

Tamerlan Tsarnaev

Tamerlan Anzorovich Tsarnaev (/ˈtæmərˈlɑːn ˈtsɑːrˈnɑːiəf/; October 21, 1986 – April 19, 2013)^[note 1] was a Russian-born terrorist of [Chechen](#) and [Avar](#) descent^{[3][4]} who, with his younger brother [Dzhokhar Tsarnaev](#), planted [pressure cooker bombs](#) at the [Boston Marathon](#) on April 15, 2013.^{[1][5][6][7]} The bombings killed three spectators and injured 264 others.^{[8][9]}

Shortly after the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) released images of the Tsarnaev brothers in connection with their investigation of the Boston Marathon bombings, the brothers killed an [MIT policeman](#), [carjacked](#) an [SUV](#), and engaged in a shootout with the police in the [Boston](#) suburb of [Watertown](#). During the shootout, Tamerlan was captured but died, partly as a result of his brother driving over him. A [MBTA police officer](#) was critically injured by [friendly fire](#) during Dzhokhar's escape.^{[10][11]} Dzhokhar was injured in the shootout and was later found, arrested, and hospitalized on the evening of April 19 after an unprecedented [manhunt](#) in which thousands of police officials searched a 20-block area of Watertown.^[12] In custody, Dzhokhar allegedly said during questioning that he and his brother also intended to detonate explosives in [Times Square](#) in New York City.^[13] Dzhokhar reportedly told authorities that he and his brother were radicalized, at least in part, by watching lectures by [Anwar al-Awlaki](#).^{[14][15]}

Childhood and family background

The Tsarnaev family was [forcibly moved](#) from [Chechnya](#) to the [Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan](#) in the years following [World War II](#).^[16] Husband Anzor Tsarnaev is [Chechen](#), and wife Zubeidat Tsarnaeva is an [Avar](#).^{[17][18][19]} The Tsarnaevs had two daughters^[20] and two sons. Tamerlan Tsarnaev was born in the [Kalmyk Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic](#)^[21] on October 21, 1986, and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was born in Kyrgyzstan on July 22, 1993.^[22]

As children, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev lived in [Tokmok](#), Kyrgyzstan.^[23] In 2001, the Tsarnaev family moved to [Makhachkala](#), [Dagestan](#), in the Russian Federation.^{[24][25][26]} In April 2002, the Tsarnaev parents and Dzhokhar visited the United States on a 90-day [tourist visa](#).^{[27][28][29]} Anzor Tsarnaev applied for [asylum](#), citing fears of deadly persecution due to his ties to Chechnya.^[30] Tamerlan Tsarnaev was left in the care of his uncle Ruslan in Kyrgyzstan,^[16] and arrived in the U.S. approximately two years later.^[31] The United States granted asylum to the Tsarnaev parents, and their four children later received "derivative asylum status".^[32] The family settled on Norfolk Street in [Cambridge, Massachusetts](#).^[33] In March 2007, the Tsarnaevs were granted [legal permanent](#)

residence.^[31] Tamerlan Tsarnaev was a permanent resident of the U.S.^[29] and a citizen of both Russia and Kyrgyzstan.^[34]

Activities prior to Boston Marathon bombing


2003–2007

According to Tsarnaev's immigration file,^[35] Tsarnaev was admitted to the U.S. in 2003, receiving his visa at the U.S. consulate in [Ankara](#), Turkey. After arriving in the U.S., he attended [Cambridge Rindge and Latin School](#), a public high school.^[36] He applied for admission at the [University of Massachusetts Boston](#) for the fall of 2006, but was rejected.^[37] He attended [Bunker Hill Community College](#) part-time for three terms between 2006 and 2008, studying accounting with hopes of becoming an engineer.^{[25][38]} He dropped out of school to concentrate on boxing.^{[25][39]}

In 2007, Tsarnaev confronted a Brazilian youth who had dated his younger sister, Bella, and punched him in the face.^[40]

2008

During 2008, Tsarnaev became a devout Muslim and stopped drinking and smoking (eventually becoming an [extremist](#) a year later). He began to regularly attend the [Islamic Society of Boston](#) mosque near his home in Cambridge. Although the [Americans for Peace and Tolerance](#), a longtime critic of the mosque, alleges that the

