

THE BOSTON MARATHON BOMBINGS | THE SUSPECTS

Bombing suspects were local, ‘normal’ US immigrants

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THE BACK STORY

The names of the two bombing suspects, Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, were released just after 7 a.m. on April 19, as a massive manhunt was under-way for the surviving brother following an overnight shoot-out in Watertown. By mid-morning, we had posted a 500-word separate. It would be updated 18 times before the first edition of the paper was published that evening.

Suspects in the Boston Marathon bombing appeared to embody the best of the American immigrant experience, having come from southern Russia, near war-torn Chechnya, more than five years ago, and assimilated into the local Cambridge community and culture.

Tamerlan Tsarnaev, 26, the alleged bomber pictured in a dark hat in FBI videos released Thursday, was a talented boxer with hopes of joining the US Olympic team. He was reportedly killed overnight in a shootout with police.

His brother, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, 19, the suspect seen in FBI photos in a white cap, was a member of the class of 2011 at Cambridge Rindge & Latin School, and won a Cambridge City Scholarship that year. He was on the run Friday morning and the target of an unprecedented manhunt in Greater Boston.

People who knew the suspects are struggling this morning to reconcile the young men they knew, who lived on Norfolk Street in Cambridge, with the acts of terrorism they are accused of committing.

“He was normal,” said Lulu Emmons, who went to Rindge & Latin with Dzhokhar. “He kind of fit in with everyone. Not really close with anyone, but he was friendly.

“I am just a little shocked. I sat next to this guy. I joked with him. I laughed with him. I had class with him. It is a little crazy,” she said.

Former teacher and school photographer at Cambridge Rindge and Latin, Larry Aaronson, said he knew Dzhokhar. “If someone were to ask me what the kid was like, I would say he had a heart of gold,” he said. “He was as gracious as possible.”



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Two brothers, two paths into everlasting infamy

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THE BACK STORY

Over the next 13 hours, building on that base, 28 reporters contributed to a 3,200-word breaking news profile of the Tsarnaev brothers.

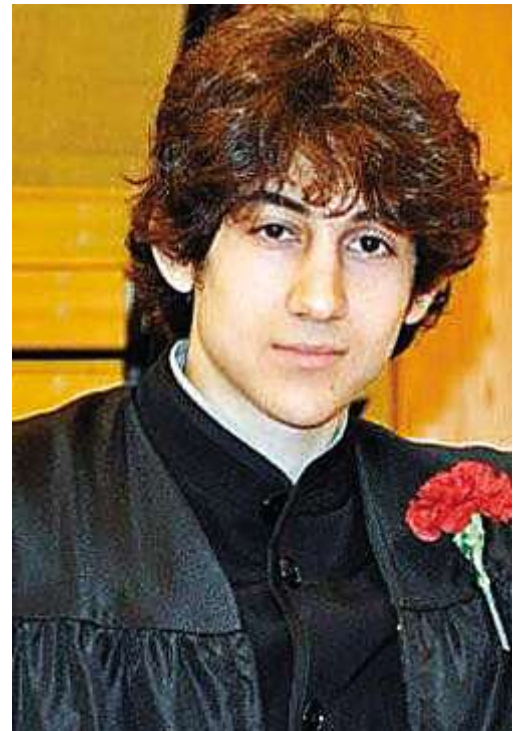
THIS STORY WAS WRITTEN BY JENNA RUSSELL, JENN ABELSON, PATRICIA WEN, MICHAEL REZENDES, AND DAVID FILIPOV OF THE GLOBE STAFF.



JOHANNES HIRN / LANDOV

‘I don’t have a single American friend.’

TAMERLAN TSARNAEV,
in a photo essay about boxing



‘We believe this to be a man here to kill people.’

EDWARD DAVIS, *police commissioner,*
on Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (above)

The two young brothers from Cambridge seemed to be on promising paths, one a scholarship student at college, the other fighting for a national title in amateur boxing.

And then, apparently with little warning, they veered violently off track, deep into the darkness, setting off deadly bombs, authorities are convinced, at one of Boston’s most iconic and joyful events.

To those who knew them, the apparent transformation of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, 26, and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, 19 — ethnic Chechens, born in the former Soviet territory now known as Kyrgyzstan and transplanted to a working-class Inman Square neighborhood — seemed almost inconceivable.

