

The exclusive story of Colleen LaRose, the American-born woman who came to be considered the new face of terrorism



CHAPTER ONE

From abuse to a chat room, a martyr is made

BY JOHN SHIFFMAN

DECEMBER 7, 2012

JANE'S JIHAD FROM ABUSE TO A CHAT ROOM, A MARTYR IS MADE

Part one in a four-part series

"Kill him."

The American who called herself Jihad Jane read the words on her computer screen. Colleen LaRose was fiddling on the Internet, passing time in her duplex near Philadelphia, when the call to martyrdom arrived from halfway around the world.

The order came from an al-Qaeda operative. The date: March 22, 2009.

This was it, she thought. Her chance. At 45, LaRose was ready to become *somebody*.

A compact woman with a seventh-grade education, LaRose was a recent convert to Islam. She found a place for herself quickly, raising money and awareness online for the plight of her Muslim brothers and sisters. They were underdogs, just like her.

During her darkest days, LaRose had endured incest, rape and prostitution. She surrendered her life to drinking and drugs, from crack to crystal meth. Now, if she accepted the order to kill, she would surrender her life to a higher power: Allah.

The man who issued the directive called himself Eagle Eye. LaRose knew him only by his online messages and his voice, and he claimed to be hiding in Pakistan. Eagle Eye wanted her to fly to Europe to train as an assassin with other al-Qaeda operatives, then to Sweden to do what few other Muslim jihadists could: blend in.

The terrorists believed that her blonde hair, white skin and U.S. passport, even her Texas twang, would help her to get close enough to the target: Lars Vilks, a Swedish artist who had blasphemed the Prophet Mohammad by sketching his face on the head of a dog.

"Go to Sweden," Eagle Eye instructed LaRose. "And kill him."

A year later, when U.S. authorities revealed the plot, they repeatedly described the Jihad Jane case as one that should forever alter the public's view of terrorism. At the time, one official said the



THE TARGET: The Swedish artist Lars Vilks, above, received death threats in 2007 after drawing the Prophet Mohammad on the head of a dog. **REUTERS/BOB STRONG**

(Front page) The woman who pledged to assassinate Vilks, Colleen LaRose, is pictured as a child, left, and as an adult, after she converted to Islam. **REUTERS/FAMILY PHOTO/HANDOUT (LEFT) /VIDEO FRAME GRAB COURTESY OF SITE INTELLIGENCE GROUP/HANDOUT (RIGHT)**

conspiracy "underscores the evolving nature of the threat we face." A second said the case "demonstrates yet another very real danger lurking on the Internet" and "shatters any lingering thought that we can spot a terrorist based on appearance."

The case was so serious, authorities said, that they charged LaRose with crimes that could keep her in prison for the rest of her life.

The court filings and press releases draw a frightening portrait of the Jihad Jane conspiracy. But an exclusive Reuters review of confidential investigative documents and interviews in Europe and the United States – including the first with Jihad Jane herself – reveals a less menacing and, in some ways, more preposterous undertaking than the U.S. government asserted.

"I got so close to being able to do this," LaRose says today of the plan to kill Vilks.

In truth, what happened proved more farcical than frightful, more absurd than ominous.

The conspiracy included a troubled trio of Americans, each a terrorist wannabe:

How the series was reported

JANE'S JIHAD is based on six months of reporting in Pennsylvania, Texas, Maryland, Colorado, Washington, D.C., and Ireland. The accounts, including the thoughts and actions of characters in the stories, are based on court records and other documents, many of them confidential, as well as interviews with people involved in the case. Reporter John Shiffman gained exclusive access to those documents and individuals. Many spoke only on condition of anonymity. In Ireland, the law forbids the government and defense lawyers from commenting until court proceedings are completed. In the United States, prosecutors do not typically comment before sentencing. The Reuters interview with Colleen LaRose, the woman who called herself Jihad Jane, is the only one she has granted.

HOW IT HAPPENED

Colleen LaRose is born near Detroit.	LaRose's biological father rapes her and her sister repeatedly.	LaRose , 13, runs away to Texas, where she becomes a prostitute.	LaRose , 16, marries a man twice her age.	LaRose , 17, arrives at a Memphis shelter and is committed to a psychiatric facility for several months.	Divorced from her first husband, LaRose , 23, marries again.	Her second husband files for divorce and LaRose , 34, moves into a trailer south of Dallas.	LaRose meets Kurt Gorman , a radio antenna repairman. She falls in love and moves to Pennsburg, Pa.
1963	1971-77	1977	1980	1980	1986	1997	2002

LaRose; a Colorado woman named Jamie Paulin Ramirez; and a Maryland teenager named Mohammed Hassan Khalid. All have pleaded guilty to breaking U.S. terrorism laws, but only LaRose was charged in the plot to kill Vilks. Her sentencing was recently rescheduled from Dec. 19 to May 7.

Since the 9/11 terror attacks, the FBI has investigated hundreds of cases similar to the Jihad Jane conspiracy. With each investigation comes a challenge: how to prevent acts of terrorism without violating civil rights or overreacting to plots that are little more than bluster.

"We are going to err on the side of caution," says Richard P. Quinn, the FBI's assistant special agent in charge for counterterrorism in Philadelphia. "We will go after operatives and operations that are more aspirational than operational because to do otherwise would almost be negligent."

At least at the outset, authorities had no way to be certain how much of a threat LaRose might pose, given her resolute conviction and her unique attributes – primarily the way she looked. No one disputes that LaRose and Khalid managed to make contact with overseas al-Qaeda operatives and with a loose affiliation of young American-born male Muslim jihadists inside the United States.

Quinn says the case exemplifies al-Qaeda's new approach to terrorism. He says the Jihad Jane conspiracy – from recruiting to planning – "represents the many new faces of the terrorist threat."

But some civil rights advocates say the U.S. government has exaggerated the danger posed by aspiring terrorists – in this case and scores of others.

"You can't say these people are totally innocent – they aren't, and there's something wild and scary about them – but almost all of them seem to be incompetent and deluded in some way," said Ohio State University professor John Mueller, who has written extensively about how the government has handled terrorism cases. "When you look closely, many of these cases become interestingly cartoonish."

Interviews and documents, many composed by those involved in the Jihad Jane case as the conspiracy unfolded, often reveal their innermost thoughts. They also show the gullibility of the main players or the ways that they botched almost every assignment along the way.

Khalid, a troubled high school honor student who lived with his parents in Maryland, inadvertently linked his secret jihadist blog to a page on his school website.

“We are going to err on the side of caution. We will go after operatives and operations that are more aspirational than operational because to do otherwise would almost be negligent

Richard P. Quinn
FBI

Ramirez, a lonely Colorado woman known as Jihad Jamie, headed to Europe to train for holy war. She was lured to Ireland by a Muslim man promising a pious, married life but soon came to believe that all he really sought was a cook, a maid and a sex slave.

Perhaps most intriguing is the story of LaRose, the aspiring assassin whose devotion and naivete left her susceptible to recruitment but prone to failure.

In the only interview she has given, LaRose says she became devoted to the Muslim men she met online and blindly followed their instructions because they seemed righteous. "I just loved my brothers so much, when they would tell me stuff, I would listen to them, no matter what," she says. "And I also was ... lost."

Indeed, just weeks into her jihad, she became homesick. And days before returning from Europe to America, she emailed the FBI – to see whether the government might spring for her airfare home.

Despite the media attention the case has received, many details haven't been previously disclosed. Among them: how LaRose, Khalid and Ramirez became radicalized; how they found one another; how they repeatedly bungled the plot that authorities say posed a "very real danger;" and how they came to sacrifice everything for a group of strangers who promised immortality but delivered ignominy.

"Jihad Jane is a perfect figure in some

ways because it's like a soap opera," says her intended victim, the artist Vilks. "This is today's most interesting part of terrorism – the amateurs."

THE ENCOUNTER

Colleen LaRose's path toward terrorism began with what devout Muslims would consider a sin – a one-night stand.

Her tryst occurred in 2007, two years before LaRose agreed to kill Vilks. At the time, she was in Amsterdam on vacation with her longtime boyfriend, Kurt Gorman, and the two were arguing.

They had dated for five years and were living in suburban Pennsylvania. They had met when Gorman, a radio technician, was dispatched from Pennsburg, Pa., to repair a 307-foot radio tower that stood near cotton fields south of Dallas. LaRose was living beneath the tower in a single-wide trailer she shared with her sister, her mother, her stepfather, and two ducks named Lewis and Clark.

Gorman, who declined to talk to Reuters, was a few years younger than LaRose. Colleen found him mellow, gregarious and adventuresome. He fell for her loud, infectious laugh and her penchant for practical jokes. He flattered her with attention and spoiled her with generosity. When she told him that she wished she had bigger breasts, he paid to get them enlarged. Her new size DDs came to dominate her 4-foot-11 frame.

One night during the Amsterdam vacation, the two were at a bar and LaRose got loaded.



BEFORE JIHAD: LaRose with her boyfriend, Kurt Gorman (right) and his father. The three lived together in a duplex near Philadelphia.

REUTERS/FAMILY PHOTO/HANDOUT

She could be a mean drunk and she lit into Gorman. He left the bar. LaRose remained.

A short time later, a man approached her. He was Middle Eastern, a Muslim – and handsome. She went home with him, in part to spite her boyfriend, in part because she was curious.

The decision would change her life.

THE CONVERSION

The Amsterdam dalliance with the Muslim man sparked an interest in Islam, one that LaRose kept secret from her boyfriend Gorman when they returned to Pennsylvania.

To learn more about the religion, she began visiting Muslim websites. To meet Muslim men, she signed up for a popular dating site, Muslima.com.

She used Gorman's credit card to pay for access to the site. When Gorman saw the bill, LaRose laughed it off as a lark.

