

The following is an account of the persecution unleashed against my family by the Argentine government. The results of this persecution are as follows: my 61 year old mother, Esther Ballestrino de Careaga and my brother-in-law, Manuel Carlos Cuevas are disappeared today and the rest of family is dispersed.

My Kidnapping and Torture

On June 13, 1977 I was waiting on the corner of Juan B. Justo and Corrientes (two large avenues in the federal capital) for my father and husband whom I was supposed to meet there. I had earlier passed by my parents house which had been searched by military forces days before.

After waiting approximately 5 minutes a car stopped in front of me and before I had time to react 2 men in civilian clothes grabbed me and put me in the car. The people nearby were as stupefied as my father and husband who were walking towards the corner and saw them put me in the car. I later learned from them that other cars had blocked the traffic on those two streets.

Once I was in the car they threw me down on the back seat, blindfolded me and began to ask where my family was. I didn't answer and was very shocked: Where were they taking me? What would happen to me?

During the trip they didn't do anything to me, I think they just slapped me a few times, but they threatened me saying that I would talk because if I didn't I would see when we arrived. After a short trip in the car we arrived at the place where I was held for four months. It was a clandestine prison located in the basement of the building at Av. Pasco Colon and Garay in the Constitucion section of Buenos Aires. This building was the headquarters of Federal Coordination of the Argentine Federal Police and is currently an administrative center and garage for the Federal Police. (I obtained this information during my stay in the concentration camp and there are many facts which lead me to believe it's true.)

Once inside I could see that it was a garage even though I was blindfolded because I could see somewhat from below the blindfold and I saw a lot of cars. They made me enter a room and go down a ladder that led to a basement. As soon as I had done this, they said again that I would talk, that I would tell them where my family was, and when I refused again (I said I didn't know) they made me undress and began to torture me. I didn't say anything and undressed without resisting.

They began to throw buckets of cold water on me and as I stumbled and covered my face with my hands they threw me on the floor and continued with the same torture. This time they stepped on my wrists to hold me down. I tossed my head back and forth in desperation so as not to drown. I can't remember the exact details of that moment, but I know there were many men there. It was the first time that I saw uniforms. In my horizontal position I could see that the men who were stepping on my wrists wore black boots with blue trousers tucked into them.

Then they took me to what they called the "quirofano" and I call torture chamber, a room with a metal table in the middle covered with a foam pad. They layed me down there and began to torture me with electric shocks.

I will try to remember as exactly as possible what happened with respect to the tortures, but it was so horrible I lost consciousness several times. I had no idea of the time span or the order of the tortures.

AR-ANM-DICE-03-008-2/4
the scrapes from the trestle horse. I still have the marks of torture today. Amnesty International doctors who examined me last year found more than 100 scars and other traces of torture. Archivo Nacional de la Memoria

It was only after they took me to the infirmary that I said I was pregnant. Many people have asked me why I didn't speak sooner and that perhaps it would have been better if I had. Yet the brutality of those people was so great that I don't believe they would have treated me any better. On the contrary, I feared that they would use the baby to torture me, as their mental illness and sadism, their laughter and comments of pleasure while they tortured me were so great.

They took me to the "quirosfano" again that day and tortured me. They tortured me in that way two or three more times during my detention in the camp, not as brutally as before, but when one knows what it is and after resting and as the time goes by, the terror is worse.

Afterwards they became more viscious because I hadn't told them I was pregnant. They told me they would "open my legs" and take out the baby, that they would make me miscarry: "Why didn't you tell us you little asshole? Do you want us to take it out now?" "No." "No what asshole." (a kick) "No, sir." "Ah, that's better."

At noon on the day after my kidnapping I gave them the address of where I lived with my parents, after enough time had passed for them to leave. They had left. When the police came back from the house after not finding anyone there they tortured me again. This time because: "You knew that there wasn't anybody there, you little whore." They were full of hate because they hadn't found anyone.

The Concentration Camp

After a few days they took me to a cell and I adapted little by little to that life and I learned how I had to live, what I could and couldn't do. And despite the fact that my eyes were constantly blindfolded and they only took me out of the cell three times a day, I have a general idea of what the place was like.

There were two sections of cells: number one (which was the best) and number two, where I was. In the latter section the cells were along a very narrow corridor facing each other. To take us out to the bathroom they opened the doors one by one (we had to be standing up when they opened the doors) and a guard screamed out the cell number and we stepped out, turned and grabbed the shoulders of the person in front. The guard led the first person.

The guard changed every 24 hours. I think that each shift was formed by an officer, a junior officer, and two or three assistants. According to the shift that was on the day you were kidnapped, the officer of that shift always interrogated you. There was also another guard that also rotated every 24 hours and these were the "jailers" who had to count the prisoners, take us to the bathroom give out the food, etc.

5.

There are all kinds of people in the camp, the demagogues, the torturers, the impeccably dressed gentlemen who come to see how things are. All they do is observe, and ask "How old are You?" "-16, sir." "Are you pregnant?" "-Yes, sir." "Did they torture you?" "Yes, sir." And he looks at the marks on your body and goes away.