But as friends and neighbors pieced together recollections of the terrorism suspects and their family, a picture emerged of an older brother who seemed to grow increasingly religious and radical — and who may have drawn his more easygoing younger brother into a secret plot of violence and hatred.

“I used to warn Dzhokhar that Tamerlan was up to no good,”

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BOB LEONARD

Tamerlan (black hat) and brother Dzhokhar (white hat) at the marathon on Monday.

Zaur Tsarnaev, who identified himself as a 26-year-old cousin, said in a phone interview from Makhachkala, Russia, where the brothers briefly lived. “[Tamerlan] was always getting in trouble. He was never happy, never cheering, never smiling. He used to strike his girlfriend. . . . He was not a nice man.”

The older brother dropped out of college, was seemingly unemployed, and faced a domestic violence charge in 2009. The younger brother, Dzhokhar (pronounced Ja-HAR), seemed less troubled, people who knew him said, a friendly, relaxed teenager called “an angel” by his uncle and a party-loving “pothead” by some friends. But there were hints of something ominous underneath the surface: a message on Dzhokhar’s Twitter feed on Marathon Monday last year referred to a Koran verse often used by radical Muslim clerics and propagandists.

The two young men, seven years apart, shared a keen intelligence and willingness to work hard, according to interviews with dozens of people who knew them. But there were stark differences between Tamerlan, who came to America as a teenager, and Dzhokhar, who was 10 or 11 when the family immigrated to the United States, and by all accounts thrived in their new American home. Their father, a lawyer before he emigrated, worked as an auto mechanic in the United States, while their mother was a licensed cosmetologist.

Their older son, an accomplished amateur boxer described by some as arrogant or standoffish, aspired to be an engineer but dropped out of Bunker Hill Community College. His younger brother, a well-liked wrestling team captain and National Honor Society member in high school, is currently enrolled as a sophomore at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, living in a dorm on campus and studying to be a marine biologist.

“If someone were to ask me what this kid is like, I would say that he had a heart of gold,” said Larry Aaronson, who taught the younger suspect at the public Cambridge Rindge & Latin School. “He was as gracious as possible ... This is all surreal to me.”

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Family history

The Tsarnaev brothers were ethnic Chechens, born in the former Soviet Republic now called Kyrgyzstan. Whether they ever lived in war-torn Chechnya is unclear. Their father, Anzor Tsarnaev, was described by family Friday as a former Russian amateur boxing champion. While the family was living in Kyrgyzstan, Anzor Tsarnayev said in an interview Friday by the Russian agency life-news.ru, they had trouble with government authorities.

“In Kyrgyzstan we were oppressed,” the father said. “We wanted a quiet life. I was afraid for my kids and tried to save them.”

By 2001, the family had taken refuge in Makhachkala, the capital of the predominantly Muslim Russian region of Dagestan, which borders Chechnya. There, the brothers briefly attended grade school. Anzor’s sister Maret Tsarnaeva told reporters that she wrote the refugee petition in April 2002 for the father, mother and youngest son, Dzhokhar, to receive asylum in the United States. The three other children, Tamerlan and his sisters, Alina and Bella, joined the family later.

With the family reunited in the United States, they seemed to be on the path to fulfilling their American dreams. The brothers attended high school and college and seemed to be succeeding, family members said.

“Everything was perfect because Anzor is a very loving soft hearted father,” Maret said of her brother.

But Anzor Tsarnaev’s former boss at Webster Auto Body in Somerville saw a very different side of the man, describing him as “one of the toughest guys I’ve ever known.”

Joe Timko, a foreman at the repair shop where Anzor Tsarnaev worked several years ago, recalled seeing him changing a transmission in a car in front of his house in single digit temperatures and snow. Timko said he instilled that toughness in his sons, sometimes riding a bike to a boxing gym on Somerville Avenue, while Tamerlan ran alongside him, training.

Tamerlan, the eldest son, became an amateur boxer, emulating his father, who helped train him. Boxing as a heavyweight, he competed in the national Golden Gloves competition, said John Allan, owner of Wai Kru Mixed Martial Arts in Allston, who remembered seeing him compete.

“He was the best boxer in Boston,” said Allan. “He



JOHANNES HIRN/LANDOV

Tamerlan Tsarnaev practiced at the Wai Kru Mixed Martial Arts center in Boston in 2009.

