Chehalis Woman Runs For 13 Years, Returns to Face Parental Kidnapping Charges

Local News

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CHEHALIS, Wash. - A former resident of Lewis County, Washington, KAREN KRISTINE SUDDERTH, 52, formerly of Chehalis, Washington, was taken into custody today at Sea-Tac Airport as she arrived on a flight from Thailand. There has been a warrant out for SUDDERTH’s arrest since January 22, 1997, for Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution. In July 1999, SUDDERTH was indicted by a federal grand jury for International Parental Kidnapping. According to court documents, the case began on August 30, 1996, when SUDDERTH failed to bring her son, who was then five-years-old, to a scheduled weekend visitation with his father. Mother and son fled the U.S. in September 1996, and remained out of the reach of law enforcement until today. The son turned 18 last week, prompting SUDDERTH to contact law enforcement and return to the United States.

According to records filed in the case, SUDDERTH and her former husband, David Calhoun, entered into a final parenting plan in Lewis County Superior Court on November 3, 1994. SUDDERTH was the custodial parent, but Calhoun was to have residential visitation with the boy every other weekend. On Friday August 30, 1996, SUDDERTH and her son failed to appear at the Lewis County Courthouse for the visitation. According to records filed in Lewis County, SUDDERTH took her son out of the country September 12, 1996, to Senegal, West Africa, where she worked as a music teacher at the Dakar Academy. In January 1997, SUDDERTH was charged in Lewis County Superior Court with Custodial Interference in the First Degree. In November 1997, SUDDERTH was charged federally with Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution. Finally, in 1999 SUDDERTH was indicted by the grand jury in Seattle for International Parental Kidnapping. SUDDERTH and her son traveled from Senegal to Thailand at some point, but U.S. efforts to extradite her from Thailand were unsuccessful.

SUDDERTH will make her initial appearance in U.S. District Court in Tacoma today at 2:00 before Magistrate Judge J. Richard Creatura.

International Parental Kidnapping is punishable by up to three years in prison and a $250,000 fine.

The case is being investigated by the FBI, and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney William H. Redkey Jr.