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My
Imprisonment

DANIEL JOSEPH MALDONADO

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Daniel Joseph Maldonado

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Daniel Joseph Maldonado, an American convert, was arrested by the Kenyan military in January 2007 and handed over the US authorities. In April he pleaded guilty to a charge of receiving training from a foreign terrorist organization and was sentenced to ten years imprisonment in June. In this first-hand account from his cell in Houston's Federal Detention Centre he describes the circumstances around his migration to Somalia, the tragic death of his wife Umm Musa and his subsequent arrest in Kenya and imprisonment there and in the US.



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My Imprisonment in Kenya and America¹

In the name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful. Praise be to Allah, Please and Blessings be Upon Muhammad. Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmahtullahi wa Barakatuhu.

Once my wife (may Allah accept her) and I found out that an Islamic State was established in Somalia, especially after the taking of Mogadishu, we decided to go and make Hijra (migration) from Egypt. Immediately we made plans and tried to sell everything in our apartment. After being offered about \$7,000–\$8000, Umm Musa (May Allah accept her) made such a beautiful statement. She said, “You know that everything (in the apartment) is worth more than that Daniel...But what Allah offers me is better!” So she gave away everything in the apartment to someone to distribute to the poor in a small village. If that wasn’t enough, we had about \$2,800 cash after we had gotten tickets etc. She decided to give \$2,000 to a close friend in deep debt, so as to reap as many blessings as possible for the trip ahead.

None of the above do I attribute to myself and Allah is a Witness over what I say. With only \$800 we left for Somalia...Did that stop her? No, she still gave to those in need! To this day, I don’t even know half of the good she did. Such was her custom to keep it hidden.

Something worth mentioning, we ended up staying in the airport [at Dubai] for three days, waiting for a flight. What did Umm Musa say about going out in Dubai? She said, “I lived with poor people in Egypt; I am going to live with the poor in Somalia. Dubai will be a fitnah (trial)” Thus we slept in the airport. I can still see her (thinking back) nodding off while nursing the baby under her abaya (coat-like burqah) in secrecy.

She became extremely devout; everything about her changed for the better. Her faith was stronger than I have ever seen! She became so pious, and put all her trust in Allah to the point I felt I was no longer even on the same level as her...Not even close!

While I was away from her and the children, I would try to call her and them as much as possible. We would constantly entertain Allah’s praise and express our deep love for one another. Her patience was truly amazing!

After the bombing of Mogadishu airport, I advised that she and the children leave to the South to meet me as soon as possible. I remember asking her, “Did you hear it [the bombing]?” She said, “Yes”. I asked, “Were you scared?” She simply said, “No”.

I met her and the children in a town between the area she had left and the area we would head to before she would leave the country. She had dirt all over her abaya from the difficult trip; her eyes were tired and weary. I approached her and said, “I swear, I have never seen you more beautiful than today!”

¹ Source: www.al-istiqaamah.com

So we went further, South. We would stay in a house with many other families before we left (the next morning). After Fajr (the pre-dawn prayer), the sisters started preparing to evacuate. Umm Musa refused to go. After some of us spoke to her, she – while weeping – listened and prepared to leave.

Knowing that the Ethiopians were coming and the women were about to leave, she thought that there was a great possibility I would be killed. So we had a nice, long beautiful talk as she prepared. We expressed our love and admiration for each other. She thanked me by saying: “You are the greatest teacher I have ever had. You are the only man who has stuck around in my life. (Her father and grandfather etc were never around for her. She grew up in a house of women.) You are a real man. I love you so much.” She was weeping. Then she said something that I will never forget:

“Forgive me...I could not ask Allah to make you a martyr. I love you too much to see you go... So I asked Him to make me a martyr instead!”

After much loving talk, the S.U.V. (off-road-vehicle) started to ride away. Her eyes were watering as it pulled off... Seeing it was slowly pulling away past me, I said: “Peace be upon you, oh women of Paradise insha’Allah!” She asked why I said such. I said “If any women are the women of Paradise, it is you, the women of the migrants.”

The S.U.V. pulled away and she recited a verse from Quran as they drove off... It was Eid. That would be the last time I would see my wife....May Allah accept my beloved and join me with her in Paradise with our children. Ameen.

Surviving in the Jungle

After my family had left for the border, I departed with the brothers. To make a long story short, we were surrounded by helicopters attacking all units around us from mid-afternoon to maghrib (sunset).

The next day we were ambushed...many died in that ambush...For those who survived along with me, we ended up wandering in the jungle with literally nothing to eat! Our water ran out as well... The following day we were so very thirsty, we would lick the dew of the leaves in the jungle! It was two days since our last drink. We would make du’a (supplication) for water while walking... After not finding water, we reminded each other that we should seek forgiveness, for the one from sin will have his du’a answered. Sure enough, about a mile ahead was some water. I can remember all of us weeping and thanking Allah while prostrating. I can still hear one of them panting while saying “Allahul Kareem” (Allah is the Most Generous) over and over again. We would sit on the edge of this waterhole with a shell we’d found and use it as a cup. One would fill it and pass it to another who would pass it to another. There were to be many days like that...

For two weeks we did not eat at all except for one time at the very beginning of our wanderings. One day we came out to a Savannah area; it looked like something out of Lion King! We were careful, as helicopters were still in the sky and we were obviously being hunted by them. We would stay along the edge of the jungle area until we felt it was safe to actually go out into the long-grassed Savanna.

Suddenly one of the brothers caught a baby gazelle that seemed to just stand there, waiting for us. A brother took out a simple razor from his pocket. He pointed the animal towards the Qibla (direction towards Makkah) and we slaughtered it according to the noble shareeah (Islamic Law). We had one lighter (which later broke), a few packs of season that my wife had given me, and garlic that we used for antibiotics. We praised Allah and ate. After this we would not eat anything except leaves and an occasional snail for two weeks. Keeping our tongues wet with the remembrance of Allah did more for us than the occasional waterhole...and they were few. For those two weeks we would go a day, sometimes two, without water. We walked and walked, malnourished and thirsty. We became so malnourished that our skin began to feel tight around our ribs.

We came to another open area one day, but this one had much water. In fact, there was the jungle behind us and miles of shallow water in front of us. We needed to make it to the other end where the jungle began again. We walked through this chest-high water from mid-afternoon to the next morning...It was extremely hard on us, seeing that we could not rest or sit down, because the water was chest-high! By the time we got out, it was almost Fajr time. I don't think that I have ever been so cold in my life! I remembered that Umm Musa (may Allah accept her) had given me these packets that warm up when you open them. So I used them with the brothers. Strange, I remember asking her: "What in the world would I need hand-warming packets for in Africa?" She simply said: "You never know..."

A bit before this incident, I had a dream of her. (I didn't know she had passed away). She was wearing a blue silk hijab and her face was uncovered (she always appeared veiled outside). This hijab stretched out as far as I could see. I had to climb up it! I then lay next to her, stared into her eyes and said: "I love you..." She replied "I love you sixty three times." To this day, I wonder about the meaning of that dream.

Some nights later, a brother told me that he had a dream about my family — although he had never met my wife. Mind you, I didn't know about her death yet. He said that my wife was at a long white table that had such beautiful food on it. My children were running around playing. My wife then said to them, "Patience, patience he will be with us very soon." In retrospect, I find these dreams to be amazing.

Arrest and Imprisonment in Kenya

So it is that we would, after thirsting and starving for two weeks, find a small village in Kenya. Being that the villagers were Muslims, some spoke Arabic. They fed us and gave us water. I remember walking into the village with all the brothers and falling prostrate to Allah crying and thanking Him for what seemed like an hour!

We were brought to a Masjid (mosque) where we could finally rest. After getting bombed, shot at with bullets whizzing by my head, having friends die, starving and sleeping in ant and tic infested areas, I barely noticed a rat in the masjid crawling on my leg. One brother shouted, "Akhee (brother), there's a rat!" I brushed it off myself like you would a fly; I was so exhausted.

Suddenly someone yelled out "Soldiers!" The Kenyan military stormed in, pulled us out, laid us on the ground and beat many of us. Then we were thrown half-naked onto a truck on top of each other, to be driven through the jungle to the next town, in the freezing cold night. Thrown

out of the truck, we were pushed around, beaten some more, laughed at, humiliated and filmed, then thrown into a dark, dirty cell. Four walls and a bucket, that's it. Suddenly a Yemeni brother and I started singing "Ghurabaa" (The Strangers). We even wept. That night we would be pushed around, beaten and interrogated by the Kenyan police.