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smoked all of the professionals.”

“He was noticeable because he was very relaxed, very smooth,” said Douglas A. Yoffe, the coach at the Harvard Boxing Club, who has seen Tamerlan box about half a dozen times over the past decade.

Yoffe also said Tamerlan stood out because he kept his distance from others in the clubs and at the tournaments where he fought.

“I remember he had that blase attitude,” Yoffe added. “For a very young fighter he was almost disdainful. He was very confident.”

Profiled in the Lowell Sun in 2004, Tamerlan said he liked the USA.

“America has a lot of jobs. That’s something Russia doesn’t have,” he told the newspaper. “You have a chance to make money here if you are willing to work.”

He later said, in a photo essay about his boxing exploits, that he hoped to be selected for the US Olympic team, and that he dreamed of becoming a naturalized citizen. But he also lamented his alienation, saying, “I don’t have a single American friend. I don’t understand them.”

Tamerlan attended Bunker Hill Community College part-time for three semesters, from the fall of 2006 through the fall of 2008, according to a school spokeswoman. But he never graduated and appeared to focus on his boxing career and a Rhode Island woman he is said to have met outside an Allston gym where he trained.

Dzhokhar, meanwhile, was a gifted student who earned good grades in high school but liked to smoke marijuana with friends, said those who knew him. He volunteered with the Best Buddies program, which pairs volunteers with people who have disabilities, and wore a red bow tie and matching vest with his black tuxedo at his prom in the spring of 2011.

On September 11th, 2012, a year and a half after his high school graduation, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev became a naturalized US citizen, according to government officials, after passing a criminal background check, a US civics and English test, and completing an interview with a federal immigration officer.

At the naturalization ceremony at the TD Garden, he stood with more than 2,500 immigrants to take the oath of US citizenship, raising his right hand and promising to defend the Constitution and laws “against all enemies, foreign and domestic.”

“I don’t want to dwell on the anniversary today, of 9/11,” Judge Douglas P. Woodlock, wearing black robes, told the cheering crowd of immigrants from 132 countries. “But it seems to me that one thing we can say is the resilience of the United States after that attack is the result of the many different cultures which have blended together to provide continued strength for this nation.”

By contrast, Tamerlan had a green card, but was not a citizen. His father said in a New York Times interview that the domestic violence charges against him might have thwarted Tamerlan’s attempt to gain United States citizenship.

Growing extremism

In recent years, as discord rippled through their family, both brothers displayed signs of growing extremism.

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Maret Tsarnaev told reporters at a press conference on Friday in Toronto that her nephew Tamerlan recently went from praying no more than once a day to praying five times a day. A neighbor and family friend in Cambridge said Tamerlan became a devout Muslim within the past few years.

“He started talking about religion,” said the family friend, who asked not to be identified. “He grew a long beard.”

The friend said Tamerlan urged him to be more observant, asking, “Why don’t you become a better Muslim? Why don’t you pray, why don’t you do your Islamic duties?”

When the friend joked about the beard, he said, Tamerlan became upset, asking “Why are you making fun of my religion?”

A next-door neighbor on Norfolk Street in Cambridge said he too noticed a change in Tamerlan’s appearance about a year ago when he began wearing long white linen garments. The neighbor, who asked not to be identified, characterized it as a striking change for the once hip-looking, urban young man, but said it only lasted a month.

Online, it appears, Tamerlan toyed with extremism. A YouTube account created in Tamerlan Tsarnaev’s name in August 2012 includes in one playlist a video dedicated to the prophecy of the Black Banners of Khurasan, which is apparently embraced by Islamic extremists.

In another video, featured on a playlist entitled “terrorists,” a speaker holds an assault rifle and wears camouflage fatigues while flanked by armed men wearing masks.

“There will always be a group of people who will stick to the truth, fight for that truth,” the speaker says in Russian with an accent common to the Caucasus region that includes Chechnya. “And those who won’t support them will not win.”

The Globe could not confirm that the user was the same person as the bombing suspect who was killed in a shoot-out.

At the end of 2011, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev contacted Brian Glyn Williams, a history professor at UMass Dartmouth who teaches a course on the history of Chechnya, expressing an interest in learning more about Chechen history.

“He wanted to rediscover his roots and his identity,” said Williams.

