

COVER STORY

/BY: Carlos Moncada

AN INTRUSION UPON THEIR SECLUSION? LAWSUIT FILED

"... JUST CURIOUS, DID YOU KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS HAVE 2 CAMERAS FACING YOUR POOL, AND A SPEAKER THAT HAS VERY VULGER [SIC] LANGUAGE THAT COME OUT IF IT?..."

-AIRBNB RENTER CARRIE

THE WALL-MOUNTED CAMERA WAS "DISTURBINGLY" AIMED AT THE COUPLE'S PRIVATE AREAS – NAMELY A HOT TUB AND OUTDOOR SHOWER AREA – AND AT BATHROOM AND BEDROOM WINDOWS, THE SUIT READS.

SEMINOLE — William and Grazina Chatt were among the wave of out-of-state buyers who flocked to Florida during the COVID-19 pandemic when they bought their lakefront vacation home here in December 2021.

The Illinois residents figured they would split their time between Tampa Bay and the Chicago area, renting out the four-bedroom, two-bath pool house on Airbnb to short-term visitors while they were up north. However, it wasn't long before the Chatts and their guests started having run-ins with a next-door neighbor upset about the couple's home-sharing business.

The incidents, characterized in court papers as ranging from unsettling to downright creepy, have escalated to where the Chatts are now suing their neighbor in a case that raises an intriguing question: Should people have a reasonable expectation of privacy in their backyards?

In their lawsuit, filed Feb. 25 in Pinellas-Pasco Circuit Court, the Chatts lay out a litany of unusual and intrusive acts allegedly perpetrated by the neighbor, J.C. Cali. They claim that Cali, among other things, has used outdoor speakers to blast random sounds — including crying babies, barking dogs, revving chainsaws, even pornographic movie clips — at the couple's backyard.

Cali also allegedly called the Pinellas County

Sheriff's Office at least 10 times between 2002 and 2003 with what the lawsuit described as exaggerated or false complaints about loud noises or parties at the Chatt home, in the Ridgewood Mountain Village subdivision off Park Boulevard.

"In none of the instances were citations issued by the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office and in each case the responding officer determined that they did not observe noise levels in violation of any ordinance," the suit reads.

A review of incident reports filed along with the suit shows that while Cali was identified as the caller on some complaints, others were made anonymously or the caller's name was blacked out. Also, in one instance a sheriff's deputy wrote that she heard a man "yelling in back upon arrival." In another, a deputy stated that "Grandkids were in the pool after arriving from out of state late. Will have them quiet down."

Amid the noise complaints, the suit reads, Cali would leave a gas-powered lawn mower or generator running next to the Chatts' 6-foot privacy fence for several hours, spewing exhaust fumes into their backyard. On one such occasion, the couple's daughter and her friends had to abandon their sunbathing due to the noxious fumes, the suit states.

The long-running feud literally reached new heights when, in 2023, Cali mounted a security camera atop his roof, about 25 feet off the ground, the suit reads. The solar-powered camera, mounted

Rooftop Camera with Flag,
Photo Source: Pinellas Cty Court Files



to a flagpole, was positioned directly over the Chatts' backyard. Affixed to the flagpole was a white "Airbnb kills neighborhoods" flag with a red slash.

The rooftop camera apparently was in response to the Chatts placing privacy thatching on top of their wood fence, in an attempt to block the view of another camera that Cali had installed on the wall of his house above the fence line, according to the suit.

The wall-mounted camera was "disturbingly" aimed at the couple's private areas — namely a hot tub and outdoor shower area — and at bathroom and bedroom windows, the suit reads.

The Chatts are asking the court for a temporary injunction to have both cameras removed or disabled, arguing the devices intrude upon their seclusion and that of their guests, who have included children and an 86-year-old grandmother.

They also want the court to order Cali to destroy any images in his possession of their private

activities, fearing the images could be circulated online, to remove the speakers and to stop looking in their windows or through their fence.

The suit seeks more than \$30,000 in damages, alleging that the Chatts have suffered economic loss as well as emotional distress, embarrassment, humiliation and marital discord. No trial date has been set.