The next morning, we were woken up to be cable-tied, blindfolded, mocked and thrown into a truck that brought us to a helicopter. We were thrown off the truck onto the ground and put on the helicopter, then taken to an airport and put on a plane. The whole flight we were mocked and threatened whilst blindfolded and cable-tied. The brothers and I heard a sister on the plane with kids. One brother asked: "Are you okay, sister?" Suddenly one of the police or soldiers came around and said, "Shut up!" The he told her, "If you speak again, I will tape your eyes shut."

No one would utter a word throughout the whole flight to Nairobi...Wondering if I could sneak a peek to see what was going on, I noticed that the baby and the little girl were my daughters! Frantically, I would try to peer everywhere I could to see if my wife was seated close by. All I could think was: "Oh Allah! Where is she? She would never leave the baby with someone else. Where is our son Musa?"

After landing, I would be pulled off the plane with the others. I could not contain myself. I asked the sister while being pulled off, "Sister! Do you know my wife?" She quickly responded "Yes!" I asked where she was, and the sister replied "Your daughters are fine." I exclaimed while being roughly pulled off: "My wife and my son?" She again stated: "Your daughters are fine; they are okay."

*[Note: More can read about this sister and her imprisonment alongside Daniel's children in a **report by Cageprisoners:**]*

I was thrown to the ground on my knees. I could hear cameras snapping and people around me. One man came and asked where I was from. After telling him, I said: "There is a woman on the plane who knows my wife. Is my family okay?" He left, then came back and said, "Your family is fine..."

The others and I were then shipped off to a prison barefoot, malnourished and extremely dirty. The cell was cramped with about twelve of us. It was very dirty, with just one bucket to share as a toilet. We would pass the time by praising and remembering Allah. I never made so much dhikr (remembrance) in my life. Every night, you could find each of us standing in prayer on and off — as if it were an intended rotation. The police would constantly pull us out to interrogate us, one at a time, every other day or night. Many of us were threatened with death along with getting shipped back to Somalia and being handed over to the Ethiopians! The days seemed to last forever...When we would ask about our embassies out of curiosity, they would quickly reply: "Your embassies know you are here. They don't care about you."

The Tragic News Regarding My Wife...

One day, while sitting on the cold hard floor, I mentioned my love for, and desire to see my wife and kids. I expressed my worry about the situation on the plane, although I was told all is well. One of the brothers stared at me and then stated that he needed to pray. I wondered; it was not prayer time. He finished and then told the brother next to me: "Tell him..." A tear rolled down my cheek... I knew now what they were about to disclose. I leaned closer to the brother, voice cracking, heart torn but hesitant until confirmation.

“Tell me what?! What are you going to tell me?” I was crying. He said, “We were told that an American woman with three children got sick and died on the way. They buried her as a martyr...I’m sorry brother...”

I immediately stood up, tears pouring like never before. My whole world felt as if it had ended. I paced the cell and then leaned on the wall crying, “Don’t, not here! Don’t tell me this here! No...no... Oh Allah, Oh Allah...” One of the older brothers embraced me and quietly repeated in Arabic: “Patience my brother...patience; it is from Allah.” I slumped down the wall on my back until I was seated. Tears in my eyes, I looked up and noticed how everyone was crying with me. I asked about my son; no-one knew anything. I jumped up and yelled for the guard. He proudly came to the door. I said, “I found out just now that my wife has died. I need to know whether or not you have all of my kids.” He said, “How do you know that?!” He opened the door brandishing his night stick saying, “You better get away from this door and shut up before I crack your head open!”

The Hardest Test

The hardest part of this whole ordeal was losing my best friend, my wife, my beloved, my soul mate, the mother of my children. May Allah accept her, ameen. She once told me in Somalia that she never felt so close to Allah and that she wished for shahaadah (martyrdom). *“Whoever wishes to meet Allah, Allah will wish to meet him.”* It is known that whoever protects their life, property, family and religion and dies while doing so is a martyr. She died while doing all of the above! We know about the hadith (Prophetic tradition) about the one who dies of fever and sickness or plague. We all know about the one who migrates for Allah and dies doing such. I cannot think of a reason that she wouldn’t be shaheed (martyred). She got what she asked for: body not washed for burial [a martyr’s body is not washed for burial], buried in the land she loved and did not want to leave.

You know, this comes as no surprise, as I have never known Umm Musa (may Allah accept her) to raise her hands (in supplication) except that Allah gave her exactly what she asked for. For instance, after the birth of our son, the doctors said she would not be able to have children again, due to many complications. Praise be to Allah! She gave me two beautiful daughters — exactly what she wanted!

She was simple and extremely humble, never making people feel beneath her. She was not the scholarly type, but she practiced what she knew. If you could prove it from The Book (Quraan) and the Sunnah (Prophetic Way), she would not argue, but submit to the proofs. She feared Allah so much! I remember her telling me while crying as if she had lost a beloved one, that she committed a grave wrong when we first became Muslim. She explained that she feared she would never be forgiven. I asked her what it was.

She said that she once exclaimed “Jesus Christ!” when angry or surprised. I asked, “Were you calling upon him (in invocation)?” She cried, saying “No,” explaining that it was just something she grew up saying without meaning (as is common among many a Westerner). I laughed in admiration and told her not to worry, that she did nothing wrong. Moreover, the fact that she feared Allah so much that she worried over something that any new Muslim would do, made her even better! I truly miss her. May Allah accept her and reunite me with her and our children in Paradise, ameen.

Interrogated by the FBI

In the days after the news of my wife's death I would be pulled out of my cell, blindfolded, shackled, ear muffed and a bag put over my head. I was put in a car and driven away. I could hardly breathe... all I could think was: "They are going to shoot me." I believe I thought this because I could feel the road change from pavement to dirt.

I figured: "Bag over my head, ear muffs, blindfold, dirt road, threats a day before...I'm dead."

I just repeated the shahadatain (Islamic testimonies of faith) again and again. I would end up at a sort of safe house where the FBI would question me. It became increasingly obvious that someone had informed on me, as they knew everything. But what bewildered me was that this "someone" had lied about a lot of things, unless that was just a tactic. Nonetheless, that misinformation was to later be in my paperwork, stating that it was given by a co-witness, a close associate of mine! The details of the few truths made it clear who did some of the talking. I understood then, that one of my beloved brothers had turned on me... I forgive those that did, as the conditions were unbearable. May Allah have Mercy on them.

Reunited with my Children

I was brought to another prison to stay at and was joined by my two daughters! I asked my four year old, while holding the baby, "What happened to Mommy?" She said in a soft, yet very hurt voice: "Mommy got hot with the fever... She went to Allah... They put her in the ground..." I burst into tears and held her, telling her: "I'm sorry. Daddy's sorry..." Then I asked her, "Where is your brother?" She paused and said, "He ran away into the jungle... he only has one sandal Daddy..." I asked the police if they had a little boy in custody. They replied in the negative...

That night I was put in a cell while my daughters were kept somewhere else. Perhaps they were with the woman whom they were arrested with or with female police officers across the street.

I thanked Allah, praised him and asked Him for a miracle regarding my family being put together. I called on Him saying, "You are the One who gathers. Gather me and my family here!"

I later awoke to the sound of a voice at the reception desk. It was a familiar voice, a young boy explaining why he wasn't in school. It was the voice of my son! I jumped up and yelled his name through the door. He ran past the police to the door crying, "Dad? Is that you?" They opened the door and he embraced me without any hesitation. We cried together in each other's arms... The police asked me: "This is your son?" It became obvious that their bringing him to that police station was unintentional.

I asked Musa what had happened. He told me that his mother got sick and the brothers told him that they were taking her to the hospital. This was miles and miles deep in the jungle on the road to Kenya. They clearly said this not to upset him. Muhammad had been with the men bringing the women over the border. He told me that jets had attacked them and everyone fled. He said that he saw his "uncle" getting his stomach blown out.