Williams called Chechnya “probably the most dangerous heart of darkness in the world.” The Russians, he said, have fought the Chechens since the 1700s and killed about 200,000 people — one fifth of Chechnya’s population — from 1999 to 2001.

But Christopher Swift, who teaches national security studies at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and has studied the war in Chechnya for nearly 15 years, said it is unlikely that the Tsarnaev brothers were formally trained by Chechen Islamist militants, whose terrorist activities have always been focused on Russia.

“If there is any connection between these kids and the insurgency there, it will be the first time they have struck a target outside of Russia,” Swift said in an interview.

The brothers’ mother, Zubeidat Tsarnaev, said she never heard her sons talk about terrorism. She was quoted by CNN saying that one son got involved in religion about five years ago, but “he never told me he would be on the side of jihad,” she said. “How

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could this happen?”

Tamerlan’s turn to Islam came as the family seemed to be disintegrating, according to neighbors and court records.

A next-door neighbor on Norfolk Street, who declined to provide his name, said he would constantly hear yelling and police would often show up at the family’s apartment. Another neighbor also described “screaming and arguments.”

The parents divorced, and spent extended periods of time back in Russia. The suspects’ mother, Zubeidat, was arrested in June 2012 in Natick and charged with shoplifting after a Lord & Taylor employee accused her of cutting the sensor tags out of several dresses, valued at \$1,952, and hiding them in her shopping bag. The police report described her as unemployed and divorced.

Yet the older brother had the beginnings of his own family. He was married to Katherine Russell, who grew up in North Kingstown, R.I. Russell began wearing Islamic clothing shortly after she started at Suffolk University, one neighbor said. Russell and Tsarnaev also had a child in the past few years, and the three of them were seen on and off at Russell’s parents’ home in Rhode Island. Her mother, Judith, Friday read a prepared statement from the home saying she was “sickened” by the knowledge of what Tsarnaev did.

“Our daughter has lost her husband today, the father of her child. We cannot begin to comprehend how this horrible tragedy occurred,” said the mother. “In the aftermath of the Patriots Day horror we know that we never really knew Tamerlan Tsarnaev.”

The family declined to answer questions when a Globe reporter came to the door.

Dzhokhar, who reportedly did well in high school, was failing many of his college classes, according to a university transcript reviewed by The New York Times. The transcript shows him receiving seven failing grades over two semesters in 2012 and 2013. Several UMass students recalled seeing him smoking or playing laptop video games in the common area of his hall.

About two years ago, the father, Anzor, returned to Dagestan and his former wife also returned to Russia sometime later, according to CNN, leaving the sons on their own. The parents went back and forth to the United States numerous times to visit their children, their aunt said, and another relative said the older brother, Tamerlan, also spent a lengthy period in Russia last year.

Cousin Zaur Tsarnaev said he most recently expressed his concerns about Tamerlan — the alleged bomber pictured in a dark hat in FBI videos released Thursday — to Dzhokhar when the younger brother visited last summer. He added that Dzhokhar went to mosque sometimes but he was “never an extremist.”

“Dzhokhar is a sweet boy, innocent. He was always smiling, friendly and happy,” Zaur Tsarnaev said. “I don’t know how he is involved in this.”

Tamerlan, by contrast, had seen his share of troubles.

Gym owner Allan said that Tamerlan had once introduced him to an American, Brendan Mess, whom Tamerlan described as his best friend.

Two years ago, Mess and two other men were brutally killed in a Waltham apartment where they were found by police with their throats slit and their bodies covered with marijuana. The

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murders remain unsolved.

Tsarnaev hadn't been to Allan's Wai Kru Mixed Martial Arts center in years, instead going to another nearby boxing gym.

Until this month.

Allan, who is currently traveling in Thailand, said he got an e-mail within the past week saying Tsarnaev showed up at the gym acting rude and disrespectful, using other people's equipment, walking on the mats with his shoes.

"It was a clear indication that something was up," Allan said. "He was becoming a complete [expletive]."

In the photo essay about Tamerlan's boxing, called "Will Box for Passport," Tamerlan stops to answer a phone call while walking from his Mercedes to the martial arts center. He has a long wool scarf wrapped fashionably around his neck and gleaming white leather slip-on shoes and is carrying an Oceanfly dufflebag.

