

# Special report: Eric Rudolph writes home

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# Contents

<b>Part I: Rudolph's mother looks for answers</b>	<b>3</b>
The Eric his mother remembers . . . . .	5
'I prefer Nietzsche to the Bible' . . . . .	6
'The good guy or the bad guy' . . . . .	8
<b>Part Two: Eric Rudolph tells how he eluded FBI</b>	<b>10</b>
'A piece of providence' . . . . .	12
'Lick the floor' . . . . .	13
'Would he tell?' . . . . .	14
'The staple that sustained me' . . . . .	15
'He had me' . . . . .	16
'Flickers of light' . . . . .	17
<b>Among his victims</b>	<b>18</b>
Emily Lyons . . . . .	18
Alice Hawthorne . . . . .	20
Robert Sanderson . . . . .	20
<b>The crimes and the search</b>	<b>23</b>

# Part I: Rudolph's mother looks for answers

SARASOTA, Fla. — *“Despite my many flaws, I still hope that you can find it in your loving selfless heart to forgive me... And even though I cannot apologize for being who I am and expressing myself in the way that I did, it troubles me greatly that you had to experience any hardships because of my deeds.”*

Pat Rudolph reads the Mother's Day card from her son, the second youngest of six children. It feels so different from the others she opened this year. It came from prison, for one, and from a man she now struggles to understand.

He even signed it as a stranger might, with a middle initial and last name affixed to his first: “Your wayward son, Eric R. Rudolph.”

She is 77 now, but these days, she feels years older — far more tired than when Eric Rudolph vanished into the mountains of North Carolina in 1998 and she feared she never would see him again. At least then she had his innocence to sustain her. That's what she believed, anyway.

The boy she raised would never do what the government said he had done: kill two people and wound more than a hundred by bombing two abortion clinics, a gay nightclub and the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. The man who did that, who hid a bomb in a backpack and sent masonry nails tearing through the Olympic crowd, couldn't be her son. She had reared him as a pacifist. No matter his views, he would never hurt others. (**Related link:** Rudolph timeline)

Then she heard the news in April. Her son would plead guilty to everything. To killing the off-duty police officer outside the clinic in Birmingham, Ala. To killing the woman at the Olympics. To maiming so many others. (**Related link:** Rudolph's victims)

Eric Rudolph, now 38, had confessed in exchange for four life sentences without parole. He would not be tried. He would not face death. He is scheduled to be sentenced July 18 for the bombing in Birmingham.

She hasn't seen him in the dozen weeks since he confessed; she often feels too ill to travel. And she talks with him sparingly; she cannot afford his collect calls. So she relies on his letters from jail — letters she shared with USA TODAY in hopes of showing a fuller picture of her son — to sate her need to know who he has become.

To date, he has granted no interviews and, through his mother, declined to talk to USA TODAY. When he pleaded guilty April 13, he released only a rambling, 11-



Eric Rudolph, left, and his mother Pat in New York City in 1996.  
Family photo

page statement that condemns abortion and homosexuality and says he had “nothing personal” against his victims.

By contrast, his letters home — more than 200 pages in sloppy cursive — are cogent and well-written. More than his statement, they offer an unadorned glimpse into the mind of Eric Rudolph: why he did what he did, how he survived in the wild, and why he was caught.

They reveal a thinker, clever and cunning, who details how he fooled locals and the feds during five years on the lam; an egoist who sees himself and his plight in the books that now take up his days; a zealot, unapologetic in his disgust for abortion and the government; a son who seems to deeply regret what his family has endured.

“I get more of a feeling for him from the letters than when I’m with him,” his mother says. “And that’s what counts. The feeling.”

Since a rookie cop caught Rudolph behind the Save-A-Lot grocery store in Murphy, N.C., two years ago, Pat Rudolph guesses that her son has gained about 30 pounds.

Worry and heartache have cost her just as many, and in the past few weeks, she has begun to see a therapist. She needs to talk, to figure things out. She has even been writing a book to try to explain her son, and herself, to the world.

Eric Rudolph is a monster, an American terrorist. That’s what she has heard people say. And she can quarrel with them for only two reasons: because he is hers, and because she knows him. Or does she?

“I would so much like for us to see one another before I leave this place,” he writes of his impending transfer from Alabama to a prison in Colorado. “And perhaps it will be for the last time, for distance may place an insurmountable obstacle between us.”

As she reads his words again and again, she asks the same question as his victims and their families: Why? Perhaps, she worries, *she* is to blame.

