

# ENQUIRE WITHIN

**Question:** *At first everyone felt the greatest compassion with the parents of Madeleine McCann, but over a year after her disappearance, we seem to have lost sympathy. Why did we lose that sympathy do you think?*

**Answer:** At the end of the day, this is a story about a four year old child, rather than her parents. Whatever the outcome, our deepest sympathy for Madeleine McCann will always be constant and true.

Also, whatever the final outcome of the Madeleine McCann story, we will always have the deepest sympathy for her parents and family because the loss of their daughter, however caused, is still a tragedy of huge dimensions.

The original news was shocking. On holiday, relaxing, doing no harm, a family is devastated by the abduction of their 4 year-old daughter. It is every parents' nightmare and every parent ached for Madeleine's parents, Gerry and Kate McCann.

Then more details started to emerge. The children had been left alone in their bedroom, presumably locked in. The parents and other adult friends were in a local bar eating and drinking, but some 100 yards distant from the children.

Doubts started to well up immediately. We have all been there. You have children and you want to go out for a meal and a few drinks, so what do you do? You either take them with you or you leave someone with the children to look after them. The idea of locking the children up in their bedroom when they are asleep would be repugnant to most parents, but the McCann's appear to have done just that. Very quickly, a sense of "well, I wouldn't have done that" started to mingle with the sympathy and dilute it, without, of course for a moment diluting our deepest sympathy for their predicament and for the child herself.

The knowledge that Gerry and Kate McCann

were both doctors only seemed to make matters worse. We are not talking here about feckless parents, from rough or socially deprived housing estates, in need of parenting classes. As well-educated professional people, they knew better than to leave their children alone and yet they did leave them.

Why did none of the adult party volunteer to stay with the children? The impression grew that we were dealing with a selfish bunch of

people, not totally committed to the well-being of the children involved if it meant inconveniencing themselves or not being able to have a few drinks.

Then rumours started to fly in the newspapers. Some of them suggested that the McCanns had given the children a mild sedative to ensure that they would stay asleep. People started to consider alternative

explanations to the one given by the McCanns, and inevitably, the police put the parents in the category of "suspects" rather than victims in this disappearance. All this led to an erosion of sympathy as people started to think the unthinkable.

The activities of the McCanns since the events on May 2007 have also tended to erode public sympathy. They have become a media circus, international jet-setters, instantly recognizable and world famous. They plead that this is all about helping find Madeleine and other children, but it is difficult not to feel over-exposed to the story, overwhelmed and even besieged. After all, many many children disappear every year and who else has caused such a huge fuss about it? It almost feels that having made their critical mistake, the McCanns now want to bombard the rest of us with their guilt and put responsibility for finding Madeleine on the rest of the world.

Having said all this, I still feel the deepest sympathy for Madeleine's parents, whatever the end of the story proves to be.

