

Kidnap changed Jenny Gallagher forever

In 1987, Hamilton woman Jenny Gallagher was kidnapped and held at a bush campsite for two days. Wintec journalism student *Nicolina Newcombe* talks to her and the police officer who led the inquiry.

JENNY GALLAGHER remembers every detail of the day she was abducted from her Hamilton lakeside home and held to ransom for cash and diamonds.

"I was on the telephone. A man rang the doorbell and asked if I was Jenny Gallagher. I said 'yes' and he said, 'I've got something for you'. He had a parcel (wrapped) in coloured paper in his hands. He swung it around and pushed a shot gun at me. He said, 'You're being kidnapped'. I said, 'Don't be ridiculous'.

"It's not something you expect on a Monday morning."

Gallagher, who at the time was aged 45 and married to high-profile Hamilton businessman Bill Gallagher (the couple has since divorced) was abducted on February 2, 1987, by two men and held for two days at a campsite in bush at Te Pahu, 20km southwest of Hamilton.

She says the ordeal was terrifying but she was determined to come out of it alive.

"If you think about being alone in the bush, it's instinctual, it's survival."

One tactic was to keep her blindfold on after her captors said she could take it off, so she would not be able to identify the men.

Another was to not let on there was a gap at the bottom of the blindfold. She used her finger to test the level of drinks so her captors would not suspect. Once she had to pretend she couldn't see a spider floating in her tea but just as she was about to take a sip, one of the men took away the cup and scooped it out.

In an interview with the Waikato Times after she was freed, Gallagher said the men made constant threats towards her and her children and she feared she would be killed. "There was a lot of knife practice on the trees."

After two days, police stormed the campsite and arrested her captors. Dean Ronald Cree, 24 and Fred Orrell, 54, were charged with kidnapping and being armed while committing a crime and each was sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment.

Police said no ransom was paid and they refused to say how much was demanded. Jenny Gallagher says it was a million dollars in cash and diamonds.

It was the third recorded kidnapping for ransom in New Zealand and the first in the Waikato. Rex Miller, who was head of Hamilton CIB at the time says he was the first to learn about the abduction and, because of the threats made by the kidnappers (they said they would kill Gallagher if the media was notified), he elected to tell only one other officer. The two officers



JENNY GALLAGHER: She says she is "getting on with life" but still suffers from the effects of her kidnap ordeal, including memory loss.



FLASHBACK: Jenny Gallagher's kidnapping, the first ever in the Waikato, dominated the news in 1987.

While Gallagher's kidnapping dominated the news in

assembled a squad and told them it was a drug raid. The media blackout remained for three days while negotiations continued.

Miller says the kidnappers were eventually traced after they made calls from a telephone box. Police followed them back to their campsite and then launched a full-scale rescue with helicopters and ground support. Forty police were involved.

Jenny Gallagher emerged safe, but exhausted, in deep shock and covered with insect bites.

Today she says she is "getting on with life" but still suffers from the effects of her ordeal, including memory loss. "I had to learn a lot of things again. I reinvented myself. It changed me for ever; it changed my family and friends."

She now does voluntary work and helps other crime and accident victims.

1987 it was not the only serious crime in the Hamilton police district that year. Police records show there were 528 reports of violent crime including nine murders, four attempted murders and four manslaughters that year.

In 1987 the Hamilton district had 300 police, half the number today. Rex Miller, who is no longer in the police, says that while the number of staff has gone up, so has crime. "It's like the cat chasing its tail, crime has probably doubled too."

Miller believes Hamilton was "probably" a safer place in the 1980s.

"The whole climate has changed. Twenty years ago a pub brawl involved a couple of guys having a punch-up; these days, people are bringing weapons."