Today, Pat Rudolph does what federal authorities did for more than five years: She searches for her son. They hunted for him in the mountains of North Carolina. She hopes to find him here, in these letters.

## The Eric his mother remembers

“The latest tour group just came through: The authorities here often bring a group of people, I know not who, up to the windows of my cellblock and peek in like tourists at a zoo viewing the latest exotic animal,” he writes in an undated letter from his cell in Birmingham. “I try to ignore them and act nonchalant, but I must confess I have the urge to bounce around and scratch my armpits for their entertainment.”

Pat Rudolph can’t help but smile. In her mind’s eye, she sees him there, playing the gorilla, and his lightheartedness lessens her load. *That’s* the Eric she remembers. The witty teen who could mimic scenes from the movies; the intense boy who pitched Little League; the son she taught at home during his last two years of school.

Even then, his humor was dry, subtle, controlled. Still, he always could make her laugh. “One of his coaches in baseball used to call him ‘Smiley,’ because he didn’t smile that much,” she recalls. “But when he did, it was a beautiful smile.”

She goes there for only a moment. Then ... reality. He will always be an oddity now. Always caged. Always on display.

Ask some of the victims of his crimes and they’ll say Rudolph’s price is small — too small compared to theirs. He is alive, after all. Alice Hawthorne, 44, an entrepreneur from Albany, Ga., was killed in the Olympics bombing; Robert Sanderson, 35, an off-duty police officer working as a security guard, was killed in the Birmingham blast.

Emily Lyons survived. A nurse at the New Woman All Women Health Care Clinic in Birmingham, she was blinded and crippled when the nails from a Rudolph bomb tore through her in 1998. The day of the bombing, she says, Eric Rudolph “decided to be God.” She is angry that prosecutors cut Rudolph a deal. “He deserves to die,” she says.

Since the blast seven years ago, Lyons, now 48, has had 21 operations. On her face. On her neck. On her legs. Almost everywhere. Her left eye is plastic; damage to her right keeps her from driving at night.

“That poor girl’s been through it,” Pat Rudolph says. “But what can I say that’s going to heal her broken heart and broken body? Only that I’m sorry that my son did this thing... The apology really needs to come from my son.”

In his letters, Rudolph shows no such inclination. In one, sent about a week after the guilty plea, he becomes introspective about his choice to turn violent. It is the only clue in the letters about why he took this course, but his soul-searching seems no more than an intellectual exercise.

“Perhaps I should have found a peaceful outlet for my opposition to the government in Washington: maybe I should have been a lawyer and fought (for) decency in the face of this rotten system; perhaps I could have taken up teaching and sought to inculcate a healthy outlook in a decidedly unhealthy society,” he writes. “But I didn’t do any of these things, and I resorted to force to have my voice heard. However wrongheaded my tactical decision to resort to violence may have been, morally speaking my actions were justified.”

The words pain Pat Rudolph, and she reacts like any mother might. She loves her son but hates his manner. And she believes — because it gives her strength — that some day her son will grow wiser.

## **‘I prefer Nietzsche to the Bible’**

“Many good people continue to send me money and books,” Rudolph writes in an undated letter. “Most of them have, of course, an agenda; mostly born-again Christians looking to save my soul. I suppose the assumption is made that because I’m in here I must be a ‘sinner’ in need of salvation, and they would be glad to sell me a ticket to

heaven, hawking this salvation like peanuts at a ballgame. I do appreciate their charity, but I could really do without the condescension. They have been so nice I would hate to break it to them that I really prefer Nietzsche to the Bible.”

He took two years to tell his mother he was guilty. She heard it first from an assistant to one of his lawyers. Then she wept. “My heart sank,” she remembers. “I didn’t know what to do. What could I do? What could I say?” She managed only a few words to the assistant: “It’s hard for me to believe this.”

But a part of her knew, she says now. A part of her sensed it the first time she hugged him after he was caught on May 31, 2003. “I felt he was uneasy,” she recalls. “It wasn’t his usual grab-and-hug-you sort of thing.” She never did ask him whether he’d done the bombings. She still hasn’t. The phone calls and visits are monitored, the letters read by others.

With his guilty plea, however, his letters home changed, and he began to tell of his reasoning and of his crimes. “I don’t believe that a government that sanctions, protects and promotes the murder of 50 million unborn children in the heinous practice of abortion has the moral authority to judge a man for murder,” he writes in a letter she received April 21.

