

## ***OK, HERE'S THE PLAN....***

It's February 9, 1944. Corporal Jose Galvez, B company, U.S. 34<sup>th</sup> Division, 5<sup>th</sup> Army, aims his rifle and fires. Again and again, on Hill 593 at Monte Cassino, Italy, during his squad's retreat from the Germans' hellacious counter attack against the Allies' push to take Cassino. Corporal Galvez, serving as a sniper covering his lightly-armed recon group, watched in shock as an entire German brigade unexpectedly overran the lead part of Company B in order to retain Hill 593.

Galvez didn't know he was entering a fateful battle—one that was to end with the enemy driving the Allies off the Hill and delaying the Allied advance in Italy by three months. He did know his buddies were getting killed, so he continually exposed his position by firing at will into the German brigade. Despite the incoming fire directed at him, he killed many enemy soldiers and drove the rest to cover, enabling a chunk of B Company to retreat in a fighting withdrawal. In all the confusion of battle, no one in his Company was aware that nearly all the effective fire was coming from Galvez, riskily “advertising” and holding his position as they got to safer ground. Therefore, no medal.

Meanwhile on the same day, Hector Trespalacios stood in his East Los Angeles victory garden shaking his head in dismay. His father dead, his mother feeble, Hector at nine-years-old was responsible for getting a “crop”. But the rabbits were giving him a run for his money. That morning, he found the radish sprouts cropped to the ground and three new burrow holes under his makeshift fence.

He knew it was early in the year to start a garden, but he had to do something. Too young to enlist or even hold a job, he nevertheless wanted to contribute to the war effort which his older brother had died for six months earlier.

Hector spent the rest of that day tearing his fence down and single-handedly rebuilding it. He scrounged up more scrap chicken wire, spliced it together, and dug the trenches deeper. While he was at it, he expanded the fenced area by 70 additional square feet. By evening, he had turned down several offers to play baseball with neighborhood kids, but he had a start on a garden that would rival any other family's from Hollywood to Whittier.

By the time the war was over, he was a local celebrity for his “Jardin City Terrace for Victory,” which had out-produced gardens twice as big that were tended by adults. What's all this got to do with police work? You'll see.

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Hector never lost his love or knack for growing things. After high school, he stayed in the produce business, taking care of his mother, starting his own family and staying in East Los Angeles. Meanwhile, Jose survived the war and returned to Southern California. Like Hector, he fell in love, married, had kids, celebrated their successes and suffered through their failures, got them through school, loved them, etc.

Then, in a flash, Jose and Hector each looked around and realized that 60 years had raced by. They were old men, in a society that doesn't particularly revere its elderly, sometimes doesn't respect them and, all too often, *preys on them*.

Although they would never meet, they happened to live within a few miles of each other; Jose, 86 in Monterey Park, and Hector, 70, still in East Los Angeles. It was in April 2005, that Hector answered a knock at his door and was confronted by two men and a boy. One man said that he was dying to look at the car Hector had parked out back at the end of his driveway. In fact, he offered to buy it. Hector told him, "Sorry, not for sale," but the man continued to bug Hector so insistently, and acted so interested, that Hector finally relented and took the three of them to the back yard.

That was where the crooks rolled out the plan. Hector was showing the men the engine when the kid asked to use the bathroom. Hector somewhat reluctantly agreed. The conversation about the car continued until Hector felt the kid had been gone long enough. While the men looked at the car, Hector returned to his house. Of course, they followed him in.

Hector was relieved to see his wallet still on the couch where he had left it when his "visitors" arrived. One man went down the hallway to "check on the kid." The other guy was talking to Hector in the living room when Hector heard the sound of drawers opening and closing in the bedroom. As he walked toward the bedroom, he heard the guy in the living room leave through the front door; then the other guy and the kid walked right past him in the hallway without a word and went outside. Hector got their plate number as they drove away and, embarrassed and scared, checked his wallet. Sure enough, all \$565 was missing. When his daughter got home, she discovered that 13 pieces of jewelry and 4 watches had been taken from the bedroom dresser. Hector was heartsick.

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It had been six months since Jose Galvez had been tricked by the big guy and the two women who came to his door. It made him really mad--he had begun to figure out what was going on, but at 86 he wasn't quick enough on his feet to stop the scam once it was underway. He and his wife were now out several hundred dollars-worth of jewelry thanks to these low-life con artists-- a guy and two women who practically invaded their house by insisting on looking at some trees in their back yard. Meanwhile, one of the women asked to use the restroom. After awhile, all three left. The next day, Jose discovered his security box was opened and missing several items of jewelry. He didn't figure he would live long enough to ever see his wife's jewelry again.

