

## **Sofia Leal, wife of Gonçalo Amaral, writes an open letter to Dr Kate McCann (2008)**

In a newspaper article, published in Portugal in 2008, Dr Kate McCann was quoted as saying that Gonçalo Amaral was 'a disgrace' - a word used about him many times over in the British press.

This prompted Mr Amaral's wife, Sofia Leal, to send an open letter to her. She was quoted at the time as saying:

"I don't understand, I don't accept and I don't even admit that a mother whose daughter has disappeared, treats my husband in that manner, saying that he is a disgrace as a man and as a professional. I do not admit that exactly that person says it, after my husband gave up so much of his family time to search for her daughter".

Then, in a letter dripping with irony and sarcasm, she addressed 'an open letter' to 'Mrs Kate Healy'. Healy is Dr Kate McCann's maiden name and the name by which she was often known professionally.



Sofia Leal, with her husband Gonçalo Amaral

Here is the letter in full:

### **Open letter to Mrs Kate Healy**

Dear Madam,

You will forgive my boldness, but after I read your comment (in an interview to *Expresso* newspaper) concerning Gonçalo Amaral, my husband and the

father of my daughters, I cannot avoid sending you these words of gratefulness.

For many years, I have been trying to make myself heard in this sentiment that unites us both: "...as a professional and as a person his behaviour has been a disgrace".

Look at it closely:

a) Professionally

- As a Coordinator of Criminal Investigation for the Polícia Judiciária, my husband has always refused to sit around from 9 to 5 in the comfortable chair in his office, as his hierarchical status implies.

Instead, he spent the day (and very often, the night) with the investigators on the terrain, co-ordinating searches, surveillances, apprehensions and other diligences 'in loco'. A disgrace!

But if it was only the fact that he was subject to the weather, it wouldn't be serious, as our climate is not too bad, as you know. The problem is that this dedication to the cause has earned him a non-promotion in his career.

Indeed, I will explain this to you, even because this case happened when the searches for your daughter were under way. My husband applied to the category of Superior Coordinator, and in between drug apprehensions, sequestrations and homicides, he somehow managed to produce a thesis about drug trafficking by sea, which he defended in Lisbon, in front of a jury that congratulated him.

Full of hope, Gonçalo Amaral returns to the Algarve and awaits the result. To his surprise, he was passed over by other colleagues (real co-ordinators, truth be told), because he had not been able to score points in the 'professional formation' parameter.

That's right, Mrs Kate, my husband spent his life working, involved in complex investigations, he was the man who apprehended the highest volumes of drugs in Portugal, but given the fact that he had no time to go to Lisbon to parade himself up and down the corridors of the PJ's Institute, he was not promoted. A disgrace, Madam, a disgrace!

As you probably know, even because you seem like a very well-informed person to me, my husband's salary was less than 1.5 times the lowest salary in your country. But as a wife, as a mother and as a Portuguese citizen, I can't complain, because Gonçalo Amaral's salary was equal to 4.5 times the lowest salary in Portugal.

But pay attention to the following, which is an example of what I'm going to explain next: At some point, an individual shoots a member of the PSP [urban police] and flees into neighbouring Spain. A PJ team follows him, including my husband. They stayed there for over two weeks.

Now, at that time, the international expense coverage was around 100 euros. As you can easily imagine, it's not possible to sleep and eat in Spain with this amount of money, much less shortly before Christmas and taking into account that the value will only be paid at around Easter time (if one's lucky). But Gonçalo Amaral never refused, not even for one day, to search for the escaped murderer, relaying the expenses onto our family accounts. And this is just one example among many. At some point in time, I suggested that we should create a fund or something similar to deal with these extraordinary expenses, but he never listened to me. You see, we also have mortgages to pay around here...

A disgrace, Mrs Kate, a disgrace!

#### b) As a person

As a person, his behaviour has also been a disgrace, because to begin with we could never distinguish that he even had a personal life, due to the manner in which he dealt with the profession that he embraced. But if my good friend Mrs Kate allows me, I can offer you some examples:

\* 5 years ago, a child named Joana 'disappeared'. Her mother, just like you, Mrs Kate, tried to project the case into the media, but she didn't make it any further than SIC...

Eight days later, came the confessions and the evidence: during an incestuous act between mother and uncle, the child was beaten, then dismembered and her body dumped who knows where. Mother and uncle went to jail, in a process that was co-ordinated by Gonçalo Amaral and which earned them almost 20 years in jail, each.

But let us go a bit back in time. The child died on the 12th of September. On Christmas Eve, our family was reunited for prayer, when my husband asked me to prepare a bag with some food and warm clothes, because he had not carried out his Christmas act of penance. Can you, Mrs Kate, imagine where Gonçalo Amaral went on that Christmas night under heavy rain and thunder?

He went to the Olhão Prison, where João Cipriano, Joana's uncle, a confessed murderer and a clinically diagnosed psychopath, is detained. According to my husband, to simply offer an alimony to some beggar was not a sacrifice to him. The fact that he embraced and shared his Christmas meal with João Cipriano was the sacrifice that he offered to God, in memory of Joana. Is this not a disgrace?

You should also know that every year, on the 12th of September, my husband has a mass celebrated in memory of Joana Isabel Cipriano Guerreiro. He says that nobody will ever remember the poor little girl again. Right, but they remember to unjustly accuse him of actions and crimes that he never committed. Isn't this a disgrace, Mrs Kate?

\* There is a last episode that I will report to you, one that I still find hard to

talk about. Last year, in May, we started to move our family to Portimão. My husband was supposed to enjoy a holiday period starting on the day after your daughter's disappearance [3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> May 2007]. 'For obvious reasons'. that didn't happen.

I started on a new job, looked for a house, moved house, and tried to integrate our daughters in new schools and new routines. All of this I did alone, without any help from my husband, who, for obvious reasons, was looking for your daughter, Mrs Kate.

In October, on his birthday, a week after our daughters started school, Gonçalo Amaral was dismissed and returned to Faro. This was supposed to be the time of the family's reunion and it turned out to be another separation. Isn't this a disgrace?

Our daughters never managed to understand, and we never managed to explain to them what obvious reasons were those that rewarded in this manner a father who left his own daughters to go looking for a child that he had never met and whose parents had neglected her. It was a pity that my dear friend Mrs Kate was not around anymore at that date, because you could have been very helpful to me in explaining these 'obvious reasons'" that led to their father's dismissal, to our daughters.

Finally, I can only report to you that intimately, Gonçalo Amaral is precisely what the latinos are famed for: shameless, as my pudency does not allow me to write any further.

I ask you, my good friend, to forgive these confidences from a wife and mother, but I'm certain that you will understand. I finish this letter asking you to send your mother my most sincere praises. She sounded so sincere to me, when during an interview she referred that she felt like slapping the face of the person who left her grandchildren alone. She spoke so openly that she sounded like a genuine Portuguese grandmother...

My dear friend Mrs Kate, without wishing to bother you any further, I would like to request one last favour from you: now that you have started to tell some truths, please continue, and let the world hear the truth that it has been waiting for.

Best regards,

Sofia Leal

Wife, and Mother of the Daughters of Gonçalo Amaral