

EXPLOSIVE



Patrick Yevsukov

Collin McKenzie-Gude

CHARGES

Collin McKenzie-Gude's lawyer says the **young man from Bethesda was just into role-playing** and never intended real harm with the weapons and explosives found in his room. Prosecutors—and his best friend—say something **much darker was in play**

BY EUGENE L. MEYER

Such a nice young man. And so polite. It's "yes, sir" this and "yes, sir" that and "have a nice day, Judge." You could be forgiven for forgetting why this slight, almost cherubic 20-year-old with reddish hair is standing before the bar of justice, about to be sentenced to 61 months in federal prison for possessing explosives—explosives the government contends were to be used for the kind of horrific crimes associated with hardened terrorists and kids gone wacko.

Think Columbine, or Oklahoma City, or even 9/11. The prosecutors do. And so, ultimately, does the judge on this mid-January morning at federal court in Greenbelt.

Collin McKenzie-Gude has been described by former teachers as an outstanding, well-mannered, intellectually curious youth. "I cannot fathom Collin planning any evil," Kenneth Cooper, his

high school morality class teacher, wrote to the judge. "This is not the young man I came to know, admire and respect." At the sentencing, Cooper says, "I'd be proud to call him a son."

So what is this son of Bethesda doing in court, facing years of hard time in a federal pen? Prosecutors seeking a harsher sentence say he was plotting to take out the man who would become the 44th president of the United States. That he was planning to buy guns with filed-off serial numbers and shoot the seller if the deal went bad. That he was devising a plan to murder his best friend's mother.

And who is this "other boy" referred to in newspaper accounts of the crime—this friend, Patrick Yevsukov? He is the 19-year-old whose cooperation with prosecutors, in exchange for leniency at his own sentencing, has brought Collin to this place and time.

Steven D. Kupferberg, Collin's lawyer, says, "There is absolutely no truth in the plot to kill [Barack]Obama. I don't think there are any masterminds. I think these were two kids under the spell of [Patrick's father] Serafim Yevsukov," who allegedly taught them about explosives. He likens the crime to teenagers setting off firecrackers and cherry bombs in a more innocent era, and imagining, but never carrying out, actual plans.

Rene Sandler, Patrick's lawyer, has a different view of Collin's intent. "This isn't fantasy. This was a plot, a plan.... The government interceded in what could have been a presidential assassination,"

instructions on how to kill someone from a distance of 200 yards and a AAA highway map with handwritten markings that prosecutors characterized as tracing a route to Camp David. Learning of the search, Collin tried unsuccessfully to carjack a vehicle at White Flint Mall, knocking the 78-year-old driver to the ground. He turned himself in to police a day later, on July 30, 2008. Three days later, Patrick was formally charged, as well.

They are bright young men, who once showed so much promise. But who are they, really, and how did their friendship come to this?

This is a tale of two families from dif-

ferent cultures, overlapping in a kind of Venn diagram of dysfunction, and of their sons, whose futures are forever blighted by criminal records.

his mother, Meghan Haney. The Gudes declined to be interviewed for this story, although their views and backgrounds are on record. Serafim Yevsukov, who would be blamed for many of their son's troubles by the Gudes and their lawyer, ultimately would be unable to defend himself. In what one lawyer termed a Hitchcockian twist to this tale, he was in a near-fatal car crash the day before Thanksgiving of 2009. Months later, family sources said he was severely brain-impaired.

On Sept. 23, 2008, facing numerous charges, Collin McKenzie-Gude pleaded guilty in federal court to a single count of possessing bomb-making materials.

The following February, he pleaded guilty in state court to attempted carjacking, as well. On Jan. 9, 2009, Patrick Yevsukov entered a guilty plea to state charges: two counts of manufacturing or possessing destructive devices, and one each of

**"This isn't fantasy. THIS WAS A PLOT....
The government interceded in what could have
been a presidential assassination."**

— Rene Sandler, Patrick Yevsukov's lawyer

she says.

Or was it all just loose talk?

"If all of us out here were judged or put in prison for what we say we want to do or might do, how many of us would be out of jail?" asks Collin's aunt, Jacqueline Gude Castro, who lives near Charlottesville, Va. But, she acknowledges, "I don't know what is true or not true, or if this was a hobby gone wrong. Frankly, it's just a big mystery to us."

