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'Revenge Suicide Hypothesis' Offered by Lawyer for Estranged Husband of Missing Woman

The lawyer claimed Jennifer Dulos, who vanished in May, took her own life to prevent her husband from obtaining custody of their five children.

By Neil Vigdor

We are exploring all possibilities, including that ... threat she made ... prior to her disappearance: 'I'll do anything I have to do to make sure you never see the kids again.' This, ... with evidence of an alarming number of medical tests ... just prior to her disappearance, makes the revenge-suicide hypothesis something we are taking very seriously.

— Norm Pattis

Defense attorney for Fotis Dulos



Fotis Dulos, center, and his lawyer, Norm Pattis, left, during a court proceeding last month.

In late May, Jennifer Dulos dropped off her five children at school in a Connecticut town, then vanished. Less than two weeks later, her estranged husband and his girlfriend were arrested in connection with her disappearance.

Now, as the search for Ms. Dulos, 50, enters its sixth week, a lawyer for her estranged husband is offering an unusual explanation for what happened: she took her own life to prevent him from getting custody of their five children.

The lawyer, Norm Pattis, said he also recently discovered that Ms. Dulos underwent \$14,000 in medical diagnostic and blood tests just before her May 24 disappearance.

"We don't know what diagnosis supported those tests," Mr. Pattis wrote in an email on Tuesday to The New York Times. "Was she critically ill? Did she plan a final farewell intended to assure Fotis never saw the kids? We are looking for Jennifer and for answers."

The husband, Fotis Dulos, 51, along with his girlfriend, Michelle Troconis, have pleaded not guilty to hindering the prosecution and tampering with evidence.

In an interview with NBC 4 broadcast on Tuesday night, Mr. Dulos declined to comment on the specifics of the case but said, "I never wanted Jennifer out of the way."

Ms. Dulos and her husband had been going through a tempestuous divorce, accumulating an enormous volume of court motions regarding disputes about bed times, doctors for the children and steep lawyer fees, among many other things. Mr. Dulos claimed in a court filing that the children were being kept under armed guard at their grandmother's apartment in New York City.

"We are exploring all possibilities, including that she made good on a threat she made to him prior to her disappearance: 'I'll do anything I have to do to make sure you never see the kids again,'" Mr. Pattis said.

"This, together with evidence of an alarming number of medical tests she endured just prior to her disappearance, makes the revenge-suicide hypothesis something we are taking very seriously as we continue our investigation."

The "revenge-suicide hypothesis" is the latest conspiracy theory proffered by Mr. Pattis, who has developed a reputation as a legal maverick with a flair for the dramatic.

Mr. Pattis is known for taking on clients that other lawyers would not, such as Alex Jones, the founder of the right-wing conspiracy theory website Infowars, who was sued by Sandy Hook families for his false claim that the 2012 school shooting was a hoax.

Last week, Mr. Pattis told several news outlets that Ms. Dulos had staged her own disappearance and had written a manuscript with a plot similar to that of "Gone Girl," a novel that was made into a 2014 film about a woman in a crumbling marriage who fakes her murder and hides in the Ozarks.

Carrie Luft, Ms. Dulos's close friend who has acted as a spokeswoman for her family since her disappearance, dismissed Mr. Pattis's claims in an interview on Tuesday.

"Jennifer Farber Dulos would absolutely never leave her children and would never do anything that would bring them harm," said Ms. Luft. "Attorney Pattis's perpetuation of these allegations is hurting the

Dulos children now and into the future."

The children, who range in age from 8 to 13, have been staying in Manhattan with Ms. Dulos's mother, Gloria Farber, who is seeking custody. The children have been participating in summer school and athletics, along with going on field trips and visiting friends, according to Ms. Luft.

"They miss their mother terribly," Ms. Luft said. "Every conversation about the case ends with, 'When are they going to find mom?' Given the horror of the situation, they are doing well. We're doing everything we can to provide them some sense of normalcy within this unfathomably abnormal situation."

Shortly after her disappearance, investigators discovered Ms. Dulos's blood mixed with Mr. Dulos's DNA on a faucet in the \$3.5 million home she shared with her five children in New Canaan, a wealthy enclave known for its lush, open space — and low crime.

Security camera footage recovered by the police showed Mr. Dulos and Ms. Troconis, 44, dumping trash bags along Albany Avenue in Hartford on the night of Ms. Dulos's disappearance, according to arrest warrants. The footage also showed a person matching Mr. Dulos's description dumping an item into a storm drain on the same street. The license plate on the vehicle used on that trip had been issued to Mr. Dulos, who is a resident of Farmington, Conn.

Connecticut State Police and cadaver dogs spent three weeks searching a Hartford trash plant for clues, to no avail. An F.B.I. evidence response team also combed through the woods of Waveny Park in New Canaan, near where Ms. Dulos's S.U.V. was found.

Chief Leon Krolkowski, of the New Canaan police department, did not respond to multiple requests for comment. Richard J. Colangelo Jr., a state prosecutor involved in the case, also did not respond to requests for comment.

A spokeswoman for the Connecticut State Police said on Tuesday that there were no new updates on the investigation.

Mr. Dulos, who is free on \$500,000 bond, is seeking to bring the divorce case to a halt as a result of Ms. Dulos's disappearance.

Mr. Dulos urged the public not to rush to judgment in his case during his interview with NBC 4.

"I know what I've done and I know what I haven't done, so I have to stand and fight and hope that the truth is going to come out," he said. "When it first started, I seriously pinched myself a couple of times and I said, 'This cannot be true. I'm dreaming this. I'm wearing orange and in a cell, 6-foot-by-9-foot. This cannot be true.'"

Mr. Pattis, in his blog, recently addressed why he decided to represent Mr. Dulos and Mr. Jones.

"The answer might surprise you: I'd rather represent the scorned than

the popular," Mr. Pattis wrote. "It's how I am put together. It starts with a simple enough proposition. No one is the sum of their worst moments. Put another way, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

On a separate website for his law practice, Mr. Pattis also promotes his media appearances. Philip Russell, a defense lawyer from Greenwich, said Mr. Pattis understands the power of the media in high-profile criminal cases.

"When it's in his client's interest," Mr. Russell said, "he does not shy away from combat." ■