

# FBI Sees McVeigh Sister as a Potential Suspect

**Authorities think the brother may have confided intentions to her. Her lawyer says she had no knowledge of a bombing plot.**

PENDLETON, N.Y. — With her light brown hair swept back to frame her pale face, Jennifer McVeigh forces a wan smile and the nervous fear briefly melts from her eyes.

"We're doing pretty well, things are going better," she insists, seemingly trying to convince herself that her words are true.

Standing in front of her father's one-story home here, she adds: "We're holding up, now that the attention isn't so bad."

But the fear quickly darkens across her face once more. Jennifer McVeigh has just returned home from the Buffalo field office of the FBI in her new green-and-silver Chevrolet pickup. She spent the afternoon being fingerprinted and palm-printed as a potential suspect in what authorities believe was a conspiracy to bomb the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

And as soon as the hopeful words are out of her mouth, it seems to hit her again that the attention really is just beginning.

For the McVeighs of Pendleton, Irish Americans who have lived and died within shouting distance of the Erie Canal in western New York for five generations, the stunning news that one of their own, 27-year-old Timothy J. McVeigh, has been charged in the worst terrorist act on U.S. soil was stunning enough. But now that has been followed by another traumatic revelation: Jennifer, a 21-year-old honor student who graduated from community college Saturday, an easygoing party-goer who once worked as a Jell-O wrestling waitress, is a target of federal investigators as well.

Federal prosecutors have not concluded that Jennifer McVeigh was an active participant in the April 19 bombing or its planning. But they suspect her brother may have brought her dangerously close to the inner circle by confiding his intentions to her.

So sources close to the case say that the Justice Department's task force on the bombing is trying to decide whether to attempt to use her as a witness against the defendants or seek to charge her with committing an act of "seditious conspiracy," a plot to overthrow the government by destroying federal property.

In an interview, Jennifer McVeigh denied knowing some of the other likely targets of the government's conspiracy investigation. "I don't know [Michael] Fortier," she says, when asked about the Arizona man who has been negotiating an agreement to cooperate with investigators and may implicate her and her brother. "I've never met him."

Her Buffalo attorney, Joel Daniels, also asserts that Jennifer McVeigh had no criminal knowledge of plans to blow up the federal building. "We are making every effort to convince the government that she was not part of any illegal conspiracy or criminal enterprise."

Yet federal investigators are still not convinced. Indeed, her close relationship with her brother--highlighted by a series of damaging letters she received from Timothy in the months before the bombing--has become a key element in the probe.

The FBI has been intrigued by Jennifer McVeigh's role since the very early stages of its investigation, when a search

of her truck and of a Pensacola, Fla., house where she was vacationing turned up a bundle of extremist pamphlets, books and tapes. FBI agents also found her burning papers in a barbecue grill when they approached her to serve a search warrant.

As a result, U.S. officials have delayed calling Jennifer McVeigh before the grand jury handling the Oklahoma City bombing case until they decide whether she is to be treated as a suspect or a witness, Daniels says. Before she hired an attorney, she underwent at least two weeks of intensive interviews by the FBI in Buffalo--during which she "cooperated fully," according to Daniels. "The FBI would pick her up in the morning and drive her home at night. The interviews went on all day. She was camping out at the FBI office."

During those sessions, she reportedly remained defiant, defending the hardline militia-inspired views she shares with her brother, and Daniels has now halted the FBI interviews.

After weeks of sifting through the family's background, FBI investigators have lost interest in all of Timothy McVeigh's relatives--except Jennifer. The fact that both may be linked to the case has left friends and loved ones here at a loss to explain what in the family's middle-class American background may have led the brother and sister to this point.

"Who knows what happens to kids?" sighs Msgr. Paul Belzer, pastor of Good Shepherd Catholic Church, who has privately consoled William McVeigh, Timothy's father.

The McVeigh family traces its American roots back to 1866, when Edward McVeigh, Timothy's great-great grandfather, left Ireland and settled in Lockport, N.Y., about 10 miles from Pendleton, on the banks of the Erie Canal.

The McVeighs rarely budged for the next century, with each generation successfully maintaining the family's quiet, comfortable blue-collar standard of living. William McVeigh, 55, works at General Motors' sprawling Harrison Radiator factory in Lockport; his father, Edward, worked there for 30 years. For generations, the family adhered to the unspoken local cultural rules and attended the Irish parish, St. Patrick's, in Lockport.