Tamerlan Tsarnaev	
Тамерлан Царнаев	
<div><div></div><div>Tsarnaev in 2009 (age 23)</div></div>	
Born	<div>Tamerlan Anzorovich Tsarnaev^[note 1]</div> <div>October 21, 1986^[1]</div> <div>Tugtun village, Kalmyk ASSR, Russian SFSR, Soviet Union^[1]</div>
Died	<div>April 19, 2013</div> <div>(aged 26)</div> <div>Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.</div>
Cause of death	<div>Cardiac and respiratory arrest from head and chest trauma after being unintentionally ran over by Dzhokar Tsarnaev</div>
Resting place	<div>Al-Barzakh Cemetery Doswell, Virginia, U.S.^[2]</div>
Citizenship	<div>Kyrgyzstan</div> <div>Russia</div>

mosque supports "a brand of Islamic thought that encourages grievances against the West, distrust of law enforcement and opposition to Western forms of government, dress and social values,"^[41] the mosque has condemned terrorism and would later ask Tsarnaev to stop attending because he interrupted the Friday sermon.^[21]

Spouse	Katherine Russell (a.k.a. Karima Tsarnaeva) (m. 2010)
Children	1 (daughter)
Relatives	Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (brother)

In May 2008, Tsarnaev's sister said that her husband was engaging in acts of physical abuse and adultery. Tsarnaev flew across the country to [Bellingham, Washington](#), to "straighten up the brains" of his brother-in-law, Khozhugov.^[40]

2009

An aspiring heavyweight boxer, Tsarnaev trained at the Wai Kru Mixed Martial Arts Center, a [Boston](#) club.^[39] In 2009–10, he was the [New England Golden Gloves](#) heavyweight champion, winning the [Rocky Marciano](#) Trophy.^{[42][43]} In May 2009, he fought in the nationals in the 201-pound weight class, but lost a first-round decision.^{[42][44]}

Tsarnaev first dated Nadine Ascencao, who became his live-in girlfriend. After an incident between Ascencao and Tsarnaev, she called 911 crying hysterically and asking for help. Tsarnaev was arrested at his home at 410 Norfolk Street in Cambridge, on July 28, 2009, for [aggravated domestic assault](#) and [battery](#).^[45] The case was dismissed for lack of prosecution.^{[33][46][47]}

Tsarnaev dated Katherine Russell of [North Kingstown, Rhode Island](#) on and off while she attended [Suffolk University](#) from 2007 to 2010.^[48] Russell converted to [Islam](#) and started wearing a [hijab](#) in 2008.^[49] Friends said he would shout at her that she was a "slut".^[50] They described fights in which Tsarnaev would "fly into rages and sometimes throw furniture or throw things".^[51]

The Tsarnaev brothers' uncle, Ruslan Tsarni, said he "had been concerned about his nephew being an extremist since 2009". Tsarni said that Tsarnaev's radicalization started not during his visit to Russia in January 2012, but much earlier in Boston after he was influenced by a Muslim convert known as "Misha".^[52] "Misha" was later identified as Mikhail Allakhverdov, a 39-year-old from [Rhode Island](#) (of [Armenian-Ukrainian](#) origin,^[53] born in [Azerbaijan](#)).^[54] Allakhverdov told [The New York Review of Books](#) that he rejected violence, was not Tsarnaev's teacher, had not spoken to Tamerlan in three years and had never met his family members. Furthermore, he said that he had cooperated with a brief [FBI](#) investigation that the [NYRB](#) reported had found no ties between Allakhverdov and the attacks.^[53]

2010

According to a 2010 photo essay in *The Comment*, the graduate student magazine of [Boston University College of Communication](#), Tsarnaev said that he was working to become a naturalized citizen in time to be selected for the U.S. Olympic boxing team. He added that he would "rather compete for the United States than for Russia",^{[39][43]} while remarking that he "didn't understand" Americans and did not have any American friends.^[39] A later FBI report recorded Tamerlan stating that was a misquote, and that most of his friends were American.^{[55][56]} He added that he abstained from drinking and smoking, because "God says no to alcohol"^[57] and that "there are no values anymore. People can't control themselves".^[58] Rule changes disqualified all non-US citizens from Golden Gloves boxing, ending Tsarnaev's boxing career and Olympic hopes.^[40]