This much is clear: During the summer of 2008, Patrick's aunt, Ludmila Yevsukov, a Russian language professor at Montgomery College who had become deeply troubled by the boys' friendship, reported to police that Collin had brought an assault rifle to Patrick's grandmother's home in Gaithersburg. She also said Collin had promised to get Patrick a pistol and had brought chemicals to her family's house.

Montgomery County police executing a search warrant of Collin's house late that July turned up a treasure trove of firearms, chemicals and detonators from which improvised explosive devices (IEDs) could be built. They also found

unauthorized access to a computer, and theft under \$100 for stealing police letterhead stationery for his friend. Collin's father, Joseph Gude Jr., a U.S. Treasury Department employee, pleaded no contest last May to a misdemeanor charge related to purchasing an AK-47 assault rifle for his son. Gude received probation, allowing him to keep his federal job.

They met at St. John's College High, a Catholic prep school on Military Road Northwest in Washington, D.C., where both excelled academically, on the rifle team and in the Junior ROTC program. Collin was captain of the rifle team. Patrick was in the color guard and commanded the drill team. Both were interested in explosives and guns, a combustible mixture. Collin was a straight arrow who had matriculated in Catholic schools; Patrick had been an altar boy for nine years at the Russian Orthodox Church of St. John the Baptist in D.C. Collin was a year ahead of Patrick, but over time they hung out together more and more outside of school. It was an association that would come to trouble both families for different reasons.

A picture of that association emerges in court transcripts, police affidavits and interviews with Patrick, his aunt Ludmila and

Though they avoided trials, the boys' guilty pleas left conflicting and unresolved versions of events. Was Patrick "brainwashed" by Collin, the older boy? Or was Collin drawn into a web of excitement by Patrick's father, who was "hell-bent on teaching his kids to use explosives," as Kupferberg, Collin's lawyer, maintains?

In Patrick's version, the 5-foot-5-inch, 153-pound Collin slept with a loaded gun under his pillow. In Collin's version, according to his parents, it was the 6-foot-3, rail-thin, 155-pound Patrick with the gun under his pillow. During an interview late last fall, Patrick says Collin kept "several firearms in a go-bag, as he described it, in his closet, in case he ever

needed to get away very fast." Collin's lawyer said many of the chemicals seized from Collin's house were brought there by Patrick. However, Patrick testified in court that only "a small percentage" were, and that the rest were purchased by Collin.

The two came from strikingly different but not wholly dissimilar backgrounds.

Both families appeared to live comfortably, with financial support from the boys' maternal grandmothers. Both sent their sons to a private, parochial high school costing upwards of \$15,000 a year. The 4,424-square-foot house that Patrick called home until May 2008 had five bedrooms, 3-1/2 baths and a three-car garage on Goshens Edge Court, at the end of a gravel road in the county's still rustic reaches, near the picture-postcard village of Laytonsville. The house sits on 5.4 acres and was purchased primarily by Meghan's mother, Mary Elizabeth Haney, who lived with them.

Though the Gudes' home is in Bethesda's affluent 20817 ZIP code, it's a modest split-level in the Ashburton subdivision, built on a small lot in 1959 and featuring a covered front porch with wind chimes, a screened-in side porch and a sound barrier separating it from the Beltway. The 1,982-square-foot house on Rockhurst Road was purchased with help from Debra McKenzie-Gude's mother, Virginia McKenzie, 94, who occupied the master bedroom and bath on the first floor, while Debra and Joseph slept in a smaller, upstairs bedroom next to Collin's.

The Gudes continue to be together and wholly supportive of their only child. Patrick Yevsukov's parents were divided on how to raise their three children (Patrick is the oldest), and had separated shortly before the boys were arrested. They are now divorced.

Joseph Lane Gude Jr.

is distantly related to Gilbert Gude, the late congressman who was a fixture in Montgomery County politics for many years. He is also the oldest son and namesake of a distinguished Army colonel who served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Gude Jr. graduated from Bethesda-Chevy Chase

High School and from the University of Maryland. He served nine years in the Air Force, including a stint in Vietnam, and rose to the rank of captain. He later became a program analyst with the Treasury Department's information privacy program.

