

Style

Walking the same sidewalks as the Tsarnaevs

By **Ibby Caputo** April 21, 2013

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

As I-was-there stories proliferated across the Internet over the weekend, those of us who live on Norfolk Street wondered what to make of the fact that we actually were there, that we have been living on the same street as the Tsarnaev family. What in years to come will we say about sharing sidewalks with the Boston Marathon bombers?

Because by Saturday morning, it was as if nothing had ever happened here. No police presence. No international media camped out at the end of the street. The only remnants of Friday's crime scene were a few police barricades pushed against a brick wall.

In a cafe, I overheard a few people talking about Friday's events, clarifying for one another the facts as far as anyone knew them. No one seemed particularly shaken up. Mothers walked by with babies in strollers, people were out walking their dogs, and the Portuguese-speaking men were swapping stories on the sidewalk as usual. The fish market had customers, and shovels lined the outside of the hardware store on Norfolk Street, open for business.

On Friday, I could not have imagined such a quick return to normal. That was a true I-was-there day for me, when the professional met the personal. I was reporting for WGBH Radio, the local NPR station where I work, describing the events unfolding a block from my apartment. My landlady and neighbors had been evacuated. They stood among the media, trying to figure out what was going on, watching as SWAT teams were driven onto the scene. It was cinematic, really.

I noticed a sense of camaraderie among the temporarily displaced. A diner, cafe and convenience store stayed opened to feed the crowd, and Tupelo, a Southern-style restaurant, set up a table outside and served free ribs and cornbread, making the crisis feel a little like a block party, even as the governor ordered a lockdown, and the manhunt for our "armed and dangerous" 19-year-old neighbor continued. At one point during the long, sunny day, police instructed the media and residents to cover our ears, as law enforcement agents were said to be detonating explosives they found inside the suspects' apartment.

Eventually, one of the cross streets opened, and the crowd was able to get closer to the Tsarnaevs' apartment. We could see forensic experts wearing white jumpsuits and yellow boots moving around a car under a blue tarp. Slowly,

the media thinned out, as the police presence dwindled, and some of my neighbors were allowed back into their homes.

On Saturday morning, I walked down Norfolk Street, curious as any other neighbor might have been. There was not even a police car parked outside of the alleged bombers' house. A young man who lived on the second floor was outside, talking with a few straggling journalists. He had left the door to the brown house open, so I went inside. The dark stairwell was filled with debris, and at the top was a boarded-up apartment that police had scoured less than 24 hours earlier.

A gap between the board and the door frame allowed for a glimpse inside, where a pair of pink children's boots stood out among adult shoes stacked neatly on a rack.

Shoes that shared the same sidewalk as me.

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