In the spring of 2010, Katherine Russell became pregnant with Tsarnaev's child. Russell dropped out of college at the end of her junior year and married Tsarnaev on June 21, 2010, in a 15-minute ceremony in an office at the Masjid Al Quran in the [Dorchester](#) area of Greater Boston.^{[59][60][61][62][63]} [Imam](#) Taalib Mahdee said that he had not met the couple before the ceremony, and that Katherine was the one who had called and asked to be married there.^[60] Katherine Russell adopted the Muslim name "Karima".^{[64][65]} The couple's daughter, Zahara Tsarnaeva, was born in October 2010.^[66]

Tsarnaev first came to the attention of Russian security forces in December 2010 when [William Plotnikov](#) was briefly detained in Dagestan and forced to disclose his social networking contacts in North America with ties to Russia.^[67]

2011

In early 2011, Russia's [Federal Security Service](#) (FSB) told the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) that Tsarnaev was a follower of Islamic extremism. The FSB said that he was preparing to leave the United States to travel to the Russian region to join unspecified underground groups.^{[68][69]} The FBI initially denied that it had contacted Tsarnaev, but then confirmed that it had after Tsarnaev's mother talked about the FBI's contacts with her son on [RT](#).^[70] The FBI said that it interviewed him and relatives of his, but did not find any terrorist activity.^[69] At that point, the FBI asked the FSB for more information, but the Russians did not respond to the American request and the FBI closed the case.^[71]

Tsarnaev's mother said that FBI agents had told her they feared her son was an "extremist leader", and that he was getting information from "extremist sites".^{[72][73]} She said Tsarnaev had been under

FBI surveillance for at least three years and that "they were controlling every step of him". The FBI denied this accusation.^{[74][75]} Tsarnaev "vaguely discussed" *jihad* during a 2011 phone call with his mother that was taped by the FSB, and intelligence officials also discovered text messages in which his mother discussed how he was ready to die for Islam.^[76] In late 2011, the [Central Intelligence Agency](#) put both Tsarnaev and his mother on its [Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment](#) database.^{[76][77]}

Alleged involvement in Waltham triple murder

Two Jewish men, Erik Weissman and Raphael Teken, as well as their roommate Brendan Mess, were killed in a triple homicide in [Waltham, Massachusetts](#), on September 11, 2011, the tenth anniversary of the [9/11 attacks](#).^{[78][79][80]} Each victim's throat had been slit with such great force as to nearly decapitate him. Thousands of dollars worth of marijuana and cash were left covering the victims' bodies, and \$5,000 was left at the scene.^[81] The local district attorney said that it appeared that the killer and the victims knew each other. It was reported on April 23, 2013, that local authorities believed Tsarnaev may have been responsible for the triple homicide, and they and the FBI were investigating the possibility.^{[82][81][83][84]} In May, forensic evidence connected the two brothers to the scene of the killings, and their cell phone records appeared to place them in the area. The officials cautioned that until more definitive DNA testing was complete, it was still too early to consider bringing an indictment against the younger of the two brothers.^[85]

[ABC](#) reported on April 23, 2013, that authorities had linked Tsarnaev to the Waltham unsolved triple homicide.^[78] A search warrant affidavit that was partially unsealed in November 2019 provided further details about Tsarnaev's alleged connection to the crime.^[86]

2012

Visit to Russia

Tsarnaev traveled to Russia through Moscow's [Domodedovo International Airport](#) in January 2012, and returned to the U.S. in July 2012.^[87] He and his wife received [public assistance](#) and [food stamps](#) from September 2011 to November 2012, which included all the time Tsarnaev was in Russia. Zubeidat Tsarnaeva said her son had wanted his wife and their child to move to Dagestan with him, and that: "She herself agreed; she said she wanted to study a different culture, language."^[60]

During the six months he was overseas, he visited his family in the [North Caucasus](#).

