Filing # 145430155 E-Filed 03/10/2022 09:20:24 AM

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR SARASOTA COUNTY, FLORIDA

JOSEPH PETITO and
NICHOLE SCHMIDT,

Plaintiffs,

vs. CASE NO. 2022 CA _____ SC

CHRISTOPHER LAUNDRIE and
ROBERTA LAUNDRIE,

Defendants.
_____/

COMPLAINT

COME NOW, JOSEPH PETITO and NICHOLE SCHMIDT, by and through their undersigned counsel, and file the within Complaint against the Defendants, CHRISTOPHER LAUNDRIE and ROBERTA LAUNDRIE, and in support thereof, allege as follows:

1. This is an action for damages that exceed $30,000.00 exclusive of prejudgment interest, costs and attorney fees.

2. Venue is proper in Sarasota County, Florida because the Defendants reside therein.

3. This Court has jurisdiction over the within matter pursuant to F.S. §86.011 and F.S. §26.012.

4. The Plaintiff, JOSEPH PETITO, is a resident of Vero Beach, Florida, and is the father of Gabrielle Petito, deceased.

5. Plaintiff, NICHOLE SCHMIDT, is a resident of Blue Point, New York, and is the mother of Gabrielle Petito, deceased.

6. Defendants, CHRISTOPHER LAUNDRIE and ROBERTA LAUNDRIE, are residents of North Port, Florida, and are the parents of Brian Laundrie, deceased.

Filed 03/11/2022 10:09 AM - Karen E. Rushing, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Sarasota County, FL

7. Brian Laundrie and Gabrielle Petito became engaged to marry on or about July 2, 2020.

8. On July 2, 2021, Brian Laundrie and Gabrielle Petito left New York in a van owned by Gabrielle Petito to take a trip to the western United States which was expected to last for several months.

9. Prior to the trip taken by Gabrielle Petito and Brian Laundrie, Joseph Petito and Nichole Schmidt, and Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie, had a cordial relationship.

10. Gabrielle Petito had hopes of becoming a travel influencer, a "van-lifer" and document her cross-country travels on social media sites such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok.

11. During the course of the aforementioned trip, Gabrielle Petito called her family almost daily, including her parents, Joseph Petito and Nichole Schmidt, and her siblings.

12. The last communication that Gabrielle Petito had with Joseph Petito was on August 21, 2021.

13. The last communication that Nichole Schmidt had with Gabrielle Petito was on August 27, 2021.

14. It is believed that on August 27, 2021, Brian Laundrie murdered Gabrielle Petito. The cause of her death was blunt force injuries to the head and neck with manual strangulation.

15. Gabrielle Petito was twenty-two (22) years of age at the time of her death.

16. After Brian Laundrie murdered Gabrielle Petito, Brian Laundrie sent text messages back and forth between his cell phone and Gabrielle Petito's cell phone in an effort to hide the fact that she was deceased.

17. On August 27, 2021, it is believed that Brian Laundrie sent a text to Nichole Schmidt in which he referred to Gabrielle Petito's grandfather, Stan, by name. Gabrielle Petito never called her grandfather by his name.

18. It is believed, and therefore averred that on or about August 28, 2021, Brian Laundrie advised his parents, Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie, that he had murdered Gabrielle Petito. On that same date, Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie spoke with Attorney Steve Bertolino, and sent him a retainer on September 2, 2021.

19. On August 30, 2021, Brian Laundrie sent a text message from Gabrielle Petito's cell phone to Nichole Schmidt stating that there was no service in Yosemite Park in an effort to deceive Nichole Schmidt into believing that Gabrielle Petito was still alive.

20. On September 1, 2021, Brian Laundrie returned to the home of his parents, Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie, driving Gabrielle Petito's van.

21. After this point in time, there was no contact between Joseph Petito and Nichole Schmidt on the one hand, and Christopher Laundrie and Roberta on the other.

22. From August 27, 2021, until September 19, 2021, when Gabrielle Petito's remains were found at the Spread Creek Dispersed Camping area in Wyoming, Plaintiffs were extremely distraught and were attempting to locate Gabrielle Petito.

23. While Gabrielle Petito's family was suffering, the Laundrie family went on vacation to Fort DeSoto Park on September 6-7, 2021.

24. In an effort to avoid any contact with Nichole Schmidt, on or about September 10, 2021, Roberta Laundrie blocked Nichole Schmidt on her cellular phone such that neither phone calls nor texts could be delivered, and she blocked her on Facebook.

25. On September 14, 2021, with full knowledge that Gabrielle Petito had been murdered by their son, Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie through their lawyer issued the following statement:

> "It is our understanding that a search has been organized for Miss Petito in or near Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. On behalf of the Laundrie family it is our hope that the search for Miss Petito is successful and that Miss Petito is reunited with her family."

26. On September 16, 2021, Attorney Richard Stafford, on behalf of Gabrielle Petito's family, issued a letter to Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie as follows:

> "We are writing this letter to ask you to help find our beautiful daughter. We understand you are going through a difficult time and your instinct to protect your son is strong.
>
> We ask you to put yourselves in our shoes. We haven't been able to sleep or eat and our lives are falling apart.
>
> We believe you know the location of where Brian left Gabby. We beg you to tell us. As a parent, how could you let us go through this pain and not help us? As a parent, how can you put Gabby's younger brothers and sisters through this?
>
> Gabby lived with you for over a year. She was going to be your daughter in law. How can you keep her location hidden? You were both at Jim and Nichole's house. You were both so happy that Brian and Gabby got engaged and were planning to spend their lives together. Please, if you or your family have any decency left, please tell us where Gabby is located. Tell us if we are even looking in the right place.
>
> All we want is Gabby to come home. Please help us make that happen."

27. Despite the fact that Joseph Petito and Nichole Schmidt implored Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie to tell them if their daughter was alive, and if she was not, where her remains were located, Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie refused to respond to either Joseph Petito and Nichole Schmidt, or law enforcement.

28. Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie instructed that all contacts were to be made through their attorney, Steven P. Bertolino, and he issued "no comment" when asked about Gabrielle Petito's well-being.

29. While Joseph Petito and Nichole Schmidt were desperately searching for information concerning their daughter, Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie were keeping the whereabouts of Brian Laundrie secret, and it is believed were making arrangements for him to leave the country.

30. Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie knew of the mental suffering and anguish of Joseph Petito and Nichole Schmidt, and knew that they could alleviate, at least in part, such mental suffering and anguish by disclosing what they knew about the well-being and the location of the remains of Gabrielle Petito, yet they repeatedly refused to do so. In doing so, Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie acted with malice or great indifference to the rights of Joseph Petito and Nichole Schmidt.

31. Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie exhibited extreme and outrageous conduct which constitutes behavior, under the circumstances, which goes beyond all possible bounds of decency and is regarded as shocking, atrocious, and utterly intolerable in a civilized community.

32. As a direct and proximate result of the willfulness and maliciousness of Christopher Laundrie and Roberta Laundrie, Joseph Petito and Nichole Schmidt had been caused to suffer pain and suffering, mental anguish, inconvenience, loss of capacity for enjoyment of life experienced in the past and to be experienced in the future.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs, JOSEPH PETITO and NICHOLE SCHMIDT, respectfully request this Honorable Court enter judgment in their favor and against the Defendants,

CHRISTOPHER LAUNDRIE and ROBERTA LAUNDRIE, and award to them just compensation for the damages they have suffered, together with costs, and such other relief as this Honorable Court deems just and appropriate.

/s/ Patrick J. Reilly, Esquire
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