

Bomb Inquiry Figure's Widow Shares Findings

The Oklahoman

Judy Kuhlman, Diana Baldwin • *Published: March 12, 1998*

The grandmother of two children killed in the Oklahoma City bombing spent 3 1/2 hours Wednesday with the Oklahoma County grand jury investigating conspiracy theories in the bombing.

Kathy Wilburn said little to reporters as she entered and left the Oklahoma County jail at 201 N Shartel, where the grand jury has been meeting.

Wilburn is the grandmother of Chase Smith, 3, and Colton Smith, 2, who were killed in the bombing. She also is the wife of the late Glenn Wilburn, who died of pancreatic cancer last year at age 46.

Glenn Wilburn and state Rep. Charles Key, R-Oklahoma City, spearheaded a petition drive that empaneled the grand jury on June 30. "I just shared with them the findings from mine and my husband's investigation," Kathy Wilburn said as she left the jail Wednesday. Wilburn said she believes people other than convicted bomber Timothy McVeigh and co-conspirator Terry Nichols were involved in the bombing.

Oklahoma Highway Patrol trooper Vernon Phillips, of Sallisaw, was the only other witness to appear Wednesday. Phillips was with the jury for about an hour. He was assigned to the patrol's bomb squad in 1995.

In 1992, Phillips stopped a car in eastern Oklahoma that belonged to Elohim City resident Andreas Strassmeir. Pete Ward Jr. was driving the car. Ward also had stayed at Elohim City, a white separatist community in eastern Oklahoma. Strassmeir has been said to be John Doe 2, the mysterious man depicted in the federal government's sketch of one of the bombing suspects. A conspiracy-oriented publication has said Phillips arrested Strassmeir during the routine traffic stop. But sources said Ward was the only one in the vehicle when the trooper pulled the vehicle over.

The trooper remembered a briefcase and documents, some written in German, in the vehicle, sources said. Strassmeir has denied involvement in the bombing.

At the grand jury, Wilburn was accompanied by her attorney, David Autry. Larry Dellinger, an investigator in the district attorney's office assigned to the grand jury, carried a cardboard box of papers and manilla folders into the grand jury room. Wilburn also carried papers with her into the jury room.

Autry said the file folders and other items in the box were subpoenaed by the grand jury. He advised Wilburn not to tell reporters about items in the box.

The Wilburns maintained federal agents had prior knowledge of the attack and covered up a larger conspiracy to protect themselves. Federal authorities vehemently denied those allegations. The explosion on April 19, 1995, resulted in 168 deaths. McVeigh, 29, was sentenced in June to die. Nichols, 42, is awaiting sentencing.

Glenn Wilburn and J.D. Cash, a free-lance reporter, sought alternative theories to the government's case against McVeigh and Nichols, McVeigh's Army buddy. "My husband literally gave his life for this," Kathy Wilburn has said publicly. "He was driven by it. He was eaten up with it." Their stories were popular on radio talk shows and in conspiracy-oriented publications.

At first, Kathy Wilburn said she and her husband were not taken seriously. In fact, she said they were often criticized. "I don't think they understood the work we were doing," Kathy Wilburn said. "Never was it our position that the ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) was warned and just hid out and waited for the building to be blown up."

Wilburn also asks why the Federal Bureau of Investigation did not run 20 fingerprints investigators found in McVeigh's car and in a room McVeigh stayed in at the Dreamland Motel in Junction City, Kan., April 14-18, 1995.

Kathy Wilburn said she was told the fingerprints were not run for a match because the FBI didn't want to give Nichols' defense team more ammunition against federal prosecutors.

Wilburn said FBI agent Jon Hersley told her the FBI would try to find a match for the fingerprints after the Nichols trial was completed.

However, Wilburn said she doubts the government will ever try to find a match for the prints.

She complained that U. S. Justice Department officials said no agents are assigned to the Oklahoma City bombing case and the file had been closed.

Chris Whatney, federal spokeswoman for the Oklahoma bombing investigation, said Wednesday there is no ongoing investigation.

Archive ID: 715269