LaRose believed in God but she had

never followed any particular religion. As she continued to explore Islam online, she met a man in Turkey who became an especially helpful mentor. He explained the Five Pillars of Islam, and LaRose learned the *wudu*, the Muslim washing ritual. She ordered a Koran.

After a few weeks, she discovered that converting was easy; she didn't even have to visit a mosque. All she had to do was recite the *Shahada*, a pledge to accept Allah as her only God and the Prophet Mohammad as his messenger. Just months after her one-night stand in Amsterdam, while chatting with a Saudi Arabian man, LaRose typed the *Shahada* and converted to Islam via instant messenger.

Sitting before the Dell desktop computer, an unusual feeling washed over her. Happiness.

"I was finally where I belonged," she recalls today.

She took as her Muslim name Fatima, after one of the Prophet Mohammad's daughters. "That's the prophet's favorite daughter," she reasons, "and I was my dad's favorite daughter."

By "dad," LaRose meant her stepfather. Her biological father – she dismissively calls him "nothing more than a sperm donor" – was, by his own admission, a monster.

The clearest documentation is contained in a series of archived juvenile court records reviewed by Reuters.

On Nov. 6, 1980 – when LaRose was

Text continues on page 6

LaRose has a one-night stand with a Muslim man. She later converts to Islam via instant messenger.

Radicalized, **LaRose** uses Jihad Jane online and corresponds with purported jihadists **Eagle Eye** and **Black Flag**.

Jihadists overseas ask **LaRose** to become a martyr for Islam. She agrees.

LaRose pledges to use her white skin, green eyes and U.S. passport to help terrorists.

Eagle Eye, an al-Qaeda operative in South Asia, asks **LaRose** to "marry me to get inside Europe." She agrees.

Eagle Eye directs **LaRose** to assassinate the Swedish artist Lars Vilks. **LaRose** agrees.

LaRose forwards a message from **Eagle Eye** to **Mohammed Hassan Khalid**, a 15-year-old who posts it in a jihadist forum.

Ali Damache, known as **Black Flag**, messages **Eagle Eye** that **LaRose** "wants to join you in the jihad field."

2007

2008

Jan. 2009

Feb. 20

March 7

March 22

July 8

July 10

THE JIHAD JANE CONSPIRATORS



Colleen R. LaRose
aka Jihad Jane

49, PENNSBURG, PA.

American-born, she lived a drug-addled life on the margins until a chance encounter at age 45 introduced her to Islam. Following Internet radicalization, she agreed to a conspiracy to murder a Swedish artist who had blasphemed the Prophet Mohammad.



Mohammed H. Khalid
aka Hassan

19, ELLICOTT CITY, MD.

Immigrated with family from Pakistan at age 14 and became an honor student. Feeling bullied and ostracized in U.S. society, he turned to the Internet to learn about his roots and became radicalized after watching videos of attacks on Palestinians. At 16, he helped LaRose and others provide material support to terrorists.



Jamie Paulin Ramirez
aka Jihad Jamie

34, LEADVILLE, COLO.

American-born, she was living with her mother and young son in a Rocky Mountain town when she became intrigued by Islam while researching a paper for a college class. She converted, met Ali Damache online and agreed to join his jihad and travel to Ireland. She married him there.



Ali Charaf Damache
aka Black Flag

47, WATERFORD, IRELAND

Born in Algeria, raised in France, he immigrated to Ireland in his late 30s. He persuaded LaRose and Ramirez to join him in jihad in Waterford, and married Ramirez. U.S. authorities say he conspired with a terrorist known only as Eagle Eye.



Eagle Eye

PAKISTAN

Alleged al-Qaeda operative, cited in the U.S. indictment as the person who put LaRose in touch with Damache and ordered her to kill the Swedish cartoonist. His whereabouts remain unknown.



Abdullah

AMSTERDAM

Alleged al-Qaeda operative assigned to assist LaRose in Europe. LaRose expected him to teach her about the ways of Islam and train to become an assassin. His whereabouts remain unknown.

17 - she wandered into Runaway House, a shelter for teens in Memphis, Tenn.

The girl's platinum-blond hair desperately needed a wash. Her hollowed eyes betrayed cocaine and heroin use. She carried venereal disease.

Colleen told a counselor that she had run away from home at age 13 and lived on the streets as a prostitute. She became pregnant and suffered a miscarriage that left her unable to have children. At 16, she married a man twice her age.

Runaway House routinely saw its share of cruelty. But Colleen's story deeply shook the counselor, Ollie Avery Mannino.

Colleen's parents, heavy drinkers, divorced when she was 3. Growing up near Detroit, she struggled in school and had to repeat the first grade. Once, she came to school with mouse bites on her fingers.

There was more. When Colleen was 8 years old and her sister, Pam, was 11, her biological father began to rape them, Colleen told the counselor. Her father, Richard LaRose, would appear at their door at night with a bottle of lotion, a silent signal that it was time to undress. The rapes started when Colleen was in the second grade; they continued until she ran away.

Mannino promised to help but explained that the law required her to notify a minor's parent that a runaway was safe. Colleen gave Mannino her father's number. When the counselor reached Richard LaRose, she told him that his daughter was in Memphis. Then she told him what Colleen had said.

"Yeah," Richard LaRose replied without hesitation, Mannino recalls. "I raped her."

He said it sharply, without remorse, and in such a prideful, guttural tone that Mannino snapped her head, stunned. The confession - or boast - is memorialized in the confidential report Mannino wrote to the court shortly after the call. To this day, Mannino, who spoke to Reuters with Colleen's permission, vividly remembers what happened next.



Runaway House did contact Colleen's mother and her father. Mr. LaRose openly admitted the sexual abuse of Colleen to a counselor at Runaway House. He referred to the incidents as "rape". These incidents of incestuous relationships have distorted Colleen's view of love and relationships with men. She appears to have superficial interpersonal relationships. Colleen states that she is married yet she has been separated from her husband for several years and has no idea of his whereabouts.

Richard LaRose acknowledged to a counselor at a runaway shelter that he had raped his daughter Colleen, documents show. **REUTERS/PHOTOGRAPHER**

Colleen took the phone. Angry, her face flushed and tears flowing, she screamed at her father: "Look what you've done to me! You did this to me! It's your fault! Why? Why?"

A moment later, Colleen hurled the phone at a bulletin board, scattering notes and pictures. Then she crumpled into the chair.

The counselor bundled the girl off to a hospital for psychiatric treatment.

Mannino said she reported Richard LaRose to local authorities but, inexplicably, he never was charged with raping either daughter. He died in 2010.

"He never did say he was sorry for what he did to us," says Pam LaRose, now 52, who described the rapes recently in her first media interview. "I still have a lot of anger. Colleen feels the same way. We don't talk about it a lot. Too much pain is involved."

THE CAUSE

LaRose remained infatuated with Muslim men and Islam throughout the first half of 2008. But shortly after she converted, she stopped taking her new religion seriously. Pledges to stop drinking fell away. She never visited a mosque. She never learned how to properly pray.

Her waning interest fit an often flighty personality. In Texas, she had worked in a nursing home. But living outside Philadelphia, she held no job and struggled to pass the time while Gorman travelled.

She had her cats, Klaus and Fluffy,

chatted on the phone with her sister in Texas and played games on web sites like pogo.com. She also flirted with men in chat rooms and became obsessed with fantasy warrior stories - she read *Shogun* and watched the movies *Spartacus*, *Braveheart*, *300* and *Troy*.

Not until six months after her online conversion to Islam would she re-engage. In addition to passing time watching action movies, LaRose became riveted by violent YouTube videos of Israeli attacks on Palestinians and American attacks on Iraqis.

The videos of dead and wounded children moved her most. Sometimes while she watched, she could hear the young American children in the duplex below hers, laughing and playing. The disconnect infuriated her. No one seemed to know or care about the plight of the Palestinians. It was so unfair.

By summer 2008, LaRose was posting jihadist videos on YouTube and MySpace. She used various names online, including Sister of Terror, Ms. Machiavelli and Jihad Jane. During the next year, she exchanged messages with avowed jihadists - people with codenames such as Eagle Eye, Black Flag, Abdullah and Hassan - as well as with a woman in Colorado who seemed a lot like her.

LaRose didn't try to hide her posts. She didn't know how. Whenever she wanted to have a private discussion with Eagle Eye, she simply let him take remote control of her computer so he could ensure the secrecy of their chat.

Eagle Eye seemed careful, brave and righteous. He claimed to be on the run from Pakistani authorities and to have

REUTERS TV



See the videos:
<http://link.reuters.com/sam87s>



FIELD OF DREAMS: Colleen LaRose's sister, Pam, lived with her in a trailer in this Texas field for many years. Pam LaRose said her sister was easily manipulated by men. **REUTERS/ANDREW LAMPARD**

participated in the 2008 Mumbai attacks in which terrorists killed 166 people. In mere months, LaRose grew to trust him implicitly. She asked what she could do to help.

His first request seemed innocent enough: Send money to your Muslim brothers and sisters, he told her. So she did, dipping into cash that her boyfriend gave her.

LaRose knew that sending money to people who might be jihadists could be illegal, but who was watching *her*? Among those she helped: a Cairo cab driver who wanted \$450 to fix his broken taxi.

At one point, she also tried to send \$440 to a Somali man who wanted to start an online forum for an al-Qaeda cell. She soon discovered that Western Union didn't serve war-torn Mogadishu.

THE PLEDGE

In January 2009, al-Qaeda operatives asked LaRose to do more. They wanted her to become a martyr.

She agreed, and by February sent an online message pledging to use her blonde hair, green eyes and white skin to "blend in with many people... to achieve what is in my heart."

“I will make this my goal ‘til I achieve it or die trying

Colleen LaRose, aka Jihad Jane

A month later, LaRose also agreed to an overseas rendezvous with Eagle Eye, to marry him and help him get "inside Europe."

