## **OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING: 1995-2015**

# **20 Years After The Bombing, How Is OKC Different?**

#### BY CLINT DAVIS Scripps National Desk

In April 1995, gas was about \$1.25 a gallon, "Seinfeld" was TV's most popular show and the O.J. Simpson murder trial was dominating the national conversation. Also, the hair was bigger.

It's that last part that reminded longtime Oklahoma City resident Jennifer McCollum just how long it has been since her hometown was rocked by what was then the deadliest terrorist attack in United States history.

"I drove by the memorial recently and saw a laminated picture of (23-year-old victim) Julie Welch. I realized that her hair had gone out of style and it really crystallized for me that she was never going to grow old," McCollum said. "It took my breath away because it was the first time I realized how much time had passed."

April 19 marks 20 years since the Oklahoma City bombing killed 169 people and injured more than 650 others. The attack targeted the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City.

Despite the passage of two decades, McCollum and other Oklahoma City residents remember with perfect clarity what they were doing when they heard about - or felt the explosion, at 9:02 a.m.

"I was still in bed when the house shook in the morning," Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett told the Scripps National Desk. "I had anchored the evening news the night before. I didn't know what (the noise) was. I wasn't sure there was anything wrong." Cornett said he turned on

the television and saw reports within five or six minutes of the blast \_ but still none of the news outlets knew what had happened. "The initial reports were that it was some kind of natural gas explosion. The idea that it was a bomb never occurred to me," Cornett said.

McCollum, 47, was working in public relations at Tinker Air Force Base, located about 11 miles from the blast. She said she also thought it was a natural gas explosion at first.

When someone told her there had been a "very large explosion downtown," McCollum recalled having a sobering realization. "I just remember instantly being aware that people were, in that moment, dying, she said. "A co-worker and I went into an office, closed the

### The Oklahoma City bombing

April 19 is the 20th anniversary of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, an act of terrorism that killed 168 people.

April 19, 1995: A car bomb explodes near the Alfred P. Murrah building, ripping a nine-story hole in the building and an 8-foot crater.

1995

90 minutes after the

explosion, Timothy

April 21, 1995: McVeigh is charged, and the government releases information about his possible motive involving the government's handling of the standoff in Waco, Texas.

1996

1997

★ Oklahoma City Feb. 23, 1996: A dismembered leg found in the wreckage thought to

McVeigh is sentenced to belong to another conspirator death. is positively linked to a previously identified victim.

1999

Dec. 23, 1997:

Terry Nichols is

convicted of

conspiring to

build a bomb.

June 13, 1997: May 27, 1998: Michael Fortier, who knew about the bomb plot, is sentenced to 12 years in prison for not warning the government of the attack.

June 11, 2001: After choosing to end his appeals, Timothy McVeigh is executed.

2001

2000 June 5, 1998: Nichols is spared the death penalty and is sentenced to life in prison.

held as a bombing suspect. Source: Tribune Newspapers reporting Graphic: Tribune News Service thing so tragic could happen here," McCollum said, echoing

McVeigh, 27, was arrested

for a traffic violation and

a familiar refrain many Americans likely would have uttered in the years before the Oklahoma City bombing and 9/11.

The prevailing notion after those attacks was summed up by 34-year-old Mia Blake, editor-in-chief of Oklahoma City-based Slice magazine. "I feel like our city is much less innocent since the bombing,' Blake said. "I think in general, people are more cautious."

The bomb, built and detonated by U.S. Army veterans Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, was housed in the back of a rental truck that was parked in front of the Federal Building.

Cornett said he didn't recall widespread security changes across the city afterward but did say it seemed to make people more alert. "After the bombing, I think people took anti-government groups more seriously and were more likely to report them."

McCollum said the bombing and subsequent national tragedies like the Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary shootings have made her hold her children a little tighter.

"I kiss my children goodbye every morning with the knowledge that it could be the last time I see them. I just never want to leave them with a bad goodbye," McCollum said. fighting back tears. "I try not to live my life in fear, but these things have happened to other people who never expected them.

Among the victims of the bombing were 19 young children who were at a day care center inside the federal buildabout her 4-month-old son. "I think, 'What if I had dropped him off at day care that day?' It definitely adds another dimension to my thoughts on the bombing."