As Pat Rudolph reads those letters, she bristles at his righteous indignation. It is not her way.

His mother, who once studied to be a nun and joined with activist and pacifist Dorothy Day and the Catholic Workers Party in the 1950s, now sees herself as a libertarian. She once chose the words “anarchist” to describe her views but now believes in a limited government. Her Christian faith is more spiritual than religious, more about meditation than about prayer.

And as for abortion, Eric Rudolph’s mother believes the decision belongs to the woman, not to the government.

She sees how her son views religion — not spiritually, but as a scholar might - and she thinks that’s how he reconciles his actions.

Like the Koran to Muslim terrorists, parts of the Bible have been commandeered by her son to justify the unjustifiable, she says. As she explains, “You can find a scripture in there to suit anything.”

Even so, for Eric Rudolph — a man who quoted a Biblical passage on hypocrisy when he pleaded guilty — the choice of Nietzsche over the Gospel is a curious one. Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher, once declared “God is dead.”

His mother says she recognizes the intellectual Eric, the son who spent only a few terms in college but loved history. The religious zealot, she says, is a mystery. “A lot of this fundamentalist kind of thinking is a recent thing with him,” she says. “I don’t know where all this occurred, because it’s certainly not from me or from anyone else in the family. I just don’t know where all of this came from.”

She isn’t alone. The man who once led the hunt for Rudolph, former FBI agent Woody Enderson, says that “no one really knew him... I really don’t know what led him to become the person he is.”

Much has been written about her husband's death from cancer when Eric was a teenager — how Pat and Bob Rudolph, Eric's father, went to Mexico in 1981 so Bob could be treated with laetrile, a drug banned in the USA. But Eric Rudolph, in a statement the day he pleaded guilty, dismissed the notion that his father's death left him angry at the government.

Another myth, Pat Rudolph says, is that the far-right Christian church in Missouri the family attended when Eric was 17 made her son hateful. The family stayed less than a year. "We were exploring a lot of things then, and it's something we looked into. But it wasn't right for us," she explains. "Just because you look at porn doesn't make you a child molester."

Her son's views on homosexuality also surprise her. One of Eric's brothers is gay.

## 'The good guy or the bad guy'

"I'm starting Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, which is supposed to be the greatest novel of all time," Rudolph writes in an undated letter. "I've read his *Crime and Punishment* years ago, which I can honestly say was the best novel I have read to date... He was tried and convicted of revolutionary activity by a Tsarist court and sentenced to death by firing squad. As he was being tied to the stake, he was given a last minute pardon and was sent to Siberia."

Perhaps this is how he views his life — a revolutionary spared from death but exiled to prison. His mother thinks so.

"I just finished reading *Billy Budd* by Melville," he writes in another undated letter. "It's a story about a good man sacrificed on the altar of military-legal expediency. It makes a powerful statement at the end of the novel about the relativity of history, and just who ends up being the good guy or bad guy depends on who gets to write the story."

Perhaps this is what gives him hope: that someday, his actions will be seen, not as terrorism, but as heroism. For now and to most, his mother understands, Eric Rudolph belongs among a small group of homegrown terrorists: the Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski; and the man who toppled the Oklahoma City federal building, Timothy McVeigh.

And Pat Rudolph, by the actions of her son, becomes the terrorist's mother. "I often think of Mrs. McVeigh," she says quietly. "What did that woman feel?"

"Here's a child that you fed at the breast for two years, almost ..." Her voice wavers. "I'd always tried to do the right things by him, for him, and it was like a slap in the face.

"God have mercy on him," she whispers. "That's all I can say."

It is at these moments that she looks back to the letters. She sets aside the pages of dogma and picks out a few letters he has sent her. They are her favorites. They make her smile.



In them, Eric Rudolph doesn't talk politics. He tells stories of his time on the run. They are daring tales, and they leave her proud, almost tickled.

As she reads them, Pat Rudolph stops looking for answers. His words pull her back to the place where she raised him, back to the mountains of North Carolina and the chilly nights of October 1999, almost two years after he vanished.

## Part Two: Eric Rudolph tells how he eluded FBI

ANDREWS, N.C. — During Eric Rudolph’s five years on the lam, despite a nationwide manhunt and a million-dollar bounty, a transient appears to have come closer to catching the serial bomber than did any federal agent.