Finally, in late March, Eagle Eye asked LaRose to commit her words to deeds. Travel from Pennsylvania to Europe, he said. Find Vilks, the Swedish artist who has blasphemed the Prophet Mohammad. Then shoot him - six times in the chest.

LaRose felt torn.

She wanted to say yes to Eagle Eye instantly. It would be an honor to become a martyr, she thought. Few sisters received such an opportunity. Plus, she wanted to make Eagle Eye proud. He was *so* religious, and though she had never seen his face, she had come to love him - not in a romantic sense but more like a brother.

But there were other considerations. Her elderly mother had recently moved to Pennsylvania to live with her, and her

boyfriend's ailing father also lived in the duplex. Whenever her boyfriend travelled for work - often - she was left to care for them.

Sitting before the keyboard, she read and reread Eagle Eye's message: "Go to Sweden...And kill him."

She would have to choose one path or the other - an exciting life as jihadist or a mundane one as caretaker.

She chose jihad.

"I will make this my goal," she promised, "til I achieve it or die trying."

Patiently, she awaited further instructions from Eagle Eye. But she didn't keep a low profile.

Throughout the spring and into mid-summer, LaRose drew more and more attention to herself, posting jihadi videos, anti-Zionist rants and solicitations to raise money.

Then, on a humid day in mid-July, a stranger approached the duplex near Philadelphia and rapped on her door. LaRose didn't answer, and the man left his business card behind. When she picked it up, she rushed to her computer.

LaRose sent two messages - one to a high school student 150 miles away and another to her al-Qaeda handler on the other side of the world.

The messages were the same: The FBI was on to her.

Tomorrow: 'I am a terrorist'

Edited by Blake Morrison

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She agreed to kill for Allah and train as an assassin.
Now, Jihad Jane reaches out to friends

CHAPTER TWO

A vow is confirmed, a jihad grows

BY JOHN SHIFFMAN

DECEMBER 8, 2012

ICONIC IMAGE:

Circulated after Colleen LaRose was charged with terrorism, this photo was taken following a drunk driving arrest, a decade before she became Jihad Jane.

REUTERS/TOM GREEN

COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Part two in a four-part series

Colleen LaRose, the middle-aged American woman who called herself Jihad Jane, hurried to the computer in her duplex near Philadelphia – the place where she had spent months entertaining murder.

Minutes earlier, an FBI agent had left a card on her door, requesting a call, and LaRose had known precisely what to do. She emailed her al-Qaeda handler for advice.

It was July 17, 2009, and almost four months had passed since LaRose had agreed to kill in the name of Allah. Now, the FBI left a calling card on her doorstep. How had they found her? And what did they know?

Her al-Qaeda handler, Eagle Eye, lived in Pakistan. He was wise. He was pious. He would guide her.

LaRose, now 46, had never seen his face, but during online chats, he had seen hers. Her blonde hair, fair skin and green eyes made her a prized recruit, especially for the undertaking Eagle Eye had ordered. She would blend in nicely, avoiding suspicion. Eagle Eye's plot called for her to travel to Sweden and murder Lars Vilks, the artist who had blasphemed the Prophet Mohammad.

When LaRose reached Eagle Eye, he told her to call the agent back. Find out how much the FBI knows, he said.

Obediently, LaRose dialed the number. The agent picked up.

Have you ever visited extremist Islamic forums? he asked.

No, never, she lied.

Have you ever solicited money for terrorists?

No. Another lie.

Do you know anyone who goes by the online name Jihad Jane?

No, LaRose said.

The call didn't last long, and the FBI agent didn't reveal much. She couldn't tell if the FBI had seen her YouTube posts supporting al-Qaeda and violent jihad.

For more than a year, LaRose had clashed

How the series was reported

JANE'S JIHAD is based on six months of reporting in Pennsylvania, Texas, Maryland, Colorado, Washington, D.C., and Ireland. The accounts, including the thoughts and actions of characters in the stories, are based on court records and other documents, many of them confidential, as well as interviews with people involved in the case. Reporter John Shiffman gained exclusive access to those documents and individuals. Many spoke only on condition of anonymity. In Ireland, the law forbids the government and defense lawyers from commenting until court proceedings are completed. In the United States, prosecutors do not typically comment before sentencing. The Reuters interview with Colleen LaRose, the woman who called herself Jihad Jane, is the only one she has granted.



JIHAD JAMIE: Jamie Paulin Ramirez was living with her young son in her mother's home in a Colorado mountain town when she discovered Islam, met a charming Muslim man online and agreed to join him in Ireland. **REUTERS/LEADVILLE (COLO.) HERALD DEMOCRAT**

online with YouTube Smackdown, a group that flagged and reported hate speech and jihadist activity. Maybe they had contacted the FBI. But so what? Her YouTube rants couldn't be considered a crime.

Then again, what if the FBI knew more? What if agents had read messages LaRose exchanged with Eagle Eye in Pakistan or his associate Black Flag in Ireland? The men were al-Qaeda – that's what they said, anyway.

What about her jihadi friends inside the United States – the woman in Colorado and the teenager in Maryland? Did the FBI know about them? Or about her pledge to kill the Swedish artist?

Despite the concerns, LaRose plunged forward. Without disguising herself, she began contacting fellow jihadists online. She warned them of the FBI's visit and

asked them to delete anything that might prove incriminating.

Then LaRose took the next step on her path to martyrdom – an act she later described as one of the proudest moments in the conspiracy to kill the artist in Europe.

She found a bargain flight to Amsterdam for \$400.

"I went straight to the airline," she says today. "I didn't use no middle person. I also made it two weeks ahead of time."

The plot, loose as it was, was advancing. Jihad Jane booked the flight for Aug. 23.

THE HONOR STUDENT

Shortly after the FBI agent left her duplex, LaRose emailed a high school student who lived near Baltimore, about 150 miles away.

HOW IT HAPPENED

Colleen LaRose

repeatedly lies to the FBI, denying she visits jihad websites or calls herself Jihad Jane. **LaRose** asks **Mohammed Hassan Khalid**, a 15-year-old honor student, to help delete her incriminating posts. He complies.

Eagle Eye, an al-Qaeda operative in South Asia, boasts of his bomb-making prowess to **Ali Damache**, an Algerian living in Ireland who calls himself **Black Flag**.

Damache tells **Khalid** that “we have already organized everything” for **LaRose’s** jihad. “We are willing to die in order to protect her no matter what the risk is.”

Khalid tells **Damache**, “If the strikes are successful, I hope to see new videos.”

LaRose writes to fellow Muslim convert **Jamie Paulin Ramirez**, a Colorado woman considering an invitation from **Damache** to join them.

July 17, 2009

July 18

July 19

July 22

Aug. 1

Please contact jihadi forum administrators, LaRose begged the teen. “Ask him to PLEASE remove ALL my posts... because I told the FBI guy I don’t know that site.”

The teenager, who went by Hassan online, did as asked. “She is being threatened by the FBI,” he explained in a message to the forum administrators.

Hassan wasn’t a creative pseudonym like Jihad Jane. It was simply the middle name of Mohammed H. Khalid, a gangly Pakistani immigrant who lived with his parents, older brother and two younger sisters in Ellicott City, Md.

Khalid, 15, had met Jihad Jane on YouTube months earlier and their online friendship had grown quickly. By now, they were talking to some of the same people overseas: an al-Qaeda operative named Eagle Eye and a Muslim man in Ireland who called himself Black Flag.

Like LaRose, Khalid had become radicalized watching videos of Muslim children maimed or killed in attacks by Israeli or American forces. Khalid was not a convert. He had been born a Muslim in Dubai and raised in Pakistan from age 11 to 14.

His family, classic American immigrants seeking a better life for their children, had arrived in Maryland in 2007. Khalid’s father delivered pizzas. His mother kept the home.

The family of six squeezed into a modern-day tenement, a tiny two-bedroom apartment selected for its location inside the best school district his parents could afford. In

one bedroom, Khalid and his brother shared a mattress. In the other, his sisters lived beside stacked boxes of perfume the family peddled at a weekend flea market. Their parents slept on a mattress in the dining room.

Khalid excelled during his first two years at Mt. Hebron High School. He earned A’s in English, Algebra, Science and U.S. History. He joined the chess club and later became an administrator for the school web site.

Although his parents were thrilled with Khalid’s grades, they began to notice subtle changes. He seemed withdrawn and spent so much time alone in his bedroom on his laptop. They worried he might be downloading porn.

If only.

Eager to learn more about his Muslim heritage, the 15 year old had stumbled onto violent jihadi videos and become addicted. The anti-American rhetoric proved intoxicating to an immigrant boy struggling to find an identity in a place that embraced neither his race nor his religion.

Khalid began translating from Urdu to English sermons and violent jihadi videos – snuff-style images of U.S. soldiers in the throes of death, and beheadings of Americans Nick Berg and Daniel Pearl.

Khalid posted the videos and began to solicit money online for al-Qaeda. He never aspired to kill anyone personally. He later described himself as a “keyboard warrior.”

“I will be a great facilitator,” he wrote to a friend.

To shield his identity, Khalid studied basic terrorist tradecraft – how to use programs such as Pidgin to encrypt chats and Tor to cloak his location. He learned to use code words – for example, “HK” in place of “jihad.” The letters were chosen because J falls between H and K on the keyboard.

Now, in mid-July 2009 – around the time Jihad Jane warned him about the FBI – Khalid launched a new online endeavor. It was brimming with teenage bravado. He called the blog *Path to Martyrdom/Resisting the War Against al-Islam*. From the blog, Khalid linked to hundreds of videos of al-Qaeda sermons and violent attacks.

He intended *Path to Martyrdom* to be anonymous. His keystrokes betrayed him.

Pivoting between maintaining the school’s website and his new jihadist blog, he inadvertently linked the “About Me” section of *Martyrdom* to the wrong web page – the page for his high school track team.