But that tradition-bound Catholic lifestyle was disrupted by the 1978 divorce of William and Mildred McVeigh. Mildred moved back to Lockport and later to Florida, taking Jennifer. Timothy and an older sister were left with her husband.

Although Daniels says the parents now are on good terms, Jennifer and Timothy still grew up in separate households. Jennifer didn't return to live with her father until high school, when her mother remarried. By then, her brother had left home for the Army.

Yet ultimately, Timothy would develop his closest family relationship with his younger sister. His father, who remains on sick leave from work and in seclusion, has visited him in prison since the bombing but apparently knew little about Timothy's activities after his son left the Army in 1991. In his letters to Jennifer, Timothy repeatedly warned her not to let their father see what he was writing.

Meanwhile, his mother, Mildred Frazer of Ft. Pierce, Fla., and his older sister, Patricia Davis, a registered nurse in Plantation, Fla., have had little to do with Timothy in recent years. His mother issued a terse statement: "I have had only brief contact with my son the past 10 years and only know details from what I have been watching on TV. P.S.: Please leave our family alone!"

But Timothy called upon Jennifer for help as early as 1992, when he asked her to pick up and mail him a large amount of high-caliber ammunition from a gun store in Lockport, where Timothy had previously worked. Daniels confirmed that the ammunition purchase is under investigation by the FBI. If Jennifer violated any postal regulations or gun laws in sending the ammunition, prosecutors may seek to use that to pressure her to cooperate.

Jennifer's ties to her brother seemingly deepened last October, when Timothy, who had been staying with old Army buddies in several places, came home to live for nearly three months following the death of their grandfather, Edward McVeigh. Timothy McVeigh didn't arrive in time for the funeral at St. Patrick's Church.

But according to Daniels, Timothy did stay to help with his grandfather's estate sale and lived at home in October, November and part of December.

Investigators suspect that Timothy began to form a plan for a violent attack at that time. And the days at home together may have given Timothy an opportunity to influence his sister's political views.

While it remains unclear exactly what happened between brother and sister, there is scant evidence that Jennifer held any extreme anti-government views before then.

A year ago, she was enjoying what appeared to be a robust life as a liberal arts student at Niagara County Community College. She was a part-time waitress at the Crazy Horse bar, where she occasionally joined in the Sunday night female "Jell-O wrestling" tournaments, in which contestants grapple in vats of gelatin.

On the Niagara campus, she was involved in extracurricular activities, including the Human Services Assn., which arranged donations for poor families.

As recently as last fall, in an American government class that focused on the political process and the structure of the modern U.S. government, "she never made any controversial statements or raised any questions," noted Clyde Tyson, her teacher. "And this was the class where she would have been most likely to raise questions that might have reflected her political views."

Yet by March, Jennifer was publicly espousing militia-style beliefs in a letter to the editor published March 9 in the Lockport Union Sun & Journal. It read much like her brother's letters to the same newspaper: "If you don't think the Constitution is being perverted, I suggest you open your eyes and take a good look around," Jennifer wrote. "Research constitutional rights violated in Weaver, Waco. Also Gun Control."

By the time of the bombing, the FBI found a young woman who seemed fully immersed in the anti-government cause. Investigators say that a search of her truck and of the Pensacola home of Dennis Sadler, a 22-year-old construction worker and an old friend whom Jennifer was visiting in April, turned up a raft of militant documents. According to the search warrant, filed in federal court in Pensacola, the documents included pamphlets titled "The New World Order," "The Patriot Report" and "You May Not Have a Country After 1995!"

But the government's real interest in Jennifer McVeigh doesn't stem from her beliefs but from allegations that her brother might have brought her in on a bombing plan.

The FBI has reportedly obtained 20 to 30 letters Jennifer received from her brother, including one dated March 25 that warned her not to communicate with him after April 1, 18 days before the Oklahoma City bombing. His letter cautioned her to "watch what you say" in letters back to him, "because I may not get it in time, and the G-men might get it out of my box, incriminating you." He also told her to burn his letters--as she is believed to have been doing when the FBI arrived. In addition, sources say, witnesses have told the FBI that she had mentioned at a Christmas party that her brother was going to be involved in "something big" within the next few months.

So Jennifer McVeigh remains stuck in legal limbo. Escorted by FBI agents, she arranged with her teachers to complete her coursework at home so she could graduate on time. Now unemployed, Jennifer McVeigh still holds out hope of one day becoming an elementary school teacher and has been accepted at Buffalo State University for fall classes.

"But frankly, admits Daniels, "those plans are now on hold."