The search for Rudolph, sought in four bombings that killed two people and injured more than a hundred, always focused in this region — a densely wooded area in the western part of North Carolina. Rudolph had spent his teenage years here and had returned as an adult in the early 1990s, supporting himself doing carpentry.

In letters to his mother written from a jail cell in Birmingham, Ala., Rudolph describes how he repeatedly crept into this town of 1,600, even after scores of federal agents had set up their headquarters just blocks away. He tells of raiding Dumpsters and gardens, of stealing grain from silos and transporting it in a truck he stole from a used car lot. He also recounts how he feared he had been discovered during a chance encounter at a trash pile less than two years into hiding.

“We did the best job we could do,” says Woody Enderson, the FBI agent who headed the task force hunting for Rudolph until he retired in August 1999. “But to my knowledge, we never physically saw him.”

His mother, Pat Rudolph, shared the letters with USA TODAY in the hope of showing a fuller picture of her son. He has granted no interviews and has released only an 11-page statement when he pleaded guilty April 13.

The 200-plus pages of letters, written freehand, offer the most complete account to date about how he survived in the wild. He describes what he ate, how he slept, even how he kept himself amused. He also tells, for the first time, how he was caught by a local cop.

Based on those letters, among them one he sent to an anti-abortion Web site in May, USA TODAY retraced Rudolph’s steps and interviewed those whose lives were unwittingly touched.

The letters say nothing about whether others knowingly helped Rudolph; Enderson says neither he nor the FBI believes Rudolph had help. Nor do the letters contain explicit directions to his hide-outs in the mountains around Andrews and Murphy, N.C.

Those points are of little interest to Rudolph’s mother. She’s still trying to understand why the boy she raised turned into a terrorist — a man who signed his Mother’s Day card to her “Your wayward son.”



Eric Rudolph smiles as he leaves a federal courthouse in this June 22, 2004 file photo, in Huntsville, Ala.  
Haraz Ghanbari, AP

But as Pat Rudolph reads her son's words, she allows herself to set aside his crimes. In her mind's eye, she lets Eric Rudolph take her with him on his clandestine journeys, to show her how he survived on the run.

## ‘A piece of providence’

“You said you liked my little anecdotes,” he writes in a July 27, 2004, letter, “so I have a little tale you may find entertaining.”

The time is fall 1999, probably mid-October. “On this particular night, the air was cool, fall having started a month before,” he writes. “I was hesitant to get out from under my improvised bed, which was made of leaves and plastic.”

But he was hungry. He needed food. Forget hunting. He had found an easier — if riskier — way of getting it that summer, he writes. Under cover of darkness, he would slip into Andrews, where scores of federal agents had made an old sewing factory their headquarters.

On his way in, he would help himself to vegetables from two enormous gardens. Then, he would wade across the Valley River and sneak behind the McDonald's, picking through the burgers tossed out at closing. He would go behind the grocery store across the street and raid the trash bin there. Sometimes, he'd even scrounge through the trash at Civic Cinema, looking for unsold popcorn.

He started toward town before midnight, he writes, and “the mountain trail down to the road was steep and full of obstacles. Having to traverse it in the dark without a flashlight was something that was done primarily from memory. Each step must be calculated and correlated with the surrounding shadows produced by the trees and the general landscape. Once you get used to the step count and how the trail looks at night, it becomes fairly easy.”

At the road — based on the descriptions in his letter, most likely Airport Road just outside the Andrews city limits — he paused “in a clump of bushes and shrubs” and waited for traffic to subside. Then, Rudolph writes, he headed down to the gardens.

“The gardens were a piece of providence; a real Godsend to have these two big, well-tended and continually stocked gardens right on the way to town,” he writes. “Probably tended by two retired couples living next door to each other, these gardens were a regular cornucopia of plant life.”

That, in fact, was how it used to be, recalls Gene Webb. He's 77 now and doesn't plant as much as he used to. But based on Rudolph's descriptions, Webb may be the gardener who, along with his brother, unwittingly fed a fugitive. Webb's house sits where Rudolph describes. The gardens lie side by side, just across the road from his house. And when the weather turns cold, Webb covers his gardens with a plastic tarp to guard against frost, just as Rudolph recalls.

“I had to be extremely gentle with the frozen plastic,” he writes, “for across the street, on the porch of the gardener’s house, was my nemesis: a 20-pound pile of canine crap named ‘Fluffy,’ waiting patiently on guard for the slightest noise.