He explained that he got down, and when they came again he ran into the trees. The brothers called out to him, but he couldn't find them. He got lost in the jungle for two nights, surviving on berries and dirty water that he'd found. He would retrace his steps back to where they were camped. He told me that everything was black and burnt. Even the wheels on the car were melted. Musa found his way to a village where "a man with a cow" took him in and fed him. Later this man handed him in to the Kenyan military. The next day, all my children were reunited with me, alhamdulillah!

I had to tell my son about his mother... I explained that I had something to tell him that will be difficult. He stood there awaiting this important news as if nothing was wrong. I said, "Your mother has left this world my son." He said, "No Dad, they took her to the hospital." I told him: "Son, they said that to you so you wouldn't get upset...I'm sorry; your mother died." He looked at me weeping, and without a tear in his eye he looked towards the heavens and said, "Allah has willed it. InshaAllah I will see her in Paradise"

I could not believe how well he took it; how faithful a reply! I hugged him and said, "I'm sorry." He told me, "It isn't your fault Dad! You did the best you could do!"

I am a 28 year old man who has been through a lot, and my heroes are a woman who has left this world and a nine year old boy...

Echoes of Guantanamo–Style Treatment

Eventually, my children and I were taken out of prison and put on a plane heading for America. I had to sign papers to temporarily grant custody to my parents seeing that I was "*in quite a bit of trouble*" — as the FBI agent put it.

We landed at a military base where my children would be separated from me. The agents let us say our goodbyes. They assured me that my children would be taken good care of, and sent directly to my parents. They did keep to their word.

I would stay at that base for three days. After starving in the jungle and being imprisoned in Kenya, I felt like I was in a 5 star hotel! The agents explained that I would be leaving the next day and that the people transporting me would be very strict. When these new agents came, they told me I would not be allowed to pray at all, or use the bathroom without the door being left open. I praise Allah! I made salatul khawf (the Fear Prayer) instead.

The next day I was blindfolded, ear plugged then ear muffed. I was shackled — hands chained to my waist and ankles shackled as well. For the duration of that 24 hour flight I could not hear, see or touch anything... One could never imagine what that's like until one experiences it for themselves. To pray, I would sneak my hand to wipe the bottom of my shoe for the clean earth on it and make tayyamum (dry ablution using mud or dust) in order to do salatul khawf. I praise Allah! Never through this ordeal did I miss even one prayer. And this is of the benefits of knowledge, even if it is little.

Solitary Confinement and Conviction

We landed in Houston and I was immediately put in solitary confinement with literally no human contact at all. I have been here ever since. I pleaded guilty to "receiving training from a foreign

terrorist organization” in order that the second charge of “conspiring to use an explosive device outside the United States” be dropped. That charge carried a maximum sentence of life imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000. I have been sentenced to ten years in prison and fined \$1000. If I stay out of trouble in prison, it will only be eight years. Since I am in a Federal prison, I cannot get parole. So the least I will do is eight years, unless some information comes up that could prove innocence etc. I never went to Somalia to fight. I wouldn’t have taken my wife and three small children into a war zone. The situation just erupted while we were there.

I pretty much sit in a cell with a bed, sink shower, toilet and desk for 23 hours a day. I eat and receive all of my “sanitary items” in my cell. I am only allowed outside for one hour a day, the only exceptions to that being Friday and Saturday. I spend my time reading Quraan or any other books on Islaam and doing dhikr (remembrance of Allah). We were put on this earth to worship Allah. As long as we are able to do that, we have all we need! Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmahtullahi wa Barakatuhu.

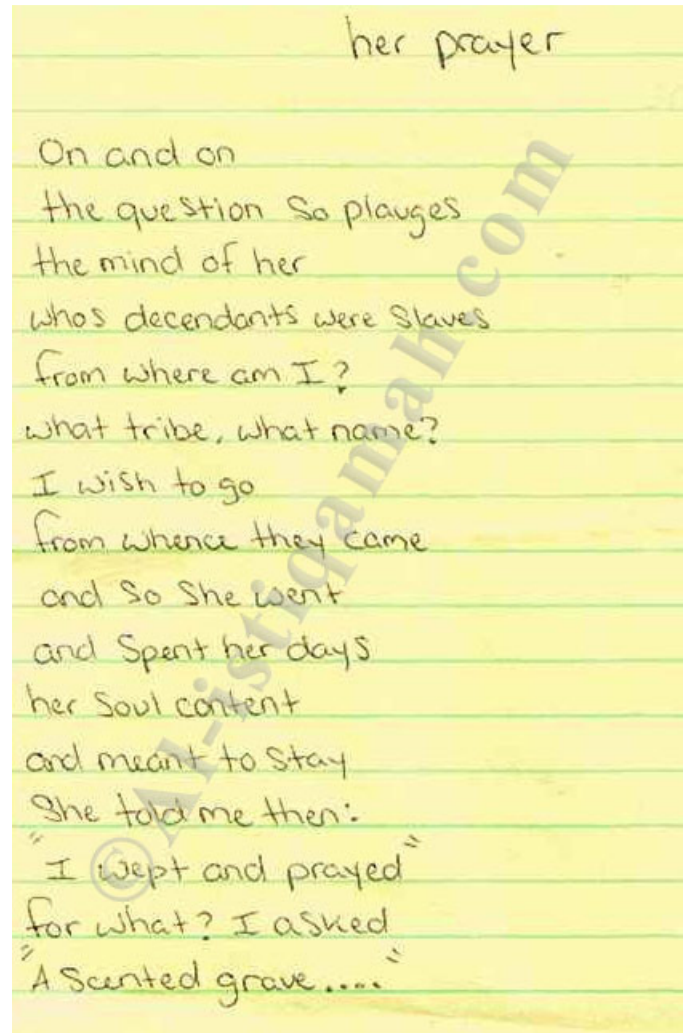
“What can my enemies do to me? My Paradise is in my heart; it goes with me wherever I am. If they kill me, it is martyrdom. If they exile me from my land, it is a vacation in the Path of Allah. If they imprison me, it is to allow me a private devotion with Allah” Sheikh-ul-Islaam Ibn Taymiyyah

Daniel Joseph Maldonado

'Her Prayer'²

On and on
the question so plagues
the mind of her
whose descendants were slaves.
From where am I?
What tribe, what name?
I wish to go
from whence they came.

And so she went
and spent her days.
Her soul content
and meant to stay.
She told me then:
"I wept and prayed"
For what? I asked.
"A scented grave..."



² The following poems were written by brother Daniel about his wife Tamekia who died of malaria near the Kenyan-Somalian border.

'Stay with Me'

If I tell you I miss you
Kiss you and hug you
Hold you and told you I love you

Would you stay with me?
Or would you say goodbye?
Can you lay with me?
Will you stay the night?

Don't fade away from me
Please stay in sight
If this is make-believe
I'll pay the price

What must I do
So that I don't wake up?

A Letter from Daniel Maldonado

01/08/2007

In the Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful
Praise be to Allah, Peace and Blessings on Muhammad
Asalaam alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuhu,

To all my dear and beloved brothers and sisters in Al-Islam;

I hope and pray this letter reaches you all in the best of imaan and health.

To Proceed;

"Then it occurred to them after they had seen the signs (of his innocence). (That it was best) to imprison him for a time."

(Surah Yusef 35)

Sheikhul Islam Ibnul Taymiyyah said: "What can they do to me?! My garden and my paradise are in my breast, wherever I go they are with me. If they kill me, I become a martyr, and if they banish me from my country, I go abroad as a tourist, and if they imprison me they allow me to have solitude (to worship Allah)."

Indeed this was written for me before I was born, decreed and settled. The Prophet (saws) said: "Oh Allah, make me pleased with your decree, so that I may know that whatever has befallen me was not to miss me, and what has passed me by, was not meant to be in my lot."

He (SAWS) also said: "Wonderful is the situation of the believer All of his affairs are good (for him)! And this is only for the believer. If good befalls him he is thankful, and that is good for him. If harm afflicts him, he is patient, and that is good for him."