The legal filing includes a number of exhibits, including screen-shot images from the Chatts' own security camera, which they installed to monitor the narrow border separating the two properties after the incident with the exhaust fumes.

The images show instances of Cali standing by his shed looking at one of the Chatts' bedroom windows, and of Cali standing on his roof looking into their backyard. Cali also once told Grazina Chatt "that he had previously observed the Chatts' son and his friends by looking through back window of the Chatt home," the suit reads.

Other exhibits include copies of several text messages about Cali that Grazina Chatt received from Airbnb visitors.

In one text dated Feb 9, 2025, a guest named Carrie wrote:

"Good morning Grazina! Just curious, did you know your neighbors have 2 cameras facing your pool, and a speaker that has very vulger [sic] language that come out if it? There is sometimes music, and some times bits and pieces of movie clips. We are not a loud group, just trying to relax by the pool and listen to our music. When we play our music, the volume is turned up on your neighbors speaker. Just and [sic] FYI."

Another message, dated Aug. 18, 2023 from a guest named Josh, states:

"Just an fyi, my wife and i went out to dinner last night and upon coming home, my family said the neighbor was saying obscene things thru [sic] a speaker. Today i looked and there are 2 cameras pointed into the pool area from the neighbors [sic] house. One directly. Comments were sexual in nature, then chainsaw noises people screaming for help and crying babies. This is pretty disturbing behavior. Thought you should be aware."

Efforts to obtain comment from Cali,

Border separating the Chatt and Cali properties.

Photo by Carlos Moncada



NEWS //

...Continued from Pg. 7

47, were unsuccessful. No one answered the door at his residence last week.

William Chatt, 55, a lawyer whose office is in the Chicago suburb of Burr Ridge, said from the couple's other home in Dunedin that he did not wish to comment, saying, "The lawsuit speaks for itself."

That case, Jackman vs. Cebrink-Swartz, arose after the escalation of a boundary dispute that Bridget and Keiron Jackman had with their neighbors, Catherine Cebrink-Swartz and Richard Swartz, resulting in the Swartzes installing a 25-foot-high security camera on the gable of their roof that faced the side of the Jackmans' home. The Jackmans sought a temporary injunction, but the trial court denied their motion. But the 2nd



Security Footage
Photo Source: Pinellas Cty Court Files

Screen Capture
Photo Source: Pinellas Cty Court Files

Just an fyi, my wife and i went out to dinner last night and upon coming home, my family said the neighbor was saying obscene things thru a speaker. Today i looked and there are 2 cameras pointed into the pool area from the neighbors house. One directly. Comments were sexual in nature, then chainsaw noises people screaming for help and crying babies. This is pretty disturbing behavior. I thought you should be aware

Josh - Aug 19, 2023, 11:51 AM

Screen Capture
Photo Source: Pinellas Cty Court Files

Good morning Grazina! Just curious, did you know your neighbors have 2 cameras facing your pool, and a speaker that has very vulgar language that come out if it? There is sometimes music, and some times bits and pieces of movie clips. We are not a loud group, just trying to relax by the pool and listen to our music. When we play our music, the volume is turned up on your neighbors speaker. Just and FYI.

9:06 AM

The suit's legal argument of "intrusion upon seclusion" is a type of invasion of privacy that arises when someone intentionally intrudes — physically or otherwise — upon the solitude or private affairs of another in a way that would be highly offensive to a reasonable person. William Chatt stated in the suit that he was told by a sheriff's deputy that she did not believe the Chatts or their guests had the right to an expectation of privacy in their backyard, despite the privacy fence. But there may be legal precedent to the contrary, based on a very similar case in Sarasota County in 2020.

District Court of Appeal, which covers Pinellas County, determined in 2021 that the trial court erred in its analysis of the intrusion upon seclusion claim and reversed the lower court ruling. The appeals court also asked the Florida Supreme Court to resolve a question "of great public importance" about whether a private citizen's recording activities within the curtilage of a neighbor's home — despite a privacy fence — amounts to invasion of privacy through intrusion upon seclusion. The high court declined to take up the question last year.



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