“Every time I would go to the garden, he would be there watching, waiting,” he writes of the dog. “A sound from the garden would send him into a rage, forcing my hasty retreat. I tried to make friends by feeding him (McDonald’s) hamburgers, but he would have none of my blackmail. He hated me, and I hated him, and the battle would continue every time I invaded his territory.”

If Rudolph is referring to Webb’s dog, the name is Blue, not Fluffy. And he’s a Black Labrador, weighing about 100 pounds these days. But like the dog Rudolph remembers, Blue has always been protective, Webb says. “This one’ll bark when somebody passes,” he says with a nod toward Blue.

As for any signs that Rudolph had visited, Webb thinks for a moment. “Someone could get a dozen ears and you wouldn’t know it,” he says. “Now my brother, he got to missing a lot of tomatoes.”

Former FBI agent Enderson says he isn’t surprised. “There were thefts from gardens that had never had thefts before,” he says. Rudolph, he says, “was absolutely resourceful.”

## **‘Lick the floor’**

On that October night, Rudolph writes, “everything went smoothly and I proceeded to bag my take and put it under the bushes on the side of the road where I would retrieve it on my way back. And then I covered the last leg of my trek down to the intersection” just across the river from Andrews.

Instead of using the well-lighted bridge, Rudolph opted to cross the Valley River. A drought had left the water level low, and Rudolph had “improvised a pair of waders made out of plastic garbage bags and string,” he writes. “I would put these on and cross the river just upstream from the bridge.

“Once over my first stop was the green garbage can behind Gibson Furniture, where I usually find a couple of items of interest. Cigarettes, lovely cigarettes, half smoked and many of them. A little work back at camp, cut the filters down and wipe the remainder with a clean towel, and you have nicotine-induced bliss.”

Virgil Gibson, 62, who owns the store, says he had no idea Rudolph was smoking his spent Marlboro Lights. “Oh mercy,” he says with a chuckle. “That’s unusual.”

After Rudolph was caught on May 31, 2003, Gibson says the FBI interviewed him. But not about any cigarettes. Rather, they had found a magazine at one of Rudolph’s mountain campsites.

“It was addressed to me,” he says. “It had my name on it.”

Indeed, Rudolph proved an avid reader. “Also at Gibson’s can,” he writes, “are USA TODAY newspapers — two, sometimes three a week. This was a good find, for I spent a good deal of my days reading and re-reading these papers.

“Often as I went about my weekly late night chores,” he writes, “I would think about the articles I had read that day, and engage in debates with myself about the latest issue of interest in the news, or I would invent comedy routines based upon something in the paper that I had found to be funny.”

In one article, he writes, “human rights groups were protesting the abuse of factory workers in Vietnam. Apparently, Nike shoe factories in Vietnam employ a large number of young females as workers, and these are usually managed by middle-aged South Korean males... One of the accusations involved these managers forcing the girls, when (they) misbehaved, to run around the factory, and also they were made to lick the floor. On this particular night the dialogue with myself was based upon an imagined scene between these abused girls and their tyrant boss.”

The article was published Oct. 4, 1999. It is just as Rudolph describes. “In other Vietnam factories,” one sentence reads, “workers had been slapped with shoes or ordered to lick factory floors.”

“In my best Oriental accent, I would run the dialogue back and forth,” Rudolph recalls in his letter. “In a light voice I had the imaginary manager say, ‘You lick the floor. You run round factory now.’”

“ ‘No, I don’t want to lick floor. Oh please don’t make lick floor,’ lamented the cringing, crying girls... And on and on this improvised skit would go as I sifted through the garbage,” he writes. That night, he was searching for a way to improve his leaf sleeping bag, he writes. “Right on top was the very thing: (a) large piece of plastic perfectly draped over the top of a long rectangular box. Pulling the plastic off the box, I proceeded to fold it up, all the while continuing with my running dialogue between the fictitious manager and shop girls.”

That’s when he saw the man — and when the man saw him.

## ‘Would he tell?’

“Out of the corner of my eye, just as I was finishing this line, the long rectangular box began to slowly open like a coffin lid in a vampire movie, and there in the box was the barely visible figure of a human being,” he writes. “My thoughts started racing. ‘Was this an ambush? Did someone see me going through the garbage on a previous night and set this up?’ With my heart in my throat, the figure suddenly spoke.

“ ‘Who’s making you lick the floor, buddy?’ said the figure. His voice came hard ... “ he writes, “and had probably been damaged by years of alcohol and cigarettes. Suddenly it came to me. ‘This is a bum... Without thinking I said, ‘Nobody ... nobody is making me lick the floor,’ and slowly moved away, back towards the river.”

