

"A Spanish guy jumped out of the truck and put a gun to my head and said, 'Don't move. I'm going to kill you.'"



"I said, 'For that much money you better kill me. You're not going to get that much money. We don't have that much money.'"

FOILED KIDNAPPING

'I'm happy because I'm here'

By MARY SCHENK
mschenk@news-gazette.com

Antonio Aguas is not griping about much these days. In fact, he's just downright happy to be alive.

"I say, 'Thanks, God, for the second opportunity to be around,'" said the 43-year-old husband, father, brother, son and business owner.

Late last summer, Aguas lost six days of his life to kidnappers looking to be handed a chunk of the money that he's worked so hard to earn in the last 20 years.

During those days and nights, two men demanded millions from his brother, threatened to kill him and members of his family, beat him, bound and gagged him, mentally tormented him and joked and smoked with him.

He suggested that the congressmen who set sentencing guidelines for criminals ought to be kidnapped so they could decide for themselves if the 31- and 30-year sentences that his captors received last month for what they did to him is adequate.

Other than his irritation at what he views as not quite enough prison time for them, Aguas is not angry with his captors.

"I'm happy because I'm here. I want to be around," he said in an interview with The News-Gazette, his first time to speak publicly about his case.

'Worst mistake'

Aguas' unintentional thrusting into the limelight as a crime victim started



Restaurant owner Antonio Aguas talks for the first time publicly about his experience as a kidnap victim.

Daniel Haerem photo/The News-Gazette

about 6 p.m. Sept. 10, 2006, when he stepped outside his office for a smoke.

Aguas and his brother Ramiro, two of eight children raised on a farm in central Mexico, are the primary own-

ers of the LaBamba restaurant chain. Antonio and Ramiro, who is 14 months older, were living and working in the Chicago area in the 1980s when Ramiro was dating a woman who

attended the University of Illinois.

Noticing then the dearth of good Mexican restaurants in Champaign

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