I am sure there is quite a bit of talk concerning me, and my past, and present situation. And I am sure that many of you rush to defend my honour, and for the I am truly grateful. I do remind you though, it is Allah who says: "And be not distressed because of what they plot" (Surah an Naml 127)

All of the above does not mean I do not feel the sting of this trial of mine No! By Allah! This has truly been the most painful days of my life! I have lost the most beloved person in my life; the mother of my children, my best friend, my companion, my beloved wife, May Allah accept her! I lost nearly all of my friends in war, some I helped patch up their wounds one day, just to have them killed the next... Now my children are not only without mother, but without father as well... But this is no reason to give up or give in! Rather, this is a reason to

Praise Allah more and seek patience in Salah. Allah says: "Oh you who believe! Seek help with patient perseverance and prayer; for Allah is with those who patiently persevere." (Surah al baqarah 153)

The next verses speak volumes to me after I have lost my wife (May Allah accept her), lost all I own, wandered the jungle with nothing to eat for 14 days, and now have had my children taken from my life after imprisonment:

"And say not of those who are slain in the way of Allah: 'They are dead'. Nay they are living, though you perceive not."

"Be sure we shall test you with something of fear , and hunger, some loss in goods or lives, or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere- who say when afflicted with calamity: 'To Allah we belong and to Allah we shall return'".

"They are those on whom (descend) blessings from the Lord." (Baqarah 154-157)

In light of the above I can only say:

"This is what Allah and his messenger had promised us, and Allah and his messenger had spoken the truth." (surah al Ahzab 22)

My dear and beloved brothers and sisters; The life of this world is passing, while the Hereafter is racing towards us! Do not feel bad for me, for even a prisoner can attain Paradise! Although he has no orphan to give to, and no person to feed, He has reassurance in those words of Imam Ahmad: "Whatever is lacking in the life of this world will be less for reckoning."

So I thank and Praise Allah! And I thank all of you for your prayers and kind words. It is an honour to be able to say I am your brother! I love you for the sake of Allah oh Ummah of Muhammad!

P.s. For those who have been mailing me; please keep them coming! For those who have not; I would love to hear from you!

Daniel Maldonado

Source: www.cageprisoners.com

Press Cut Outs

Compilation of Media Articles on Daniel's Case

Maldonado Gets 10 Years in Terror Case

24/07/2007

By Juan A. Lozano, Associated Press Writer

HOUSTON --A U.S. citizen convicted of receiving training at a terrorist camp alongside al-Qaida members in his efforts to help overthrow the Somali government was sentenced Friday to 10 years in prison.

Daniel Joseph Maldonado, 28, a Muslim convert also known as Daniel Aljughafi and Abu Mohammed, also received a \$1,000 fine.

Maldonado admitted to traveling in December to a terrorist camp in Somalia, where he was trained to use firearms and explosives in an effort to help topple the government and install an Islamic state. Members of al-Qaida were present at the camp.

Maldonado was captured by the Kenyan military while trying to flee Somalia in January and brought back to the United States in February.

In April he pleaded guilty to a charge of receiving training from a foreign terrorist organization.

Ten years was the maximum prison sentence Maldonado could have received. He faced a fine of up to \$250,000. The sentence was handed down by U.S. District Judge Gray H. Miller.

Maldonado, who grew up in Pelham, N.H., lived in Houston for four months in 2005 before moving with his wife and three children to Cairo, Egypt.

Authorities said that after going to Egypt, Maldonado moved to Somalia with his wife and children. Just before his arrest as he and his family tried to leave Somalia and go to Kenya, they became separated. His wife, Tamekia Cunningham, later died of malaria. His three children are being cared for by his parents in New Hampshire.

FBI agents and prosecutors accused Maldonado of working to turn Somalia into another Iraq where insurgents would come in and terrorize the country.

In statements made to FBI agents after his arrest, Maldonado said he had "no problem" with killing Americans or with the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

Defense attorneys, however, described Maldonado as a man who, driven by anti-Muslim sentiment in America after the Sept. 11 attacks, moved away with his family so they could live in peace as Muslims.

His mother, Rena Maldonado, in a five-page letter submitted to Miller before Friday's sentencing, asked the judge for leniency for her son.

"He is not a terrorist. But a man that loves his family and his country," she wrote in her letter, which was part of court filing that included eight pages of photographs detailing Maldonado's life. "He would have never wanted his children to come back here if he didn't."

Rena Maldonado said she took particular offense to claims that her son condoned the Sept. 11 attacks.

"The lies told by the press about Danny agreeing with 9/11 is completely absurd and a complete lie. This bothers us probably more than anything else because it is so untrue," she wrote.

[SOURCE: Boston.com](#)

Mother Says Her Son Not A Terrorist

19/07/2007

She pleads for leniency, says the Islamic convert 'meant no harm'

by CINDY GEORGE

Since his capture in Kenya this year, Daniel Joseph Maldonado has been described as an American terrorist.

The Muslim convert's identity morphed from accused al-Qaida operative in January, to federal detainee in February and admitted terrorist by April.

Maldonado, 28, was the first American charged with training with a terrorist organization in Somalia.

But his mother disputes what the government says about her son and hopes to influence the Houston federal judge who will sentence him Friday.

Rena Maldonado said Wednesday her son is not a terrorist, but a man raised in a Christian home surrounded by a large, loving family.

"He did not go against the United States. He has never been against the United States. He did not train with al-Qaida," she said in a tearful phone interview from New Hampshire. "He meant no harm for anyone."

In a five-page letter to U.S. District Judge Gray Miller, Rena Maldonado pleads for leniency for her son. The document is typed in capital letters.

Maldonado pleaded guilty to receiving training from a foreign terrorist organization in exchange for prosecutors agreeing not to file any more federal charges against him. The charge carries a maximum prison sentence of 10 years and a fine up to \$250,000.

In handwritten statements during overseas interviews with U.S. agents, Maldonado confessed to going to training camps to prepare for jihad, or holy war, and acknowledged associating with al-Qaida while receiving firearms and explosives training. In one statement, he said he had "no problem" with fighting or killing Americans, nor with the Sept. 11 attacks.

"This bothers us probably more than anything else because it is so untrue," Rena Maldonado said, insisting that her son was coerced into making any anti-American pronouncements. "They are using him as an example."

Maldonado's case file is filled, almost exclusively, by sealed court papers, though the sentencing documents filed by his public defender this month are unsealed. Included with his mother's letter are eight pages of family photos that show Maldonado as an infant, during various childhood holidays and vacations, as a gap-toothed boy with a bright smile and as a dreadlocked father holding his infant son.

"It is not at all unusual to submit a character letter in advance of sentencing," said Federal Public Defender Marjorie Meyers.

Maldonado, who blogged under the name Daniel Aljughaifi and Abu Mohammed, was recruited to Houston for a short time in 2005 to work for the Houston-based IslamicNetwork.com.

Since childhood, her son "had a fixation on Egypt and becoming an archaeologist," Rena Maldonado, 61, said. She thinks it is beyond coincidence that he was offered an opportunity to work there by the Web site. "I find it odd. I do think he was targeted."

Her letter details how her son was raised, how he came to adopt Islam and his transformation into a family man.

Daniel Maldonado grew up in rural New Hampshire.

"Danny," as his mother calls him, adopted a hip-hop lifestyle as a teen and developed a following as a rapper. One of his admirers was Tamekia Cunningham.

After Daniel and Tamekia had their first child, they married and moved in with his parents. The couple began to explore different religions by reading the holy books of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. They decided that Islam "seemed to be the real religion," his mother writes.

The couple stopped smoking, drinking, cursing and eating pork, and began praying five times daily.

Maldonado worked as a pizza delivery man, security guard, meat cutter and in construction to support his family before becoming a computer technician. That expertise is why he was recruited to Texas, his mother writes. His boss paid for the family of four to move to Egypt.

The letter also discusses how Tamekia Maldonado survived pancreatitis in New Hampshire and spent just one day in an Egyptian hospital after delivering the couple's third child by Caesarean section. Tamekia Cunningham Maldonado died of malaria after the family moved to Somalia.

While fleeing Somalia in January, Maldonado was captured by Kenyan soldiers who held him and the three children in jail. The four were then turned over to U.S. authorities.

Now, Rena Maldonado and her husband, also in his 60s, focus on raising their grandchildren: a 9-year-old boy, a 4-year-old girl and a baby girl who just turned 1.

[SOURCE: Houston Chronicle](#)

Pelham native left U.S. to 'fight jihad'

By JUAN A. LOZANO

The Associated Press

Handwritten statements released Thursday depict the frustration, confusion and deception that revolved around a U.S. citizen and New Hampshire native accused of receiving training from al-Qaeda in his efforts to help overthrow the Somali government.

