

Police stop alleged parental abduction

Mom accused of trying to take son, 7, to Australia

IAN HITCHEN – Winnipeg Free Press, December 17, 2011

BRANDON -- A western Manitoba woman was arrested in Los Angeles late Thursday night after she allegedly abducted her seven-year-old son and attempted to take him overseas.

Brandon Crown attorney Garry Rainnie said quick work by the RCMP allowed authorities to intercept the woman before she flew to Australia with her son.

"They did an awful lot of good work in a very short period of time," said Rainnie, one of the Crown attorneys who gave advice to police as they worked on the case.

"I think they acted very quickly once the complaint was made."

Blue Hills RCMP were notified Wednesday evening that a woman had possibly abducted her son. The boy's father had called police, concerned that his estranged wife and son had left the area with many of their personal items and passports.

RCMP began an investigation that also involved several United States law-enforcement agencies, the federal Department of Justice, Manitoba Justice and the Canadian Border Services Agency.

On Thursday at 10 p.m., the 47-year-old woman was arrested at the Los Angeles International Airport by American officials and remains in custody. She will now face charges under the Criminal Code for parental child abduction, and arrangements are being made to have her extradited back to Canada, police said.

The woman is not being identified to protect the identity of the child.

Brandon lawyer Derek Cullen confirmed the father was on his way to Los Angeles on Friday to pick up his son.

It's not clear how close the woman and child came to leaving the continent. However, Rainnie said the woman had purchased tickets to Australia and he understands she was set to depart early Friday morning. Had mother and son made it to Australia, the legal process of having the son returned to Canada would have been far more difficult, he noted.

Rainnie said the boy's father and mother are still married but separated. The mother lives in one part of western Manitoba, while the father lives in another.

However, no custody order is in place and the father is entitled to equal custody of the child, Rainnie said.

Rainnie expects the boy will be able to live with his dad once he returns to Canada.

It's not clear exactly how the woman and child entered the U.S.

Rainnie said it appears the mom and son drove across the border into North Dakota and then might have flown to Los Angeles.

Rainnie said he'd like to know how the mother entered the U.S. with her son.

Often, when only one parent arrives at the border with a child, proof of permission to enter the U.S. from the other parent is requested. It appears the mother didn't have the father's permission to take their child out of Canada.

None of the allegations against the mother has been proven in court.

Earlier this week in an unrelated case, another child was abducted, albeit briefly, in the city of Brandon.

A five-year-old boy was kidnapped off a street by a man in a vehicle, but was found 45 minutes later -- physically unharmed -- walking a few blocks away by officers with the Brandon Police Service.

No arrests have been made.