April 26, 1995: Terry and James

Nichols, two brothers from

Michigan, are charged with

The charges against James

Nichols were later dropped.

helping McVeigh make bombs.

"Everyone thinks of the bombing first." That was Blake's take when asked if she felt the attack still defines her city among the nationwide consciousness. "I think it's absolutely the first thing people recognize about Oklahoma City.'

McCollum was inclined to agree, adding, "It brought a nationwide awareness to the city and in the era of Google search, that can be negative; to always see tragic images when someone does a Google image search of Oklahoma City."

1998

convicted on all 11

counts of murder

and conspiracy.

June 2, 1997:

McVeigh is

Cornett, who was elected to a fourth term as the city's mayor in 2014, said changing Oklahoma City's national image has been an important part of his tenure. "We became branded by tragedy. That's

why I went after an NBA team \_ we needed the national public to connect something positive to Oklahoma City.

Although Cornett doesn't want the bombing to be first in the minds of the general public outside of Oklahoma City, inside the city limits, he's adamant that citizens don't forget what happened on April 19, 1995.

"We want to commemorate it," he said, referring not only to the people who were killed

but also to what he called an "unmatched" sense of unity that emerged in the city after the bombing.

'Our whole community was affected by that life experience," Cornett said. "In the months after the bombing, something almost magical happened in the city. We came together, helped each other up and dared the world to pull us apart again."



door and praved together. "I couldn't believe some-

ing. That fact still gives Mia Blake pause when she thinks

# **McVeigh Defense Archive: Bomber Saw Blast As Failure**

**BY MICHAEL GRACZYK** Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas - Timothy McVeigh considered the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building 20 years ago somewhat of a failure, viewed himself as a "Paul Revere-type messenger" and even suggested his defense team should receive \$800,000 from the government, according an archive of documents donated by the convicted bomber's lead attorney.

The estimated 1 million pages of paper documents from Stephen Jones now fill 550 file cabinet-sized boxes at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas, where the Enid, Oklahoma, attorney received his undergraduate degree. The trove, delivered to the school in three phases since 1998, only became fully organized late last year.

It includes a confidential report from a polygraph examiner, who wrote that McVeigh had wanted to 'take out' the Murrah Building on April 19, 1995. Although the blast killed 168 people, including 19 children, the examiner concluded that "In McVeigh's mind, he believed that he had definitely screwed up because he left the building

still standing." McVeigh was executed by injection in 2001 at age 33. **Co-conspirator Terry Nichols** was convicted separately and sentenced to life in prison.

Even as he stood accused of orchestrating what until the Sept. 11 attacks was considered the deadliest act of terrorism on U.S. soil, McVeigh appeared to be driven by profit and thought his attorneys should be entitled to "\$800,000 (after fees, taxes)."

"If I'm gonna die anyway, I want to make some money. Not for me, but to try to make up for what my family has been put thru, as well as to shell out some 'bonuses' to my legal

team.," he wrote in one note to his defense team included in the archive

In another, he doodled a tank ramming a house and wrote: "This is the FBI! ... Send out your women and children. We know you're in there and we know you have Bibles and a copy of the Constitution!" The collection also includes

a copy of a published cartoon showing 11 jurors frowning and one smiling, with an arrow pointing to her and the note: My choice, potential juror.'

Don Carleton, executive director of the museum, said Jones wasn't comfortable putting the material at an Oklahoma institution "because the feelings were so raw" and his fears the collection could be perceived as "almost a shrine" to the convicted bomber.

"It's been a difficult collection to figure out how to let people know we have it available for research," Carleton said. 'You don't want to promote it. That's not the right word. You don't want to publicize it without coming across as being somewhat celebratory. It's almost like Holocaust records. You've got a whole bunch of people who are rightly so sensitive to this.'

Besides the handwritten notes from McVeigh, the defense case files include reports of investigations, news stories, photos, recordings and trial exhibits.

In 2001, Jones published a book suggesting McVeigh and Nichols could not have been alone in carrying out the bombing, McVeigh denied any knowledge of another collaborator, or presence of an accomplice who became known in the case as John Doe No. 2. But the polygraph examiner, Tim Domgard, wrote there were "indications of deception" in McVeigh's responses related to questions about others involved

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