

# The Lovettsville community

## Children recovered from South America Now home in Lovettsville

by John P. Flannery

Lovettsville's Tony Quintana has been living a waking nightmare ever since his wife took his two daughters, Victoria (born 2006) and Virginia (born 2008), to Argentina, and refused to return them to the United States, despite a U.S. court order awarding Tony custody.

The young girls were taken from Loudoun county in January 2010, seven and a half years ago. During those many years Tony often feared that he might never see his daughters again.

But he did not give up—and last Tuesday Tony watched Victoria

and Virginia pass through customs at Dulles and was able to sweep them up in his arms at last.

It was a stunning moment, laden with unimaginable emotion—a moment many thought improbable until it finally happened and Tony's girls were with him at long last.

The girls can now occupy the special room that he'd prepared for them years ago in his Lovettsville house.

This Dickensian tragedy of a father separated from his children by so many miles occurs more often than you might imagine.

David Goldman fought to

retrieve his son from Brazil when his ex-wife's family tried to keep Sean there. The highest court in Brazil finally awarded custody to David, but father and son were kept apart for five years after Sean's mother took Sean to Brazil for a "two week vacation." David considered the case an abduction.

Tony saw his case the same way.

Tony Quintana is an open-faced, friendly, seemingly happy engineer, glad to meet and talk with anyone. But despite the positive energy he radiates, he found it hard to get authorities to do anything to help him—not County nor State nor Federal, not even with lawyers and politicians pushing for assistance.

Dennis Burns lived a nightmare like Tony's. Dennis' wife, Alianelli, asked a Colorado court to let her take the children, two daughters, ages 3 and 1, to Argentina in a divorce action. The court said no. So she abducted them and went to Buenos Aires.

Once in Argentina, she claimed all sorts of abuse by Dennis to justify her contempt of the American court order. Local Argentinian counsel have form pleadings that almost identically charge abuse by American fathers in such cases. Time passed. Years afterwards, an Argentinian trial judge found no abuse, and said Dennis should get his children. But even that court order faced challenges, delays, and appeals to the Supreme Court of Argentina.

The State Department says that there are about 1,200 cases like this each year, not necessarily involving Argentina. The United Kingdom conducted a study of abductions and found 70 percent of them are by the mothers.

It's ironic, however, that Argentina should be "disappearing" American children, when Argentinian mothers once formed the Asociacion Madres de Plaza de Mayo to protest how Argentinian children "disappeared" under the military dictatorship from 1976 through 1983.

In 1980, the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Parental Child Abduction

Last Sunday, Tony took his daughters to Walmart to get them bicycles. The girls posed for a family pictured there with their grandmother, Estrella; their Aunt Star, and their father, Tony

became International Law, with the objective of controlling the abducting parent, and both the United States and Argentina signed the Hague Convention.

Tony didn't know all of this, when he started his fight for Victoria and Virginia.

Tony hadn't even known he had a problem. Unlike Dennis, there'd been no hint of a divorce.

"Victoria, my wife," Tony said, "had some problems with childbirth, and she seemed to suffer some depression afterwards, but I imagined she would recover, and she appeared to. When I traveled for work, I'd take her and both daughters with us, and it seemed we were having a good time."

"We would alternate our Christmas vacations for the girls between Argentina, where my wife was born, and Puerto Rico where I was born, so the grandmothers could visit with the children. We tried to work this out so I could fully participate."

But this went terribly wrong after the Christmas visit in 2009. "She asked to stay on after I had to come back for work, then kept delaying coming home, claiming she'd lost her passport. When I arranged to come down to help them come back, she cooperated in these arrangements—but she told me on the day I was to fly to Buenos Aires that she'd filed an action in Argentina to arrest me. I had no idea she was thinking anything like this. Victoria's mother worked in the court system. She seemed to have some influence in the court, and with my wife."

"Counsel told me not to go, that I might get arrested," said Tony, "so we went to Court in Loudoun and the Circuit Court issued an order, awarding me custody, and requiring Victoria to return my daughters from Argentina. When she failed to do so, the Loudoun Circuit Court issued an order for her arrest that we caused to be served in Argentina."

"I had an array of counsel, here in the States and in Argentina," said Tony. "Only a trial lawyer can imagine what this cost." Later he said, "It cost seven figures for family, international and criminal defense counsel."

"I went to the Commonwealth Attorney, to Jim Plowman, and requested he prosecute Victoria for the abduction, but he would do nothing. He said it was a civil matter. It was an abduction. It was a crime. But Mr. Plowman would do nothing."

"I had to convince local counsel in Argentina," said Tony, "that I really had not abused my daughters. He reviewed the charges and found them to be frivolous."

"I met with others who had children abducted," said Tony. "Their cases all followed the same pattern."

The Supreme Court of Argentina finally ruled, brushing aside all obstacles. It said the marriage residence and domicile was in Virginia, that the United States had jurisdiction, the Circuit Court decision was valid, and the children must be returned to Tony.

"Now that my girls are here, I have no medical records since we were together," said Tony, "and I need them so my girls can attend Lovettsville Elementary School. But we're sorting that out."

Last Sunday, Tony took his daughters to Walmart to get them bicycles. "They've been after me to get them bikes. So that's what we're doing. My mom, Estrella, is here from San Juan, and my sister, Star, from the Carolinas. I have five sisters—Maria, Julia, Lydia, and Isabel are all coming too."

"There may be more problems, but I'm with my girls and can deal with anything that comes now. I'm a happy man."

Still he may have one further obligation. "I may testify about this problem, like David and Sean Goldman did. There are a lot of people like me."



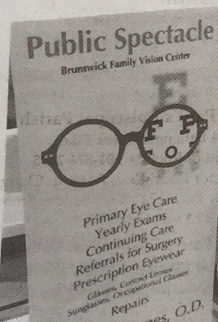
Victoria and Virginia before they were taken to Argentina in 2010.



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