The three sets of statements, which Daniel Joseph Maldonado gave to FBI agents after his arrest in Kenya last month, detail in the 28-year-old's words why he left the United States, his time in Somalia and the frantic last few days he and his family spent in the country before his capture by authorities.

In his initial handwritten statement, Maldonado wrote he moved from the United States because of anti-Muslim sentiment following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and heard that Somalia was emerging as a "true Islamic state."

"I would be able to live, pray, act, dress and be a Muslim without anyone yelling at me, calling me names, refusing me jobs or apartments," he wrote.

He also said in later statements that he wanted to "fight jihad" or a holy war in Somalia.

The statements first became public during Maldonado's two-day probable cause and detention hearing earlier this week. A federal magistrate judge ruled Wednesday there was sufficient evidence that Maldonado received weapons and bombmaking training at a Somali camp where al-Qaeda members were present. Maldonado was ordered held without bond until his trial.

Maldonado, 28, a Muslim convert also known as Daniel Aljughaifi and Abu Mohammed, is accused of traveling in November to an al-Qaeda terrorist camp in Somalia, where he was trained to use firearms and explosives in an effort to help another group, the Islamic Courts Union, topple the government and install an Islamic state. He was captured by the Kenyan military while trying to flee Somalia on Jan. 21.

He faces charges of undergoing military training with a terrorist organization and conspiring to use a weapon of mass destruction, specifically a bomb. If convicted, he faces up to life in prison.

During the hearing, FBI agent Loretta Eglen-Anderson testified she and other agents had him write down what he had done in Somalia.

Maldonado, who grew up in Pelham, and lived in Houston from August 2005 to November 2005, moved with his wife and three children to Cairo, Egypt, before going to Somalia in November.

Maldonado wrote that he didn't find acceptance in Egypt nor when he first got to Somalia, which has not had an effective national government since 1991.

Eglen-Anderson testified Maldonado initially lied to FBI agents about his reasons for going to Somalia. In later statements, Maldonado admitted he "left out the fact that I wanted to fight jihad."

After arriving in Somalia, Maldonado wrote he and his family were taken in by a man. In revised statements he said the man gave him a gun and ammunition.

Maldonado left his family in the Somali capital of Mogadishu and traveled to the southern port city of Kismayo, where FBI agents and federal prosecutors said he went to receive weapons and bombmaking training at an al-Qaeda camp. Maldonado later admitted he did go to receive training.

In his statements, Maldonado never mentioned al-Qaeda and said he was sick for a week with malaria after arriving in Kismayo.

After recovering in a hospital, Maldonado said he was asked again "to join the jihad. But I was more concerned with my family in Mogadishu and still doubtful about weather it was a valid jihad."

Maldonado later admitted he lied about his doubts.

Maldonado wrote that after the fighting in Somalia intensified, he tried to get his family to come to Kismayo so they could leave the country. He was reunited with his family but was told he and his family would have to travel separately to Kenya.

In his worry and frustration, Maldonado wrote he called his parents and lied to make them feel guilty.

"So I decided to make them feel bad by saying that I was a soldier and I was going to fight jihad and possibly die," he wrote.

Prosecutors said they don't think he was lying.

Maldonado was able to travel with his family part of the way to the Kenyan-Somali border.

"We said very sad goodbyes, hoping for each others safety, and her and the children left," he wrote.

In his efforts to get to the border, Maldonado traveled by boat and truck, ending up in a camp in a wooded area. The camp was raided and Maldonado fled, eventually being captured by Kenyan troops.

Maldonado's wife died of malaria, but it is not clear where or when she died. The couple's three children are now being taken care of by Maldonado's parents in New Hampshire.

[SOURCE: ConcordMonitor.com](http://ConcordMonitor.com)

Terror Suspect's Wife Died During Journey

17/02/2007

By Cindy George / Houston Chronicle

Daniel Joseph Maldonado told authorities he was ready to kill Americans for his political beliefs. But the true casualty of his jihad may have been his own wife.

Maldonado, the first American to be charged with training to fight with al-Qaida in Somalia, took his wife and three children with him. There, Tamekia Cunningham succumbed to a high fever that likely was caused by malaria. U.S. officials flew the couple's three children home to their grandparents in New England after Maldonado was captured in Kenya.

And Maldonado, who survived the war and his own bout with malaria, now sits in a jail in Houston facing up to life in prison, accused of studying with a bomb maker.

Daniel Maldonado, in green shirt, was returned to Houston under heavy guard.

A Muslim convert who goes by Daniel Aljughaifi, Maldonado was "Danny" to his high school classmates in Pelham, N.H., a snow-covered land of white pines and sugar maples, where the Revolutionary War more than two centuries ago seems far closer to home than war-torn Africa. Even as a teenager, Maldonado was known for his strong beliefs.

"He was very into his views and political stands," Jessica Gillis, a classmate at Pelham High School, said via e-mail to the Houston Chronicle. She stressed that he never talked about religion. "He was not at all violent and only debated his views and stood up for them when in political debates during history class."

Gillis added that she remembers Maldonado as "friendly, smart, intelligent and outgoing."

Dorothy Mohr, an English teacher when Maldonado was at the school and now the principal, agreed that he was talkative and opinionated.

"He always had something to say about whatever," she said. "Danny was a nice kid. He probably wasn't as into his studies as [most]."

Disappeared

If Maldonado was not much of a student, he made a lasting impression on his teachers and classmates.

When he entered Pelham High in 1995, he was the only student there in memory to wear his hair in dreadlocks. His freshman yearbook photo shows a shy smile on his face. In the next year's photo, his expression has hardened into a tough-guy stare.

By 1997, his junior year, Maldonado had disappeared from both the yearbook and the high school.

Maldonado in a photo from the 1997 Pelham High School yearbook.

Maldonado, now 28, attended the school in this sleepy bedroom community named for Henry Pelham, the British prime minister when the town was incorporated in 1746. Large wood-frame houses, some dating to the early 1700s, dot the hills and valleys. Most residents commute to jobs in nearby Massachusetts.

Ninety-four percent of the 700 students at the high school are white. Maldonado and his siblings would have stood out just because they were Hispanic. But though yearbook photos show Maldonado's two brothers with short hair and preppy clothes, Danny tried to look different.

Mohr said Danny is the only student she can recall ever having dreadlocks.

"That was his identification statement," she said. "I don't know if you've noticed, but we pretty much all look the same. Danny was a memorable character."

Classmates remember Maldonado as having a good heart and being outspoken.

Maldonado had an older brother, Scott, who one classmate recalls was popular and a star of the soccer team. Scott had a shock of curly hair in front, with the sides and back cut short.

A younger brother, Josh, wore glasses and had very short hair. Josh was involved in student government and on the homecoming court.

Faculty members also remembered that Danny had an older sister, Tamara, who, like Danny, did not enjoy school.

Classmate Gregory Atwood recalls Maldonado hung out with a hip-hop clique in puffy coats, headphones and jeans so baggy they were falling down. They tried to act like "tough, urban kids," Atwood said.

"It was kind of a joke to really be like that in Pelham because it's white suburbia," he said.

Atwood, who is a firefighter in Pelham, said Maldonado was loud and acted out a bit but was also "very respectful and pleasant."

"He had his problems, but nothing like this," said Ron Santagati, a substitute teacher who occasionally had all the Maldonado youths in class. "He didn't like school."

Better life

Maldonado's parents, Jose and Rena Maldonado, now live about 15 miles north of Pelham, in Londonderry, N.H. Jose Maldonado spoke briefly to a reporter for the Eagle-Tribune newspaper Wednesday while shoveling snow from his walkway. Jose said that Daniel, his wife and the couple's children had moved to Somalia in search of better living conditions for Muslims. Jose said he knew nothing of his son's activities in Africa.

Before moving to Houston in August 2005, Daniel Maldonado lived in several places in New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

He decided to go to Somalia to wage jihad, which authorities say he described during an interview as "raising the word of Allah, uppermost, by speaking and fighting against all those who are against the Islamic state." He chose to help Somalia because he said it is the only legitimate Islamic state, authorities say.

