

Who killed Kristen?



Kristen Deyell

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Guadalajara is Mexico's Silicon Valley. Where there's big money to be made -- thanks to high-tech giants that have put down roots here and the pricey technical colleges that feed them.

Like the one Kristen Deyell of Calgary signed up at last year. For Kristen -- much more than a three-month student exchange -- it was a chance to immerse herself in a language and a culture she loved.

Deyell was staying with Marcela Castillo Estrada, a child psychologist who had decided to take in exchange students. Estrada was a little hesitant at first because Deyell was her first foreign exchange student. How would Kristen and Mexico mix?

"She was so beautiful," recalls Estrada, "I thought I maybe will have problem with all the men in my house, but when the days passed I learned to love her because she was very mature in some things and she knew what was important in life."

And the letters to her mother Cher Ewing in Calgary confirmed it. Deyell was having the time of her life.

"She really didn't want to come home, she wanted to stay," remembers Ewing.

And on April 20, 2004, Ewing arrived in Guadalajara to visit her daughter. They spent the first two days catching up and touring around the city. As it turned out, these days would be the last two that Deyell and her mother would spend together.

That evening, Deyell informed her mother and Estrada that she was going out to a birthday party at a local student hang out called the Bali Bar. It was a popular nightclub with patrons that included local Mexicans and international students.

Later that night, Ewing received the phone call that every parent dreads.

"The telephone rang and this was not usual," Estrada says with a sigh. "I could hear a voice saying 'Come to the hospital.'"



A recreation of the shooting



Dave Deyell, Kristen's father

"And I repeat, 'But please tell me how is Kristen?' Then he told me: 'Kristen is okay, but please come on'."

The two women rushed to the hospital and spent the next two hours being told nothing. It was excruciating for both women but especially for Kristen's mother, Ewing. She finally demanded to know whether her daughter was dead or alive.

"We were led through the swinging doors and the doctor there told me she had been shot and the bullet had entered the back of her neck and gone through her spinal cord and she was dead."

For Ewing, the next two days were a blur of overwhelming grief. The hardest call was to her former husband, Kristen's Dad, Dave Deyell.

"Cher just called me and just said that Kristen's been killed. And it just, you know it's total disbelief and total shock," recalls Dave Deyell.

"And I'm not sure how else to describe it. It's like half my heart's been ripped out and won't be replaced. I thought perhaps that I was dreaming that maybe this nightmare would end. And it hasn't."

One other thing that seems to have no end is the quest for answers about the murder of his only daughter; answers that have been frustratingly hard to come by.

Dave Deyell was in constant touch with the police in Guadalajara.

"They weren't telling us much of anything. In fact, the homicide detective told me up front, and his English was quite good, he referred to it as 'an accident'."

To add to Dave Deyell's frustration, the police stopped answering his phone calls and emails altogether.

So exactly what did happen that night?

Here's what W-FIVE, based on eyewitness accounts, has managed to piece together. It started as these tragedies often do. A fight in the early morning hours. Words fly, then fists, then tables and broken glass. Two of the young men involved in the brawl were thrown out, but didn't go far. In a red BMW parked just outside, they waited.

But little did Kristen Deyell know that the man they were waiting for was the same person who'd just offered her a ride home in his truck.

As the truck pulled out of the parking lot, with Deyell in the passenger seat, shots rang out – as many as 20 shots – fired from the red BMW. One of those shots hit Kristen Deyell.

It was late but the parking lot and the street were well-lit. And there were people around -- bouncers, patrons, a cabbie, and a hot dog vender -- many of them close enough to see what happened.

According to Bali Bar owner Julian Gonzales Rodriguez, who was there that night, it was a full hour before the police showed up and by then. Most of the witnesses had gone. Or weren't talking.

"In Mexico it's very difficult, the security. (There are) many guys, many boys with guns." Rodriguez told W-FIVE. And those boys with guns are frightening enough to keep witnesses from talking to the police.

It's not an unusual story in Mexico, where few people have faith in the police. People like Estrada, who has never had any run-in with the police but still has little faith.