He met Debra McKenzie, born in Texas but with Maryland roots dating to Colonial times, at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Bethesda. It was 1979; he was 32, she was 27. She had graduated from Ursuline Academy in Bethesda and Catholic University, earning a master's degree in social work. She veered into real estate, then video production. For the past two years, she has been a volunteer with the Art of Living

she preferred the word "facilitate" to "raise."

"He was usually able to tune into his inner truth and know what was best for him," she wrote of her son. "It was important to me to facilitate and honor that sacred trust, perhaps especially so because I wished my mother had done so with me.... I respected Collin's personhood." Collin, she wrote, "was always very bright, very aware, very perceptive—a wise old soul."

Collin's aunt, Jacqueline Gude Castro, says the couple had a close relationship with their son. "I never witnessed any animosity," she says. Nor did she see any sign of teenage rebellion.

Patrick seemed to envy their close fam-

"There is absolutely no truth in the plot to kill [Barack] Obama. I don't think there are any masterminds."

— Steven D. Kupferberg, Collin McKenzie-Gude's lawyer

Foundation, a New Age nonprofit founded by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. The foundation's stated goal is to relieve stress and end violence through meditation. Both parents were ardent supporters of Barack Obama, whom prosecutors say their political-conservative son wanted to kill.

In Joe Gude's military family, "children were to be seen, not heard," he wrote the court before his son's sentencing. "I was in my middle thirties before I began to feel comfortable addressing adults by their first names." After a five-year courtship, the couple married in 1984. Throughout the marriage there were tensions involving Debra's "co-dependent relationship" with her mother, according to Gude in his letter to the judge. But she helped them purchase their four-bedroom home. For many years, Gude wrote, "it was two families under the same roof. Me and Debra and Debra and [her mother]."

The Gudes were 43 and 37 when their only child was born. Reacting to restrictions each faced growing up, they gave him tremendous freedom to pursue his interests. In her letter to the judge, Debra said


ily ties. "Collin's parents had a very normal and friendly relationship," he says in an interview, "the very opposite of my parents. They took an interest in what Collin was doing, in his hobbies. It was kind of refreshing, given how strict my father and uninterested my mother were. His parents were well-intentioned. They set up a lot of ground rules. Guns were separated from ammunition in a locked case. [But] Collin was able to slip the chain link off in a way his parents didn't realize."

At the age of 8, Collin drew a gun "barrel with firing mechanism directly behind," his mother recalled in her letter to the judge. He and his father took up model rocketry as a "father-son hobby," Kupferberg wrote in his pre-sentencing brief to the judge. They built rockets in their basement and launched them in Frederick County.

When Collin was in eighth grade, Joe Gude enrolled him in the Maryland State Police Basic Firearms Safety Training Course. Collin also received instruction at a private indoor shooting range in Rockville. He signed two written agree-

ably to impair her accuracy so she would flunk her requalification test.

Collin's senior yearbook picture shows him smiling and in uniform. "Live life, don't be a bystander in your own existence," says an anonymous quote next to it. "Rage more."



"In the weeks leading up to the arrest, it began to worry me more and more what he might do and be capable of."

—Patrick Yevsukov, speaking of his friend, Collin McKenzie-Gude

The Yevsukovs had been in the news before, though for distinctly different reasons. Patrick's grandfather, also named Serafim, was a navigator for Aeroflot, the Soviet national airline, a job that took him beyond the Iron Curtain. Chafing at life under communism, he and his family sought to leave the Soviet Union, filing the necessary papers in 1978, long before glasnost. Those seeking to emigrate at the time were either Jewish or, like the Yevsukovs, political dissenters. Famed dissident Andrei Sakharov and his wife, Elena Bonner, who had immigrated to the West, championed the Yevsukovs' cause. At the time, Patrick's father had been imprisoned for four years in Siberian labor camps for refusing military service and the elder Serafim had been placed in a Moscow psychiatric hospital for six months for protesting his son's imprisonment.

Pleas on their behalf came from the highest levels—British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and 24 U.S. senators, including Al Gore, Orrin Hatch and Paul Sarbanes. The Yevsukovs were released in 1987 and settled in the Washington area.

