

FBI Still Undecided on McVeigh's Sister/She May Be Witness or Suspect in Blast

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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."

Jennifer McVeigh has just returned from the Buffalo field office of the FBI. She spent the afternoon being fingerprinted as a potential suspect in what authorities believe was a conspiracy to bomb the A.P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

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, the news that one of their own, 27-year-old Timothy 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, 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.

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.

Her attorney, Joel Daniels, asserts that Jennifer McVeigh had no criminal knowledge of plans to blow up the building.

Federal investigators are 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 early stages of its investigation, when a search of her truck and of a house where she was vacationing turned up extremist pamphlets, books and tapes. Agents also found her burning papers when they approached her to serve a search warrant.

U.S. officials have delayed calling Jennifer McVeigh before the grand jury handling the bombing case until they decide whether she is to be treated as a suspect or a witness, Daniels said.

Before she hired an attorney, she underwent at least two weeks of intensive interviews by the FBI, 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," he said.

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

FBI investigators have lost interest in all of Timothy McVeigh's relatives -- except Jennifer.

The FBI reportedly has 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. 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."

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."

Caption:

Mug: Jennifer McVeigh