Tsarnaev's father said that he was with him in [Makhachkala](#), the capital of Dagestan, for six months and that they had done ordinary things, such as visiting relatives. His father also said that they visited Chechnya twice, to see relatives there and to receive his son's new [Russian passport](#).^{[19][88]} While Tsarnaev arrived in Russia in January 2012, however, he only arrived in Dagestan around March, and his father arrived there in May.^[89] [U.S. House Homeland Security](#) Chairman [Michael McCaul](#) said he believed that Tsarnaev received training during his trip and became radicalized.^[90] In an early report, Dagestan's interior minister Abdurashid Magomedov said through a spokesman that Tsarnaev "did not have contact with the [Islamist] underground during his visit".^[91]

Tsarnaev's maternal third cousin, Magomed Kartashov, is a figure in Dagestan's Islamist community.^[92] Zubeidat confirmed that they "became very close." Kartashov's Islamist organization, "The Union of the Just," advocates Islam as a political system under [sharia law](#). Kartashov later stated the Boston bombing was "good" in that it would increase converts to Islam similarly to the attacks of September 11.^[93]

According to media reports, Tsarnaev was seen by Dagestan police, who were conducting surveillance, making six visits to a known Islamic militant in a [Salafi](#) mosque in Makhachkala founded by an associate of [Ayman Zawahiri](#).^{[94][95][96][97]} According to Russian investigative newspaper [Novaya Gazeta](#), quoting unnamed Russian security sources, Tsarnaev was linked to 23-year-old [William Plotnikov](#), an ethnic Russian-[Tatar](#) Islamic militant and Canadian citizen, with whom he communicated via online social networking sites.^{[98][99][100]} Tsarnaev had also visited Toronto, where Plotnikov lived with his parents.^[101] Once in Dagestan, Tsarnaev is said to have met on several occasions with Makhmud Mansur Nidal, a 19-year-old Dagestani-Palestinian man. Nidal was under close surveillance by Dagestan's anti-extremism unit for six months as a suspected recruiter for Islamist insurgents, before the police killed him in May.^[97] According to [Novaya Gazeta](#), Tsarnaev had sought to join the local insurgency, and was put on a period of 'quarantine' – a clearance check by insurgents looking for infiltrating [double agents](#), taking several months for a recruit to be verified. After Tsarnaev's alleged contacts were both killed, he "got frightened and fled". He left Russia in July two days after Plotnikov was killed, in an apparent hurry that Russian authorities considered suspicious, not waiting to pick up his new Russian passport – ostensibly one of his main reasons for coming to Russia.^{[30][100][102][103]}

In an interview, Tsarnaev's father later said he had to force his son to return to the United States to complete his U.S. citizenship application, after Tsarnaev tried to convince his family to allow him to stay in Dagestan for good.^[104]

Return to U.S.

Tsarnaev returned to the U.S. on July 17, 2012, having grown a long, thick beard^{[87][105][106][107]} and wearing [kohl](#) around his eyes as a sign of his religious devotion to the [Sunni of Islam](#) and the example of [Muhammad](#).^[108] His life took on an "increasingly puritanical religious tone" with "Islamist certainty".^[109] He appeared, to some family members, to have become an "extremist".^[110]

After his return to the U.S., Tsarnaev created a YouTube channel with playlist links to two videos which were tagged under a category labeled "Terrorists", including one to Dagestani Islamic militant Amir Abu Dujana (Gadzhimurad Dolgatov, also known as 'Robin Hood', a commander of a small group in the [Kizilyurt](#) district, who was killed in battle in late December 2012); the videos were later deleted.^{[24][111][112][113]} [CNN](#) and the [SITE Institute](#) found a screen grab of one of the videos, which featured members of the militant Islamist group [Caucasus Emirate](#) from the North Caucasus.^[24] He also linked to [jihadi](#) videos on YouTube, including ones by radical cleric [Feiz Mohammad](#); in one video, voices can be heard singing in Arabic as bombs explode.^{[25][114][115][116]} He frequently read extremist sites, including [Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's Inspire](#) online magazine.^[61]

Tsarnaev applied for U.S. citizenship on September 5, 2012, but [Homeland Security](#) held up the application for "additional review" because they found a record of the 2011 FBI interview of him.^[117]

Tsarnaev and his wife were receiving state welfare benefits as late as November 2012, but not at the time of the Marathon Bombings in April 2013.^[118] His wife's lawyer said that Tsarnaev was unemployed prior to the bombing^[105] and had been helping take care of their daughter, while his wife worked over 70 hours a week as a home health care aide, to support her family.^[48]

Tsarnaev was pulled over by police in Boston, [Brookline](#), and Cambridge at least nine times in four years. The source does not state which years these were exactly.^[119]

