

"It's an amazingly difficult time," Belinda Pulver (with husband Bill on Aug. 16) told WHO on Aug. 8.

MADDIE PULVER MYSTERY

'We're so RELIEVED'

The arrest of a man suspected of attaching a bomb to a Sydney schoolgirl brings relief to her terrified family but raises more questions

Since the day a balaclava-clad man entered a Sydney home and strapped what he said were plastic explosives to schoolgirl Madeleine Pulver's neck, the girl's family have been a tight-knit group. As evening descends on their harbourside home, one by one, parents Bill and Belinda and children Harry, 20, Maddie, 18, Angus, 16, and the youngest, Archie, move to one bedroom, where the family sleep securely and safely together. But after the arrest of a Sydney man in the US over the alleged extortion attempt, that nightly ritual is a thing of the past. "I have given Maddie a hug—I think she is very relieved," her mother, landscape-company owner Belinda Pulver, 51,

tells WHO of the arrest. "And we are very relieved they can now move back to their own bedrooms, so we're not all sleeping in one room. They can all move on with their lives."

The arrest of a man suspected to have brought that fear on the family was another strange twist in an already bizarre case. On Aug. 15 in the US, the FBI, working with NSW Police, arrested investment banker Paul "Doug" Peters, 50, in La Grange, Kentucky, for an alleged extortion attempt. Peters appeared in a Louisville, Kentucky, court on Aug. 16 and was remanded in custody until his next hearing on Oct. 14. "We have a fairly detailed chain of circumstantial evidence," says NSW Assistant Police

Commissioner Dave Hudson. "We are confident he is responsible for the crime."

A crime as unique as it was terrifying. Authorities have now revealed that the intruder entered the Pulvers' palatial home in leafy Mosman at 2.15 PM on Aug. 3 while Maddie was home alone, studying for her Year 12 trial exams. The man, wearing a blue business shirt and chinos, walked into her room carrying a black aluminium baseball bat and wearing a multi-coloured striped balaclava. According to a court document filed in the Louisville District Court, Maddie "stood up, retreated, and asked the man what he wanted." The intruder said: "Sit down and no-one needs to get hurt."



THE VICTIM

Maddie Pulver in an undated photo. "These people have had their lives turned upside down," says NSW Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione.



The La Grange, Kentucky, house (on Aug. 16) where Paul Peters lived when in the US.

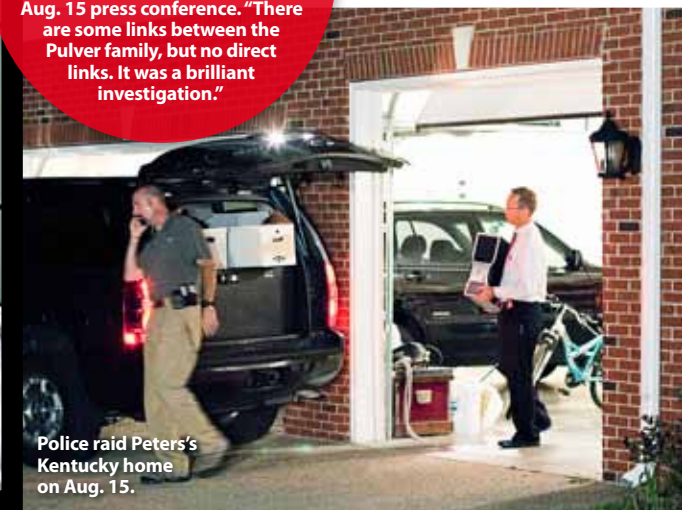


THE ACCUSED

"He would come and stay a month or two, then leave," says a La Grange, Kentucky, neighbour of Paul "Doug" Peters (in his police mugshot).

'BRILLIANT INVESTIGATION'

Paul Peters "became a suspect after he left the country," said Commissioner Scipione in an Aug. 15 press conference. "There are some links between the Pulver family, but no direct links. It was a brilliant investigation."



Police raid Peters' Kentucky home on Aug. 15.

Maddie complied, as the man placed the baseball bat and a backpack on the bed beside her. She noticed he was holding a black box, which the man forced "against her throat and looped a device similar to a bike chain, which was also attached to the box, around her neck." He then also placed a lanyard around her neck which had attached to it a 4Gb USB stick and a plastic folder filled with documents. As he left the room, he said: "Count to two hundred ... I'll be back ... if you move I can see you. I'll be right here."

But after calling out a few times, Maddie realised the intruder had left and sent a text message to her mother, before removing the documents from the plastic sleeve and seeing the word "explosive." On the note, which referenced a character in James Clavell's 1966 novel *Tai-Pan*, the intruder asked the "recipient" to contact him via a supplied email address: "Powerful new technology plastic explosives are located inside the small black combination case delivered to you," it read. "The case is booby trapped. It can ONLY be opened safely, if you follow the instructions and comply with the terms and conditions." Police arrived to find Maddie "crying and hysterical."

After X-rays and tests, police determined the device was free of explosives and removed it from the schoolgirl, who was taken to hospital. The man "carried out a hideous crime," said NSW Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione. "It was 10 hours of torture."

And police would go "all out" to seek the perpetrator of that terror, Scipione told Maddie's father, Bill, the CEO of a software company. According to the extradition document, Peters became a suspect through the supplied Gmail

"I'll be back. If you move I can see you. I'll be right here"

—the intruder

address. It is alleged Peters accessed the email account on Aug. 3, after the faux bomb was placed around Maddie's neck, at a library and a video shop on NSW's Central Coast. It is alleged CCTV footage links him to the locations.

The "compelling" circumstantial evidence led to his arrest by an FBI SWAT team around 3 PM on Aug 15. "The FBI was standing about and they said, 'Get back in your house,'" a neighbour, who asked not to be named, told WHO of the arrest. "It was crazy." Peters, said Scipione, "was surprised."

So, too, are those who knew him. The son of a pilot and physiotherapist, Peters was one of four siblings and studied law and economics at the University of Sydney. He has a sister, a ballet dancer, and two brothers: Wayne, an investment banker, and Brent, who was reportedly once acquitted of attempted murder and heroin supply. "Paul was a really good guy," says a former Scots College student, who asked not to be named. Adds another: "He never did anything by halves. He would study until 2 AM and come to school exhausted."

He commuted between homes on Sydney's Central Coast and Louisville, and was estranged from his American wife, Debra Peters, with whom he has three teenage children. According to some, however, he was trying to save his marriage, even discussing the fact with his NSW Central Coast hairdresser, Tammy Schreiber. "He said he wanted to re-marry his ex-wife," Schreiber tells WHO. Says his next-door neighbour, who asked not to be named: "He was a nice, wonderful man. He wore his little khakis, his oxford shirt. He was just like any kind of suburban dad."

Not according to police. In custody in a Kentucky jail, Peters has been charged with aggravated break and enter, committing an indictable offence and kidnapping. "He will contest these charges," his lawyer Scott C. Cox tells WHO. "He has no criminal history whatsoever." Belinda Pulver has expressed "a lot of relief" with the development, but remains mystified as to a motive. "We look forward to finding out that connection," Belinda Pulver tells WHO. "Why he picked us would be good to know."

■ By Emma Martin and Pam Windsor