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HUGH DOWNS, ABC News Good evening. I'm Hugh Downs. BARBARA WALTERS, ABC News And I'm Barbara Walters. And this is 20/20.

ANNOUNCER

From ABC News, around the world and into your home, the stories that touch your life -- with Hugh Downs and Barbara Walters, this is

20/20.

Tonight -- the most devastating attack to happen in America.

RELATIVE OF BOMBING VICTIM

We want the truth, and we need the truth to heal.

ANNOUNCER

Now, Oklahoma City survivors question -- did the government suspect what might happen? KATHY WILBURN [ph], Grandparent of Bombing Victim Just give us the truth.

ANNOUNCER

Their suspicion grows as people recall strange coincidences -- a bomb squad truck, sniffing dogs, special police units -- all before the blast. CLAUDE CRISS [ph], Private Investigator We saw officers going through the bushes looking in these windows at the bottom of the courthouse here.

ANNOUNCER

Tom Jarriel investigates. Was the government warned before the bombing? "The Families Want to Know." And -- the incident that outraged America. The death of a teenage girl, blamed on a man who may never be punished. He's a foreign diplomat. No matter what diplomats do, the law can't touch them. Police say a diplomat's son raped this woman and 14 others. CAROL HOLMES [ph], Rape Victim He clearly felt that he was above the law.

ANNOUNCER

Lynn Sherr with a system that mocks justice. Foreign diplomats living "Above The Law." Then -- her death gripped the nation. So did the images of a little girl in the spotlight. Now, many people are wondering -- are beauty pageants really meant for little girls like these? Dr DAVID ELKIND [ph], Child Psychologist They don't distinguish clearly between what they want and what their parents want.

ANNOUNCER

These proud parents disagree.

PARENT OF CHILD BEAUTY CONTESTANT

She likes it.

ANNOUNCER

Deborah Roberts takes you into a world everyone's talking about. Are they missing out on childhood? "Little Beauties." Plus -- sometimes you just have to have it. A big, thick steak.

CHILD

It's juicy. 3rd MALE STEAK HOUSE CUSTOMER Steak is an American thing.

ANNOUNCER

It tastes so good, how can it be bad? The experts have done the tests. Now, we'll tell you what's inside -- the best steaks to eat and the worst. And what about those tasty extras? 1st FEMALE STEAK HOUSE CUSTOMER That's not fat free, and neither am I.

P13/29

ANNOUNCER

Arnold Diaz brings you the first look at an eye - opening report. "Let Them Eat Steak." Those stories tonight, January 17, 1997, after this brief message. [Commercial Break]

[SEGMENT BREAK] [eof999] BARBARA WALTERS, ABC NEWS IT HAS BEEN NEARLY TWO YEARS SINCE THE OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING THAT CLAIMED 167 LIVES. AND GRIEF HAS GIVEN WAY NOW TO SOME VERY DISTURBING QUESTIONS. SOME OF THE VICTIMS' FAMILIES SAY THAT THEY HAVE REASON TO SUSPECT THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS AWARE OF WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN AND FAILED TO WARN THEM. HUGH DOWNS, ABC NEWS WHAT AROUSED THEIR SUSPICIONS? IS THEIR SUGGESTION EVEN CREDIBLE? 20/20 CONDUCTED ITS OWN EXCLUSIVE INVESTIGATION INTO SOME OF THEIR STORIES. AND WHAT TOM JARRIEL DISCOVERED, WE THINK DESERVES SERIOUS PUBLIC ATTENTION. WAS OKLAHOMA CITY AN AVOIDABLE TRAGEDY? WELL, RIGHT NOW, THESE FAMILIES HAVE NO ANSWERS, ONLY TROUBLING QUESTIONS. TOM JARRIEL, ABC NEWS [VO] THE DAY BEGAN WARM AND SUNNY FOR MID - APRIL IN OKLAHOMA CITY. IT COULD NOT HAVE SEEMED MORE ROUTINE. IN THE SUBURBS, GLENN WILBURN [PH] WAS HELPING HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER GET THEIR TWO PLAYFUL GRANDSONS, THREE - YEAR - OLD CHASE AND HIS TWO - YEAR - OLD BROTHER, COLTON, READY TO TAKE TO THE DAY CARE CENTER DOWNTOWN IN THE ALFRED P. MURRAH BUILDING. GLENN WILBURN, GRANDPARENT OF BOMBING VICTIM CHASE NEEDED HIS SHOES PUT ON HIM SO, I PICKED HIM UP AND SET HIM ON THE BAR AND PUT HIS SHOES ON HIM. AND AS I DID, I HAD TO PUT MY ARMS AROUND HIM. AND I'M PUTTING HIS SHOES ON, AND I KISSED HIM ON THE FOREHEAD. AND I SAID, "YOU KNOW, YOU'RE A GOOD BOY." I SAID, "PA - PAW LOVES YOU."