In November 2012, Tsarnaev reportedly confronted a shopkeeper at a Middle Eastern grocery store in Cambridge, near a mosque where he sometimes prayed, after seeing a sign there advertising Thanksgiving turkeys. He said "This is [kuffar](#)"—an Arabic reference to non-Muslims—"that's not right!". Also in November 2012, Tsarnaev stood up and challenged a sermon in which the speaker said that, just like "we all celebrate the birthday of the Prophet, we can also celebrate July 4 and Thanksgiving," according to Yusufi Vali, a mosque spokesman. Vali said Tsarnaev stated he "took offense to celebrating anything," be it the Prophet's birthday (which not all Muslims celebrate) or American holidays.^[21] In January 2013, Tsarnaev again disrupted a [Martin Luther King Jr. Day sermon](#) at a mosque in Cambridge. He objected to the speaker's comparison of Muhammad to [Martin Luther King Jr.](#) Tsarnaev was shouted down by members of the congregation and was later

asked not to return to the mosque unless he was willing to refrain from shouting during sermons. The mosque said Tsarnaev had disrupted a sermon previously.^[120]

2013 Boston Marathon bombing, MIT killing, and carjacking



Boston Marathon bombing

Tamerlan Tsarnaev, along with his brother Dzhokhar, committed the Boston Marathon bombing on April 15, 2013. After the bombing, the brothers murdered MIT police officer Sean Collier.^{[121][122]} While on the run, the brothers [carjacked](#) Dun "Danny" Meng on April 18, 2013. Meng was held hostage in his car until he escaped at a gas station.

Death



Tsarnaev at the site of the bombings

In the early hours of April 19, 2013, in [Watertown](#), a suburb of Boston, Tsarnaev engaged in a shootout alongside his brother against local police authority. During the conflict, he sustained wounds to his back and legs, both being non-fatal. Eventually, he ran into the road and engaged in a physical fight with two officers with all three of them being thrown to the floor. Dzhokhar then

attempted to flee using their stolen [SUV](#), but was unaware of his brother's location and sped down the road.^[123]

The exact sequence of events and key details remain unclear, but the federal indictment substantiated, and witnesses said, that he was struck, pulled into the wheel well, and due to his brother attempting to speed away, was rapidly and violently dragged inbetween the ground and the bottom of the car, with one officer commenting how the entirety of the right side of his upper torso was blown open by the force, whilst his chest and face to become crushed and battered against the floor. He was dragged approximately 20 metres before disconnecting from the wheel well and was then thrown into the middle of the road. Police arrested him afterwards, but he died shortly after in hospital.^[124]

According to paramedic Michael Sullivan, who treated Tamerlan after the shootout, he angrily resisted efforts to treat him as he was being driven to the hospital, lifting himself from the stretcher and screaming loudly.^[125]

He was taken to [Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center](#), where, despite efforts to revive him, he was pronounced dead from blood loss and cardiac and respiratory arrest.^{[126][127]} His death certificate gave the cause of death as gunshot wounds to the torso and extremities, as well as blunt trauma to the head and torso.^[128]

The imam of a prominent Boston mosque, the Islamic Institute of Boston, condemned the violence and refused to give Tsarnaev a Muslim burial.^[129] His body was released to the funeral service hired by the family at 5:30 pm. EDT May 2, 2013, by the Massachusetts Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.^[130]

Tsarnaev's body was moved to a funeral home in [North Attleborough](#); after protesters picketed the building, it was handed over to Graham, Putnam, and Mahoney Funeral Parlor in [Worcester](#).^[131] Officials in Boston, Cambridge, at a state prison, and in over 120 other U.S. and Canadian locations refused to allow Tsarnaev's body to be buried in their jurisdictions.^[132]

On May 9, Worcester police announced that Tsarnaev's body had been buried in an undisclosed location.^[133] It was later reported that Tsarnaev was buried in a small Muslim cemetery, Al-Barzakh Cemetery, in [Doswell, Virginia](#).^[134] The burial was arranged by Martha Mullen of [Richmond, Virginia](#), who said she was appalled by the protests at the funeral home, which she said "portrayed America at its worst" and wanted to find a way to end the impasse. She contacted Islamic Funeral Services of Virginia, which agreed to provide an unmarked plot in their cemetery. The funeral agency released a statement saying "What Tsarnaev did is between him and God. We strongly disagree with his violent actions, but that does not release us from our obligation to return his body to the earth."^[135]