The younger Serafim's first job in the United States was at an Ethan Allen furniture store, where Meghan worked as the receptionist and her mother as the manager. Serafim (known to his family as Sima) was hired as a truck driver and warehouse manager.

Meghan had moved with her mother from a Chicago suburb to Maryland in the 1980s. She and Serafim married on Nov. 24, 1989, at the Rockville courthouse. Then came three children: Patrick in 1991, Katherine in 1993 and John in 1995. Serafim started his own business, Wallpapering by Sima, also painting homes, putting up drywall and doing other remodeling chores.

In 2002, Meghan's mother bought the

ments with both parents, pledging to use firearms safely and responsibly. The second one, drafted by Collin, addressed Joe Gude's purchase of an AK-47 assault rifle for him. "It indicated that Collin had an awareness perhaps beyond his years of the responsibility and safety issues," Joe testified at his son's sentencing.

Since it's illegal to have such a weapon shipped to a Maryland address but not to possess one here, Joe suggested Collin have it sent to the Virginia home of Patrick Gude, Joe's brother, according to his testimony at the sentencing hearing. From there, it was brought to the Chevy Chase home of Joe's father, where Joe picked it up before giving it to his son. "I had concerns, never voiced beyond our family," Joe said during sentencing. "In this day and age, we made a choice not to advertise the fact that we had firearms."

Both products of Catholic schools, Joe and Debra wanted the same for Collin, but they couldn't afford it until Debra's mother offered to help pay his tuition at The Woods Academy in Bethesda. There, Collin was a "conscientious student...generally good natured [with] no history of any kind

of difficulties with teachers or school friends," school head Mary Worch wrote in a letter to the court. The 9/11 attacks inspired him to write in a student newsletter that the tragedy should not result in hate crimes against American Muslims. He also wrote to President George W. Bush, urging restraint in Iraq.

At St. John's, Collin stood out, according to Kupferberg, for opposing drinking and drugs and refusing to attend parties where they were used.

For 10 days in August before his senior year, Collin attended a private 10-day youth leadership program costing \$2,195 on "Intelligence and National Security," on the campus of American University (AU). By high school graduation, he had a 3.5 GPA and had been accepted to AU's School of International Service, where he hoped to prepare for a career in the State Department's U.S. Diplomatic Security Service. But Collin's high school career wasn't unblemished: He was suspended from the rifle team for what his lawyer described as "a practical joke"—adjusting the scopes on another team member's rifle, presum-

Goshens Edge house for \$625,000 with her daughter and son-in-law. Six years later, in May, according to court documents and Patrick's testimony, Meghan demanded Serafim leave with their sons, who remained loyal to their father. They moved into Serafim's mother's townhome at 12 Circuit Court in Gaithersburg, where Patrick lived until he was charged on Aug. 2.

Meghan filed for divorce that July, alleging "extreme emotional abuse" by Serafim, his mother and sister. Her husband, she said, had been "consistently controlling, bullying and emotionally abusing" throughout the marriage, forbidding the children from participating in sports or activities, having friends, or, in Patrick's case, obtaining a driver's license.

She said in her divorce filing that "cultural and familial differences" had affected their marriage and alleged that "for years" Serafim had "facilitated and encouraged" Patrick's behavior "and actively indoctrinated Patrick into a criminal way of thinking and living." He had, she wrote, gotten "involved with Russian martial arts and decided to buy guns. He made Patrick like his playmate and got him involved," teaching him about explosives and how to assemble and disassemble an AK-47 assault rifle.

After attending two court-ordered "co-parenting skills enhancement" sessions, Serafim would deem Meghan's statements "flagrant, inflammatory and altogether false accusations" in court papers filed in the divorce case. In an interview with investigators in August 2009, a few months before his accident, he would acknowledge participating in and teaching the Russian martial art, Systema, and instructing his son in how to handle a gun, but would deny instructing Patrick in how to use anything more explosive than fireworks.