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] The day care center was a convenient spot for federal workers to drop their toddlers in the downtown area. About two dozen kids attended the second - floor nursery. These scenes were photographed the week before April 19. On that fateful day, as the children played, about one - half block away, a truck pulled to a stop. This is an exclusive 20/20 photograph of that Ryder rental truck. The quality is poor because it was snapped by a small security camera inside an apartment lobby. Because this truck played such a vital role in the Oklahoma bombing, we have colorized and enhanced the black and white security photo to show more clearly exactly where the yellow Ryder rental truck was parked. Until tonight, the truck has never been seen. The time -- just minutes before 9:00 am. Just down the street, at 9:00 am sharp, Lue Klaver [ph] convened the monthly meeting of the Oklahoma Water Resources Board. LUE KLAVER, Water Resources Board Chairwoman My name is Lue Klaver. And I've been designated...

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] As the meeting proceeded, authorities believe the driver of the truck left the Regency Towers, then drove half a block to the Murrah building and parked the truck outside. It was loaded with high explosives. This was directly across the street from the Water Resources Building. Connie Ziegelgruber [ph], the board's recording secretary, made this audio tape of the meeting. She listened as we played her tape, never before heard by a nation so shocked by what was imminent.

LUE KLAVER

Receive information regarding... Explosion CONNIE ZIEGELGRUBER, Water Resource Board Recording Secretary This is when the bomb went off. We immediately had ceiling tiles coming down.

WOMAN

My babies! My babies!

RESCUE WORKER

Multiple head lacerations. We need medical supplies.

BYSTANDER

It must have been a bomb or something, I guess.

REPORTER

Come again.

BYSTANDER

It must have been a bomb.

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] It was a bomb. A 4,800 - pound mixture of ammonium nitrate fertilizer and fuel oil -- known as an amfo bomb, carried inside the Ryder truck. It killed 167, including 19 children buried in the day care center. When Glenn Wilburn saw on TV the little shoe he had put on grandson Chase, he knew both boys had died. Where the Ryder truck was photographed earlier, wreckage was everywhere, including the truck axle with an identification number, which later would help trace down who rented it. Federal agents quickly arrested Tim McVeigh and Terry Nichols as prime suspects for the bombing. A third man, Michael Fortier [ph], was arrested as an alleged accomplice. The government said they would pursue and arrest a man known only as John Doe 2 and others. In the aftermath, the derelict Murrah building was demolished. The stunned citizens of Oklahoma City buried their dead and put their faith, without question, in the credibility of the federal investigation. But now, more than 18 months later, the initial shock has worn off. Many families are beginning to ask hard questions. Why now? Attorney Dan Adomitis [ph]. DAN ADOMITIS, Attorney This community's had a lot of things to deal with after the bombing. And this was not the kind of thing one likes to talk about when we have a loss like this. And I think now is the first time this community's really able to start talking about some of these issues.

TOM JARRIEL

[on camera] At issue increasingly for some of the victims and families -- what did authorities know or suspect before the explosion that federal workers and the children arriving at the Murrah building did not know or were not told? [VO] For seven months, 20/20 has looked into just that question. And we have found solid facts which tend to support their suspicion. Our investigation uncovered eyewitnesses and government documents which show a lot of unusual activity was going on behind the scenes shortly before the explosion occurred. Consider what several people we found saw that morning, including Adomitis, chief counsel for a tire company.

DAN ADOMITIS

Well, I was coming downtown for a charity board meeting that I had at 7:30 in the Oklahoma Tower, which is located right over there.

TOM JARRIEL

[on camera] You drove right down this street?

DAN ADOMITIS

Right down Hudson Street -- one way street -- trying to get into the parking lot up here.

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] Suddenly, he noticed something different.

DAN ADOMITIS

There was this fairly large truck with a trailer behind it. And it had a shield on the side of the door and it said "bomb disposal" or "bomb squad" below it. And I really found that interesting. You know, I'd never seen anything like that in person.

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] Authorities now claim in federal investigative reports that the huge, ominous truck, with its trailer, was being used by a deputy to run routine errands. We also found Claude Criss [ph]. CLAUDE CRISS, Private Investigator That morning, the presence of law enforcement was in the air. It was everywhere downtown here.

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] As a private investigator and part - time employee for the county courts, he drove a regular downtown route. But on April 19, shortly before 8:30 am, about a half hour before the explosion, he, too, noticed something highly unusual. [on camera] As you reached this corner, Harvey and McGee, and looked in this direction, what did you see?

CLAUDE CRISS

We saw officers going through the bushes and looking in these windows at the bottom of the courthouse here.

TOM JARRIEL

One or two officers, or several?