JAMIE JOINS

On August 1, 2009 – around the time LaRose found her bargain ticket to Europe – a 31-year-old woman sat before a laptop at her mother’s kitchen table in the remote town of Leadville, Colo.

REUTERS TV



See the videos:
<http://link.reuters.com/sam87s>

Jamie Paulin Ramirez felt stifled. Her young son, Christian, bounded past every now and then, and her nosy mother kept making excuses to stroll by.

As discreetly as she could, Ramirez tried to shield the screen. She and her mom had clashed about her conversion to Islam. It wasn't that her mother objected to the religion; she had married a Muslim herself. She just thought her daughter was overzealous.

Ramirez feared her mom would launch into a tirade if she caught her chatting with her new Muslim friends, just as her mother criticized her for wearing a head scarf, or *hijab*.

"When I would pray she would scream at me," Ramirez recalled in a document reviewed by Reuters. "When I would wear my *hijab* to work and to the store, she would say it was embarrassing."

One of Ramirez's new online friends was another recent convert to Islam, a woman from Pennsylvania who sometimes called herself Jihad Jane. They seemed a lot alike – they were both white, blonde, Americans. And each had gravitated toward Muslim men in Europe, including one man in Ireland. He had been trying to persuade Ramirez to bring her son and join him there.

On this day, Jihad Jane wrote with big news: "Soon, I will be leaving for Europe to be with other brothers & sisters. When I get to Europe, I will send for you to come be there with me... This place will be like a training camp as well as a home."

"I would love to go over there," Ramirez replied.



BLACK FLAG: Ali Damache (left), who went by Black Flag online, after he was detained by Irish authorities in March 2010.

REUTERS/PATRICK BROWNE

Their chat turned to politics. And, years later, the brief exchange that followed would become part of the government's case against both of them.

Jihad Jane: "When our brothers defend our faith [and] their homes, they are terrorist. Fine, then I am a terrorist and proud to be this."

Ramirez: "That's right ... If that's how they call it, then so be it. I am what I am."

Ramirez was raised a Methodist, but she had become embittered toward God and abandoned religion years earlier following her sister's death from cancer.

Thrice divorced, Ramirez had moved in with her mother to save money. But they quarreled often, especially about her young son – what he should read, how he should pray, what he should eat for dinner, whether

he should wear his hair short or long.

Ramirez had been looking for a reason to leave.

Her turn toward Islam had begun the year before, while researching a paper for a college class. Intrigued by what she learned about the religion, she continued reading. After a few months, she slipped down to a Denver-area mosque and converted.

Now, her new, nonjudgmental friends on Islamic forums were enticing her to join them. The man in Ireland – the one Jihad Jane knew as Black Flag – pressed Ramirez hardest.

Ramirez knew the man only by his real name, Ali Damache, and in his latest message to her, he persisted: Bring your son. Marry me. I will teach you Arabic and the mystical beauty of the Koran.

Ramirez hesitated. Men had burned her so many times. She liked what she knew of Damache. He was nice – he complimented her on the color schemes of her *hijabs*. Even so....

Damache urged her to ask Allah for guidance. Pray for a week, each night before bedtime, he said, then consider the colors of the dreams: If the dreams come in white or green, it is a sign that she should fly to Ireland with her son; if the dreams come in red or black, she and her son should stay in Colorado.

Ramirez struggled to recall her dreams, but it wouldn't matter. Damache told her *he* had prayed, too, and his dreams were glowing green – the color of Islam, and of Ireland.

OK, Ramirez agreed, that *must* be a sign

Text continues on page 6

LaRose steals two passports from her Pennsylvania boyfriend; one is valid, the other is expired. She mails them to **Khalid** in Maryland and buys a one-way ticket to Amsterdam for Aug. 23.

Damache emails an unidentified contact in Eastern Europe: "The job is to knock some individuals that are harming Islam." He explains that he is structuring a "planning team," "research team," "action team" and "finance team."

Eagle Eye advises **Damache** to "keep a low profile" and shave his beard.

In Pennsylvania, the father of **LaRose's** boyfriend dies of a heart attack.

LaRose emails a purported al-Qaeda contact: "I will be away from here in a couple days." Within hours, an FBI agent knocks on her door.

➤ **Early August**

Aug. 7

Aug. 11

Aug. 20

Aug. 21

THE JIHAD JANE CONSPIRATORS



Colleen R. LaRose
aka Jihad Jane

49, PENNSBURG, PA.

American-born, she lived a drug-addled life on the margins until a chance encounter at age 45 introduced her to Islam. Following Internet radicalization, she agreed to a conspiracy to murder a Swedish artist who had blasphemed the Prophet Mohammad.



Mohammed H. Khalid
aka Hassan

19, ELLICOTT CITY, MD.

Immigrated with family from Pakistan at age 14 and became an honor student. Feeling bullied and ostracized in U.S. society, he turned to the Internet to learn about his roots and became radicalized after watching videos of attacks on Palestinians. At 16, he helped LaRose and others provide material support to terrorists.



Jamie Paulin Ramirez
aka Jihad Jamie

34, LEADVILLE, COLO.

American-born, she was living with her mother and young son in a Rocky Mountain town when she became intrigued by Islam while researching a paper for a college class. She converted, met Ali Damache online and agreed to join his jihad and travel to Ireland. She married him there.



Ali Charaf Damache
aka Black Flag

47, WATERFORD, IRELAND

Born in Algeria, raised in France, he immigrated to Ireland in his late 30s. He persuaded LaRose and Ramirez to join him in jihad in Waterford, and married Ramirez. U.S. authorities say he conspired with a terrorist known only as Eagle Eye.



Eagle Eye

PAKISTAN

Alleged al-Qaeda operative, cited in the U.S. indictment as the person who put LaRose in touch with Damache and ordered her to kill the Swedish cartoonist. His whereabouts remain unknown.



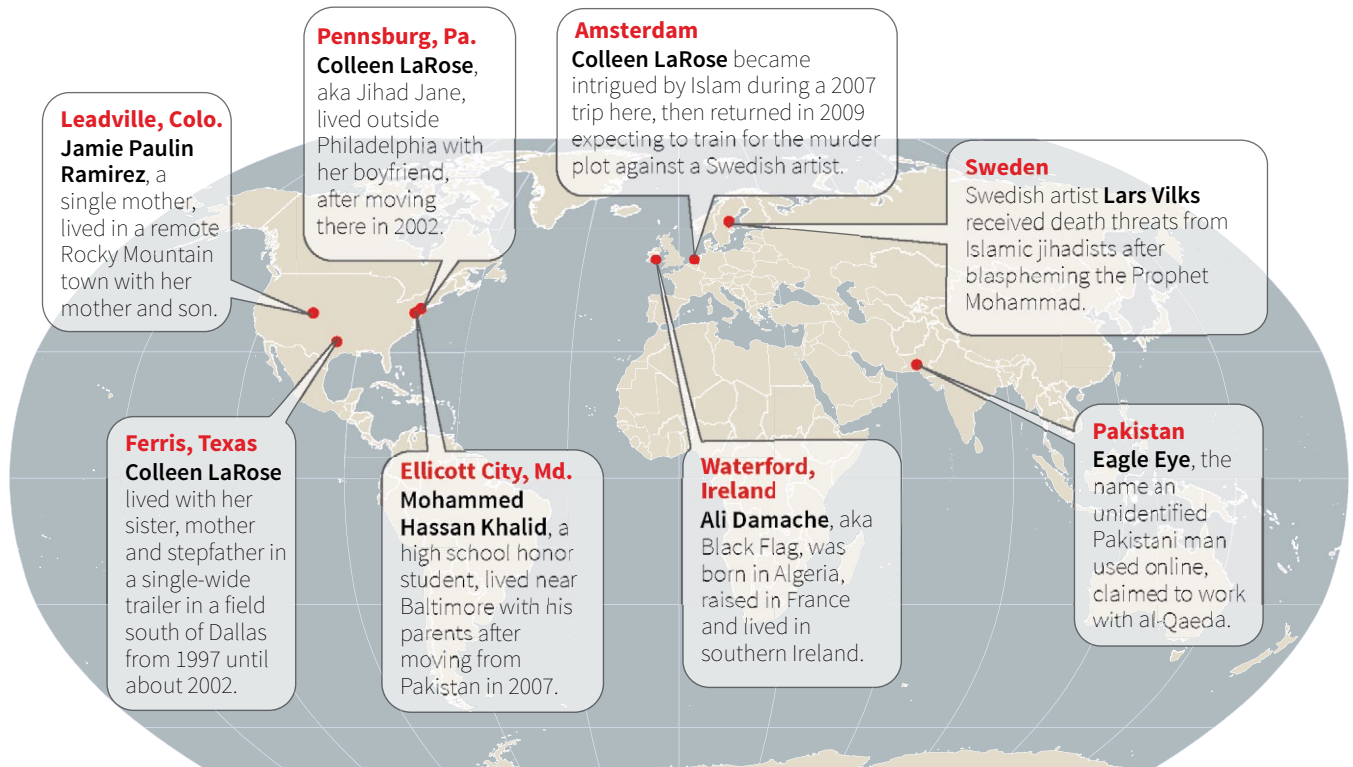
Abdullah

AMSTERDAM

Alleged al-Qaeda operative assigned to assist LaRose in Europe. LaRose expected him to teach her about the ways of Islam and train to become an assassin. His whereabouts remain unknown.

A worldwide conspiracy

The Jihad Jane case spanned three continents and six different time zones.



from Allah. She began shopping for two plane tickets to Ireland.

THE PASSPORTS

In the weeks leading up to her own flight to Europe, LaRose grew excited about what lay ahead.

Finally, she would meet some true Muslims – men more righteous than she was, people wholly committed to the cause. They would teach her to pray and the ways of Allah. More important, they would accept her as one of their own.