But Rudolph couldn't help but worry. "Did he recognize me? Would he run and tell? I thought to myself. I made my way quickly back across (the river), splashing through the cold water, and climbing up the bank, my half-soaked body was beginning to feel the cold," he writes. Then he looked back. The transient hadn't moved.

"It looked good so far, but was he just waiting to catch his breath before leaving?" he writes. "Then, after several tense moments, he lit up a cigarette, and every few drags on his smoke, he would let out a few gut-wrenching coughs. After finishing his cigarette, he lifted the lid on his box, climbed back in, and laid back down to sleep."

Rudolph writes that he waited a week before heading into town again. "But needless to say," he writes, "I began to approach garbage a little differently."

## **'The staple that sustained me'**

In another letter — one Rudolph apparently also sent to a Web site run by a militant anti-abortion group called the Army of God — he writes about how he drew hundreds of pounds of corn, wheat and soybeans from silos even as authorities set up a speed trap a few feet away. A mix of the three grains — boiled, then pounded into pancakes and fried — proved to be "the staple that sustained me for many years," he writes in the letter, dated Sept. 11, 2004.

During his trips into Andrews that October 1999, Rudolph had stolen garbage cans from stores, he writes. He swiped garbage bags from the Dumpsters at McDonald's. He washed them in the river and then began filling them with grain from silos along Airport Road, in a town named Marble halfway between Murphy and Andrews.

At night, he climbed to the top of a silo, opened a hatch and scooped the feed into the trash bags, he writes. Then he dumped the bags in the garbage cans, which he stored behind a lone building across the road from the silos.

"One night I had to wait atop the silo for a few hours as a state trooper set up across the road at the church to lay in ambush for hapless speeders," he writes. "He would race off and catch one, and after writing his ticket he'd return to his spot next to the church."

Based on his description of the silos and the building, the "church" appears to be a structure that housed a racquetball court that doctors and other professionals built years ago.

Once, he writes, he thought he had been spotted by a hunter along the creek behind the building. He scurried up a ridge and waited for the feds, he writes. "I realized they weren't coming. For whatever reason, the hunter didn't divulge what happened," Rudolph surmises.

No matter. Rudolph resumed his harvest. In the letter, he talks about how he scoped out a truck to haul the filled garbage cans back to one of his camps. He spotted it on a used car lot about a mile from the silos. "A nice dark blue 1996 four wheel drive Chevrolet Silverado was the truck of choice," he writes.

He apparently stole it and transported the filled garbage cans on Halloween 1999. A police report filed in Andrews and subsequently with the Cherokee County Sheriff's Department shows that a 1996 Chevrolet Silverado disappeared from the lot of Buy Rite Motors between Oct. 30, 1999, and Nov. 1, when it was reported stolen. Rudolph mentioned Buy Rite in his letter. The stolen truck wasn't dark blue, though. It was black.

"At this time there are no leads," a deputy handling the case writes.

Until USA TODAY contacted the owner of Buy Rite Motors late last month, it appears no one had any idea that Rudolph was the thief. The Silverado was recovered a few weeks after it was stolen, owner Paul Pollina says. "When they found that truck," he recalls, "they didn't even dust for fingerprints or anything."

Former FBI agent Enderson says he's "confident" that no one ever connected the stolen truck to Rudolph. "There was a point in time when we had told local authorities to notify us of any stolen vehicles," he says. "But that was early on. By October of '99, it probably had slipped their mind or something like that."

In the letter, Rudolph hints that he even encountered police on the way back with the grain. "But just wait until you hear about the time the cops took me to get some gas for my stolen truck," the letter ends. "Maybe next time."

## **'He had me'**

On May 29, 2004 — almost a year to the day after his capture — Rudolph decided to tell his mother what happened the night a rookie cop spotted and arrested him behind the Save-A-Lot grocery store in Murphy.

"It was a Saturday night, like other Saturday nights, a good night for garbage," he writes in a letter. "I had a good pile of bananas already, but thought I could get more and end my fruit drying early this year, and this is how I ended up at the Dumpster that night. I told myself not to go out, for I had plenty of bananas already, and enough Taco Bell burritos to cure an anorexic. Pushing aside my fears, I left the camp."

