

'I wonder if we were too liberal': Jack Letts' mother on her IS convert son

Errr....

Yes.

From the [Telegraph](#)

On the morning of September 2, 2014, Sally Lane received a phone call from her teenage son that would change the course of her life. "Mum, I'm in Syria," Jack Letts, an A-grade student from Oxford, told her over a crackling line.

"You'll get killed, you'll get beheaded," she remembers screaming at him before the connection dropped. "You stupid, stupid boy." As far as she knew, Jack was on a three-month trip to Kuwait with friends, learning Arabic and studying the Koran. But he had travelled into Islamic State territory, where he would profess his hatred for Western ideals and declare himself an "enemy of Britain".

The media published photos of him grinning in camouflage and gave him the nickname "Jihadi Jack", turning him into an unlikely poster boy for one of the most brutal terror groups in history. He was captured and jailed in Syria in 2017, stripped of his British citizenship and held without trial ever since.

In what had been the first real breakthroughs in his case, the Canadian federal court last month ruled that Jack, who has Canadian citizenship through his father, and other nationals being detained in north-eastern Syria have the right to return. But this week Justin Trudeau's government filed an appeal, a decision Ms Lane called a "cruel delay tactic".

A proposal [to repatriate Jack](#) and the handful of other Britons back to the UK proved so politically toxic the idea was quickly abandoned by the Government.

Ms Lane, 60, is publishing a memoir, titled *Reasonable Cause to Suspect*, putting “all the secrets out there” and telling the “real story” in the vain hope that they may help to free her son. *He and Shamima Begum can both stay out there so far as I'm concerned.*

It has been a nearly decade-long crusade – a Kafkaesque ordeal that has seen her lose her job, friends and home. Along the way, she would be convicted of financing terrorism and eventually flee the UK for Canada.

With the Canadian appeal looming, Ms Lane has allowed herself a moment of self-reflection with her book – asking herself whether there was something in his childhood that set him on his path. Was he really the monster the media had made him out to be, and if so, had she helped create it?

“I wondered if they thought Jack’s problems stemmed from his over-liberal parents who hadn’t taken a firm enough hand with him,” she writes. “Judging from the comments from [some newspaper] readers, a portion of the general public certainly believed this to be the case.”

The boys would spend time between their mother’s flat, which Ms Lane shared with “a group of lodgers, including an aggressive heroin addict whose friends regularly robbed the place”, and their father’s.

Mr Letts was born in Canada before moving to the UK in the 1980s to work as a roof thatcher. Mr Letts, who Ms Lane jokingly refers to as “an idealistic, Green anarcho-communist farmer”, joined campaigns calling for independence for East Timor and West Papua, and hosted Timorese separatists in the spare room.

“I valued the fact that they had access to a rich, cultural experience that opened their eyes to worlds beyond Oxford,” she writes. Now she wonders whether this exposure “translated into his desire to fight for justice for Muslims, whom he had been told by his new friends were the ‘most oppressed people on earth’.”

“I wouldn’t call myself a radical lefty as some people are doing. But certainly, Jack was raised to question oppression and imperialism,” Mr Letts has said. “We took him on the Iraq war march and all this kind of stuff.”

Jack in particular was a “high-intensity and demanding child”, Ms Lane writes.

He would later be officially diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), though his parents would reject the doctor’s recommendation of medication in favour of therapy. “He became obsessed with washing, spending hours in the bathroom and spreading wet towels around the house,” she writes

In secondary school, he studied ethics and philosophy and showed a keenness to learn more about Islam, the religion practised by many of his friends. He soon began meeting with imams at a local mosque and “mixing with older students from Kuwait, Qatar and Turkey in coffee shops on Cowley Road”.

“One Saturday evening, as Jack was preparing to go to his discussion group, he announced, ‘Mum, I’m going to convert to Islam’,” Ms Lane says. In Islam, he found a structure to a life he had been craving – washing his hands and feet to pray five times a day.

Ms Lane, who grew up Christian but had long since rejected religion, saw Jack’s new-found faith as a positive channel for his energy until his views began to grow more extreme.