It would be an honor to fly to Amsterdam for training, then travel on to Sweden to carry out the killing.

Her instructions: to shoot the artist Vilks six times in the chest. “That way,” LaRose recalls today, “they know it was not

an accident. It was intended.”

A short while before her flight, LaRose stole her boyfriend’s passport and birth certificate, presumably to provide false identification for the terrorists. LaRose located two of the boyfriend’s passports, one current and one expired, as well as several birth certificates.

Following her handler’s instructions, LaRose mailed everything to young Khalid near Baltimore.

Then, days before the flight to Amsterdam and the start of her new life, the realities of her old one intervened: Her boyfriend’s father suffered a heart attack. Soon after, he died.

LaRose wasn’t deterred. She let her al-Qaeda associates know she was still coming. “I will be away from here in a couple days...” she wrote. “Then...I will get to

work on important matters.”

Within hours, LaRose heard a knock on the door of her home near Philadelphia.

The FBI had returned. This time, LaRose answered.

Tomorrow: The jihad begins

Edited by Blake Morrison

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A death in the family complicated her plans,
but Colleen LaRose packs her bags for Europe

CHAPTER THREE

The FBI visits, the jihad begins

BY JOHN SHIFFMAN

DECEMBER 9, 2012

THE CONVERT: After becoming radicalized online, American-born Colleen LaRose flew to Europe to embark on her jihad. **REUTERS/SITE INTELLIGENCE GROUP**

JANE'S JIHAD THE FBI VISITS, THE JIHAD BEGINS



IRISH EPICENTER: (left) Ali Damache, the alleged terrorist, rented a small apartment in the southern Irish city of Waterford. U.S. authorities say he lured two American-born women, recent converts to Islam, Colleen LaRose and Jamie Paulin Ramirez, there in fall 2009. (right) Local Muslims converted this suburban Waterford home into a mosque. **REUTERS/ANDREW LAMPARD**

Part three in a four-part series

Colleen LaRose answered the door of her duplex near Philadelphia to find an FBI agent standing on the porch.

He had questions about her interest in Islamic websites.

For LaRose, whose online name was Jihad Jane, it was the second time the FBI had questioned her that summer. Weeks earlier, she'd spoken with an agent by phone and offered a series of lame lies: She had denied any interest in jihadist forums, denied wiring money overseas, denied that she went by Jihad Jane.

This time, on Aug. 21, 2009, LaRose lied less.

Yes, she visited Muslims websites, she said. As a recent convert to Islam, she wanted to

learn as much as possible. Yeah, she said, maybe her political views had angered others online. But she denied raising money for al-Qaeda or having any connection with extremists.

Lying to the FBI is a crime, the agent told her.

OK, she said.

Then he asked if she planned to travel to Holland.

She was thinking about it, she told the agent, but there had been a death in the family – a heart attack had just taken her boyfriend's father. His funeral was the next day.

When the agent asked for a way to keep in touch, LaRose gave him her cell number. Call anytime next week, she told him.

A day later, LaRose attended the funeral. The day after the service, Aug. 23, she pulled the hard drive from her computer

and stashed it in a box. She gathered \$2,000 in cash and packed three suitcases. With a bargain plane ticket to Amsterdam in hand, LaRose persuaded an acquaintance to drive her to the airport.

She was moving ahead with the plan conceived by the al-Qaeda operative in Pakistan, the man she knew only as Eagle Eye. Already, she had pledged to kill the Swedish artist Lars Vilks. He had blasphemed Islam by drawing the Prophet Mohammad's head on a dog.

As she headed to Europe with plans to murder in the name of Allah, LaRose left her boyfriend and mother with the impression she was running a quick errand.

MARY RICHARDS

Landing in Amsterdam, Colleen LaRose felt euphoric. She had shed her old life – 46 years scarred by rapes, prostitution, drugs and failed marriages – for this new one full of promise.

At the airport, LaRose donned a full burka for the first time. More firsts awaited: She would meet her first jihadist, enter her first mosque and learn how to pray.

She gave the taxi driver the name of the mosque, and as the cab pulled away from the airport, a song from childhood popped into her head.

Who can turn the world on with her smile?

How the series was reported

JANE'S JIHAD is based on six months of reporting in Pennsylvania, Texas, Maryland, Colorado, Washington, D.C., and Ireland. The accounts, including the thoughts and actions of characters in the stories, are based on court records and other documents, many of them confidential, as well as interviews with people involved in the case. Reporter John Shiffman gained exclusive access to those documents and individuals. Many spoke only on condition of anonymity. In Ireland, the law forbids the government and defense lawyers from commenting until court proceedings are completed. In the United States, prosecutors do not typically comment before sentencing. The Reuters interview with Colleen LaRose, the woman who called herself Jihad Jane, is the only one she has granted.

HOW IT HAPPENED

When an FBI agent visits **Colleen LaRose**, aka **Jihad Jane**, in suburban Philadelphia, she lies. She denies she has raised money for al-Qaeda or has plans to fly to Europe to join a jihad.

LaRose attends the funeral of her boyfriend's father.

On instructions from **Eagle Eye**, her al-Qaeda handler in South Asia, **LaRose** hides her computer hard drive and flies to Amsterdam. There, she expects to meet a jihad leader, a man known only as **Abdullah**, and train to kill a Swedish artist who has blasphemed the Prophet Mohammad.

To track the artist, **LaRose** signs up to become part of the artist's virtual community. She uses the name Sally Jones and creates a new Gmail account.

Aug. 21, 2009

Aug. 22

Aug. 23

September

Who can take a nothing day, and suddenly make it all seem worthwhile?

It was the theme from the 1970s TV series, "The Mary Tyler Moore Show." LaRose imagined herself as the lead character, Mary Richards. If she had been wearing a hat instead of a burka, LaRose thought, she would have stepped from the cab with a huge smile and acted out the show's classic opening, twirling around and tossing her hat in the air.

Well, it's you girl and you should know it! With every glance and every little movement, you show it...

You're gonna make it after all...

When the taxi driver found the mosque, no one was waiting for LaRose. For nearly an hour, she stood outside in a full hijab with her luggage. Then it began to rain.

Finally, another Muslim woman arrived and took LaRose to see her contact, a man named Abdullah. LaRose had expected him to introduce her to fellow jihadists, to train her for her mission, to teach her the ways of Islam.

None of that happened. Now that LaRose had actually arrived and it was time for action, Abdullah the terrorist was suddenly hedging, dodging, equivocating,

pleading for patience.

Two weeks into her visit to Amsterdam, LaRose concluded that Abdullah was a poseur. It was time for her to leave, she told him, and Abdullah quickly agreed. He suggested that she visit his associate in Waterford, Ireland, the man who called himself Black Flag.

LaRose packed her bags.

CALLING 911

Back in the United States, one of LaRose's most trusted allies was struggling, too.

Mohammed Hassan Khalid had lost access to his primary weapon of jihad: his computer. His parents took it away.

It happened a few weeks into the boy's junior year in high school, after Khalid's parents confronted him about the long stretches he spent alone in his bedroom with his laptop. They suspected he was trolling for porn.

When Khalid refused to explain what he was doing, his parents grabbed his computer. Khalid threw a tantrum but they wouldn't give it back.

Then, this aspiring jihadist, who knew that his friend LaRose had twice been visited by the FBI, made an odd and impulsive choice: He dialed 911 and invited law enforcement into his home. His parents, he told the dispatcher, were abusive.

When police arrived, the officers backed the parents. Only after authorities left and Khalid gave his parents his password would they begin clicking through his computer.

They discovered his al-Qaeda translation projects and jihadi videos.

As the teenager later wrote to a friend, they "saw the beheadings, which scared the crap out of them."

Stripped of access to his online life, Khalid soon became despondent. He refused to eat. He slept all day. After a few days, his parents dialed 911 themselves and had Khalid admitted overnight to a psychiatric facility.

The boy told no one about Eagle Eye, Jihad Jane, Black Flag, or the stolen passports LaRose had sent him for safekeeping – including the one he had forwarded to Black Flag in Ireland.

'NO MATTER THE RISK'

Waterford seems an unlikely place to launch a jihad.

Founded by Vikings and renowned for its crystal, the southern Irish city is far more tranquil than Dublin or Cork. Only a few hundred Muslims live there, many who immigrated for jobs at the regional hospital. To create a mosque, local Muslims converted a suburban home near the hospital.

Yet the city became the confluence of the Jihad Jane conspiracy. Here, in September 2009, Black Flag met his two prized recruits in person for the first time: LaRose and Jamie Paulin Ramirez, the lonely Colorado woman whom he had persuaded to come by telling her that Allah had willed it in a dream.

Both women were Americans – white, blonde, and recent converts to Islam. And

“(My parents) saw the beheadings, which scared the crap out of them.”

Mohammed H. Khalid
Jihad Jane conspirator

though they had often chatted online, neither knew that the other was coming.

Short but thin and handsome, Black Flag was known in Waterford by his given name, Ali Damache. Born in Algeria in 1965, Damache grew up in central France. After high school, he sold perfume and cosmetics in the women's section of a Paris department store for many years. Around 2001, he moved to southern Ireland.

Damache bounced from sales job to sales job – he worked at a drug store, a telephone call center, a real estate agency and an insurance firm. To comply with Irish welfare and immigration law, each time he lost a job he enrolled in computer-training programs, giving him access to computers and a reason to spend a lot of time online.

He wed an Irish Catholic woman, a marriage that lasted about seven years. In 2007, Damache began regularly going to mosque and, about a year later, wearing Muslim attire.

By 2009, Damache was calling himself Black Flag. Online, he made contact with Eagle Eye, LaRose, Ramirez, Khalid, Abdullah and others whom the FBI has linked to al-Qaeda cells.

Throughout the summer, even after LaRose tipped him that the FBI was watching, Damache continued to send online messages that U.S. authorities say place him at the hub of the conspiracy.