"If Americans came, I would fight them, too," Maldonado allegedly said. He would have "no problem" with fighting or killing Americans, nor with the Sept. 11 attacks. He also allegedly said he would be willing to become a suicide bomber if he were wounded.

He is accused of training with al-Qaida from September until January and studying bomb making. He faces life imprisonment if convicted on the weapon-of-mass-destruction charge. Training with a terrorist organization carries up to 10 years in prison.

Training camps

He came to the attention of federal investigators while living in southwest Houston. According to the criminal complaint against him, Maldonado is thought to have moved to Egypt in November 2005, then to Somalia a year later.

Armed with an AK-47 assault rifle, he spent months in southern training camps where al-Qaida fighters were present. In January, Maldonado was trying to flee Somalia when he was captured by government soldiers across the border in Kenya. It was there that he encountered U.S. investigators, including a Houston police officer working on the case as an interrogator.

In Kenya, FBI officials plucked Maldonado and his children. Agents made sure the three children made it to the United States safely.

"FBI agents escorted them from Kenya until the time they were met by both set of grandparents," Houston FBI spokeswoman Shauna Dunlap said Thursday. The youngest child may have been born last summer while Maldonado and his wife were in Egypt.

She declined to comment about why Maldonado was in Houston because the case is part of an ongoing investigation.

Rodwan Saleh, president of the Islamic Society of Greater Houston, said the enthusiasm of recent converts can be exploited by some extreme groups. And though he did not know Maldonado, Saleh said the man may have been steered to the darker sides of Islam.

Blog and Internet message-board posts indicate Maldonado's eagerness to learn Arabic.

"As new people accept Islam, they need to have someone who truly teaches them the essence of the religion," Saleh said. "Someone who is now highly spirited or naive or ignorant, someone can really take advantage of that."

Saleh said he encourages any Muslims who know Maldonado or his circle of friends to work with authorities.

"It is our duty to be cooperative so this does not happen again," he said. "If there is any recruiting through him or someone else, we need to know."

Graves reported from Pelham, N.H. Staff writer Robert Crowe in Houston contributed.

[SOURCE: Houston Chronicle](#)

From N.H. to Somalia: Recalling A Suspect's Zeal

18/02/2007

By Charles A. Radin, Globe Staff

METHUEN -- Daniel Maldonado, a slender young man in his early 20s with tattoos and dreadlocks, entered the Selimiye Mosque in a densely populated neighbourhood of central Methuen with a humble request for help converting to Islam.

But as his commitment to ever purer, more intense religious observance deepened over the next several years, he became critical of other Muslims' observance of the faith, until the imam who helped him convert told him to refrain from judging others or to leave the mosque.

Maldonado, on the road to the Islamic fundamentalism that would ultimately lead him to Somalia, decided to leave.

Soner Uguz knew Maldonado, who has taken the name Daniel Aljughaifi, from the beginning of his journey into Islam.

"I met Danny the week he converted, about seven years ago," said Uguz, identified by worshipers at the mosque yesterday as Maldonado's best friend. "He was cool. He dressed in T-shirts and jeans and didn't hide any of his tattoos. His hair was in dreadlocks. He was eager, and he had a lot of questions."

All that changed radically.

Last week in a federal court in Houston, where he had been living for a while before he went overseas, Maldonado became the first US citizen to be charged with participating in terrorist activities in Somalia.

Maldonado, who grew up in Pelham, N.H., and later lived in Methuen, became immersed in Islam and attended prayer sessions regularly at Selimiye Mosque. He began wearing traditional Arab clothing, including the galabeyah, an ankle-length gown with long sleeves that covered the tattoos on his arms. He struggled to grow the beard of a religious Muslim. When he could not, he blamed his Puerto Rican heritage and began chastising fellow Muslims who could grow a full beard and chose not to.

His wife dressed in a burkah, exposing only her eyes, and wore gloves in public. The couple's daughter, a toddler at the time, wore the hijab headcovering, though under most interpretations of Muslim law this practice is required only after a girl reaches puberty. They renamed their son, Anthony, as Mohammed.

He was no longer the eager and humble young man he had been when he entered the mosque for the first time around 2000.

"He was arrogant; he knew the book [the Koran] better than anyone," Uguz said at the mosque yesterday afternoon after prayers. "He went from loving rap to hating poetry."

Another worshiper at the mosque -- Matthew Yusuf Trombly, who like Maldonado is 28 and a convert to Islam from Christianity -- said Maldonado fell victim to "the zeal of the convert."

Within the congregation, Trombly said, "the general attitude was that he was just learning Islam and maybe trying to do too much too fast and got confused.

Still, "he was friendly," Trombly said. "He came across as a street kid, and that was charming in a way. You don't run into kids like Danny Maldonado every day. He had a lot of charisma.

"People say that when he first came he loved music and would talk about how much he loved rap," Trombly said. "But by the time I really got to know him, in 2004, you would never mention music to him. You knew what you were going to get" -- a lecture on sin.

Opinionated, outspoken, and charismatic also are the words chosen to describe Maldonado in his high school days by Dorothy Mohr, principal of Pelham High School in Pelham, N.H., where Maldonado dropped out in February 1997, during his junior year.

"Danny was always an outspoken student, though I use the word student lightly," Mohr said. "He'd show up late for class, without the materials or homework, but he would know what we were talking about. Then he would go off on a tangent and get adamant about it."

Maldonado's intensity then was directed at political subjects, not religion, she said. He was not a member of a group and had no involvement in school activities that Mohr could recall. But "kids would willingly listen to him," she said. "They'd never say to him, 'Be quiet; you don't know what you're talking about.' He had charisma."

Maldonado also had brushes with the local police, but there was nothing serious or suggestive of his alleged turn toward terrorism.

"It was traffic violations and typical high school things, loud house parties and things like that," said Captain Joseph Roark of the Pelham Police Department.

Still, Roark said, he wonders now what was going on in Maldonado's head as he made his way through adolescence.

"He was a bit detached, kind of distant," Roark said.

Friends at the mosque also saw a dreamer in Maldonado. "He used to tell me he wanted to get a visa and live in Yemen because they spoke the purest Arabic there," Uguz said. "We told him to cut it out -- we never thought he'd do it, for the sake of the kids."

Maldonado did not go to Yemen to live. But in August 2005 he left Massachusetts and moved to Houston. Then in November of that year he moved to Egypt with his wife and three children.

A year later, according to an affidavit by the FBI agent who filed the terrorism charges against Maldonado in Houston last week, he moved to Somalia, where he underwent military training and studied bomb-making.

He is scheduled to appear in federal court to face those charges on Tuesday. Conviction could mean life imprisonment.

According to an affidavit filed in US District Court for the Southern District of Texas, Maldonado said he would have "no problem" killing Americans because he was angry with the United States and said he had "no problem" with the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

The Houston Chronicle said yesterday that Maldonado's wife, Tamekia Cunningham, died of a high fever probably caused by malaria during the couple's time in East Africa.

The newspaper, which did not identify its sources, said the couple's children have been brought by US officials to their grandparents in New England.

Relatives of Maldonado who live in Londonderry, N.H., declined to comment Thursday.

The Muslims who gathered to talk about Maldonado after prayers in the Methuen mosque yesterday afternoon said they were worried that what Maldonado is alleged to have done would reflect badly on Islam and their mosque.

"We saw him as a person who was into studying, rather than physical jihad," Trombly said. "But everything about him changed, so I can't say I am completely surprised."

[SOURCE: Boston.com](#)

US Citizen Pleads Guilty to Training to Fight Jihad

24/04/2007

Aweys Osman Yusuf

Mogadishu 22, April.07 (Sh.M.Network) A United States citizen, who trained to fight jihad along with elements of al Qaeda to establish an Islamic state in Somalia, has been convicted of receiving training from a foreign terrorist organization, Don DeGabrielle, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Texas, Kenneth L. Wainstein, Assistant Attorney General for the National Security Division of the Department of Justice, and Roderick Beverly, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation Houston Division, announced today

At a hearing this afternoon, Daniel Joseph Maldonado, a.k.a. Daniel Aljughaifi, 28, pleaded guilty to the sole charge in an Information filed on March 30, 2007 and unsealed today. During the hearing, Maldonado admitted he had traveled from Houston, TX to Africa in November 2005 and then on to Somalia in December 2006 to join the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and elements of Al Qaeda to fight "jihad" against the Transitional Federal Government to establish an independent Islamic State in Somalia.