Therefore, he was really shocked when Detective Nicole Davis from East Los Angeles Sheriff's Station called him to ask about the 6-month-old crime. He didn't even *live* in East Los Angeles, but she seemed to want to help him anyway.

And boy, did she. Nicole had seen plenty of crooks and crimes while working ELA, but this was among the lowest pieces of conniving in the lot. She wanted these guys.

She had gotten the first report on Hector's theft a few days before calling Jose. Hector was mighty glad she was on the case too. After all, hadn't she been able to show him a photo of the main crook less than a month after the rip off? He started to believe the police might catch him!

In turn, Nicole appreciated Hector as a victim. After all, hadn't he gotten her a plate number? The plate was a big help, but it didn't make the investigation exactly easy. There were a lot of steps ahead.

The plate was on a rented car. The car rental company gave Nicole the name of the renter all right, and an address - or at least the address on *that* one of his several CDL's!

It was an Enterprise rental. At the rental office, Nicole found out that this particular car had been returned an hour and a half after the thieves had visited Hector.

"This renter has a long-term contract with us," the rental agent told Nicole, but he only drives each car about a week. Then he comes in and says, 'Give me another car - I don't like this one.'" "Is that so? Say, why don't you call me next time he comes in for a different car."

Nicole got the renter's name, address, and CDL number and tried to pull up a DMV

photo. Brick wall – “File access restricted.”

The plot was thickening. When Nicole talked to the Sacramento DMV, they said that the restriction was a result of their *own* investigation of the suspect for driver’s license fraud. Turns out that part of this guy’s M.O. was to snooker the State out of multiple CDL’s and State I.D. cards.

*This guy gets scuzzier by the minute.*

Now the “case pace” was picking up and suddenly Nicole was juggling a lot of stuff: Identity fraud, undoubtedly multiple unknown victims (maybe one for each rental car the suspect “got tired of”), and Enterprise wants to go out and repo their car from the scuzball now!

Nicole went through a detective’s mental check list:

- ✓ 1. “Make” him
- 2. Find him
- 3. Hook him
- 4. Prove it

*Ok. Too early to tip my hand by letting Enterprise go looking for the guy to repo the rental. She asked them to hold off, and they agreed.*

Next, to Hector. He picked the suspect out of a photo line-up in a split second.

Nicole covered the straightforward, but unlikely approach. She called the multiple phone numbers at the suspect’s various “addresses” but got disconnected lines or no answers.

Then, to the “Match Game” with neighboring agencies. “Had any scams with this M.O.?”

Of course, Monterey Park had. The victim was Jose Galvez. That’s how Nicole came to call Jose.

By now, Detective Sergeant Keith Wall was both intrigued by what his new detective was discovering and impressed by how she was doing it. Keith went with Nicole on the trip to Jose’s house. Jose, like Hector, despite his age, had no trouble picking the suspect out of the photos that Nicole showed him.

Nicole got and executed a search warrant for a likely crash pad in Whittier County area. Sergeant Wall mustered a good part of ELA DB to join in. There they detained a guy

who looked just like Nicole's likely suspect. But it wasn't him! "The guy you want is my brother, I tell ya! He lives in Downey at 2235 Woodruff," explained the helpful homeowner. "I'm tired of his shenanigans, and I ain't taking the fall for this one."

While Nicole finished the warrant service, a fleet of ELA detectives went to the Downey address, including Detectives Miguel Macedo, Brian Villa, Anthony Camargo, Armando Morales, Jacob Sanchez, Steve Hernandez, Gabriel Rendon, and Raymon Rocha. Sure enough, there was the suspect, and he was immediately arrested. Meanwhile, at the brother's house, Nicole had recovered every piece of jewelry stolen from Hector and Jose.

Sergeant Wall wasn't merely impressed by Nicole's work because she'd cracked these cases. It was also *because she wasn't actually* a trained detective. She was an ELA patrol deputy temporarily restricted from field duty due to pregnancy. She was assisting DB in order to stay useful and "in the game."

She went on to do the suspect interview. Although he didn't confess, Nicole got him to cop out to things that only the suspect of these scams could know, which helped "nail the coffin lid." She became the District Attorney's lead investigator in a three-agency prosecution for 14 counts involving thefts from eight to nine elderly victims. The suspect pled to a "deal" requiring nine to ten years of actual prison time.

As for Nicole, well, not a bad way to spend time before the blessed event!