"The job is to knock down some individuals that are harming Islam," Damache explained to a friend in Europe. He was busy building "an



RADICALIZED ONLINE: Years after this picture was taken, Colleen LaRose sat before another computer, converted to Islam and began meeting Muslim jihadists on the Internet.

REUTERS/FAMILY PHOTO/HANDOUT

organization," he wrote, divided into a "planning team... research team... action team... recruitment team... finance team."

Damache wrote breathlessly of his plans for LaRose. "We have already organized everything for her. We are will[ing] to die in order to protect her no matter what the risk."

'SO CLOSE'

LaRose and Ramirez each landed in Ireland within days of the other, during the second

week of September. On the day she arrived, Ramirez married Damache.

There would be no honeymoon.

Instead, with Ramirez's young son, they all stayed in a one-bedroom apartment Damache rented in the heart of Waterford. The flat stood steps from upscale Italian and Chinese restaurants and the city archives, on a neat, narrow street close to the central shopping mall, riverfront and Catholic church.

The sleeping arrangements proved awkward. At times, the women stayed with the boy in the living room; Damache took the bedroom for himself.

Despite the unorthodox accommodations, LaRose remained committed to the notion of killing the Swedish artist. With little direction, she was doing what she could, tracking her target the only way she knew how: online.

To try to learn more about Vilks, for example, she signed up for a virtual community he had created. Filling out the online form, LaRose typed a false name – Sally Jones – and created a new Gmail account.

She also left a clue that underscored her sloppiness. In the postal code section of the online form, she typed 48174 – the zip code for Romulus, Michigan, a childhood home.

Damache gave LaRose a key to the Waterford apartment, and she was free to come and go. Ramirez focused on supporting her new husband's activities, whatever they were. She didn't get a key and was instructed

Text continues on page 6

Jamie Paulin Ramirez, a Colorado woman and recent Muslim convert, flies to Ireland with her young son to join a man she has met online, **Ali Damache**, aka Black Flag.

LaRose also arrives in Ireland to join **Damache**. In an awkward arrangement, the two American women stay together with **Damache** and **Ramirez's** young son. Meanwhile, the FBI alerts Irish authorities and they begin surveillance.

The parents of **Mohammed Khalid**, 16, an honor student in Ellicott City, Md., take his computer. They worry he is surfing porn sites. He retaliates by calling 911 and alleges abuse. The police side with the parents, who discover violent jihadist images on the boy's computer.

LaRose abandons her jihad and **Damache** drives her to the airport, where she expects to fly home.

Sept. 12

Around Sept. 13

September

Oct. 15

THE JIHAD JANE CONSPIRATORS



Colleen R. LaRose
aka Jihad Jane

49, PENNSBURG, PA.

American-born, she lived a drug-addled life on the margins until a chance encounter at age 45 introduced her to Islam. Following Internet radicalization, she agreed to a conspiracy to murder a Swedish artist who had blasphemed the Prophet Mohammad.



Mohammed H. Khalid
aka Hassan

19, ELLICOTT CITY, MD.

Immigrated with family from Pakistan at age 14 and became an honor student. Feeling bullied and ostracized in U.S. society, he turned to the Internet to learn about his roots and became radicalized after watching videos of attacks on Palestinians. At 16, he helped LaRose and others provide material support to terrorists.



Jamie Paulin Ramirez
aka Jihad Jamie

34, LEADVILLE, COLO.

American-born, she was living with her mother and young son in a Rocky Mountain town when she became intrigued by Islam while researching a paper for a college class. She converted, met Ali Damache online and agreed to join his jihad and travel to Ireland. She married him there.



Ali Charaf Damache
aka Black Flag

47, WATERFORD, IRELAND

Born in Algeria, raised in France, he immigrated to Ireland in his late 30s. He persuaded LaRose and Ramirez to join him in jihad in Waterford, and married Ramirez. U.S. authorities say he conspired with a terrorist known only as Eagle Eye.



Eagle Eye

PAKISTAN

Alleged al-Qaeda operative, cited in the U.S. indictment as the person who put LaRose in touch with Damache and ordered her to kill the Swedish cartoonist. His whereabouts remain unknown.



Abdullah

AMSTERDAM

Alleged al-Qaeda operative assigned to assist LaRose in Europe. LaRose expected him to teach her about the ways of Islam and train to become an assassin. His whereabouts remain unknown.

to remain at home, to cook and to clean.

Local Muslim women took LaRose to the mosque and taught her how to pray. The first time she rose after praying, LaRose experienced what she believed to be a minor miracle. A persistent pain in her stomach, one that had bothered her for years, simply vanished. LaRose was astonished. What more proof did she need that Islam could heal her?

Her faith in the jihad was another story. In the weeks that followed, nothing materialized the way Damache had promised. No training, no planning, no brothers and sisters waiting to join her in assassination. To LaRose, the great Black Flag seemed nearly as unmoored as she was – chronically unemployed, spouting verses from the Koran to justify whatever he chose to do, hiding his cowardice behind his beard.

LaRose still refused to give up her jihad. On the last day of September, she emailed Eagle Eye to let him know she remained on task and that it would be “an honor & great pleasure to kill” the artist.

“Only death will stop me here,” LaRose wrote. “I am so close to the target!”

She hadn't trained as an assassin and she hadn't traveled to Sweden. But she *was* back on Muslima.com, the Islamic dating site, hoping to find someone who might put her up in Sweden – should she ever get there.

THE EPIPHANY

Two weeks after promising that “only death” would stop her plans to kill for Allah, Jihad Jane decided to head home.

The epiphany came while she waited with a Muslim woman in a delivery truck outside a grocery in Waterford. The two women were covered head to toe. Only their eyes showed. The woman's husband was inside shopping.

Sitting in the truck, LaRose considered the woman's life. She had a husband, children, a family *and* a bond with Allah. The woman seemed happy, LaRose thought.

“Only death will stop me here. I am so close to the target.

Colleen LaRose

aka Jihad Jane

And she wanted that sort of happiness, too.

LaRose considered Damache and Abdullah again. Online, the men were aggressive, tough-talking jihadists, romantic, almost heroic. In person – in reality – they were tentative, chauvinistic, and, perhaps most telling, hobbled by pedestrian struggles like finding enough cash to pay the electric bill.

LaRose asked the woman waiting with her in the truck what she thought of Damache. The woman replied that her husband believed LaRose was a lost soul and that Damache had misled her. Perhaps Vilks, the Swedish artist, did deserve to die, but that was up to Allah, not Damache, to decide, she said.

The woman and her husband were the first Muslims LaRose had met who did not advocate violence. They were wonderful, deeply religious people, and they held a starkly different version of Islam than the likes of Eagle Eye and Black Flag.

LaRose considered all this, sitting in the truck. Again, she felt torn. She wanted to please Eagle Eye, but nothing, not a single thing she had been promised, had worked out.

She was also growing lonely and missed her longtime boyfriend back in Pennsylvania. She wondered who was caring for her elderly mother. She thought about her cats, Fluffy and Klaus.

Jihad Jane was homesick.

She emailed her boyfriend with her new Irish mobile number. A short while later, he called. Come home, he urged. Your mother

is ill, near death.

Today, LaRose insists that she wasn't abandoning her jihad, only pausing to visit a sick relative.

If so, what this budding terrorist did next is perplexing: She visited the FBI's website, located the send-a-tip section and let agents know she was heading home.

The reason? She hoped the FBI would pay for her flight.

When LaRose got no response, she called her boyfriend back and he bought her ticket.

Damache tried to talk her out of leaving. He pleaded for patience, but LaRose insisted she needed to return to care for her sick mother.

LaRose said goodbye to Ramirez and her son, and reluctantly, Damache agreed to drive her to the airport in Cork. It was a two-hour trip along scenic and often rural roads.

Unannounced, Damache brought a husky friend along for the ride, a man LaRose had never met.

As the car left Waterford, LaRose grew suspicious. They were never going to let her go back to the United States, she thought. She knew too much – where they lived, what they were planning, everything.

They weren't driving her to the airport, she thought. It was all a setup.

They were going to make Jihad Jane disappear.

Tomorrow: *'It's my destiny'*

Edited by Blake Morrison

REUTERS TV



See the videos:
<http://link.reuters.com/sam87s>

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Homesickness tugged at Jihad Jane,
but more than her family awaits her return

CHAPTER FOUR

Confessions, jail and unwavering faith

BY JOHN SHIFFMAN
DECEMBER 10, 2012



REUTERS/ART LIEN/FILES

JANE'S JIHAD CONFESSIONS, JAIL AND UNWAVERING FAITH

Part four in a four-part series

When the flight from London landed in Philadelphia on Oct. 15, 2009, the pilot asked everyone to stay seated. A passenger was ill, he explained, and paramedics needed the aisles clear.

It didn't take long for passengers to realize the ruse. Federal agents entered the plane and made straight for the short woman in a full burka.

Colleen LaRose, the woman who called herself Jihad Jane, didn't resist when they handcuffed her.

FBI agents drove her to their offices two blocks from Independence Hall. When she complained of a headache, they gave her three Tylenol and a Sprite. Then they asked her to tell her story.

LaRose, a former teenage prostitute with a heavy history of drug abuse, mangled some facts. But mostly, she told the truth:

She became intrigued by Islam after a one-night stand with a Muslim man in 2007. She converted a short while later and became radicalized watching YouTube videos of atrocities against Palestinian children.

Online, she met a man who called himself Eagle Eye and who claimed to work for al-Qaeda. Eagle Eye convinced her that she could travel to Sweden and use her appearance – her white skin and her blonde hair – to blend in. That way, she could get close enough to assassinate Lars Vilks, a Swedish artist who had blasphemed the Prophet Mohammad by drawing his head on a dog.