CLAUDE CRISS

I would say no more than seven, but more than four paramilitary individuals with arMs I saw three dogs that were being used in this block, on this side.

TOM JARRIEL

They seemed to be looking for something in the shrubs?

CLAUDE CRISS

Yes, sir. Something on the building or connected to the building. We wasn't quite sure.

TOM JARRIEL

Did these appear to be sniffer dogs, the type they use for bomb searches?

CLAUDE CRISS

That's what I would think.

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] This was directly across the street from the Murrah building. Many others saw the same type of curious activity. 20/20 found a mention of the bomb squad in this company newsletter, in this inter - office article by a county worker and in a small - town newspaper story. A few weeks after the bombing, Glenn Wilburn, his wife, Kathy [ph], and daughter, Edye [ph], hosted a dinner for the families whose children were killed or injured in the day care center. As the families talked, suspicions and anger began to grow. [on camera] At what point did you begin to suspect that there may have been prior warning to this explosion?

GLENN WILBURN

Renee Cooper [ph], who lost her child in the bombing, told me that that morning that she saw a bomb squad in front of the federal courthouse building as she drove to work. I quizzed her at length. You know, I said, "How do you know this was a bomb squad?" She said -- she was somewhat indignant because she said, "Well, they had "bomb squad" written across their jackets in huge letters." She said there was several, said there was probably six or seven.

TOM JARRIEL

[on camera] However, in federal investigative reports obtained by 20/20, there is no mention of Renee Cooper as ever having seen the bomb squad. [VO] Suspecting a cover - up, Wilburn, aided by his wife, temporarily set aside his profession as a certified public accountant to begin his own investigation -- amassing thousands of pages of documents, pictures, taking witnesses' statements and recording interviews when he thought it necessary. He says his investigation has uncovered ample information that there was some type of prior warning or prior knowledge of pending trouble in Oklahoma City. Wilburn says the local fire department was warned five days earlier.

GLENN WILBURN

I was told that there was a call placed to the fire department on Good Friday, giving them a warning of some potential danger of a terrorism act. So I went to the fire department.

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] While Wilburn was investigating at fire headquarters, a deputy chief told him no such call was ever made. But three dispatchers and the deputy chief of dispatchers, Harvey Weathers, confirmed the call. Wilburn says he asked Weathers why the department would deny it.

GLENN WILBURN

And Harvey's quote to me was -- exactly these words -- "Well," he said, "I'm not going to lie for anybody. A lot of people don't want to get involved in this deal," he said.

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] Our 20/20 investigation found documents which show that Weathers does confirm the fire department received a call from the FBI five days before the bombing, warning that there were some people coming through town they should be on the lookout for. The documents don't indicate it was specifically a bomb threat. Deputy Chief Weathers refused to talk with 20/20. Other documents obtained by 20/20 show that someone called the Executive Secretariat's office at the Justice Department in Washington and said the Murrah building had been bombed, but this was 24 minutes before the blast. No action was apparently taken. The suspicion of prior warning is bolstered, too, by this man we found who spoke to us anonymously at his wife's request. She worked in the Murrah building, which was the local headquarters for the ATF -- the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms -- the federal agency most directly involved in catching bombers.

HUSBAND OF ATF EMPLOYEE

I spotted an ATF officer in a jacket that signified that it was AFT personnel. And he just came out and told me that the ATF wasn't in the building that day. They had been tipped by their pagers not to come to work, which I was flabbergasted. You know, I didn't ask this guy this question. This is just what came out of his mouth.

TOM JARRIEL

[on camera] Did he go further to explain why they were told not to come to work?

HUSBAND OF ATF EMPLOYEE

He just -- they were tipped by their pagers of a bomb threat that morning.

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] The ATF says their field agents were either in other buildings or had worked late the night before on investigations and had not stayed away because of a bomb threat. They say a few ATF senior personnel and clerks were in the building. According to the ATF, agent - in - charge Alex McCauley [ph] was in an elevator along with DEA agent David Schickendanz [ph] when the bomb went off. An award naming Schickendanz one of the national policemen of the year would describe the two men surviving a dramatic six - story fall in an elevator. But Dwayne James [ph] and Oscar Johnson [ph] say that just didn't happen. They were the elevator maintenance men who arrived 20 minutes after the explosion. DWAYNE JAMES [?], Elevator Maintenance Man Several of us entered and did a floor - by - floor search to see where the elevators were. And we inspected each elevator and made sure nobody was in.

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] They made photographs and carefully documented their inspection. The pictures show all the safety cables and pulleys worked and kept the elevator from free falling. [on camera] One report has a couple of law enforcement officers getting on the ninth floor and the elevator falling six floors, I believe it was, down to the third floor. Could that have happened?

DWAYNE JAMES [?]

