



An Unexpected Patriot

After the conviction, trials just beginning

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She tells of a Web site that featured pictures of Osama bin Laden and a burning American flag.

She explains how an American National Guardsman she'd met on that site wanted to give over U.S. tank secrets to al-Qaeda.

And when her nearly full day on the witness stand is done, Shannen Rossmiller has demonstrated to a court-martial jury of nine commissioned officers at Fort Lewis, Wash., how Spec. Ryan Anderson had, in an e-mail correspondence with her, pushed to get a terrorist to hear his plan, and to effect his betrayal.

Acting on Rossmiller's information, authorities arranged a sting that was recorded on hidden video. Anderson says to people he believes to be al-Qaeda operatives: "It would be very easy to kill a [tank] driver, or the crew inside."

After deliberating 4 1/2 hours, the jury finds Anderson guilty of five counts of trying to help al-Qaeda. He will be going to prison for life. Rossmiller has known this day was coming, but the severity of the verdict is still a shock.

Anderson's wife and mother weep in the courtroom. Sitting just a few feet away, Rossmiller watches the women break down, and sees Anderson's father, Bruce, put his hand on his daughter-in-law Erin's back to try to comfort her.

Then Rossmiller starts sobbing herself.

My God, she thinks, what have I done? He's a man, not just some ghost on the Internet, she realizes. People love him. And I've ruined the lives of all of them. They have every reason to hate me.

Her brain is on fire, her stomach churns.

But what if I'd left him alone? Wouldn't American soldiers have died?

Rossmiller returns to her hotel room and throws up.

Having ensnared Anderson in an exchange of 30 e-mail messages over four months, Rossmiller is seeing firsthand the reach and power of her late-night cybersleuthing.

It should be a day for champagne. But Rossmiller is reeling. And the bad news continues.

"The newspapers and TV stations started calling at 1:03 this afternoon," Randy informs his wife. "I happened to look at the clock."

By the end of the day, 45 news organizations have called. And about 45 more will ring in the next day.

Rossmiller is enraged.

Before the court-martial began, Rossmiller had tried to persuade the Army to preclude her from testifying in open court, so her identity could remain secret. The Army said no.

Then she asked that her online pseudonym not be revealed. But somehow it makes its way into the media.

And suddenly terrorist cyberspace is apprised of the invented persona she used to communicate with Anderson.

Shannen Rossmiller, aka khadija1417@hotmail.com, has been outed.

Rossmiller and her husband think it's retribution for disagreements Rossmiller had with the Army during the court-martial.

Prosecutors for whom Rossmiller was testifying, she says, requested all the files she created in her terrorist hunt, tens of thousands of documents she says had nothing to do with Anderson. She refused. She can't say for certain - and Army prosecutors won't discuss - whether this explains the release of her name.

Furious, Randy lashes out. "Now you live with the monster!" he tells her.

Soon enough, the monster bites.

A Turkish Muslim from Montreal phones Rossmiller's office. A clerk gets the call and tells Rossmiller that he says, "I get her."

It turns out that Rossmiller had been targeting the Montreal man - as she had Anderson and other extremists - in her guise as Khadija. And now he knows, and has her name and number.

Oh, God, Rossmiller thinks. My children!

Randy is shell-shocked. *I just didn't know she swam in such dangerous waters*, he tells himself. Of course, he had seen her at night on the computer.

But how did it go from her typing in the near-dark to this man Anderson getting an epic prison sentence to strangers on the phone vowing murder? It doesn't seem real. The Rossmillers continue to argue.

Still, the two can't stay mad at each other for long. They never could.

Randy has been the man for her forever, it seems. They played together as children; their fathers are friends.

Rossmiller did have a disastrous one-year marriage to another guy from high school. But after her divorce, she reconnected with Randy, a farmer with a little college who bowled her over with his charm and kindness. He has been her rock for 14 years now.

At a lanky 6-foot-3, 200 pounds, with olive skin, and a full head of brown hair flecked with gray, Randy suggests the actor Sam Shepard.

One of the first gifts he gave Rossmiller was a set of Time-Life books on serial killers. He understood.

She gave up going to law school for Randy, deciding to make him a home instead. But she could never be only a farm wife and mother. "All those women meeting to learn how to make scrapbooks?" she says. "Not for me."

A shopping list for terror

After Thanksgiving 2005, sale-savvy Christmas shoppers fill the aisles of the Pocatello, Idaho, Wal-Mart, with items like candy canes and DVD players on their lists.

Michael Curtis Reynolds walks among them carrying a very different inventory: road flares, shotgun shells, speaker wire, batteries, superglue.

Noticing the items on the shelves, he then reports back to his al-Qaeda operative on the Web, really FBI special agent Mark Seyler, Rossmiller's contact at the bureau. On Nov. 9, Rossmiller informed Seyler about Reynolds, and since early December the agent has been communicating with him in her stead.

In an e-mail Dec. 3, Reynolds tells Seyler where the bomb-making ingredients can be found. And he shows how to make claymores - a type of mine - with drawings. A heading over one bomb drawing says, "placement on [gas] well heads."

Reynolds' hard drive stores the information, along with an article titled, "How Can I Train Myself For Jihad?"

Pumped full of lead

Determined not to be victimized, Rossmiller buys a .38-caliber handgun.

It's a pretty little thing, she says, a Lady Smith, with a rosewood handle. I like it. But my computer is my Kalashnikov.

And she's at war. Every morning at 3.

Eventually, for some unknown reason, the sense of menace abates. The air around Rossmiller is not as charged.

The Rossmillers institute a weekly electronic darts game in their house for diversion. Things are quiet for a while.

Then one night as the family sleeps, somebody breaks into the house, swipes Rossmiller's keys, opens the garage, and drives off with her Victory Red 2001 Pontiac Grand Prix GTP, with leather seats and a Bose stereo system.

It's found the next day, embedded in mud near a reservoir 35 miles south. The car has been shot full of .38-caliber bullets. The cops never find a suspect.

The day of the theft, one of the officers pulls her aside and asks: "Do you have any enemies?"

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