Agents asked her why she had returned to the United States. LaRose, 46, said she had been concerned about her mother. When she talked with her Pennsylvania boyfriend on the phone, he had said her mother was deathly ill. Not true, an agent assured her. Her mother was fine. It had been a trick intended to get LaRose back to the United States.

Did you give up your jihad because you got scared? an agent asked.



THE JAIL: The trio implicated in the Jihad Jane conspiracy – Colleen LaRose, Mohammed H. Khalid and Jamie Paulin Ramirez – are jailed at the Federal Detention Center in Philadelphia. They are expected to be sentenced next year. (Front page) In this artist's sketch, LaRose, aka Jihad Jane, appears in a Philadelphia courtroom in 2010 to face terrorism charges. In the sketch, she is the woman who is handcuffed. **REUTERS/ANDREW LAMPARD**

No, LaRose insisted. She gave up, she said, because Eagle Eye's men in Holland and Ireland moved too slowly. She felt "let down," she told the agents.

During her initial interviews, she didn't tell the agents that she also felt homesick. Or that, even as her host in Ireland – the man who called himself Black Flag – had driven her to the airport, she had feared she might be killed because she knew too much.

One agent pressed. Are you sure you didn't abandon the jihad because you got cold feet?

No, she insisted. And if they let her go, she told them, she planned a suicide attack against U.S. soldiers in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The agents asked about Jamie Paulin Ramirez, another blonde American woman who had travelled to Europe with her son. LaRose said she lived with her briefly in Ireland but didn't know much about her.

The agents also asked about a U.S. passport they found in LaRose's luggage. It belonged to the Pennsylvania boyfriend. But it was expired. Where, an agent asked, was the valid one?

How the series was reported

JANE'S JIHAD is based on six months of reporting in Pennsylvania, Texas, Maryland, Colorado, Washington, D.C., and Ireland. The accounts, including the thoughts and actions of characters in the stories, are based on court records and other documents, many of them confidential, as well as interviews with people involved in the case. Reporter John Shiffman gained exclusive access to those documents and individuals. Many spoke only on condition of anonymity. In Ireland, the law forbids the government and defense lawyers from commenting until court proceedings are completed. In the United States, prosecutors do not typically comment before sentencing. The Reuters interview with Colleen LaRose, the woman who called herself Jihad Jane, is the only one she has granted.

HOW IT HAPPENED

<p>Colleen LaRose abandons plans to assassinate a Swedish artist. Ali Damache, aka Black Flag, drives her to the airport.</p>	<p>On arrival in Philadelphia, the FBI arrests LaRose and she confesses. The arrest is kept quiet as agents investigate the plot.</p>	<p>Jamie Paulin Ramirez, a Colorado woman who arrived in Ireland six weeks earlier, realizes that it was a mistake to travel there, marry Damache and join his jihad.</p>	<p>Irish police detain Ramirez and Damache for questioning. In the U.S., officials announce terror charges against LaRose. The FBI searches home of Mohammed Khalid.</p>	<p>In a jihad forum, Khalid, now 17, writes that he has daydreamed about "martyrdom operations" at his high school.</p>	<p>Khalid learns he has received a full scholarship to prestigious John Hopkins University for the 2011-12 academic year.</p>
<p>Oct. 15, 2009</p>	<p>Oct. 15&16</p>	<p>Oct. 26</p>	<p>March 9, 2010</p>	<p>Nov. 22</p>	<p>Dec. 15</p>

LaRose knew the answer: For safekeeping, she had mailed it months earlier to the youngest member of the conspiracy, a high school junior in Maryland named Mohammed Hassan Khalid.

She didn't give Khalid up. Instead, she lowered her eyes and asked for a lawyer.

The FBI kept her arrest quiet as they checked out her story.

'SEX SLAVE'

About a week after LaRose's arrest in Philadelphia, Ramirez, the other blonde American woman, sat before a laptop in a southern Ireland apartment and let her emotions flow.

"I wish I was never stupid enough to come here," Ramirez typed in a note to herself.

A recent Muslim convert, Ramirez, 31, had arrived just six weeks earlier with her young son. On the very day they landed, she married Ali Damache, the man others knew as Black Flag.

He had wooed her by promising to teach her Arabic and Islam. But his lessons ended soon after they mastered the alphabet and a few basic prayers. He rarely spoke with her, except to bark orders about cooking and cleaning. She wanted to be a good Muslim wife, but if he wouldn't help her, how could she?

"This man has no intentions to make this relationship work, ever," she wrote.

"I am just a sex slave to him," she

concluded. And later, she wrote: "... I cry because I always wanted a person in my life who could love me for who I am."

Ramirez felt trapped, afraid that if she returned to the United States her estranged mother might try to wrest custody of her son. Still, she took tentative steps to try to leave. When her husband was away, she began reconnecting by email with friends and family in Colorado.

Then in January, she learned she was pregnant by Damache. How could she possibly leave now?

Irish police answered the question two months later. On the morning of March 9, 2010, police raided the small flat in Waterford, detaining Ramirez, Damache and five of his associates for questioning. Later, Ramirez was whisked past a mob of journalists and into a closed courtroom. There, she stood before a judge for a brief session, bewildered beneath her burka.

During questioning, she told the detectives what she knew, which turned out not to be much. She had come to Ireland to live with this man; he spoke of jihad but she couldn't offer specifics - in part because

"I wish I was never stupid enough to come here. ... I am just a sex slave.

Jamie Paulin Ramirez
aka Jihad Jamie

Damache had never offered any himself.

Damache refused to cooperate. In fact, he played coy with the police, deflecting questions by posing his own. He almost seemed to relish the interrogation.

THE DISCOVERY

Hours after the raids in Ireland, the FBI announced terrorism charges against LaRose, who remained in custody in the United States. U.S. officials called her by the online name she had chosen, Jihad Jane, and the story would lead the network news.

Near Baltimore, LaRose's teenage accomplice, Mohammed H. Khalid, found the indictment online. He had known the FBI was after LaRose, but he hadn't heard from her in seven months, since shortly after she had arrived in Ireland.

Now, he read the government's statement on the case:

"LaRose - an American citizen whose appearance was considered to be an asset because it allowed her to blend in - is charged with using the Internet to recruit violent jihadist fighters and supporters, and to solicit passports and funding," U.S. Attorney Michael Levy said in his statement. "It demonstrates yet another very real danger lurking on the Internet. This case also demonstrates that terrorists are looking for Americans to join them in their cause, and it shatters any lingering thought that we can spot a terrorist based on appearance."

Scanning the indictment, Khalid came to paragraph 18. It cited an unnamed co-conspirator and quoted excerpts from on-line posts that Khalid recognized.

He had sent them.

Not long after, FBI agents arrived at his parents' small apartment in Ellicott City, Md. They carried a search warrant. As some of the agents began rifling through the family's possessions, others took the teen into his bedroom.

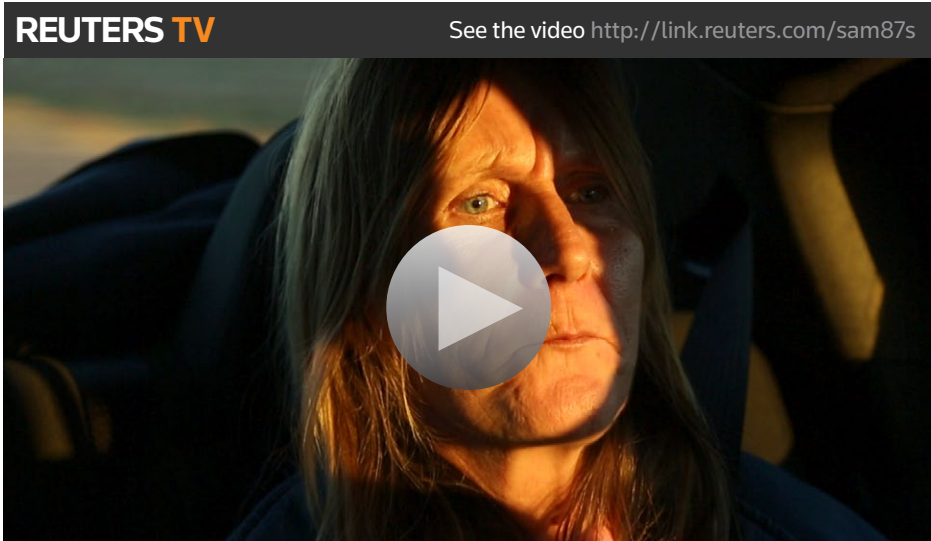
"Tell us about it," one of the agents said to Khalid, who had turned 16. "There's no benefit in lying."

The FBI agents later showed Khalid lengthy transcripts of his chats in jihadi forums. They explained that LaRose was a former prostitute and drug addict. They told Khalid that everyone in the plot had turned on him. They told him that he would be smart to cooperate. They were, they said, the only friends he had left.

Khalid believed the agents when they said he was in big trouble. So he told them that he was no longer a jihadist. The people in those forums were misguided, he said. He had reformed.

The agents asked about the passports. LaRose had mailed them to Khalid before she left for Europe. Although he had sent one of the passports to Damache in Ireland, he had hidden the other at his school, he told the FBI. Now he claimed they were missing.

During the next few weeks, the boy met



with agents a half dozen times, without a parent or attorney present. He believed he was a witness, not a suspect.

By then, Khalid had already acceded to his parents' wishes to seek counseling. A local Muslim scholar was teaching him that he was misinterpreting the Koran, and Khalid also met regularly with an imam who preached peace. He stopped posting on his blog. But it was all a front.

Khalid continued to live a double life, assembling a strong resume for college applications while secretly translating jihadi videos. He entered two high school writing contests. For one, he chose as a subject the Dalai Lama. For the other, Malcolm X.

THE ARREST

Months passed without any public word on the case, and that fall, Khalid began his senior year of high school.

