

From Telegraph UK article – Madeleine McCann’s Parents Look to US Sniffer Dog Case

September 17, 2007

Kate and Gerry McCann's legal team has contacted American lawyers over a case where key sniffer dog evidence was thrown out of court in the hope that it may help them fight any charges that they were involved in the killing of their daughter.

The couple fear that Portuguese police will rely on the behaviour of cadaver dogs who allegedly detected "the smell of death" on Mrs McCann's clothes.

Detectives in the Algarve are understood to be working on the theory that Mrs McCann accidentally killed four-year-old Madeleine and her husband helped her get rid of the body. The couple have dismissed this as "ludicrous".

The "smell of death" was not only allegedly detected on Mrs McCann's clothes but in the family's holiday apartment in Praia da Luz and the Renault Scenic car hired 25 days after Madeleine disappeared, Portuguese sources claimed. A source close to the McCanns' solicitors said the smell on Mrs McCann could be explained by being in contact with corpses while working as a GP.

The couple, from Rothley, Leics, are already preparing their defence in case they are charged with their daughter's death.

Their UK lawyers consulted the legal team of Eugene Zapata, 68, who is accused of murdering his estranged wife Jeanette in 1976.

He was charged with murder last year after dogs indicated that they sniffed human remains in the basement of the former family home in Madison, Wisconsin.

But a judge ruled last month that the evidence was no more reliable than "the flip of a coin" and could not be put before a jury.

"The court papers, giving the legal submissions, are on their way to the McCann team for consideration," said the source close to the McCanns' solicitors.

"At the moment there is no formal allegation against which the McCann team can work.

"But given that we understand the central plank of what the police are alleging involves sniffer dogs, this is important and relevant, and will be raised with the police and brought to the judge's attention."

Senior Portuguese police sources admitted at the weekend that there was "nothing concrete" with which to charge the couple.

In the last 10 days they have been declared formal suspects, accused of fleeing Portugal and endured a number of slurs about their parenting but they began to fight back by launching a newspaper and poster campaign focused in Spain and Portugal to highlight Madeleine's disappearance.

The couple were also boosted by the public backing of Sir Richard Branson, the Virgin boss, who contributed £100,000 to kick start a fund to pay for their legal team.

He has taken a personal interest in the investigation and has spoken at length to Mr and Mrs McCann.

His spokesman said: "When the McCanns said under no circumstances would they touch the find-Madeleine fund and mentioned they would sell their house, he felt he had to do something."

The McCanns have appointed top lawyers in Portugal and Britain to clear "the cloud of suspicion" enveloping them.

A source close to them said: "Any so-called evidence can be explained. There are wholly innocent reasons for everything that the police may have found which gives them cause for suspicion."

In an unprecedented move, the investigating judge, Pedro Daniel dos Anjos Frias, is understood to want to speak publicly about the case.

Source: telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1563381/Madeleine-McCanns-parents-look-to-US-sniffer-dog-case.html