Patrick's emotional state deteriorated after he was charged. His guilty plea, on Jan. 9, 2009, did not resolve his issues. He had by then turned against his father and aunt, and statements he'd made to the custody evaluator in the divorce case landed him back in court. There, the government sought to hold



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him without bond, based on his reported threat to shoot his aunt if his father gained custody of his siblings. "I don't care if I go to jail the rest of my life...it would be worth it," the prosecutor said Patrick told the evaluator.

"I've been through hell over this past six months," Patrick told the judge. "I feel like my life's just kind of crumbling around me." He remained on unsecured personal bond, but he was committed overnight to Potomac Ridge, a psychiatric facility, for evaluation and then released the next day.

During Collin's sentencing, Patrick testified that he had begun "setting off pipe bombs with my father at a very early age" and "started experimenting with explosives" when he was 9. "My father fostered my interest in explosives," he said.

In Collin's bedroom, **police found three high-powered rifles, two shotguns, one 9mm handgun, two smoke grenades, timers, a modified flash bang grenade, model rocket igniters, chemicals, including sodium nitrate, armor-piercing ammunition and printed instructions on how to construct an improvised rifle silencer.**

Patrick became interested in chemistry at St. John's and began experimenting with chemicals at home. But one kitchen experiment went awry, he testified, when he was melting potassium nitrate and sugar "to make a smoke stick." The resulting explosion cracked the granite countertop and caused "significant charring." On many occasions, Patrick said (and evidence obtained by the government confirmed), he purchased chemicals with Meghan's credit card.

In an interview with the FBI nearly a year earlier, Patrick said his father also

showed him how to make Molotov cocktails and talked about whether certain explosive devices could penetrate armor or tanks. Patrick said he feared his younger brother ending up as he had because of his father's influence.

The Gudes had had reservations about their son spending time with Patrick, according to Kupferberg. They had noted their son's growing interest in explosives and "the excitement he displayed when speaking about time spent with the Yevsukovs." Debra said they allowed him to go to the Yevsukov home "with the stipulation that he was not to be involved with any of that pipe bomb stuff," according to Collin's lawyer.

Patrick's aunt, Ludmila Yevsukov, who holds a doctorate from Ohio State Uni-

versity and taught for five years at the United States Air Force Academy, was concerned, too, but for different reasons.

inferior." Collin, she says, "mesmerized Patrick.... He was so under the control of this kid. Patrick used to know who he was. Then he was quoting Collin all the time. It was like Collin was a semi-God."

And Collin, she says, was driving Patrick everywhere in his parents' SUV—home from school, to Frederick for lunch at the Cracker Barrel, with Collin picking up the check. "Such kind favors didn't make sense," she says. "For us, it was an incredible puzzle."

Patrick, she says, had always been so proud of his family. They came to America as political refugees "with \$60 in our pocket and just went to work. My mother was 46, heroic, knew two English words, 'kitchen' and 'cat,' became an interior designer. My father did clerical work at George Washington University. We were the type of people that are the backbone of society," Ludmila says. "Then my brother established his own business, painting, drywalls, turning houses into palaces with his own hands...and my father worked with him...."

"Then, under Collin's influence, all we could hear was about Collin's parents living in Bethesda, and how [Patrick was] embarrassed by his parents and family.... We were very saddened because this was not our Patrick."

After Patrick and his father moved to her mother's townhome, a half mile from her apartment, in May 2008, Ludmila says she began hearing "incredible" things: "Collin telling Patrick how the police were dumb, morons, how it would be great to wire your car with red and blue lights, drive around, never be stopped. Complete disrespect for law enforcement."

"Patrick was saying, 'Wow, wow,' just looking at him. It was scary to watch and hear, like he was under hypnosis, a spell."

It was during this time that Meghan's mother obtained a protective order against Serafim and that Serafim sold all

his weapons, according to Patrick's testimony and a bill of sale obtained by the government. Serafim told Patrick he could no longer keep his chemicals and other items in their home. At Collin's sentencing, Patrick would testify that he gave his chemical explosives, ammunition and detonation supplies to Collin, also selling him a gun safe for \$200. "Collin didn't want his parents to know he was bringing these chemicals to his house," he said. So he first made sure nobody was home before bringing them into his bedroom.

