

When Personal Security is Compromised



Peter Silva, 2011-02-11

My Greatest Fears Realized

I debated about writing and/or blogging about this for a few days since it is very personal and didn't want a pity-party coming my way. But covering security, often from the human behavior standpoint, is what I do and what better way to share a security incident than when it happens directly to you. Plus, being able to simply get it out is cathartic to some extent. So here goes.

I attended the [London IPEXpo](#) on Oct 19-20 at Earl's Court Two. IPEXpo is one of the largest IT infrastructure shows in Europe with many focus areas: Cloud, Storage, Security, Network, Virtualization and so forth - pretty much anything that touches IT. I was invited by the F5 EMEA team to present at a number of speaking sessions F5 offered during the conference. I also brought my family along since we hadn't been to London in about 5 years and we really like the city.

A couple weeks ago while I was at work at our EMEA headquarters there was an attempted abduction/kidnapping of my 5 year old daughter at one of the underground stations in London. My wife and daughter were on their way shopping when a man grabbed her. He started with a little lure and when they got closer, he grabbed her arm and tried to yank her away from my wife. Luckily my wife was able to keep hold of her and said to another woman, *'Did you see what that guy just did to my daughter?'* She responded with, *'yes and it looks like he's doing it to another little girl!'* At that point, my wife asked for assistance from the Underground personnel. The BTP (British Transportation Police) arrived and took him into custody while taking my wife and daughter to the station for statements. My daughter asked if she could tell the officer about what happened and she told the PC, *'that man grabbed my arm.'* That was pretty much all they needed, especially after viewing the CCTV footage and they didn't want to pressure a grueling interview of a child.

I was finishing lunch with an F5 colleague when I got the call – *'we are at the police station and you need to come now.'* At first I wasn't sure if she was joking since she's used that *'I'm at the cop-shop'* routine before and I said, *'What?!?, are you kidding?'* She then briefly told me about the incident, that he was in custody and at that point, it was no joke and my personal security had been threatened. My co-worker immediately said, *'I'll take you wherever you need to go.'* This is one of the things that I love about my working family at F5, personal family is always first. That was when the flood of emotions overcame me and the gravity of the situation hit. As an aside, I don't worry about my family going anywhere since my wife is a former Federal Law Enforcement Agent and certainly knows how to handle such situations.

I often look at human behavior and the 'feeling of security' or 'peace of mind' when discussing the topic. I think that many of the fears about say, cloud security or any other topic that seems to take a few years to fully catch-on, has to do with the fact that we humans simply have a hard time with change. Add loss of control to the picture makes it even more daunting. Friends will say, *'Let it go, it's out of your control,'* and while you may understand, it doesn't always make you feel any better. That day, I did not have a feeling of security, peace of mind or any control over the situation. I knew they were safe but I did not feel safe. The mind kept telling the belly *'it's OK.'* but the gut wasn't listening. The stress increases, it's harder to think, you're sweating and it's uncomfortable.

Finally arriving at the station, the Sergeant tells me everyone is fine, the guy is arrested and we'll let your family know you are here. Some anxiety is finally released and soon, we get to hug. More stress leaves the body and thinking becomes more focused but still has plenty of questions. The BTP was great and gave us a ride in the blue and white back to our hotel. We were told on the way back that he is well known within the police department and a repeat offender. Not sure if that was good or bad news.

The following day, the BTP called and said that the guy is being charged with assault (of a minor). The CCTV caught everything. Now, I'm not a big fan of the increased surveillance everywhere but in this situation it helped tremendously. The next day it was determined that he needed a psychiatric evaluation and spent the next week in the mental facility. My wife was also asked to appear for his trial, which was scheduled for the following week. Wow, right quick as they fast tracked his trial.

My wife was at the Magistrates' Court most of the day. After a week in the mental hospital, one doc called him crazy and another said he was fit. That obviously determines which institution will be his new home. The judge had already watched the CCTV, received testimony from the responding officers, including the one who testified on my daughter's behalf and my wife's testimony only lasted about 10-15 minutes. The Magistrate just wanted to hear if her story matched what was on the video and other witness statements. His lawyer tried to make it seem like he was just being 'friendly.' She was let go after her testimony for the final determination.

Later that evening we got a call and was told he had been found Guilty of assaulting a minor. We dropped a huge sigh of relief and the flow of comfort came back again. I was starting to feel secure again, I started to feel somewhat in control again and I could think clearly once more. I believe we all go through stages when trying to make a security decision or faced with a security situation. It's called Risk Analysis, Risk Management and Emergency Preparedness. This was an extreme case, of course, but the threat came unannounced from the outside like many that occur within the corporate infrastructure. My wife was prepared and I was uncomfortable yet, we still needed to handle the situation and mitigate the risk. With your corporate infrastructure, be prepared, have a plan, mitigate risk and you will feel secure and know that you are. And if an incident does arise, you'll be ready. Find that common ground between the head and the heart. Often that's hard when various groups have different fears and things that make them uncomfortable. Acknowledge the human factor, ask questions and communicate.

I truly appreciated the F5 support and warm wishes during this ordeal. I've been with F5 since 2004 and while we recently announced that we've passed [\\$1 Billion in revenue](#), which is an amazing financial accomplishment - I have to tell you that it is the feeling of family that keeps F5 rolling.

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