[Caroline County](#) Sheriff Tony Lippa said the burial was legal.^[136] Locals, as well as the imam of the Virginia Islamic Centre, condemned the secretive burial.^[137]

On June 19, 2013, Tsarnaev's name was read aloud (in the context of a victim of gun violence) during a "No More Names" event held in [Concord, New Hampshire](#). In response, [Michael Bloomberg's Mayors Against Illegal Guns](#) issued a statement explaining that they were using a list compiled by [Slate](#), and apologized, saying that his name was "a mistake" and should have been removed.^[138]

Tsarnaev's parents proclaimed his innocence. Speaking to reporters in Russia, his mother said, "America took my kids away from me. I'm sure my kids were not involved in anything."^[139]

Family members

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev

Ruslan Tsarni

Ruslan Tsarni is the paternal uncle of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, and the brother of Anzor Tsarnaev.^[16] He was trained as a lawyer, and moved to Washington State in 1995. He returned to Kyrgyzstan by the end of the decade, and then returned to the United States, settling in [Montgomery County, Maryland](#).^[16]

During the manhunt for the brothers, he was interviewed by the FBI.^[16] When the media arrived at his home, he denounced the actions of his nephews and called on them to turn themselves in.^[16] He also buried the remains of Tsarnaev.^[16]

Zubeidat Tsarnaeva

Zubeidat Tsarnaeva is the mother of Tsarnaev and his brother. In photos of her as a younger woman, she wore western-style clothing. After she arrived in the U.S. from Russia in 2002, she took classes at the Catherine Hinds Institute of Esthetics before becoming a state-licensed [aesthetician](#) and getting a job at a suburban day spa.^[140] After deciding she could no longer work in a business that served men,^[21] she started working from home, where clients saw her become more radical and promote [9/11 conspiracy theories](#).^[141]

Tsarnaev's mother has been quoted as saying she urged him to embrace Islam in 2008 because she was concerned about his drinking, smoking, and pursuit of women. She said he began to read more

about it on the Internet. She also urged him to quit boxing because Islam prohibits hitting someone in the face.^[142] She also praised Russell, saying, "She is a serious, good, American girl who converted to Islam as if she had always been a Muslim. We all love her a lot."^[142]

Tsarnaev's mother discussed *jihad* during a 2011 phone call with him that was taped by a Russian government agency, and intelligence officials also discovered text messages in which she discussed how Tsarnaev was ready to die for Islam.^[76] His mother was also recorded suggesting that Tsarnaev go to Palestine.^[143]

Both Tsarnaev and his mother were the subject of a Russian Intelligence inquiry to the U.S. government in 2011 because of what the Russians perceived as extremist Islamic views. She was interviewed by the FBI who found nothing to pursue at the time. In late 2011, the CIA put both Tsarnaev and his mother in its [Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment](#) database.^{[76][77][144]}

Ruslan Tsarni told the AP from his home in Maryland that he believed his former sister-in-law had a "big-time influence" on Tsarnaev's growing embrace of his Muslim faith and decision to quit boxing and school.^[140]

In early 2012, Zubeidat Tsarnaeva was arrested for shoplifting \$1,624 worth of women's clothing from [Lord and Taylor](#) in [Natick, Massachusetts](#). She left the U.S. for Russia and did not appear in court.^{[140][144]} Anzor and Zubeidat Tsarnaev divorced in 2011 after twenty-five years of marriage. The couple had no personal property or real estate to divide and listed no retirement or pension benefits. They gave the reason for their split as "irretrievable breakdown of the marriage" with "no chance of reconciling our differences".^[145] The mother's move toward more Islamic extremism was reportedly a factor in the breakdown of the marriage.^[21] They may have reconciled in Dagestan.^[146]

She has strongly expressed in TV interviews that her sons are innocent and that they were framed by the FBI.^[147]

Katherine Russell

Tamerlan Tsarnaev's widow,^[148] Katherine Russell (a.k.a. Karima Tsarnaeva^[149] or Katherine Tsarnaeva),^[65] was born on February 6, 1989, in Texas.^{[150][151]} She was raised in Rhode Island; her father is an emergency room doctor and her mother is a nurse.^[152] Their home has been described as nominally Christian^[153] and Russell reportedly was not religious "at all" in high school.^[154] She attended [North Kingstown High School](#), and graduated in 2007. Her yearbook entry lists her plans as college and the [Peace Corps](#). She was remembered for her talent in painting and drawing.^[148]

