

McVeigh's Friends in Kansas and the Elohim City Link

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By J.D. Cash with Jeff Holladay

(Investigative reporter J.D. Cash today continues his interviews in the Kansas heartland related to Oklahoma City bombing defendant Timothy McVeigh and the peculiar links he found there with former Elohim City residents.)

HERINGTON, Kansas — Oklahoma City bombing defendant and admitted criminal conspirator Michael Fortier had many young friends in the function City and Herington area — and among them was a mysterious young man known as "Andy the German."

That's the assertion of a woman interviewed this week by the Gazette who said her own daughter was among McVeigh's acquaintances in these flint hills communities.

Speaking only on condition that her name not be published, the witness stated that her daughter first introduced her to McVeigh in 1992.

"Tim and Mike Fortier had many high school-age friends, plus others they met at Fort Ridley when they were soldiers there," she said.

"One of the problems that my daughter had was with a roommate, at the time, who was pretty wild."

Elaborating, she said, "My daughter would come home sometimes and find the house full of drunken teenagers...McVeigh and some of his army buddies would be there, too."

Strassmeir Linked?

When shown a picture of former Elohim City resident Andreas Carl Strassmeir, the woman hesitated briefly, then said: "If that young man is known as 'Andy,' and if he is German, then, yes, he has been to my home. He and Timmy were friends of my daughter and her exroommate... Andy dated a girl by the name of Katherine, and they had an Austrian friend named Cotti that they all ran around with."

As reported earlier by the Gazette, Andreas Strassmeir was linked to McVeigh by at least one and possibly two telephone calls that McVeigh made to the Elohim City redoubt in eastern Oklahoma just days before the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building.

Strassmeir, a German military officer, was known to his friends as "Andy" or "Andy the German."

Strassmeir fled to his native Berlin earlier this year shortly after a Gazette story, later picked up by some national media, raised questions about his possible links to groups that might have been involved in the Oklahoma City bombing. Strassmeir, who

maintained a residence at Elohim City from 1992 through the late summer of 1995, has repeatedly denied any associations with McVeigh — other than a chance meeting at a Tulsa gun show in 1993.

Elohim City Connections

Elohim City, a small religious enclave in eastern Oklahoma, significantly had links not only with Strassmeir but a far more notorious figure — Richard Wayne Snell, who was put to death in Arkansas on the very same day as the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City...a building ironically that Snell had "cased" a decade earlier as the potential site of a bombing.

Snell was convicted of the murder of a black Arkansas highway patrol trooper and a Texarkana pawnshop owner he mistakenly thought was Jewish. He was captured in Broken Bow a decade ago after he killed the state trooper in Arkansas and was fleeing. Broken Bow officers had to shoot it out with Snell before being able to take him into custody.

Snell's daughter and son-in-law still live at Elohim City...his remains are interred there...and the Rev. Robert Millar, the spiritual leader of Elohim City, pastored the condemned man prior to his execution last April 19 — hours after the bombs had exploded in Oklahoma City.

Snell has now been elevated to the pantheon of "patriot heroes" by some extreme right-wing supremacist groups. Several news accounts have hinted the bombing of the federal building may have been motivated more by the scheduled execution of Snell that retribution for the Branch Davidian fiasco two years earlier.

Uncanny Prediction

And, oddly, it was Snell who actually predicted the bombing of a federal building prior to his death.

A guess? Or foreknowledge?

According to a Denver Post story, Snell told an Arkansas state prison official several times prior to his execution that his death would be preceded by the bombing of a federal building — for which, Snell said, Mideast terrorists would initially be blamed.

The accuracy of his predictions were uncanny.

Yet Snell's own conduct on the day of the Oklahoma City bombing suggested foreknowledge, not just an uncanny guess. Awaiting his death last April 19, Snell watched the television coverage of the Oklahoma City bombing with unconcealed glee, the prison official reported. Snell would laugh, he said, and repeat for anyone around, "I told you this was going to happen today!"

