

Two grandmothers end their long search

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The headquarters of the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo once again became a place of joy and celebration yesterday as the iconic human rights group announced that yet another child who was snatched from their parents during the country's military dictatorship had been identified.

The name of the woman who is now the 117th grandchild to be identified as the descendant of disappeared parents remains a mystery, but she now knows her true origins — and that's precisely what dozens of human rights activists celebrated yesterday.

No-one seemed happier yesterday than María Assof de Domínguez and Angelina Catterino, the two grandmothers of the newly identified grandchild, the person they had been seeking for years. As Grandmothers leader Estela Barnes de Carlotto spoke, the two held up photographs of their disappeared children, who conceived a baby born in Mendoza in 1978, when she was quickly snatched from her mother's arms while she was illegally imprisoned.

"We have waited for this day for years," said Catterino, who was too emotional to say much else before a throng of media that had gathered to celebrate the news.

Assof, for her part, remembered how the two often took to the streets to look for their granddaughter, whom, as of last night, they had yet to meet.

"We were just housewives," Assof said as tears streamed down her cheeks. "I was forced to come to Buenos Aires for the first time in my life to look for my son."

The decades-long search of these two grandmothers ended on Thursday, when the National Genetic Database (BNDG) reported that the daughter of Walter Hernán Domínguez and Gladys Cristina Castro had been identified. And this identification happened not because she had approached the institution with doubts about her identity, as is usually the case, but thanks to the efforts of the National Commission for the Right to Identity (Conadi), which is under the supervision of Human Rights Secretary Martín Fresneda.

The long road to identity began in 1994, when the Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights (MEDH) received a report indicating that a baby had mysteriously appeared in the home of a couple in Mendoza at the height of the dictatorship. The case reached the Grandmothers, who then sent the report to the Conadi.

There was a time when the Conadi only investigated once a person actually approached the institution. But starting last year, the government agency began investigating these types of reports as well. The Conadi contacted the woman in February and she agreed to provide a DNA sample in order to determine whether she was the daughter of forcibly disappeared parents. The test was conducted on July 16.

“We had given up hope,” Assof said yesterday.

In conversation with the Herald, Fresneda confirmed that the granddaughter, No. 117, had been raised by civilians with close ties to repressors, though he declined to give more details.

That follows the pattern of the three most recent grandchildren to recover their identity — Ignacio Montoya Carlotto, Ana Libertad Baratti de la Cuadra and Jorge Castro Rubel. They had all been raised by civilians, some without any evident ties to the military.

### **The parents**

Gladys and Walter were members of the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (PCML).

“Maybe it was my son who pushed Gladys into political activism,” Assof said yesterday, as she struggled to explain how the repression unleashed in the 1970s decimated her family. “But she was convinced.”

Assof tried to push Catterino to talk — “tell the reporters something about her” — but Gladys’ mother struggled to break her silence. So Assof tried to give some insight into the mother of the woman whose life has surely been turned upside down last week after she found out the truth about her origins.

“Gladys was beautiful. She was a good daughter,” Assof said.

Walter was born on March 30, 1955 and had studied Architecture but worked as a bus-driver.

“He was a good student. He started working to buy new clothes and to go out on weekends,” Assof said. “He enjoyed that.”

Gladys was a bit older, born on November 23, 1953 and had studied design before going on to work at a bakery.

Yet by the time a military death squad abducted the couple on December 9, 1977 — a little more than a year after the two had married — they were already living in the shadows, aware their

political activism put them at risk. Gladys was six months pregnant.

“They were happy, but they were also afraid. They moved several times and they also sheltered a comrade,” Assof said.

There is no paper trail or witnesses who could help figure out exactly where the couple was taken after their abduction, or where their daughter was born, presumably in March, 1978.

### **The search**

Barnes de Carlotto showed up before a mass of reporters on the first floor of the Grandmothers headquarters, punctually at 1 p.m. yesterday to announce the news. Her happiness was evident as a smile appeared to be plastered on her face.

“The right to identity has been recovered once again thanks to the efforts of the state and of a society that does not want to ever live in an era of state terrorism again,” Barnes de Carlotto noted. “The only pending issue is the embrace between the grandmothers and their granddaughter.”

For Assof, that embrace apparently could not come soon enough.

“We don’t know what her name is yet,” Assof said. “But we want to tell her that she has several cousins and uncles. We want her to feel happy. That’s our only wish.”

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