

INS greets New Zealand woman with handcuffs and humiliation; HARSH TREATMENT WAS BY THE BOOK, OFFICIAL SAYS

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Body

Every summer for the past 25 years, **New Zealand** native Maggie Anderson and her American husband have visited their family **in** Portola Valley.

But never before had her visit begun **in handcuffs** and **humiliation**.

Upon landing at Los Angeles International Airport at 11 a.m. on July 24, Anderson -- a former flight attendant who had flown **in** and out of U.S. airports hundreds of times -- was questioned and arrested by federal immigration agents.

She was separated from her husband and escorted to a room where a female agent wearing rubber gloves searched underneath her bra and underwear. Nothing was found.

Anderson, 51, was held for 12 hours at the airport before she was taken away **in handcuffs** to a detention center where she remained for an additional 21 hours until the next flight back to **New Zealand**.

The charge? **In** 1998 -- three U.S. visits ago -- she overstayed her visa by eight days.

"It was, to me, emotional rape," Anderson **said**, sometimes through tears while recalling the events from two weeks past.

Immigration and Naturalization Service **officials say** what happened to Anderson happens dozens of times every day at major international airports. No travel violation, **INS officials say**, is too minor after Sept. 11.

"We have been the subject of very **harsh** criticism since 9-11," **said** Virginia Kice, spokeswoman for the **INS** Western region. "All our employees understand we cannot afford to make any mistakes now, and everybody is very, very vigilant. The stakes **in** this climate are very high."

For the first half of this year, the **INS** has denied 7,422 individuals admission into the country by air. That compares with 9,130 people denied entry over the same period **in** 2000. But as a percentage of all travelers who are entering, or returning to, the U.S. from another country, the percentage of denied admissions has remained at .02 percent.

"Post 9-11, we are being exceedingly careful about dotting all the i's and crossing all the t's," Kice **said**, "because we recognize the potential tragedy if we make mistakes."

The Andersons, however, **say** that the crackdown on terrorism is leaving scars on the safe, friendly face America proudly shows its foreign guests.

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"Is this the way it's going to be? Are we going to be a computer file and when a red light goes up next to your name, you're guilty and you're just hauled out of there?" asked Anderson's husband, Doug, who grew up in Portola Valley and whose father, Robert, was once the town's mayor. "You feel powerless. You don't get Mirandized. You don't get a lawyer."

The Andersons are farmers in New Zealand. She has run a 100-mile race through the Sierra Nevada. The 35 hours in INS custody, from her 11 a.m. arrival to her 10 p.m. flight out the next day, nearly broke her.

"I'm not weak; I'm not easily intimidated; I've been around the world," Anderson said. "But I am frightened out of my wits because I understand these people have power."

One week after her return to New Zealand, Anderson obtained a visitor visa to enter the United States, this time without incident.

Though she understands the INS does not run a hotel for its detainees, her treatment by federal agents, she said, left her dignity tattered.

They measured her and weighed her. They opened her toothpaste and makeup tubes. They read the ancient Valentine's Day card from her husband that she always keeps in her purse. They escorted her through public airport grounds with her hands handcuffed behind her back. They told her to sit down, be quiet, and raise her hand if she needed to use the bathroom.

But the worst part, she said, was the body search, or what the INS calls a pat-down. Two female INS agents, wearing rubber gloves, took her inside a room.

Turn around and face the wall, she was told. Put your hands on the wall. Spread your legs. When she didn't spread far enough, one agent kicked her foot causing her to nearly fall to the floor, Anderson said.

One agent pulled Anderson's sports bra above her chest and ran her hands across Anderson's breasts. The agent pulled down Anderson's pants and put one hand inside her underwear, front and back.

"She doesn't have anything," Anderson recalled the inspecting agent telling the other agent.

The Mercury News checked Anderson's account of her detention with the INS. Except for the foot-kick, everything was by the book, the INS said.

All individuals in INS custody who need to be transported to another place are patted down, Kice said.

"We want to ensure they're not carrying any substance on their person," Kice said, "whether it be weapons or chemicals."

Around noon, a little past her 24-hour mark in INS custody, a guard slipped Anderson a piece of paper. She would leave that night on the 10:15 flight back to New Zealand.

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