



Madeline: Will justice occur?

Stephen Birch

Below is the English translation of an excellent article that appeared in South Africa's largest national magazine *Huisgenoot*. The original article was written in *Afrikaans*.

The article itself is about Stephen Birch, my friend who made it his quest to find Madeleine McCann's body and make sure that those responsible for the little girls death and burial are brought to justice.

Unfortunately, it would appear to not be in the best interests of any of those involved in the case including the British and Portuguese Authorities. As a consequence, Stephens evidence remains totally ignored by all those with the authority or influence to act on it – Robert Murat aside.

However, the problems that are arising in the terms under which Murat will agree to the excavation of his drive taking place suggest to me that maybe his change of mind, after stubbornly refusing to allow the dig to take place for the past year, is no more than an attempt to help the McCanns win their Libel trial.

MADELEINE: WILL JUSTICE OCCUR

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The place where a South African suspects the little girl was buried six years ago, is going to be dug up

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Six years after Madeleine McCann mysteriously disappeared while on holiday with her parents, there is a new twist in the search that gripped the world.

The backyard of one of the first suspects in the case, will eventually be dug up, to see if the British toddler was buried there in secret.

If her remains were to be found in this picturesque coastal town of Praia da Luz, in the property of Robert Murat, it will be due to a South African that left no stone unturned to find her.

Last June, Cape property developer Stephen Birch (58) went to Portugal.

In the coastal town where the three year old disappeared in 2007, he climbed over the fence of Roberts house at dawn with a radar machine, and investigated the backyard and driveway.

The scans confirmed his suspicions that something was buried in the property. Could that object be Maddies remains, and thus be the missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle pertaining to her disappearance?

It's a better detective story than anything that has been

written, says Stephen about the search for Maddie.

If his hunch is proven correct, he will be the main character in the unravelling thereof.

After his findings were sent to the Attorney General in Portugal, and the British police were informed, he was deeply disappointed that they did not immediately follow up the lead. It looked like all his work and costs amounting to in excess of one million rand were in vain.

His self initiated efforts cost him more than a year, and kept him busy 14 hours a day, and resulted in him almost going bankrupt.

Now, after more than a year of waiting and hoping, the Portuguese newspaper Correio da Manha has let Stephen know that Robert has agreed to allow the backyard to be dug up.

“The world has a need to get closure on the case”, says Stephen. “It’s about a little girl that requires a proper burial”.

In 2011 Stephen began showing interest in the case for the first time, four years after Maddie disappeared one evening from her parents, Kate, a house doctor, and Gerry, a medical specialist , holiday apartment.

They left her and their sleeping twins, Amelie and Sean (then 2) behind while they together with friends ate at a nearby restaurant.

I sat in my office one day and a friend asked me if I had heard of the Madeleine McCann case. I did not know the details and watched a YouTube video. I remembered that I thought “this is a cute little girl “says Stephen in Cape Town.

His interest was pricked when he saw a video insert from Gonsalo Amaral, the original chief investigator. Gonsalo later wrote a book about it. “The Truth of the lie”.

Maddie's parents were at this stage themselves suspects, and her father is now wanting to claim damages from Gonsalo about accusations made in the book.

In 2008, the McCann's were successful in demanding damages against the British and Portuguese media groups for deformation.

At the beginning Stephen based his detective work on the findings of Gonsalo. He established that Maddie died in the apartment as a result of an accident near the sofa/couch. He also believed that her parents fabricated the abduction to hide their neglect.

I investigated everything: the surrounding area, who stayed where, and where everyone was at what time. Says Stephen.

He came to the conclusion that Maddie was not kidnapped but died in the apartment. Thereafter she was taken on foot and buried nearby.

Roberts's backyard is one of only two places where she could be buried he says. He does not want to reveal the other option.

His house is just 130 meters from the Ocean club apartment where they stayed, and it has many trees in the garden, he explains further.

All the flats are on top of each other, and everywhere is cement and stone pathways. Nowhere else could you dig such a hole.

Stephen realized that the only way he could get proof was to scan Roberts's backyard.

He and his assistants got accommodation in a flat next to Roberts's house. They watched the inhabitants of the house for four days to ascertain when it would be safe to go into the property.

The only time was between 5am and 5.45am when it was light enough, but before the workers from town arrived at the resort, and caught them.

They also had to watch the weather and ensure that the wind did not blow in the direction of Roberts dogs. For four mornings he scanned the ground quietly. It was nerve wrecking. On the first morning, when I got back to my flat, there was not a bit of saliva in my mouth.

He sent the scans to four independent international experts. They confirmed that something was buried under the driveway and recommended that it be dug up.

He hopes that within 3 months the excavation will begin. The whole thing was an unbelievably exhausting experience. I was at a stage mentally and physically drained, he says.

Stephen is a bachelor without children, and recently visited a psychic to determine why he feels there's a strong bond between him and Maddie. She said Maddie was a very stubborn child. Her mother struggled to control her and she was an individual in her own right. We are in that respect very similar.

Taking everything into consideration, I should have abandoned this thing a long time ago, but I am fighting two governments that do not want to investigate my findings. When the frustration gets too much, I think of my father's words "**If you start something, you must finish it**".