He writes about walking down the trail in the darkness, about trying to cross the highway over a bridge, about how sometimes, if a car approached, he'd have to "hang over the side of the bridge on the other side of the rail," the shallow river about 50 feet below.

"Finally, I get over the bridge and make my way through the field to the back of the Save-A-Lot's Dumpsters... At this point, I'm blind as to what is coming around the sides of the building, and have to rely solely on the sight of headlights... So I sit in the field looking from side to side, waiting for the patrol."

The police officer, he writes, drives by "usually once an hour, but on the weekends, with drunks and teenagers to deal with, his schedule is uncertain. For three years I have dodged him, on many a cold night he has come within inches of finding me. One



night, while I was hiding in the Dumpster at Taco Bell, he got out of his car, went into the Dumpster area and (urinated) on the Dumpster I was hiding in.

“On this particular night,” Rudolph writes, “he was the least of my worries, having to haul 200 pounds of fruit up to the camp was the only thing on my mind... I run to the Dumpster. Halfway across the asphalt out of the corner of my eye, he comes whipping around the corner of the building, with his lights off. This is unusual, for he never turns them off, and this is how I’ve spotted him coming around the building for three years. Maybe he watched *Cops* the TV show last night... But whatever the case, he had me. I knew he would get me, if anybody could; that some FBI tactical team, and a platoon of helicopters would not do the trick, but rather this lonely rookie cop patrolling garbage cans.

“I rush behind a stack of milk crates,” Rudolph writes. “He pulls up in front of them; I think about running, about the headache of hiding, the many nights rooting through garbage, the 10 degrees below zero days when I sit in my tent all day and shiver; and I decide that I don’t care. It was meant to happen. I’m sick of hiding from these worms. I’m not afraid to die. And so this is how I came to this place a year ago.”

Murphy police Officer Jeff Postell had been a cop for less than a year before spotting Rudolph early that morning, well before dawn. He said at the time that he mistook Rudolph’s flashlight for a weapon, drew his gun and ordered Rudolph to the ground. “I was doing what I was supposed to do,” Postell explained.

## ‘Flickers of light’

Pat Rudolph can’t get enough of her son’s stories. She sometimes wishes he were still out there, free. But if he were, then she would never be sure if he were alive. She would never read these stories.

Not every mother would be so impressed by tales of stolen trucks and thievery. But considering the crimes to which her son has confessed, Pat Rudolph allows herself to enjoy the victimless ones.

In time, she prays, her son will come to understand the magnitude of his transgressions. To see them as wrong. “There’s flickers of light there that I think will eventually deaden the darkness,” Pat Rudolph says. “When he finally understands who he is, then he’ll come to learn forgiveness.

“Once he comes to reconcile where that devil exists in his mind, he’s going to realize all along that that devil was him.”

In these letters home from her wayward son, Pat Rudolph thinks she may have found Eric. Now, she hopes he might find himself.

# Among his victims

**A nurse loses sight; receptionist, police officer die in blasts**

A look at the victims of the Eric Rudolph bombings:

## Emily Lyons

She is angry, of course. Given how his bomb ruined her body, Emily Lyons is more than entitled. She wants Eric Rudolph to die. (**Audio:** Lyons discusses her ordeal)

But she handles her anger with extraordinary grace, given all that she has been through. The explosion took her left eye and much of the sight from her right. She has had 21 operations. Still, she says she's a better person today, at age 48, than before the blast.

"You lost sight," she says, "but you gain vision."

The four bombs Rudolph detonated — outside two abortion clinics, a gay nightclub and at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta — killed two people and wounded more than 100.

Since the bombing on Jan. 29, 1998, outside the abortion clinic in Birmingham, Lyons jokes that she's "the blown-up woman." She has even entitled the book that she and her husband have written *Life's Been a Blast*.

Besides her injuries, she laments the loss of her privacy. But after working on the book with her husband, Jeff, and starting a Web site — [www.emilylyons.com](http://www.emilylyons.com) — she accepts that speaking out for women's rights and against violence is more important than peace and quiet.

She says she plans to speak for 45 minutes on July 18 — her birthday and the day her book goes on sale — at Rudolph's sentencing in Birmingham. "It's talking about what a failure he's been in all of his attacks," since he wanted to kill more, she plans to say.

She'll also ask two questions: "Why that day? Why that place?"

She and her husband, Jeff, know that the world will remember the name Eric Rudolph — the name of a killer, the name of the man who maimed her. Remembering his victims, at least one of them, might make for a better lesson.