There is also the sadist, who enjoys the suffering, screams, and pain of the tortured. The Swedes certainly must ask themselves how is it possible that people like that exist today anywhere in the world, in a civilized country. Yes, they exist and they are supported and directed by a government.

To speak was totally forbidden. The guards walked very softly and lifted the viewing window cover very suddenly. If they saw anyone talking or with their blindfold lifted up they took them out of the cell to torture them, either with shocks, beatings or other forms of punishment.

All signs of feeling were also forbidden. One when a girl was crying in her cell, a guard took her to the "quirofano". First we heard her pleading and then screaming. When they brought back to her cell they said "You're not going to cry anymore, right?" "-No, sir, I'm sorry." When they kidnapped this girl they asked her what torture she preferred: Electric shock or rape. She chose the shocks but said that later they raped her anyway. The next day a guard asked her: What happened to you last night?" "-They raped me, sir." "You asshole, (a blow) no one did anything to you here do you understand?" "-Yes, sir." They even made her kiss the sexual organ of a police man.

Even though it was forbidden sometimes we got up on the platform and spoke very quietly. One night, a guard found out and took all the people out of the cells, except for the older people and myself because my pregnancy was too noticeable by then. They made them do army exercises on the floor. Then when they took us out to go to the bathroom the guard asked whoever had spoken to raise their hand. No one did. The guard began to yell that we were all idiots and if we wanted they would kill us all. He also said: "You think I'm a son of a bitch. Sure, I'm a son of a bitch and the government pays me to be a son of a bitch torturer."

They only took us to the bathroom three times a day and even if we had to go outside of those times they wouldn't let us out. Many of us had chronic diarrhea and constipation because of the poor food. Once after calling for a long time and not relieving any answer I relieved myself in the cell. This was always severely punished. They made me do knee bends til I couldn't feel my legs anymore.

The food was a disaster, either raw or an overcooked mush. It was completely tasteless: noodles, rice, commel, almost always. Very occasionally they gave us lentils. We were so hungry that we could hear the preparations for serving the food from an incredible distance. We practically lived waiting for the meals.

My only moment of joy was when I felt the baby move inside me for the first time. I was terrified that she was dead. I spoke to her and made up poems to her in my mind and constantly caressed my belly. After I was released it was difficult for me to remove my hands from my belly. She had fought death; it was a kind of answer and I had to resist for her and with her.



And there were some who didn't think I should be released.

On the morning of the day they released me they took pictures and put me alone in a cell. At night they put me in a car with the Colonel and three or four others. One of the police held my head down in his lap. After a short trip they left me a block from my parent's house. One of the most joyfull moments of my life was the reunion with my family.

My daughter and I were released but at this moment there are thousands of disappeared persons in Argentina. This testimony can give only an approximate idea of how thousands of disappeared survive in that sub-world. But my case is one of the few in which the story can be told. I was only disappeared for four months. What about the people like my mother of whom nothing has been heard for one or two or three years?

My Mother's Kidnapping and the Persecution of My Family

Once I was released I had to locate my family. It took more than 24 hours to find them all. The last person I saw was my mother. She had gone out and would return at night. We were all celebrating and were afraid that she would have a heart attack from the shock of seeing me. When we heard her approach, I went into another room and they told her to sit down and then told her I was there. The joy of that moment is indescribable.

I later decided to leave the country to meet my husband who was in Brazil. Jorge couldn't believe that I was out and the baby was alright. Once I was in Brazil I requested refuge with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and I traveled to Sweden as an urgent case. We arrived there in November, 1977.

Because of my kidnapping and that of my brother-in-law, my mother began to work with the "Mothers of Plaza de Mayo", a group of relatives and mothers of disappeared who meet every Thursday in front of the Casa Rosada to protest the disappearance of their children. When my mother joined them there were only 15; now there are hundreds. It becomes more and more difficult for the Junta to silence them.

On December 8, 1977 my mother was kidnapped with a group of "Mother of Plaza de Mayo" and two French nuns. They had been gathering signatures from a newspaper ad on the disappeared. This occurred in the door of Iglesia de Santa Cruz located at Independencia and Urquiza streets in the Federal capital. It was 6 o'clock in the afternoon. A group of police who identified themselves as federal police detained the mothers saying it was a "drug control" operation."

Sometimes I lose hope in ever seeing her again but other times I think those hopes help me to endure the sorrow. I think they know exactly what they are doing when they kidnap people. It is so difficult to live in constant uncertainty.

A little while ago we received news from Argentina that she is alive. Many times I imagine her in the same situation as I was during my detention. Can she survive that kind of life at 61 years of age and as sick as she is?

I have two sisters and I am the youngest. All six of us- my parents, grandmother and my sisters- always lived together until the repression against our family forced us to separate.

My Parents, Dr. Raymundo de Jesus Careaga and Dr. Esther Ballestrino de Careaga are natives of Paraguay and have been exiles in Argentina from the Stroessner dic-