If you fell six floors and it was a free fall, it'd be like jumping out a six - story building. I'd ask them how long they were in the hospital and how lucky they were to survive. So, yeah, it's kind of humorous.

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] It's the behavior and contradicting stories from the ATF and the US attorneys that anger some of the families.

BOMBING SURVIVOR

I'm a survivor of the bombing.

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] All of these people either worked in the building... KATHY WILBURN, Grandparent of Bombing Victim I'm Kathy Wilburn, and I lost my two grandchildren.

TOM JARRIEL

...or lost a loved one. JANNY COVERDALE [ph], Grandparent of Bombing Victim I'm Janny Coverdale, and I lost my two grandsons.

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] We met with them in the kitchen of the Wilburns' home. All feel they are loyal Americans who were left in the dark on the events of the most tragic day of their lives. They cite, for example, ATF director John McGaw's [ph] statement to the media that he had issued a special alert to all his field offices that April 19 was Patriot's Day -- dear to the hearts of militia groups and the anniversary of the Waco siege -- a potentially dangerous day. That would have included Oklahoma City. [on camera] Anybody here see any memos, have any memos? Was anything posted in the doorways? Did the ATF office circulate anything in the building that would alert you that this was a day to be on alert for?

BOMBING SURVIVOR

If they had the courtesy to get their own people out, they should have had the courtesy to get everyone else out.

JANNY COVERDALE

I know I wouldn't have had Elijah and Erin in there. And I feel like we should have known.

TOM JARRIEL

[VO] Federal worker Randy Ledger [ph] barely survived. RANDY LEDGER, Bombing Survivor I mean, it's very disturbing, what's coming to light. I worked in the building. The building manager, you know, was my boss. That's what disturbs me is that they didn't get that information out to people to make their -- excuse me - - their own decisions.

JANNY COVERDALE

Maybe they couldn't have reached all of us by telephone to say, "Hey, don't bring your kids in tomorrow, because tomorrow's April 19. Something might happen." But I mean, just saying nothing? You drop your child off at the day care center and an hour and one - half later, he's dead.

TOM JARRIEL

[on camera] The Justice Department, under a gag order from the courts, declines to discuss a number of questions and refused on - camera comment to 20/20. But on background, they emphatically denied there was any forewarning the Murrah building or any other building was going to be bombed on April 19. They say there were no warnings of any type about possible trouble or terrorist activity in Oklahoma City. They say all questions will be answered once the trials begin. What if these were honest men who made an honest mistake, and it literally blew up in their faces?

GLENN WILBURN

Then stand up and admit it.

KATHY WILBURN

We can deal with the truth. Just give us the truth.

RELATIVE OF BOMBING VICTIM

We want to know. We know where our loved are, OK? That's not the problem. But we don't know what happened. And we want the truth, and we need the truth to heal.

BARBARA WALTERS

The truth. What is the Justice Department saying?

TOM JARRIEL

Barbara, they say there was no prior warning -- that the courtroom, the trials is the proper place to answer these questions.

BARBARA WALTERS

Now, we saw some people here, but in general, you know, there were many more involved. How widespread is this feeling?

TOM JARRIEL

We don't really know. There's an Oklahoma legislature who's just received permission to gather petitions to have a grand jury investigation of this by the county for the first time. He says he has broad support for this effort. So we'll see.

BARBARA WALTERS

That truck was never been seen before -- that photograph. Is that going to be introduced into the trial?

TOM JARRIEL

We certainly suspect it will, Barbara. The enhanced photo shows a very distinct possibility of a man standing behind that truck. And its time - sequence camera took additional photographs. So, will those additional photographs show there was a man there? Will they show that he was alone? Will it show it was the suspect, Tim McVeigh? The additional photographs in the trial should help point that out.

BARBARA WALTERS

Let's hope they do. Thank you, Tom. This was extremely interesting.

HUGH DOWNS

Well, next on the program -- how do you get away with crime in this country? Police say the man who allegedly raped this woman did. And so might the man blamed for this fatal accident. Lynn Sherr with the outrage of people allowed to live above the law -- after this. [Commercial Break]

[SEGMENT BREAK] [EOF999]

BARBARA WALTERS

Now, the incident that has turned the spotlight on a privileged group of people -- foreign diplomats. They live here, protected by our laws, yet not bound by them. And that can lead to some outrageous abuses. Let Lynn Sherr show you what can happen when you allow people to live above the law. LYNN SHERR, ABC News [VO] She lived her life like a typical 16 - year - old -- hours on the telephone, afternoons at the beach, family vacations at America's tourist spots. But there was nothing typical about the way Joviane Waltrick lost her life -- in a Washington, DC, traffic accident that has ignited a controversy involving her parents, the US State Department and a foreign government halfway around the globe.

JOVIANE'S MOTHER

My wish is not revenge. It is justice.

JOVIANE'S FATHER

My baby. My baby.