

LADIES IN WHITE CO-FOUNDER SURVIVED A FURTIVE CAR ACCIDENT IN 2007

Dolia Leal Francisco is one of the founders of the Ladies in White and was one of the most militant, heading the Sunday marches and carrying on active advocacy campaigns with foreign governments journalists, and NGOs. Her then husband Nelson Aguiar was released from prison for health reasons in October 2009 at the special request of the Spanish Foreign Minister during a visit to Cuba. They came to the United States as political refugees in April 2010.

Testimony of Dolia Leal, by telephone, July 22, 2012.



Dolia Leal, shortly after the accident

When her husband Nelson was at the Combinado del Este prison of Havana, Dolia had been warned by a State Security agent during a visit that she ought to be careful and tone down her activism, as she could well suffer a car accident. She had responded that she did not own a car and rarely rode in one and that if anything happened to her, it would be their fault --meaning the political police. He had responded: "Let's see how you are going to prove it."

Approximately 20 days later, on June 15, 2007, she was riding with a neighbor who was going to visit his father in his car and accompanied by his mother. They headed towards Combinado del Este, in the outskirts of Havana. She only remembers waking up at the hospital covered in blood, but the other two passengers, who escaped with minor injuries, related what happened. As they rode along, a car going in opposite direction made a U-Turn and crashed into their vehicle at high speed. Their car had been pretty much destroyed by the impact. The driver was reportedly a German citizen, a Dr. Waldemar Heinz Merck, in a rented car. The police that came to the

scene had carried on happily with the German, even having cold drinks he had in his car, where they had sat chatting with the air conditioner on.

Dolia had been in the back seat on the passenger side, which suffered the brunt of the impact. She suffered severe facial and bodily bruises, a bitten tongue, cuts to her lips, and a posterior vitreous detachment in the right eye. A subsequent infection to both eyes almost resulted in her going blind and took four months to clear.

Inquiries after the accident at the German embassy produced no results, even though the German Ambassador in Cuba knew Dolia and visited her at home, bringing her food while she was recovering. The Embassy claimed to have no information and the Ambassador told her he could not talk about the matter. Cuban authorities provided her no information. She wrote a letter to pertinent authorities requesting an investigation, which was never responded to. The driver of the car found out at where the German was staying and went to the hotel, where he was told he had checked out to return to Germany urgently.

Following is the Spanish language report filed by an independent journalist in Cuba shortly after the accident.

CubaNet.org

**Un accidente extraño
Junio 22, 2007
Juan González Febles**

El auto en que viajaban Dolia Leal y Dennis Lorenzo fue impactado violentamente por un auto rentado marca Toyota, conducido por el turista alemán Dr. Waldemar Heinz Merck.

De acuerdo a la información que nos facilitó la Sra. Leal Francisco, proveniente de la Policía Nacional Revolucionaria, Merck era sólo eso, un turista.

Refiere la Sra. Leal que los policías revolucionarios fraternizaron con el supuesto turista en un ambiente distendido. Incluso bebieron refrescos enlatados ofrecidos por el turista, dentro de la atmósfera climatizada del Toyota. El accidente se produjo cuando Merck, a alta velocidad realizó un viraje en U e impactó al vehículo en que viajaban Leal y Lorenzo. La fuerza del golpe les desplazó a la senda contraria y les hizo impactar con otros obstáculos en la vía. El Moskvich quedó literalmente destrozado. Lo que quedó del mismo fue tasado por las autoridades en 1600 pesos cuc.

La Sra. Leal viajaba en el asiento trasero y se encontraba directamente detrás del asiento correspondiente al acompañante del conductor. Por tal razón sufrió severas lesiones en el rostro y en el resto del cuerpo. Su estado clínico fue declarado de cuidado en el hospital militar Luis Díaz Soto, ubicado al este de la capital, donde fue atendida.

La Sra. Leal Francisco quedará con un desprendimiento vítreo posterior en el ojo derecho. No pueden hacerse pronósticos sobre hasta que punto quedará afectada su visión. Por otra parte, sufre un proceso infeccioso en el ojo derecho que deberá ser tratado con antibióticos de amplio espectro.

En el momento de la redacción de esta nota, la Sra. Leal presenta síntomas de descoordinación que hacen pensar en un eventual stress post traumático. Se le ve profundamente afectada y por momentos incapaz de conducir su relato con coherencia.

Una funcionaria consular de la embajada de Alemania en La Habana fue consultada para que aclarara detalles sobre las circunstancias que rodean este caso. La funcionaria exigió a este reportero no ser citada en la información, y manifestó el desconocimiento de la embajada sobre accidentes, ya fueran de tránsito o de cualquier tipo, que hayan involucrado a ciudadanos alemanes. Tanto en la capital cubana, como en el resto del territorio nacional.

En trabajos posteriores se dará seguimiento a este inusual accidente.

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<http://www.cubanet.org/CNews/y07/jun07/25a6.htm>