

Maddy's Dad Robbed of 'Memories'

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TORMENT: Relatives are angry at the insult to Gerry and Kate McCann whose photos have been stolen

*By Padraic Flanagan in Praia da Luz
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THE father of Madeleine McCann revealed yesterday how a sneak thief has stolen irreplaceable photographs of his kidnapped daughter.

The pickpocket stole Gerry McCann's wallet minutes after he arrived in London to boost the search for Madeleine.

It contained two treasured pictures of the missing four-year-old, who was snatched 49 days ago as she slept at the family's holiday apartment in Praia da Luz on Portugal's Algarve.

They include one showing Madeleine aged 15-months, while another was taken in church more recently.

Relatives expressed anger at this new outrage against Gerry and Kate McCann, who have endured unimaginable torment in their long wait for news of their daughter.

Madeleine's aunt Philomena McCann, 48, a teacher, said Mr McCann was distraught at the loss of his favourite pictures, which were so precious he always kept them with him.

She said the family was hoping the "dirty animal" who stole the wallet was shamed into handing them back. "How can you do that to someone who's been through what he has?" she said yesterday.

"He's already demoralised enough and to be put on the back foot like this, you can't believe some people can stoop so low. It was some dirty animal."

The thief struck soon after Gerry, 39, arrived in the UK on Tuesday for a meeting with lawyers, after he withdrew money from a cash machine at London's Waterloo. The pickpocket snatched the black leather wallet containing £100 from his back pocket.

"We don't care about the money, but we do care about getting the pictures of Madeleine back," said Philomena McCann. "They were his favourites – really treasured pictures. They are irreplaceable."

She urged the thief to consider his conscience, adding: "They can contact any member of the family, or go through the campaign website, hand the wallet into a police station, anything."

"Gerry's desperate to get them back, he's not bothered about the money, he'd just like whoever stole them to hand them back because they're precious to him."

She added: "The whole family have been overwhelmed by the support and affection from all around the world, but it takes just one rotten article to bring you down. How can you be so selfish?"

She said the theft meant Gerry had to delay a round of meetings to assess candidates to head the Madeleine campaign while he reported the incident to police and cancelled his bank cards.

Madeleine's grandmother Susan Healey, Kate McCann's mother, described the theft as "yet another kick in the teeth".

"Hopefully when they see the photos of Madeleine in the wallet they will realise what they've done," she said. Before he landed in London, Mr McCann, a heart specialist, was involved in a mid-air drama when a passenger on his flight from Portugal to Gatwick collapsed. Mr McCann managed to stabilise the man, who is in his 80s, until the easyJet flight landed shortly before midday and he could be moved to hospital.

An easyJet spokeswoman said: "The crew were full of praise for Gerry and grateful for his expert help. We want to thank him for the support he gave." Mr McCann was modest about his role in the drama. He said: "I flew in to London for a series of meetings and had to help a passenger on the flight who collapsed."

He said he hoped attention would be turned away from him and Kate so that they could look after their two-year-old twins Sean and Amelie. "The role for Kate and I in the campaign will not be nearly so public," he said.

However, tomorrow they will go before the cameras in Praia da Luz to mark the 50th day since Madeleine disappeared. At the same time, 50 green and yellow balloons will be released in 50 countries.

Source: <http://www.gerrymccannsblogs.co.uk/Nigel/id178.htm>