

## Bus Operators, LAPD Help Woman Recover Life Savings

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Feb. 10) Antonieta Vera Perez's heart sank when she realized she had just left a duffel bag with her entire life savings tucked under the seat of a Metro Bus – a bus that was receding in the distance down Olympic Boulevard.

For more than two hours last Saturday morning she sat at the bus stop, checking each Line 28 bus that went by, hoping and praying that she would spot the right one. At last, fearing that she'd never recover the \$1,200 she'd worked so hard to save over many months, Vera Perez boarded another Metro Bus.

And that's when her luck changed.

Because, when she stepped aboard the Line 200 bus, there was Division 2 Operator Mercedes Malone. "She asked me if I speak Spanish," Malone recalls. "She was almost crying."

### Poured out her story

Through trembling lips, Vera Perez poured out her story in Spanish to Malone. The operator tried to calm the frightened woman and kept her nearby as she continued her route. "I told her, if the operator finds it, he'll return it."

As she drove, Malone swung into action for Vera Perez. Over the next three hours, she called Bus Operations Control on her radio and on her cell phone to ask for assistance for the woman. She phoned MTA Lost and Found, but it was closed for the weekend. Finally, she called Division 3, which operates Line 28.

Cut to earlier in the day. Division 3 Operator Nelson Martinez braked at a Line 28 bus stop on Olympic and discharged a female passenger he had picked up near Robinson. He pulled away from the curb, but shortly afterward noticed a duffel bag under the front seat.

### A large sum of money

"I asked a woman sitting there if it was her bag, but she said, 'No,'" Martinez said. He retrieved the duffel and put it beside his seat. Later, when he opened it to look for identification, he found a large sum of money.

Martinez, who joined the MTA as a part-time operator in May, 1999, and only became a full-time operator in September, turned in the bag as soon as he arrived back at Division 3.

He left to run an errand, but by the time he returned, LAPD officers



Division 2  
Operator  
Mercedes  
Malone,  
above,  
and, right,  
Division 3  
Operator  
Nelson  
Martinez



Derek Sledge and Emillson Saint-Julien had arrived to take possession of the duffel bag and the money. They were just leaving when Malone's call to the division came through.

### **A much-relieved passenger**

Over the phone and with Malone interpreting, Vera Perez identified the duffel bag and its valuable contents. The two officers then drove out to meet Malone and her much-relieved passenger at the layover zone at Montana and Logan.

"When the officers arrived, they told her to count the money," said Malone. "She did and it was all there."

**Editor's Note:** Prior to joining the MTA, Operator **Nelson Martinez** was a 15-year employee of Carl's Jr. restaurants where he had been an assistant manager. He and his wife, Erlin, have two children, Nelson, Jr., 19, a sophomore at Glendale College, and a daughter, Delni, 4. Operator **Mercedes Malone** joined the MTA in 1990 and is married to Charles Malone, also a Division 2 bus operator. The Malones have three daughters, Mercedes, 21; Star, 15; and Alexandra, 10.

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