

10 Years Later, What Went Wrong with the Madeleine McCann Case?

DEC 04, 2017 REAL CRIME BLOG

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Kate and Gerry McCann make an appeal for their 3-year-old daughter Madeleine's return on May 7, 2007. Photo by Steve Parsons - PA Images/PA Images via Getty Images.

On May 3, 2007, 3-year-old Madeleine McCann disappeared from her family's vacation apartment in Praia da Luz, in southwest Portugal. Her case has never been solved. Still, Robert Lowery, vice president of the Missing Children's Division at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, points to other high-profile missing children's cases as support for the belief that cases like Madeleine's shouldn't be dropped.

"I think what we've learned is not to give up on these kids," Lowery says. "This is why we do long-term age progressions on children, on their images. We've found a number of children who have been alive after many years, and were long presumed dead. I use Jaycee Dugard, Elizabeth Smart, Shawn Hornbeck, and the [women] from Cleveland as good examples to remind the public that even though circumstances seem dire, don't assume that the worst has happened until we know for certain."

Thomas G. Martin agrees. He is a former supervisory federal agent for the U.S. Department of Justice and currently the president of *Martin Investigative Services*, based in Newport Beach, California. A&E Real Crime spoke with Martin about his take on the McCann case.

When you hear "Madeleine McCann," what comes to mind?

I can't be [as] definitive as some people are and say, "Well she's definitely dead." I think that's an easy thing to go to, and I don't fault anybody who comes up with that, other than [wondering], what's your evidence? And where's the body?

Those are big questions. What other questions still need to be answered?

What happened in the room? The twin siblings didn't kill her. She didn't have an asthma attack. One of the other guests went in to check, but never went into her room. That to me, is like, *What? You walk in to check on the child, but you don't look to see if the child is there?*

What do you think are the most likely scenarios regarding what happened?

[The McCanns] made it very well known to the waiters and everybody in the facility that their kids were there, alone. So I could make a much more logical case that maybe somebody initially thought that they were going to take her for a ransom. Maybe somebody wanted a little girl for their own, maybe they were going to sell her on the open market. Maybe they got her into human trafficking. That makes a lot more sense to me. It's pretty straightforward. This isn't brain surgery.

What do you think went wrong in this investigation?

[There were] too many cooks in this kitchen, but no head chef. To have a case of this magnitude and there's no resolve? It's unbelievable. Now, I don't think it's too late [to solve].

What would be the first thing you would do on a case like this?

If I headed the team up or if I was a team member, the first thing I'd want is to have the captain of the ship say, "Don't tell me what I know. Tell me what I *don't* know." That's how you solve this case now. That's how you solve a lot of missing-persons and murder cases. [You write on a] big white board...all the things we know, all the things we've profiled about Madeleine [and] her siblings. Then you take 10 investigators and you give each of them one of those 10 things on the board—what we *don't* know. And let them go out and find evidence and interview and interrogate people.

I can't tell you what happened, but I'm more focused on what I *don't* know, to solve this particular situation. And the first thing they ought to do, if they're going to reopen it, is start from Day 1: What do you have in written form, of the interviews that were conducted? I think that would be your story.

How do you feel about this case now?

This case is like no other. [It] was like a balloon. Get the biggest balloon you can find, blow it up but don't tie the knot. Then let it go. That's how this investigation went—up, down, around. At the end of the day, it went nowhere.

Madeleine, her parents—and many people would disagree with me there—her siblings and her family deserve better. They really do.

Thomas G. Martin is the author of 'Seeing the World Through Private Eyes.'

—Rachel Bozek

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