That summer, Patrick had an internship at the county police station in Rockville. Collin also had applied, but failed to submit the required references. At the station, Patrick helped with paperwork and fingerprinting. He also illegally obtained letterhead stationery which he says Collin wanted to use "to purchase restricted items" through a law enforcement Web site. Patrick says Collin gave him a St. John's faculty directory, as well, and he ran computer checks at the station to see if any of the teachers had criminal records.

Because of the internship, Patrick begged out of a family vacation in Maine that summer. Ludmila and her mother gave Patrick rides to and from the police station, and it was a conversation during this time, she says, that led her to contact police. "I didn't do that to punish Patrick or put him in jail." She wanted "to rescue them," she says.

She says Patrick told her that Collin had brought an AK-47 to her mother's home and had offered to get him a self-loading pistol. "My heart sank," she says.

Ludmila says she tried to discuss her concerns with Collin's father but was rebuffed. She says Patrick's mother accused her of "harassing Patrick's friends." She says she went to the county police station on Seven Locks Road in Rockville on July 22, where Patrick had been working, but wasn't taken seriously. The next day, she went to the county police station in Gaithersburg, where she says police appeared more receptive when she filed a written report.

On July 27, she hand-delivered a follow-up letter to the office of Montgomery

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County Police Chief J. Thomas Manger, saying, "Collin McKenzie-Gude has been brainwashing Patrick and actively involving him in highly suspicious and dangerous activities." She copied the Maryland State Police and the U.S. Attorney's Office. She also wrote to the FBI, which she says interviewed her nearly a year later. Police spoke with Serafim, as well, when he returned from vacation, and with Patrick, who would later acknowledge initially lying to protect his father and his friend. At Serafim's invitation, police visited the Yevsukov town house, looking for evidence but finding nothing incriminating.

Armed with a search warrant, police entered the Gude home in Bethesda on

what was found, the government said Collin was researching explosively formed projectiles (EFPs), "booby trap type devices" with high-explosive chemical compounds. On Collin's computer and flash drive and in his room, police found maps, lists and plans that the government would argue supported Patrick's statements that this was no child's play.

Included were a diagram of a bomb that would release shrapnel upon detonation, instructions on how to kill someone from a distance of 200 yards, a regional highway map with red circles along a route from the Washington area to Camp David and aerial views of a field in Poolesville and the Goshens Edge house where

Patrick's mother lived. Though Collin's lawyers dismissed such evidence as taken out of context and sought to undermine Patrick's credibility, the government saw darker scenarios.

In pre-sentence filings and during

the four-day sentencing proceeding, more details of the alleged plots would emerge. Collin had devised a plan to kill Meghan Haney, Patrick testified, even preparing a PowerPoint presentation outlining how various participants, divided into three teams, would carry it out. One would enter the house and set off a "flash bang" or stun grenade to disorient those inside. Another, armed with 12-gauge shotguns, would kill the occupants. Meghan was the target, but others might be "collateral damage," Patrick told investigators. A third team would use a long-range sniper rifle to shoot anyone trying to escape.

It was around February 2008, Patrick testified, and "my parents' divorce battle was growing increasingly bad. I complained to Collin on a daily basis. He said it would be a good idea if my mother were out of the picture.

"At the time, I was very angry with my mother, and I entertained Collin's plan," Patrick said. "Initially, I thought it was a

good idea because I wanted to stay at the house and have access to the property to detonate bombs. At the end, I realized I wouldn't be able to go through with it and that other members of my family would probably be hurt, as well."

Collin had brought the plan on a flash drive to Patrick's house, Patrick testified. When Meghan saw the two boys on the computer and asked what they were doing, she accepted Collin's explanation that they were preparing a mock plan to defend the house against would-be attackers.

That spring, Patrick testified, Collin showed him another plan to buy unlicensed guns with the serial numbers filed off. The seller was a fellow St. John's student, according to prosecutors and court testimony. Collin's plan, Patrick testified, included having others provide firearm cover and shooting the seller if the buy went bad.

Collin's plan was superimposed on an aerial map of a field near Poolesville that his class had once visited for stargazing. One area was marked "kill zone." Patrick was to be armed with an AR15 rifle some distance away. "If anything went wrong," Patrick testified, "I was to shoot [the seller] and his friend from approximately 400 meters."