He said in the essay that he quit smoking and drinking because "God said no alcohol." He worried that "there are no values anymore . . . people can't control themselves."

People who knew the suspects struggled Friday to reconcile the young men they thought they knew, who lived on Norfolk Street in Cambridge, with the acts of terrorism they are accused of committing.

Pamala Rolon, a senior at UMass Dartmouth and a resident assistant at the Pine Dale dorms on campus, said she knew Dzhokhar for the past year and finds it incredible that he could have played any role in the bombs at the Boston Marathon.

"He studied. He hung out with me and my friends," she said in a telephone interview Friday. "I'm in shock."

Rolon, 22, said the 300 or so students at the dorm were evacuated this morning by school authorities as the campus was shut down.

Rolon said when she returned from class Thursday afternoon, she and her friends watched the television news broadcast showing the images of the suspects, including one that she thought looked faintly like the student she knew on campus.

"We made a joke like – that could be Dzhokhar," she said. "But then we thought it just couldn't be him. Dzhokhar? Never."

In fact, less than 48 hours after the bombings, police said, Dzhokhar was back on campus at UMass, working out in the gym on Wednesday and sleeping at his dorm. "I'm a stress-free kind of guy," he wrote on Twitter, as investigators furiously worked to track him down.

In another posting, the day after the bombs, Dzhokhar left a cryptic message.

"There are people that know the truth but stay silent," he wrote, "[and] there are people that speak the truth but we don't hear them cuz they're the minority."

Peter Payack, the assistant wrestling coach at Cambridge Rindge & Latin where Dzhokhar graduated, said the youth wrestled on the team for three years and was captain for two years and a Greater Boston League all-star. Though he graduated from Rindge & Latin, he came back to wrestle with the team in February, he said.

"He was a dedicated kid, and all the kids loved him," Payack said.

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“He wasn’t a loner, the complete opposite. . . . He seemed like one of the most well-adjusted kids on the team.

“Never in a million years did [we] expect anything like this,” Payack said.

Payack, who has run the Boston Marathon 24 times and often wears his blue-and-yellow Marathon jacket, said he was particularly saddened that Dzhokhar would target the race.

“It was like a bomb going off in my heart this morning because he’s one of our wrestlers. I said ‘That guy looks like my guy.’ ”

The capture of Dzhokhar and the bloody shoot-out that resulted in his brother’s death has triggered questions about their origins.

The state news agency of Kyrgyzstan said the brothers are ethnic Chechens who lived in the Central Asian country until “roughly 2001,” when they moved to Dagestan, on the border of Chechnya in southern Russia. A spokesman for School No. 1 in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, told Russian news agencies that Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was a pupil in the first and second grade.

The Russian social media website VKontakte has a profile of a Dzhokhar Tsarnaev who identifies himself as a resident of Boston and a member of the class of 2011 at Cambridge Rindge & Latin School.

According to the profile, Tsarnaev is a member of the group “Everything About the Chechen Republic.”

The profile lists Dzhokhar’s languages as English, Russian, and Chechen, and lists him as a Muslim. The last post was made in 2012.

While the brothers are Chechens, the press secretary of Chechnya’s pro-Moscow government told the official Russian news agency Interfax that Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev have no recent connection with Chechnya.

The US Embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, said US diplomats in the Central Asian nation were scrambling to learn more about the brothers’ roots.

“We are following this issue very closely,” said Christian Wright, the embassy’s public affairs officer.

Back in the US, speaking to reporters outside his Maryland home on Friday, the uncle of the two suspects lashed out at his nephews for the shame they brought upon their family and country and “on the entire Chechen identity.”

Then the uncle, Ruslan Tsarni, apologized to the victims.

“I’m ready to kneel in front of them, seeking their forgiveness,” he said.

Maria Sacchetti, Mark Arsenault, Brian Ballou, Maria Cramer, Lisa Kocian, Sean P. Murphy, Matt Carroll, Gideon Gil, Tracy Jan, Bob Hohler, Michael Kranish, Doug Most, Sarah Schweitzer, Noah Bierman, Jonathan Saltzman, Todd Wallack, Meghan E. Irons, Bryan Bender, Lisa Wangsness, and Michael Levenson of the Globe staff as well as correspondents Leanne Poirier, Todd Feathers and Haven Orecchio-Egresitz contributed. Arsenault can be reached at marsenault@globe.com