



Reporters or Cops? CONTACTO and the search for Paul Schaefer Epilogue

On February 14, 2005, in consultation with lawyer Hernán Fernandez, the CONTACTO team decided to approach Interpol Argentina with the evidence they had collected. They knew there was a chance they would be shut out of any subsequent investigation, but they believed the international police agency was their most reliable option. Interpol handled all international complaints and capture orders in the region, and would know best how to manage the detention of a foreigner. To the CONTACTO reporters' relief, Interpol agreed to work with them and to let them document the case as it unfolded.¹

Two months earlier, Interpol had begun its own search for Paul Schaefer with information provided by Chilean police. Their research had led them to Calandrino's motorcycle shop, but not to the Germans' exact location. CONTACTO's photos and video footage of La Solita were exactly what they needed to further their investigation.

With evidence provided by CONTACTO, a Chivilcoy magistrate was able to issue a search and arrest warrant for Paul Schaefer at La Solita. But by that time neighbors said that several La Solita residents had departed, throwing Schaefer's own presence there into doubt. If police forced their way into La Solita when Schaefer wasn't there, they worried he would escape again. Interpol decided to wait until they were certain to apprehend Schaefer himself.

Both Interpol and CONTACTO continued their investigations. Pursuing a rumor that had spread among ex-colonists in Chile, Fuentes found the grave and death records of Maria Strebbe, one of the colonists who had fled with Paul Schaefer. She had died in a German hospital in Buenos Aires in 2002. Perhaps Schaefer himself had been treated there. Hospital employees did not recognize photos of Schaefer or his companions, but a pharmacist in the neighborhood identified him immediately. Recalling that since Schaefer was wheelchair bound, his bodyguards must have parked a car or van in the area when they made their visits to the pharmacy, Fuentes approached nearby parking lot attendants. One remembered Schaefer distinctly, explaining that he always

¹ All information in this epilogue is from interviews with the participants conducted by Julia Ioffe, casewriter, in May 2009, or from the CONTACTO documentary, "Se Busca Paul Schaefer."

came with four people who would reconnoiter the area before helping the old man out of a red Mercedes van.

Meanwhile, Interpol agents were able to intercept phone calls to and from La Solita, but still could not determine Schaefer's precise location. In March 2005, Interpol agents followed Peter Schmidt as he traveled by bus from Chivilcoy to Luján, a city outside Buenos Aires; from there he drove a red Mercedes van to a house in a middle-class industrial suburb of Buenos Aires called Tortuguitas.

CONTACTO later found out that in May and June 2004, Paul Schaefer had undergone two heart bypass surgeries at a private clinic in Buenos Aires. His caretakers had established this second hideout so Schaefer could be closer to medical care. It was there he had spent the many months he had been away from La Solita.

On the night of March 9, 2005 Interpol began its final stakeout of Paul Schaefer's last hideout, and CONTACTO was there to film it. At 3:25 p.m. the following day, 30 Argentine police, under the command of Interpol Deputy Commissioner Salvado Bellusci, stormed the house. Inside they found three of Schaefer's bodyguards, including Peter Schmidt, and Paul Schaefer himself, who was lying motionless on a bed. Either drugged or demented, he seemed not to understand the proceedings. None of them resisted.

The CONTACTO team was not allowed inside the house, but three hours later they filmed officers emerging with the fugitives in handcuffs: Rebeca, Schaefer's adopted daughter, a very small, frightened-looking woman in braids; Peter Schmidt, tall, with a jacket over his head; and finally, Paul Schaefer, an old man in a wheelchair shaking his head in apparent disbelief or confusion. When Fuentes, off camera, asked him if he could talk, he responded with a stiff smile.

Paul Schaefer was deported to Chile on March 13, 2005. A year later, a court in Parral sentenced him to 20 years in prison for sexually abusing 25 children, and ordered him to pay \$1.5 million in compensation.² In 2010, he was 89 years old and serving his sentence in Chile. Schaefer's five bodyguards all served short sentences for covering up the abuse. Peter Schmidt was the last to be released, on October 17, 2008, after serving two years of a three-year sentence.³

In mid-2005, the CONTACTO team produced a three hour special entitled "The Search for Paul Schaefer." The documentary, which covered their year-long investigation of Schaefer, began and ended with footage of the man's arrest. It was nominated for a number of awards, including a 2005 International Emmy.

² "Chilean colony sex abuser jailed," *BBC*, May 24, 2006, sec. Americas, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/5014608.stm>.

³ "Ex escolta de Paul Schaefer salió de la cárcel de Parral," *Orbe/El Mercurio Online*, October 18, 2008, <http://www.emol.com/noticias/nacional/detalle/detallenoticias.asp?idnoticia=326661&pagrel=3>.

To watch the full 2005 documentary (in its original Spanish), you will need Real Player. Please go to:

<http://contacto.canal13.cl/contacto2/html/Archivo/index.html>

Each part can be found respectively at:

Part 1:

http://contacto.canal13.cl/contacto2/html/Reportajes/01_schafer_detenido/index.html

Part 2:

http://contacto.canal13.cl/contacto2/html/Reportajes/02_schafer_detenido/index.html