Collin, Patrick and Daniel Mears of Gaithersburg, another student they'd recruited, went to the site to check it out beforehand. But the plan fell apart, Patrick testified, when "I told Collin I couldn't go through with actually killing anybody." The seller and his friend also backed out, Patrick testified, fearing a police sting. In court, Mears supported Patrick's account.

As for the plot to kill Obama, Patrick testified that Collin "intensely disliked Barack Obama, particularly his views on gun control. He was afraid...he'd enact sweeping gun control legislation and Collin would lose his guns." In an interview, Patrick says Collin thought Obama was "a socialist" who would "destroy the country."

Patrick testified that Collin talked about how candidates like Obama traveled in convoys and how he could be taken out with EFPs and a long-range rifle.

At first, Patrick said, he thought Collin

"You're not that smart, and the world is here to tell you that today."

—U.S. District Court Judge Peter J. Messitte

the afternoon of July 29, 2008. That morning, while police had the house under surveillance, Collin dropped off Patrick at the Rockville police station, then went to White Flint Mall, where he tried to carjack a vehicle from a 78-year-old man in the parking garage, knocking him down. When Collin couldn't get the car keys to work, he fled, leaving his cell phone behind.

Ludmila says Patrick told her, "They'll never find [Collin] because he'll disappear or commit suicide."

In Collin's bedroom, police found three high-powered rifles, two shotguns, one 9 mm handgun, two smoke grenades, timers, a modified flash bang grenade, model rocket igniters, chemicals, including sodium nitrate, armor-piercing ammunition and printed instructions on how to construct an improvised rifle silencer.

Also seized and listed in the police inventory were fake CIA and U.S. Government badges and bulletproof vests. Based on

was joking. But as Collin made a list of items to carry out the plan and then began acquiring them, Patrick said he decided it was for real. "I went along with [it] as he was theorizing," Patrick testified. "As he became more serious, I realized the gravity of the plan and didn't want anything to do with it."

Patrick says in an interview that there was no "mal-intent" in their activities, "no master plan to hurt anybody." But later in the same interview he says, "In the weeks leading up to the arrest, it began to worry me more and more what he might do and be capable of."

However, Patrick blames his aunt for triggering his legal problems. "One reason Ludde turned me in was because she viewed Collin as an interloper and outside influence," Patrick says.

Ludmila, herself, is aggrieved. Her family suffered in the gulag of the former Soviet Union, with her brother imprisoned without due process. "My great-grandparents were executed after the Revolution by the Communist regime," she says. "My uncle died in the gulag." Now she sees the family caught in a Kafkaesque replay, imprisoned not by the government but by a public image she thinks the government and the defense and even her nephew's lawyer helped to shape. She sees her brother as a hard-working father who tried to do his best for his family; she sees her nephew as a dupe, the victim of an older boy who brainwashed him.

Collin has his aunt, too, to defend him. Jacqueline Gude Castro sees him less as a perpetrator than as a victim of overzealous government prosecutors, emboldened by the temper of the times. "If we'd not had [Columbine] and the whole 9/11 and Oklahoma City the last 10 to 15 years," she says, "if it had happened 20 years ago, it wouldn't have been what it is."

Meghan Haney, Patrick's mother, sees both boys as victims. "Poor Collin," she muses at the T.J. Maxx in Olney, where she works behind the cash register. With Patrick talking to prosecutors in return for leniency, "they were pitted against each other," she says. "I feel so badly for

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EXPLOSIVE CHARGES

Collin and his parents. Collin—I think [he] really didn't do anything."

And Serafim, of course, can't speak about any of this since his car accident Nov. 25 on a rain-slicked road by Lake Needwood near Rockville. While on his way to pay his daughter's tuition at Good Counsel High School, he lost control of his 2004 Ford Excursion SUV, crashing it into a PEPCO pole.

On Jan. 7, Collin appeared for sentencing in the Greenbelt courtroom of U.S. District Court Judge Peter J. Messitte. According to a correctional officer's testimony, Collin had been a model prisoner at the Montgomery County jail in Boyds for 17 months. With a judicial dispensation not to wear jail clothes, he looked preppy in khaki pants, white button-down shirt and orange tie. He smiled and flashed a thumbs-up sign.