"I want them to see what a bomb does," Jeff Lyons says.

"I want them to see the other side. I don't want to immortalize the bad guy."



Emily Lyons  
AP

As for Rudolph's mother, the Lyonses say they feel for her and would like to talk. "We're not responsible for our children. He was an adult at that point," Emily Lyons says of Pat Rudolph. "I'm sorry that she had to endure this."

## **Alice Hawthorne**

Neighbors and friends remember Alice Hawthorne as sweet and outgoing — the sort of person who "would help anyone," says Alberta Wallace, Hawthorne's best friend. The two had roomed for four years at Albany State College.

A bomb left by Rudolph in Atlanta's Centennial Olympic Park killed Hawthorne and injured her daughter, Fallon Stubbs, on July 27, 1996. Fallon suffered deep wounds in an arm and a leg.

Hawthorne worked as a receptionist for a cable-television company. She also owned a hot dog stand managed by others.

Hawthorne's husband, John Hawthorne, said he was touched by the outpouring of affection at her memorial service. "I couldn't ask for a better send-off for Alice," he said then. "Her life should not be tied to the Centennial Olympic Park. Her life was here."

## **Robert Sanderson**

Birmingham Police Officer Robert "Sande" Sanderson was off-duty and working as a security guard at the New Woman All Women Health Clinic when he was killed by a bomb left by Rudolph on Jan. 29, 1998.

It was the same bomb that deprived nurse Emily Lyons of her eyesight.

Sanderson was the father of two sons and worked at the clinic for extra money, not because of his views on abortion, his wife said at the time.

"I don't believe in abortion, and neither did Sande," said Felecia Sanderson.

After memorial services later that year, Felecia Sanderson said she wanted her husband to be remembered as a "very kind, loving man."

Birmingham police issued pins honoring Sanderson. They displayed Sanderson's badge number, No. 257, covered by a black band. Proceeds from the sale of the pins, more than \$5,000, went to Felecia Sanderson.



Alice Hawthorne



Robert Sanderson  
AP

# The crimes and the search

The Associated Press

A look at the crimes, capture and trial of Eric Rudolph.

**July 27, 1996:** Bombing at Atlanta's Centennial Olympic Park kills a woman and injures 111 other people.

**Jan. 16, 1997:** Two bombs explode at office building in Atlanta suburb, injuring six. An abortion clinic in the building is believed to be the target.

**Feb. 21:** Nail-laden device explodes at gay and lesbian nightclub in Atlanta. Five people are wounded.

**Jan. 29, 1998:** Explosion kills a police officer and maims a nurse at abortion clinic in Birmingham, Ala.

**Jan. 30:** Rudolph stocks up on supplies in North Carolina and vanishes.

**Feb. 14:** Rudolph is charged in Birmingham abortion clinic bombing; he and his truck were spotted at the scene.

**May 5:** FBI adds Rudolph to its 10 Most Wanted list and offers \$1 million reward.

**July 7:** Health food store owner in Andrews, N.C., tells authorities Rudolph took six months' worth of food and supplies and a pickup truck from his home, leaving five \$100 bills as payment.

**Oct. 14:** Rudolph is charged in the Olympic bombing and the other Atlanta-area attacks.

**May 31, 2003:** After more than five years on the run, Rudolph is captured near a trash bin in Murphy, N.C., scavenging for food.

**June 2:** Authorities announce Rudolph is to be tried first in Birmingham.

**Dec. 11:** Prosecutors announce Attorney General John Ashcroft has given approval to seek the death penalty in the Birmingham clinic bombing.

**April 6, 2005:** Jury selection begins in Birmingham.

**April 8:** The government says Rudolph has agreed to plead guilty in all the bombings in a deal that will spare him from the death penalty.

**April 13:** Rudolph enters the plea.

**July 18:** Sentencing scheduled in Birmingham for abortion clinic bombing. Sentencing for Atlanta bombing has not yet been scheduled.



Centennial Park at the Olympic Games in Atlanta after the fatal bombing in 1996.  
AP file





Emergency workers take Emily Lyons from an Alabama abortion clinic hit in 1998.  
File photo

The Ted K Archive

Blake Morrison  
Special report: Eric Rudolph writes home  
7/5/2005, updated: 7/6/2005

USA TODAY. <[https://web.archive.org/.../usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-07-05-rudolph-cover-partone\\_x.htm](https://web.archive.org/.../usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-07-05-rudolph-cover-partone_x.htm)>

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