Tsarnaev and Russell met in 2007 in a nightclub, soon after she started as a communications major at [Suffolk University](#).^{[148][152][153][155]} They started dating on and off,^[148] and at one point in 2009, Tsarnaev was living with another woman.^[153] Tamerlan was known to cheat on Russell, and a friend of Russell's told her mother that the relationship was abusive.^[154] Russell's mother did not like Tamerlan from the first time she met him.^[154] At Tsarnaev's insistence, Russell converted to Islam in 2008, adopted the [hijab](#), and chose the name Karima after her conversion.^{[142][154]}

Russell dropped out of college in the Spring of 2010 after she became pregnant in her junior year, and the couple married on June 21, 2010, in a 15-minute ceremony in a [Dorchester](#) mosque.^{[155][156][157]} According to the officiant, it was Russell who called and made the arrangements. Only two witnesses attended the wedding.

She moved into her husband's apartment in Cambridge^[155] and gave birth to their daughter Zahara in late 2010.^[65] At times, she worked as a home health aide. From September 2011 to November 2012, she and her husband had their income supplemented by public assistance and food stamps. When Tsarnaev was in Russia for six months, she and their daughter stayed in Cambridge.^[155]

At the time of the bombings on April 15, 2013, Russell was living with her husband and daughter in the Norfolk Street family home in Cambridge.^[158] The younger brother also officially lived there, but in practice stayed in a dorm at [UMass Dartmouth](#).^[148]

After her husband's death, Russell retreated to her parents' home in Rhode Island.^[65] Her parents released a statement saying "[o]ur daughter has lost her husband today, the father of her child. We cannot begin to comprehend how this horrible tragedy occurred. In the aftermath of the [Patriots' Day](#) horror, we know that we never really knew Tamerlan Tsarnaev. Our hearts are sickened by the knowledge of the horror he has inflicted."^[159] She refused to take custody of her husband's remains and reverted to using her maiden name.^[154]

Investigators found bomb-making instructions, downloaded from [Inspire](#) magazine, on Russell's computer. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev told the FBI that he and his brother had learned to make bombs by reading *Inspire*, but it was not clear who downloaded the files.^[160] Her web history included searches for "If your husband becomes a [shahid](#), what are the rewards for you?" and "the rewards for the wife of [Mujahedeen](#)."^[161] The FBI collected Russell's [DNA](#)^[162] after female DNA was found on bomb fragments;^[163] neither her DNA nor her fingerprints matched those on the bombs.^[164]

No charges were filed against Russell and "there's been no suggestion at all by the government that she's going to be indicted," according to her lawyer, Amato DeLuca.^[161] He insisted that Russell was not aware of her husband's criminal activity,^[65] and said she has since "provided them [the FBI] with

a lot of information, many, many, many many hours. I don't know what else she could have done."^[161]

As of June 12, 2015, she lived on "a quiet street in New Jersey" with her daughter.^[161]

Biographical portrayals

Year	Title	Portrayed by	Notes
2017	<i>Stronger</i>	Jordan Lazieh	Drama/biography of a marathon spectator
2016	<i>Patriots Day</i>	Themo Melikidze	Thriller drama film about Boston Marathon bombing

References

[Boxing record for Tamerlan Tsarnaev \(https://boxrec.com/en/boxer/948276\)](https://boxrec.com/en/boxer/948276) from [BoxRec](#) (registration required)

Footnotes

1. Russian: Тамерла́н Анзо́рович Царна́ев [təmʲɪrˈʲʌn ənˈzorəvʲɪtɕ tsərˈnajɪf]; **Chechen**: Царнаев Анзор-клант Тамерлан *Carnayev Anzor-khant Tamerlan*; **Kyrgyz**: Тамерлан Анзор уулу Царнаев, **romanized**: *Tamerlan Anzor uulu Tsarnaev*; **Avar**: Тамерлан Анзоразул вас Царнаев

Notes

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Further reading

- Tsarnaev Family (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160420095707/http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324235304578438393688092634>) (*Wall Street Journal*)