a white van pulled alongside the cab. A man appeared in the van's passenger-side window with a gun. The van hit them causing the cab to swerve to the side of the road where it stopped. She watched as the cab driver got out and scuffled with the armed man. Then, the van's side door slid open and the taxi driver was thrown inside.

"I wasn't sure what was going on. I thought, 'My God ... These two have a personal issue that they're trying to take care of,'" said the woman.

Then, three men climbed into the cab, and one of them with a shot gun sat beside her and tapped her to put her head down. "I should have just gotten out and ran. I was so shocked ... I couldn't even think."

They drove for about a half hour before turning into a dark, underground area. Carrying flashlights, they led her into a small room with a table and a phone against one wall.

In the limited Spanish that she remembered from high school classes, she asked, "Que tal?" "What's up?"

One of the kidnapers turned around, gave her an icy stare and shoved her against the concrete wall. They told her what they wanted. The only word she understood was "dinero."

She called her father to relay the kidnapers' message: \$5,000 needed to be sent through [Western Union](#) in her name.

"As soon as I heard his voice, I started sobbing," she said. "He was like, 'What's wrong? Are you okay?' 'These guys have got me. They have me.' "

In [Toronto](#), her parents had called the police. The officers contacted the [RCMP](#) who alerted [Interpol](#). Her parents booked an 11 p.m. flight to [Buenos Aires](#).

The woman's captors moved her to another site. "I'm looking at these six men and thinking I'm going to be gang-raped and killed."

Instead, the next morning, the kidnapers took her to the [Western Union](#) on a busy strip. She stood in a long line from 1 p.m. until 2:45 p.m., watching the clock, thinking about her parents, thinking about running.

"I wasn't willing to take the risk," she explained, wringing her hands, sitting on the couch in her living room. "They haven't raped me, they haven't molested me. They haven't tortured me. They'll let me go if they get what they want."

When she finally collected the stack of bills, her captors took her back to the construction site. Crestfallen, she began wailing.

One of the youngest men, a clean-cut, fair-skinned man, put his arm around her. He let her call her father on his cellphone and put her in a taxi.

"While we were driving away, I turned around and I looked. He wasn't there anymore but I wanted to actually say, 'Thank you.' "

She reunited with her parents in the lobby of a hotel.

"As soon as I felt their arms go around me, I thought, 'That's it. Nothing can go wrong in these arms.' "

Since coming home, she has been trying to return to a normal routine. She suffers from nightmares and anxiety but says that she will visit [Argentina](#) again. She says the system responded well: [Interpol](#) officers escorted her parents to the Canadian embassy from the plane, consular officials were with her family at all times, and [Air Canada](#) was fully apprised of the situation and allowed her father to use their phones during the flight.

In hindsight, she wonders if that first taxi driver, who was furiously text-messaging while driving, was in on the plot. She has regrets.

"I would never go out alone. I should have read that 'express kidnappings' are common," she said. "I cannot stress enough, if you travel ... always be on guard, no matter how safe you think you are. I never want another human being to go through that."

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