"A lot of things are wrong. I don't know if they aren't smart people. I don't know if they are corrupt people. I don't know if they are – if they are lazy people. I don't believe in the police."

But through the unspeakable pain, Dave Deyell continued to look for clues in the murder of his only daughter. He came to this conclusion: "It looked to me that the authorities in Guadalajara botched it, the investigation. They weren't following up on leads. We had some of Kristen's friends in Guadalajara who were not even interviewed for two weeks after the event."

And as hard as it was getting answers from Mexican authorities – it was just as tough getting information from the Canadian government.

But Ewing kept on pressing: "Essentially they indicated to us that there really is not much that we can do with the exception of making ... a few calls and being in touch with various ministers. And that would basically be it and on they would go with the rest of their business."

Dave Deyell agrees. "I don't see that there's any big initiative by the Mexican government to solve the case. And there is really no initiative by the Canadian federal government to encourage the Mexican government to solve the case.

"I think," he said, "they would like to see this buried and move on."

But for these grieving parents there was no moving on until they found out what had happened to their daughter.

And for nine months the investigation got nowhere. And then, in a completely unrelated incident, there was a big break. It happened on a dusty back road outside Guadalajara, when police gave chase to a suspicious SUV.

After a high-speed chase the vehicle overturned and the five people in it were arrested, along with three others a short time later. They were held on suspicion of kidnapping and attempted murder.

When their mugshots are broadcast on the Mexican evening news, at least two are immediately recognized as being at the Bali Bar the night Kristen was killed. But it wasn't until a couple of days later the police realized, much to their shock, just who it was they had in custody.

The police had the son and the nephew of two of Mexico's most notorious drug lords -- Ivan Guzman and a sidekick known as El Anima.

Guzman is the son of the man known as El Chapo – one of the richest and most dangerous drug kingpins in Mexico. The U.S. government has a \$5-million dollar bounty on his head.

El Anima is believed to be the nephew of El Chapo's right hand man. The key suspects in Kristen's murder were from families who are feared for their ruthlessness – the kidnappings, the brutal murders. Men with a history of making witnesses disappear.

Kristen's parents now figure the local cops had a pretty good idea from the start who they were dealing with. All of a sudden the silence and the inaction made sense.

"I could understand why I was getting the brush off and why there was a lack of what I considered a concerted effort to solve the case that's not that complicated," says Dave Deyell.]

It was Ivan Guzman, say witnesses, who was driving the red BMW that night. And El Anima who was doing the shooting. The motive? Payback for a fistfight earlier that evening inside the bar.

And yet, in spite of the witnesses who did come forward a federal judge refused to hear the case against El Anima who was released and has since disappeared. Many close to the case believe that the judge was either bribed or threatened into letting him go. Observers of the Mexican judicial scene say it is hardly unusual.

But Dave Deyell and Cher Ewing have refused to give up and are keeping the pressure up on both the Canadian and Mexican governments. A few months ago they visited the scene of the crime in Guadalajara, with W-FIVE's cameras in tow.

They also hoped that a visit to the Canadian Consulate in Guadalajara might produce more information. But when they arrived the Consul General wouldn't see them. Instead a receptionist referred them to the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City.

In Mexico, the Ambassador was apparently "busy." Dave Deyell and Cher Ewing were referred to officials who knew little about the case of their daughter's murder.

Leaving the embassy compound, with such frustration that Ewing couldn't hold back the tears, she pleaded for help.

"Basically we're left out in the cold, we have no information from Ottawa and something has got to change because it's not right."

W-FIVE approached Foreign Affairs Minister, Pierre Pettigrew for an interview but we were turned down. Still we managed to catch up with him at one of his Parliament Hill interview scrums.

"I have been in touch with my Mexican counterparts," responded Pettigrew to W-FIVE reporter Alan Fryer. "We are looking for an early closure for this."

The Kristen Deyell murder case is now in the hands of the federal police in Mexico City. Initially, they agreed to an interview with W-FIVE but changed their minds at the last moment. They did meet with Cher Ewing and Dave Deyell during their visit to Mexico but shed little light on the case.

And so two grieving parents wait; wait for something that they feel they owe their beloved daughter. Something called justice.