While in Somalia, Maldonado was provided an AK-47, equipped with military combat uniforms and boots in Mogadishu, and participated in training camps in Kismaayo and Jilib, Somalia.

The camps included physical fitness, firearms and explosives training all in preparation to go to the front to fight for the ICU. Al Qaeda members were present at the training camps. ICU and al Qaeda, a recognized foreign terrorist organization, worked together to train fighters in the camps to fight jihad to establish an independent Islamic state in Somalia.

"For an American to travel overseas to train as a violent jihadist along side al Qaeda elements who are focused upon threatening the security of our nation, is decidedly disturbing and definitely illegal," said United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle. "Maldonado's conviction should serve as a strong warning to any American who considers joining forces with terrorist groups here or abroad."

"Today's guilty plea is the first involving an American who joined forces with Islamic extremist fighters in Somalia and should serve notice to others who would travel overseas to wage violent jihad," said Kenneth L. Wainstein, Assistant Attorney General for National Security.

"The FBI will continue to work diligently with our law enforcement and intelligence community partners here in Houston, throughout the United States, and abroad to disrupt, dismantle and deter terrorist organizations operating in America and around the world," said Roderick Beverly, Special Agent in Charge of the Houston office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Maldonado was captured by the Kenyan military on January 21, 2007 as he fled into Kenya to avoid Ethiopian and Somalian forces. Expelled by Kenyan officials, Maldonado was turned over to American authorities in February 2007.

Accompanied by special agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Maldonado was returned to Houston to face criminal prosecution. Maldonado has remained in federal custody without bond since his return to the United States and will remain in custody pending sentencing.

United States District Judge Gray H. Miller, who presided over today's hearing and convicted Maldonado, has set sentencing for June 29, 2007 at 11:00 a.m. A conviction for receiving training from a foreign terrorist organization carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in federal prison, without parole, and a \$250,000 fine.

The investigation leading to charges in this case was conducted by the FBI Houston's Joint Terrorism Task Force particularly by special agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and officers of the Houston Police Department.

This investigation culminated with the additional assistance of the Department of State and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U. S. Attorney Gary Cobe.

[SOURCE: Shabelle.net](#)

Suspect's Wife Paid Ultimate Price For Loyalty

06/03/2007

By Rachel Graves, The Houston Chronicle

The wife of alleged terrorist Daniel Maldonado came from a line of single mothers and was determined to hold her marriage together, at whatever cost.

Today, Maldonado, 28, formerly of Pelham and Methuen, is in a federal detention center in Houston awaiting trial for allegedly training with al-Qaida in Somalia.

For his wife, Tamekia Cunningham, who followed him to the war-torn African country with their three children, the cost of saving her marriage was death. Cunningham died from malaria prior to Maldonado's arrest.

"My daughter loved her husband, and she wanted to be a family," Yolanda Cunningham said in a recent interview in her Manchester home.

The couple's three children have been staying in Londonderry with Maldonado's parents since their father was arrested.

Yolanda never married, though she is now engaged, and she said that Tamekia's grandmother was divorced.

"She wanted to break that mold," Yolanda said. "She followed (Maldonado) everywhere."

Yolanda Cunningham raised her only child in Boston as a Seventh-day Adventist; Tamekia's father mostly stayed out of the picture.

Tamekia and her young mother were close friends. As Tamekia grew older, men would flirt with them, mistaking them for sisters.

In 1995, when Tamekia was 16, she and her mother moved to Salem, about seven miles from where Tamekia's future husband was living in Pelham.

Cunningham and Maldonado met while they were in high school. Yolanda remembers her daughter telling her she had her eye on a boy, but Tamekia was secretive about the details.

Jackie Robinson lived next door to the Cunninghams and was a close family friend.

"Tamekia was a very friendly, outgoing girl," Robinson recalled. "She could protect her own self. She didn't take anything off anyone, always had something to say back, always had to get the last word in."

Cunningham dropped out of school and worked retail jobs and at McDonald's. Maldonado also dropped out of Pelham High School in 1997, his junior year.

Cunningham became pregnant with Maldonado's son. She stopped working but earned her General Equivalency Diploma. For a while, she and the baby continued to live with Yolanda, and then they moved in with Maldonado and his parents. About a year and a half later, the two were married.

Soon after the wedding, Maldonado became interested in Islam. Cunningham embraced the religion, too. She started wearing a burka that covered all but her eyes.

Cunningham told her mother that the religion brought the couple closer.

"They would sit down and read and talk and discuss things," Yolanda said.

Incorporating beliefs

Yolanda and her daughter agreed that a husband and wife should have the same religion. Yolanda said she thinks Tamekia believed in the tenets of Islam but that "she was really, really into it because of him, because a house is not supposed to be divided."

Yolanda did not mind that her daughter had converted from Christianity to Islam, but she objected to Tamekia's burkas.

"Why are you covering yourself up like that?" Yolanda asked her daughter. "I see people over there (in Islamic countries) trying to get that off of them, and you're putting it on you."

When Tamekia was pregnant with her second child, a daughter, Yolanda pleaded with her to let her take a photo with Tamekia's face uncovered. Tamekia relented but refused to look at the camera. She wears a pink dress and a pink ribbon in her hair.

Cunningham did not go to the mosque with Maldonado, telling her mother that it "belonged to the men."

But Yolanda thought religion was less important to Tamekia than her husband. After Maldonado renounced music as sacrilegious, Yolanda would still catch her daughter singing.

Tamekia started a small business, Basheeras, selling halal herbal teas and oils. Tamekia gave her mother black seed oil and herbal tea to treat her high blood pressure. She also nagged her mother about smoking, calling her cigarettes "cancer sticks."

For a while, the Maldonado children attended an Islamic school in Methuen, where Daniel Maldonado worshipped at the mosque. Tamekia told her mother the school was too expensive, and she decided to home school the children.

Maldonado sometimes put a hijab, a head covering, on the couple's 1-year-old daughter, though many Muslims believe girls' heads do not need to be covered until puberty.

The couple moved frequently around Southern New Hampshire and northern Massachusetts as Maldonado struggled to keep a job. He worked at a pizza restaurant and as a butcher. They moved to Chicago, telling Yolanda that Maldonado had gotten a job as a butcher in a halal shop there. He hurt his finger at work and quit. Then they moved back to New Hampshire for about two years.

Maldonado got a job working with computers. His boss lived in Houston and asked the couple to relocate. After they had lived in Houston for a while, he sent them to Egypt, saying it would be cheaper to pay them in Egyptian pounds than in American dollars.

At first, Yolanda talked to her daughter in Egypt by phone three or four times a day. Tamekia told her mother they had an apartment in Alexandria and had found a school for the kids where the students were a mix of races and religions.

She was pregnant again and talked about returning to the United States to have the baby, but Maldonado did not want her to. The couple's third child, a girl, was born in Egypt.

Communication issues

After they had been in Egypt for a few months, Cunningham told her mother they were losing their apartment and had to move. She told her that they were in a small town - Yolanda did not know the name - and that there were delays in getting their phone service installed.

After that, Yolanda did not speak to her daughter on the phone for about six months, she said. Occasionally, they would be on the Internet at the same time and communicate through instant messaging.

In late November or early December, Cunningham called her mother. She said the family was in Somalia.

"What are you doing in Somalia?" Yolanda asked. "There's so many diseases there, famine, everything."

Cunningham told her mother that they were all right. Yolanda could hear the kids playing in the background.

"And all of a sudden the phone clicked."

Yolanda never heard from her daughter again.

On Jan. 30, Yolanda came home from work to find a message from a man in the U.S. Embassy in Kenya. Yolanda woke up at 4 the next morning to return the call during business hours in Kenya.

"He said he was calling to inform me that my daughter was dead," Yolanda said, her voice cracking and tears running down her face. "I couldn't talk. I cried and I cried and I cried."

Through numerous phone calls, the embassy official explained that the family had been traveling, apparently from Somalia to Kenya. Males and females were in separate cars, so the couple's oldest child, a 9-year-old boy, rode with Maldonado, and the two young daughters, ages 4 and 7 months, were in a vehicle with Tamekia. Yolanda asked that the names of her grandchildren not be published.