The proceeding dragged on for four days over almost two weeks in what the judge said disapprovingly had become a "mini-trial." There was FBI testimony about the bomb-making materials and weapons found in Collin's bedroom, enough components to make more than 50 IEDs. If this were Iraq, Special Agent Richard Stryker said, they would have concluded they'd "found the bomb-maker's place."

There was prolonged legal skirmishing over whether Patrick would take the stand or have his statements to investigators read by others. Under orders from the judge, Patrick, in a dark suit and red tie clipped to a white shirt, began his testimony near the end of the second day of the proceeding and continued into the third. With his former best buddy nearby, he spoke clearly but didn't look at Collin during nearly three hours of direct testimony and cross-examination.

In his closing remarks, Assistant U.S. Attorney Bryan E. Foreman said Collin was "a product of his own environment, always able to get what he wants through manipulation or some other back alley." Collin's parents, he said, were "asleep at the switch. These folks had no idea what their son was up to."

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In his remarks, Kupferberg again blamed Patrick and Serafim Yevsukov for leading his client astray.

Finally, shortly before 2 p.m. on Jan. 19, the fourth day, it was Collin's turn to address the court. "Your honor," he began tearfully, "without a doubt this has been the worst time, the past 18 months. I was arrested and placed in jail, [had my acceptance withdrawn] by the college of my dreams [AU], and worst of all been torn apart from my family that loves me very dearly. The saddest part of the situation is my own actions are responsible. I can't tell you how sorry I am and how much I regret these actions, sir. I want only to resolve my life in a positive manner and want to be back with my family and those who love me, and I don't think I can say anything more."

After a pause, he added: "I also apologize for my emotional state right now. I'm sorry."

The judge appeared unmoved. The adults who had repeatedly told Collin how smart he was had done "a real disservice to you," the judge said. "You're not that smart, and the world is here to tell you that today." Although "nobody was assassinated, nobody wounded, you were on the cusp," Collin, the judge said, was a "bright young man at a fine school [living] dual lives." Adults knew about his interest in weapons, yet saw him as "a young man mature beyond your years. You're not."

He mocked Collin's insistence that he meant no harm. "You took a course on morality, of all things," the judge said, contrasting that with the elaborate schemes to commit violence that went well beyond play. Messitte said he was "not happy" with Collin's parents, who enabled his hobby-gone-wrong. "You never should've been given the leeway," he told Collin. "But in the end, you are an adult, you take responsibility."

Messitte said he wanted to deliver a message to the larger community and to other youngsters enamored with guns and explosives. Life, he said, is not a video game, and actions have consequences. The government asked for a 79-month prison

sentence, although guidelines allowed for up to 97. Giving Collin credit for 17 months served, Messitte imposed a sentence of 61 months, with a recommendation that it be served in medium-security federal prisons in Cumberland, now home to former lobbyist Jack Abramoff, or Butner, N.C., home to Ponzi schemer Bernard Madoff and in the past to would-be presidential assassin John Hinckley Jr.

Ever polite, Collin told Messitte, "I appreciate you crediting the 17 months, your honor."

With time off for good behavior, Collin could be paroled in May 2014.

After he was charged in the case, Patrick was allowed to withdraw from St. John's, but not without turning in his uniform. He voluntarily returned his marksmanship medals, as well. "I didn't want the awards," he says. "What do I need them for?"

While free on bond, he graduated from Gaithersburg High School. Today he attends the University of Baltimore on a full scholarship with a double major in business administration and law. "I have my academic awards now," he says. "I also have a commendation letter for straight A's this [past] semester."

Patrick was to be sentenced this spring, with the expectation of probation and no jail time. "Now I have the ability to live as a normal teenager," he says. "I can have friends who have not been strictly approved. I'm learning how to develop Web sites. I have a very diverse group of friends."

"Before, I wanted to work as a law enforcement officer or go [into] the armed services. I was planning to attend West Point," he says. Now he wants to become a lawyer, inspired by his own attorney, Rene Sandler, who, he says, "gave me the chance to go on with my future.... I want to be able to help someone else to go on with their future." ■

Eugene L. Meyer, a former writer and editor for The Washington Post, is a contributing editor for Bethesda Magazine.



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