In October, he aced the SAT college entrance exam and submitted an early decision application to prestigious Johns Hopkins University. By now, he had bought another laptop. He also found ways to sneak back into jihadi forums.

His writing turned darker.

That fall, Khalid struck up an online friendship with a troubled, 21-year-old neo-Nazi-turned-jihadist who lived in the Pittsburgh area.

During an online chat on Nov. 22, Khalid told

Text continues on page 6

LaRose pleads guilty to conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists, conspiracy to kill in a foreign country, lying to the FBI and attempted identity theft.	Ramirez pleads guilty to conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists.	Khalid , 17, is quietly arrested by the FBI. Johns Hopkins later rescinds his admission.	Three weeks after Khalid turns 18, he is indicted with Damache on conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists.	Khalid pleads guilty to the conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists.	Khalid is scheduled to be sentenced.	Ramirez is scheduled to be sentenced.	LaRose is scheduled to be sentenced.
Feb. 1, 2011	March 8	July 6	Oct. 20	May 4, 2012	Jan. 22, 2013	Feb. 1	May 7

THE JIHAD JANE CONSPIRATORS



Colleen R. LaRose
aka Jihad Jane

49, PENNSBURG, PA.

American-born, she lived a drug-addled life on the margins until a chance encounter at age 45 introduced her to Islam. Following Internet radicalization, she agreed to a conspiracy to murder a Swedish artist who had blasphemed the Prophet Mohammad.



Mohammed H. Khalid
aka Hassan

19, ELLICOTT CITY, MD.

Immigrated with family from Pakistan at age 14 and became an honor student. Feeling bullied and ostracized in U.S. society, he turned to the Internet to learn about his roots and became radicalized after watching videos of attacks on Palestinians. At 16, he helped LaRose and others provide material support to terrorists.



Jamie Paulin Ramirez
aka Jihad Jamie

34, LEADVILLE, COLO.

American-born, she was living with her mother and young son in a Rocky Mountain town when she became intrigued by Islam while researching a paper for a college class. She converted, met Ali Damache online and agreed to join his jihad and travel to Ireland. She married him there.



Ali Charaf Damache
aka Black Flag

47, WATERFORD, IRELAND

Born in Algeria, raised in France, he immigrated to Ireland in his late 30s. He persuaded LaRose and Ramirez to join him in jihad in Waterford, and married Ramirez. U.S. authorities say he conspired with a terrorist known only as Eagle Eye.



Eagle Eye

PAKISTAN

Alleged al-Qaeda operative, cited in the U.S. indictment as the person who put LaRose in touch with Damache and ordered her to kill the Swedish cartoonist. His whereabouts remain unknown.



Abdullah

AMSTERDAM

Alleged al-Qaeda operative assigned to assist LaRose in Europe. LaRose expected him to teach her about the ways of Islam and train to become an assassin. His whereabouts remain unknown.

the man that he had daydreamed about “doing martyrdom operations together in my school.”

“Like Columbine?” the man asked.

“*Na’am*,” Khalid said, using the Arabic word for yes. “It was like we both were in a big truck and had guns and we were shooting randomly at a huge crowd of kids. *Subhan’Allah* how great would it be. I live in Maryland... and the kids who study in my school proudly state that their parents work in NSA and FBI.”

A few weeks after that exchange, news arrived inside a fat envelope.

“Congratulations!” began the letter from Johns Hopkins. Not only had Khalid won early admission but the school offered a full ride – a \$54,000 scholarship. It was quite an achievement for any student, let alone an immigrant who spent high school feeling alienated.

In June 2011, Khalid graduated from high school. A month later, while still 17, FBI agents quietly arrested him.

Why they chose then, months before he legally became an adult and months after his reference to Columbine, remains unclear. But that fall, shortly after his 18th birthday, the government indicted Khalid for his role in the Jihad Jane case.

The teenager became the youngest person to face U.S. terrorism charges.

THE FUTURE

Three years have passed since Jihad Jane’s arrest. And despite the guilty pleas by LaRose, Ramirez and Khalid, the Jihad Jane conspirators still await sentencing.

All confessed to conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists. LaRose also pleaded guilty to conspiracy to kill in a foreign country, lying to the FBI and attempted identity theft – for stealing her boyfriend’s passports.

The long delay in sentencing can be attributed to several factors: a continuing FBI investigation, extended psychological evaluations of some defendants, a government filing indicating that some evidence in the



SEEKING EMPATHY: Ollie Avery Mannino, the counselor who met a young Colleen LaRose in 1980, says, “When you think about punishment, you have to consider the whole person.” **REUTERS/ANDREW LAMPARD**

“It was like we both were in a big truck and had guns and we were shooting randomly at a huge crowd of kids.”

Mohammed H. Khalid

Jihad Jane conspirator

case is classified, and unexpected legal maneuvers in Ireland.

Ali Damache, the man who called himself Black Flag, caused a sensation in Irish legal circles by successfully contesting the police search of his Waterford apartment.

U.S. prosecutors have indicted him on terrorism charges and have asked Irish authorities to extradite him. Today, he remains in Ireland, awaiting trial on charges unrelated to the Jihad Jane conspiracy. His lawyers declined to comment.

The five acquaintances detained with Ramirez and Damache were released without facing any terrorism charges.

U.S. authorities won’t say if they know the whereabouts of Eagle Eye, the al-Qaeda operative who instructed LaRose to kill, or Abdullah, the man who was supposed to

train her in Amsterdam.

In U.S. District Court, sentencing for LaRose, Ramirez and Khalid has been postponed a handful of times. The most recent dates set: Ramirez and Khalid for early next year, and LaRose for May 7.

Until then, the three remain locked in the same federal prison in downtown Philadelphia, cut off from each other and from the tool that brought them together – the World Wide Web.

LaRose has been held in solitary confinement for three years; even so, on rare outings, she says she has caught glimpses of Ramirez, though the two women haven’t spoken.

Ramirez, who miscarried the baby she conceived with Damache, may face the shortest sentence of the three. Her crime: traveling to Ireland to meet Damache with a vague promise to live and train with jihadists. Authorities say she never knew about the plot to kill Vilks. Her young son now lives with her mother in Colorado.

“I’m not saying that I like being in prison but I am very grateful for this time to be able to reflect and study,” Ramirez says in a statement provided by her court-appointed lawyer,

Jeremy H. Gonzalez Ibrahim. "I was a parakeet. I just repeated what other people said."

Khalid's admission to Johns Hopkins was rescinded. His court-appointed lawyer, Jeffrey M. Lindy, says his client now realizes that his virtual friends did not love him the way his parents and teachers did. He also says Khalid regrets translating videos that may have led others astray.

"If you take away Jihad Jane and the ridiculous plan to kill the cartoonist" Vilks, says Lindy, "what you have is a teenager becoming fascinated with and learning about and adopting a radical ideology."

The lead prosecutor in the Jihad Jane conspiracy, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jennifer Arbittier Williams, says she cannot comment on the cases until after sentencing. But FBI officials in Philadelphia emphasize that they cannot afford to discount possible terrorism suspects, no matter how incompetent or intelligent they might seem.

Once a plot matures, they say, authorities might be too late to stop an attack.

"The more sophisticated that capability becomes, we may not be able to control the outcome," said Richard P. Quinn, the FBI's assistant special agent in charge for counterterrorism. "If you get shot by someone with a seventh-grade education versus someone with a Harvard education, does it matter?"

'MY DESTINY'

During an exclusive interview from jail, LaRose says she still believes that Islam saved her.

"I survived a lot of things that should have rightfully killed me," she says of drug use, rape and incest. "I also thought there was a purpose for me to be alive and then when I found Islam, I thought... 'This is why I have lived so long.'"

U.S. sentencing guidelines suggest LaRose could be jailed for 30 years to life.

Her intended victim, the Swedish artist Lars Vilks, says he believes LaRose has



BROKEN CHILDHOOD: Documents show that Colleen LaRose's biological father, Richard LaRose, repeatedly raped her when she was in elementary school.

REUTERS/FAMILY PHOTO/HANDOUT

served enough time already.

"They should let her go," Vilks says. "Now that she is known, they can keep an eye on her."

Ollie Avery Mannino, the counselor who helped LaRose confront her father about childhood rapes three decades ago, also urges leniency.

Mannino says LaRose's harrowing past doesn't excuse her conduct as an aspiring terrorist. "But when you think about punishment, you have to consider the whole person," Mannino says.

"I don't want people to have sympathy for Colleen," she says. "I want them to try empathy."

Today, in jail, LaRose expresses few regrets. "I did everything I did for the love of my *ummah*," the Muslim community, she says. "Whatever happens to me, it's my destiny. Whatever time they give me,

it's already predestined for me. So I'm not worried."

With limited access to media in prison, LaRose says she hadn't heard that the U.S. government held up her case as one that "underscores the evolving nature of violent extremism" and demonstrates a "very real danger lurking on the Internet."

LaRose also hadn't realized that her arrest caused so much buzz back in 2009 - that Katie Couric had opened the CBS Evening News with her story, declaring that prosecutors were warning that this "petite woman from the Philadelphia suburbs" now "represents the new face of terrorism."

"Wow," LaRose says, almost tickled by the characterization. Then, after a momentary pause: "Well, they're right."

Confined to a cell, often for 23 hours a day, LaRose has nonetheless found a new path toward love.

She has discovered a makeshift Internet that exists within the walls of the federal prison in Philadelphia: If she scoops enough water from her toilet bowl, LaRose can communicate with other inmates by speaking through the sewer pipes - they call it "talking on the bowls."

By talking on the bowls, LaRose fell for a new man. She knows little about him other than what he has told her. But she finds him wise, compassionate and righteous. He is not a Muslim but promises to convert when he gets out. That way, they can marry and be happy.

Colleen LaRose believes him.

Edited by Blake Morrison

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