The best source on what happened to Tamekia is apparently her 4-year-old daughter. She told officials "that her mother was hot and burning up with a fever, and then she closed her eyes and went to sleep and never woke up."

Officials think Tamekia had malaria. The group apparently buried Tamekia immediately, somewhere between Somalia and Kenya.

"They don't even know exactly where the body is," Yolanda said. She also does not know exactly when her daughter died. The embassy official told her it was mid-January or earlier.

Kenyan officials arrested Maldonado and kept him in a local jail until the FBI extradited him to Houston. The children stayed in the jail with him, Yolanda said.

On Feb. 13, American officials flew the children to Boston. Yolanda and Maldonado's parents, Jose and Rena, met them there. Yolanda said they all cried and laughed and hugged. Maldonado's parents have custody, but Yolanda sees the children frequently.

Yolanda said she is trying not to be angry with Maldonado.

"I try to forgive because that's how the Lord wants you to do, to forgive. I'm more hurt than angry," she said. "If he was going to go over there and do something that he wasn't supposed to do, why couldn't he send them back so they could be safe?"

[SOURCE: Houston Chronicle](#)

Job Lured Alleged al-Qaida Trainee To Houston

Maldonado was hired by Web guru linked to site that terror suspects prowled

By ROBERT CROWE

Daniel Maldonado, the American accused of training with al-Qaida and waging jihad in Somalia, came to Houston two years ago to work for a 24-year-old Web designer linked to Internet sites frequented by terrorism suspects.

That man, Sarfaraz Jamal, a former BMX enthusiast and "Seinfeld" fan from suburban Columbus, Ohio, is emerging as an unlikely yet intriguing figure in the Maldonado saga. And his story helps explain how Maldonado wound up in Houston, where he now awaits trial.

Jamal denies any wrongdoing and the FBI is mum, refusing to say even whether he's under investigation.

But Jamal acknowledges a connection to Maldonado, saying in an e-mail to the Houston Chronicle that he had hired him to do odd jobs on the Houston-based IslamicNetwork.com.

"A small kind of job, answering e-mails, etc." is how he described it.

Jamal said he continued to pay him after Maldonado moved to Egypt.

"I had no idea he was going anywhere but Egypt," said Jamal, who is now living in Jordan so he, his wife and their children can study Islam. "Had I known, I would not have probably risked the whole guilt-by-association thing. ... I would have tried to stop him had I known of his motivation to go there."

Others who knew Jamal in Houston say he wasn't always so interested in Islam.

"According to what I've heard from him, (Jamal) was not a practicing Muslim," said Shaikh Isam Rajab of Masjid Hamza, a mosque in far southwest Houston, who arranged for Jamal to design the Web site for the Arees Institute, an Islamic school. "So he was considering himself a bad person, and then he started practicing. And maybe that's what got to him, and he became so enthusiastic."

Married and converted

Maldonado, 28, accused of training with al-Qaida from September to January and studying bomb-making with a man who produced explosives in Somalia, faces up to life in prison if convicted. He awaits trial here because his last U.S. address was an apartment in a sprawling complex off Beltway 8 in southwest Houston.

Maldonado, the son of Puerto Rican immigrants, grew up in New Hampshire, where he met and later married Tamekia Cunningham. After their marriage, they converted to Islam. In August 2005, they moved to Houston, and Jamal helped them settle in.

Jamal grew up in a family that regularly attended mosque — his parents were from Pakistan — but he took more interest in his Hoffman BMX bike and the Internet before discovering Islam. His passions for computers and religion would soon converge.

While living in his parents' Ohio home in 2001, the teenager started ClearGuidance.com, an online discussion site for young Muslims. According to a profile in The Globe and Mail, a Canadian newspaper, the Web site began with 172 members but its audience quickly grew to thousands, "from the suburbs of Detroit to the suburbs of London."

ClearGuidance made the news after Canadian authorities thwarted a plot to bomb the Toronto Stock Exchange and Canadian Parliament last June, and the newspaper disclosed that some of the suspects had been on the site discussing using weapons and killing infidels.

Jamal, also known as Sas, shut down the site in 2004.

"It was a bit too distracting. I got bored of it," he told the Chronicle. "And it was overrun by people who spent more time on it than I did."

Helped Maldonado relocate

Internet relationships played a key role in Jamal's move to Houston from his parents' house in Ohio. He met Fatima Hye, a Clear Lake High School graduate and daughter of a prominent Quran translator on AlMaghrib.com. They married in 2004.

For Hye, now 31, just divorced with three children and deep roots here, moving in with Jamal's parents in Ohio wasn't practical.

She and Jamal established a new Web site, Islamic Network, and ran it from their southwest Houston apartment.

"Even if we are radical, I don't think it's much different from what people see as 'Jesus freaks,'" Hye told the Chronicle by telephone. "We're just really into our religion."

Jamal also stayed in touch with Maldonado, whom he had met at an Islamic conference, through mutual acquaintances and the Internet. After the Maldonados arrived in Houston in the fall of 2005, Jamal realized he couldn't afford to cover their expenses and pay his own family's bills. Islamic Network does not generate revenue, Hye said, adding that Jamal earns a living through contract computer programming, graphics and Web design.

Because Maldonado had expressed an interest in living in a Muslim country, Jamal and Hye helped the family relocate to Egypt, where Maldonado could still work for Islamic Network via the Internet, Hye said.

But living in Egypt was more difficult than expected. Maldonado didn't speak Arabic, the \$270 a month Jamal paid him didn't cover expenses, Internet connectivity was spotty at best and Tamekia was pregnant.

"We just lost touch," said Hye, explaining that she heard the news of Daniel's arrest and Tamekia's death from malaria "when the world did."

Of Tamekia's death, she said, "it just broke my heart because she was my sister."

Mentoring Jamal

Also in the fall of 2005, Jamal met Shaikh Rajab, who had recently moved to Houston to work at Masjid Hamza. The tech-savvy Jamal asked him if he would answer questions on Islamic Network.

"He's an amazing person with very weird stuff sometimes, but that's what attracted me," said Rajab. "Some of his ideas, they're really great."

Though he was warned about Jamal, Rajab thought he could be a mentor to the young man.

"Some people came to me and told me, 'Be careful, this guy, uh, he has a past,'" Rajab said. "So I asked him what happened. He said, 'No. No. Nothing. There was just a Web site with some problems, and it was just closed.'"

Rajab added, "Youth can get overzealous. They can do some crazy stuff. But I believe Sas has finally bypassed that stage. He is finally weighing things."

Uncensored dialogue

The FBI warned Congress in September about violent extremism on the Internet, and the possibility of radicalizing a small group of American Muslims.

"These online activities further their indoctrination, create links between extremists located around the world and may serve as a springboard for future terrorist activities," said Donald Van Duyn, deputy assistant director of the FBI's counterterrorism division.

Jamal and Hye say Islamic Network — as ClearGuidance once did — encourages uncensored dialogue about such controversial topics as polygamy, jihad and U.S. foreign policy — " ... which is why I guess 'extremists' will talk more on some of the sites I am a part of versus talking less on sites which censor people," Jamal told the Chronicle by e-mail.

Under the user name Daniel Aljughaifi, Maldonado was a paid message board moderator for Islamic Network. Before his capture in January while fleeing Somalia, he was one of many members to discuss attempts to establish Islamic law in that African nation.

He's now the first American to be charged with joining Islamic extremists in Somalia.

Chronicle reporter Anita Hassan contributed to this report.

[SOURCE: Houston Chronicle](#)

Support Brother Daniel

If you wish to send books to Daniel Maldonado, please order them at a known bookstore and have them delivered directly to the prison address (or they will be rejected). All books must be soft cover (paperback).

To write:

DANIEL JOSEPH MALDONADO 56473-179

FDC HOUSTON

FEDERAL DETENTION CENTER

P.O. BOX 526255

HOUSTON, TX 77052

To send money:

Federal Bureau of Prisons

Daniel Joseph Maldonado

56473-179

Post Office Box 474701

Des Moines, Iowa

50947-0001

via Western Union:

Western Union - Quick Collect

56473179

Daniel Joseph Maldonado

City Code: FBOP

State Code: DC

**Most importantly do not forget to make Dua for Brother Daniel
and his children**