

Pickpocket Snatches Father's Photos of Missing Madeleine, 21 June 2007

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Madeleine McCann's family called last night for the return of precious photographs of the missing child that were stolen from her father, Gerry, by a pickpocket.

Mr McCann's wallet was snatched at a cash machine during a 24-hour trip to Britain. Madeleine's grandmother, Susan Healey, said that irreplaceable pictures of the missing four-year-old, who was abducted in Portugal 49 days ago, were in the wallet.

"There can't be many people who don't recognise Kate and Gerry now — shame on the thieves for doing it," she said. "Hopefully, when they see the photos of Madeleine in the wallet, they will recognise what they have done. In the context of losing Madeleine, a stolen wallet means nothing. But it is just another problem Gerry can do without."

One picture reportedly showed Madeleine aged 15 months, while another was taken recently at a church.

The theft came shortly after Mr McCann helped to treat a fellow passenger who had collapsed on his flight to London, where he was interviewing people for the job of co-ordinating the campaign to find his daughter.

Mr McCann, a consultant cardiologist, was on an early flight from Faro in Portugal when the crew appealed for anyone with medical training to help a man who had become ill. Mr McCann, 39, of Rothley, Leicestershire, helped to stabilise the passenger before he was taken to hospital after landing in England.

A short time later, Mr McCann's wallet was stolen after he took money from a cash machine near the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in Whitehall.

Although Mr McCann and his wife, Kate, a locum GP, have flown many times before, it is the first time that either has had to go to someone's aid in the air as a doctor.

Mr McCann recalled the episode in his blog on the Find Madeleine website: "Helped a passenger on the flight who collapsed. He was ill enough to require a full assessment on arrival and went off to hospital in an ambulance."

Mr McCann had previously spoken about not feeling ready to go back to work since his daughter was taken from Praia da Luz on the Algarve. He is on compassionate leave from Glenfield

General Hospital in Leicester until the end of the month. He has said he does not know what will happen after that.

Mr McCann also wrote on his blog about the wallet theft, on his second trip to Britain since his daughter's abduction. He wrote: "Unfortunately, shortly after arriving in London I had my wallet stolen, which meant I was running late." Mr McCann said that he managed to get to all his meetings, which involved interviewing candidates for the role of campaign manager, designed to keep Madeleine's profile high.

But he said that it was finally time for the attention to be turned away from him and his wife, to allow them to look after their two-year-old twins, Sean and Amelie. "The role for Kate and I in the campaign will not be nearly be so public," he said. "We have to balance any campaigning in the search for Madeleine with protecting Sean and Amelie."

But tomorrow they will appear before the cameras as they mark 50 days since Madeleine disappeared with the simultaneous release of 50 balloons in 50 countries. There are expected to be ten centres in Britain, while Germany, France, Australia, Canada, America and El Salvador are among other countries expected to take part.

The McCanns intend to stay in Portugal at least until the end of the summer. Portuguese detectives are investigating claims from a holidaymaker that a girl resembling Madeleine was seen three weeks ago in the back of a horse-drawn cart close to where she was abducted.

Andre van Wyk, 66, said that a woman in the cart covered the sleeping child's face with a shawl. He was so suspicious that he followed the cart to a gypsy camp near Portimão, about ten miles from where Madeleine disappeared.

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