John Doe No. 2 in Kansas?

Herington, Kan., residents interviewed also recall that McVeigh was a close friend of Strassmeir's Elohim City roommate, Michael Brescia.

The witness interviewed by the Gazette remembers him well.

"Mike (Brescia) was introduced to me at Cardie's Corner one day in 1992 or 1993," she said. "My daughter saw me drive up and she brought him over to meet me." She described him as a young man in his 20s "and very good looking — obviously a body builder.

"All the girls thought he was really something. They called him the 'Big Kahoona' because his complexion made his look Hawaiian.

"Tim and Mike were good friends, and some people here think he is the one the FBI is looking for."

Asked to explain why, she responded firmly:

"Mike Brescia fits the description the FBI published after the bombing...you know, Joe Doe No. 2."

And did the FBI know?

"I have told them this myself!"

Family Nightmare

Recalling the day McVeigh was located by federal authorities in Perry, Okla., where he was being held on unrelated firearms and traffic charges, the witness said, "My daughter called and said, 'Mom, have you seen the TV?...That is Tim that's been arrested!'"

Panicked by her past associations with the bombing suspect, the young girl asked her mother what she should do.

"I told her to call the 800 number the FBI had been advertising for people to call if they had information.

"That started our family's long nightmare."

She then explained that federal authorities descended on the family with numerous interviews.

"They wanted my daughter's letters and pictures...the names of all Tim's friends...and it still goes on," the woman said.

"Just a few weeks ago they were asking about things they thought my daughter might have done — that have nothing whatsoever to do with the bombing." And then the news media "found out about her and began reporting that she was Tim's girlfriend, but she wasn't...Maybe her roommate might have been — but not my daughter."

As a result of what the woman considers this intrusiveness, her daughter has moved and is living in seclusion.

A Baffling Mystery

As to the ex-roommate's location, people in Herington, Kan., are both baffled — and suspicious.

"She disappeared after the bombing," this newspaper's witness said. "She was very young and wild and messed around with McVeigh's friends from Fort Riley. Mike Fortier, Tim, Andy and Mike Brescia would take the girls to these pasture parties on a ranch near Lincolnville and buy beer for the kids.

"So maybe she knew too much, Maybe she's hiding. Or is dead...like the others!" What the witness alluded to were two suspicious deaths that occurred near Herington around the time of the Oklahoma City bombing.

Residents say a house where a body was found three weeks before the bombing is the same house Tim McVeigh and his friends once frequented. A badly burned body was found after a blaze destroyed the house.

Police reports indicate a man was trapped in the house and burned to death. Likely cause was related to the man's heavy drinking, police said. Curiously, two days after the bombing, the body of another man was found in a burned-out pickup truck. Authorities have been unable to identify the remains. More Denials from Strassmeir Lawyer Kirk Lyons, a North Carolina attorney who says he represents Strassmeir, says he finds the whole thing laughable. "There is nothing to what these witnesses are telling the media about my client being identified in the Junction City area, EVER!"

Lyons referred to a document he helped Strassmeir prepare earlier this year and which was filed in Denver. It says Strassmeir might have met McVeigh at a Tulsa gun show in 1993. But it says Strassmeir doesn't know why McVeigh called him at Elohim City, and Lyons denied Strassmeir got any message.

He also said Strassmeir had only been to Kansas once — and that was a tourist to Dodge City.

Lyons further claims Strassmeir was helping a farmer build a fence on the day of the bombing.

Brescia On Run?

As for Brescia's links to Junction City and McVeigh and Fortier, he fled the Elohim City compound some months ago and has been unavailable for comment since.

His whereabouts remain a mystery since his name was first mentioned.

Brescia's parents in Pennsylvania have been regularly contacted by the media, but requests for interviews have been curtly refused.

More recently, though, the family told an investigator for McVeigh's defense team that Brescia was moving around the country and on the run because he believed he was the object of FBI surveillance.