“One of the saddest things of his later Islamic conversion

was, I thought, his refusal to engage with music of any kind,” she writes. “At that stage, he would leave the room if John started playing the guitar, or if I had the radio on. “He rejected not just my food, but everything we stood for, including our ‘Western’ lifestyle.”

At the same time, Jack was experimenting with drugs. . . becoming dependent on marijuana, which only fuelled his paranoia.



Jack standing by the IS-held controlled Tabqa dam in northern Syria holding a finger up to the sky, a picture that earned him the nickname 'Jihadi Jack' | CREDIT: Facebook

Ms Lane recalls thinking the trip to the Middle East could help. “We had arranged the holiday for Jack, hoping that it would positively channel his

academic interest in Islam and allow him to practise his spoken Arabic,” she writes. He was travelling between Kuwait and Jordan just as marauding jihadists were seizing vast swathes of territory in neighbouring Iraq and Syria before declaring their Islamic State. They called for Muslims everywhere to join them. Jack seemed to slowly become taken by the idea of living in a modern-day caliphate.

...the messages on Jack’s Facebook account became disturbingly extreme, seeing him express hatred for the “kuffar” (non-believer) and for the American and British armies targeting IS. They were flagged to police by an old neighbour and family friend, Ms Lane would discover later.

She claims his profile was hacked, yet he was repeating similar beliefs in private.

We only have Jack's account of what happened during this time. Unlike other Britons, he did not appear in any IS propaganda. Later while in custody, he would tell TV interviewers that he had fought on the front-lines and even taught younger recruits about IS's ideology.

From his infrequent messages home, it was apparent Jack had been moving between Syria and Iraq, where he told his mother he had married a local woman from a prominent tribe.

While it is true there was little other hard evidence to ever emerge of his role within IS, terrorism experts have accused Ms Lane of adopting a wilful blindness when it comes to her son.

Over the years, [Ms Lane and Mr Letts](#) have maintained that Jack did not fight for IS, despite later interviews in which he admitted as much himself. "What Jack was actually doing, we had no idea," she writes in her book. "I wondered if he was perhaps part of the secret underground resistance forces against IS and that his angry Facebook messages against the kuffar were part of his cover, as well as born out of genuine horror about the coalition bombings that were killing civilians as well as fighters."

A message came on February 29, 2016, asking for help to pay a smuggler to get him out of IS territory to Turkey. Jack claimed he had disavowed the jihadists and spoken out against them, a crime for which he spent various spells in jail. Ignoring warnings from police, Ms Lane and Mr Letts tried to send Jack £223 – money he said he needed to escape.

Not only was IS likely reading every message, but MI5 was too (she speculates that their home was bugged and phones monitored). The pair were accused of breaking UK terrorism financing laws and officially charged. They were convicted in

2019 and received a suspended sentence of 15 months.

Jack was captured by the SDF fighters during the battle for Raqqa, the heart of IS's caliphate. He admitted in various interviews conducted in the years after that he had been a member of the group, believing in the beginning that they were living the truest form of Islam on Earth.

Ms Lane claims that he was speaking either under duress or threat of torture, saying only what his prisoners instructed him to. She alleges her son has been interrogated countless times by the CIA and tortured by his SDF captors since his arrest.

His OCD has become more pronounced. "It's very bad and gets worse and worse. My cellmates are convinced I have jinn," he told one interviewer in 2019, referring to the Islamic belief that mental illness comes from a form of possession. He reportedly tried to hang himself, as well as slit his wrists, in failed suicide attempts.

She has heard nothing of Jack's Iraqi wife, who is said to have given birth to his son during his detention. After the Home Office revoked Jack's citizenship, Ms Lane spent all her time working on getting Jack to Canada.

...she says "public opinion would never be on our side. [Various ministers], the FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), a weak Labour party, Brexit, populism, Twitter, and general Islamophobia had all made sure of that."

She says she has not been met with the same hostility in Ottawa as she was in the UK, where she believes her family was fed to the wolves. She says the "unfair" British coverage of her son – the country's highest-profile white convert – meant Jack effectively faced a trial by the media.

It was late last night that I was reading this and I didn't have time to post it before church this morning. But I'm sure

I didn't dream the dozens of comments berating this lady for being, as my old friend here, Mary Jackson used to say a dozy bint, who was at best naive and at worse neglectful. But they are all gone now.