

Building a Bridge

David Kaczynski and Gary Wright

2006

Contents

Introduction	3
Gary	3
David	5
Gary	6
David	7
Gary	10
David	11
Gary	11
David	12
Gary	13
David	14
Gary	15
David	17

Introduction

The case of Theodore Kaczynski, better known as the Unabomber, is one of the highest profile and longest running cases in American history. For over seventeen years, beginning in 1978, the Unabomber strategically placed and mailed explosive devices that were designed to maim and kill people. Mr. Kaczynski was directly responsible for the death of three people and the injury of twenty-three others. While these victims were the primary targets of his attacks, an exponentially larger group was also seriously affected by his actions, including the victims' families, friends, co-workers and, in some cases, entire communities.

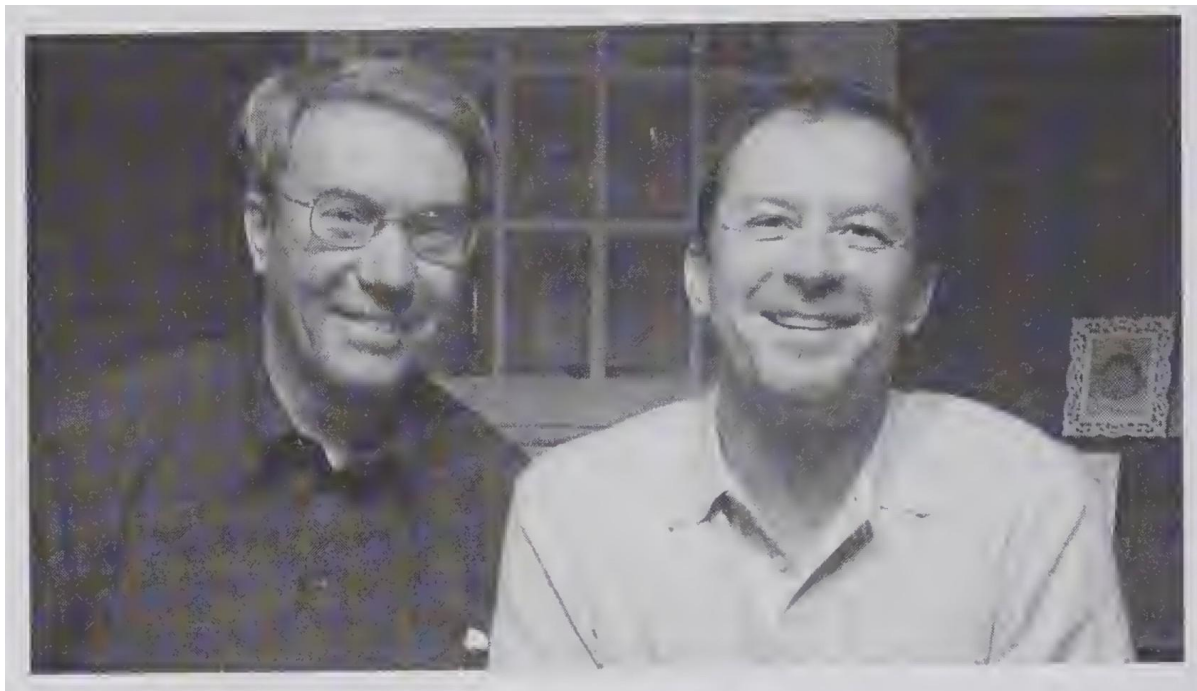
In this chapter David Kaczynski, the brother of Ted Kaczynski who turned him in to authorities, and Gary Wright, a victim of one of Theodore Kaczynski's devices, share their personal experiences with the complicated, confusing and sometimes painful journey associated with the death penalty and the healing and forgiveness process.

Gary

February 20, 1987, was very uncharacteristic for a winter day in Utah. The sun was shining, and at 10:30 in the morning it was fairly warm. I was driving back to my office with the sunroof of my car open after completing some early morning business appointments. I was listening to music as I pulled my car into the rear parking lot of CAAMS, Inc., a family-owned computer sales and service company that I had co-founded.

As I drove into the parking stall, I noticed what appeared to be a block of wood about thirteen inches long and four inches square, with four nails protruding from it. It was sitting in a spot where someone might run over it, and I thought, I had better move it, so it doesn't damage a tire. After I parked the car and began to walk over to throw what appeared to be a piece of scrap wood into the garbage dumpster, I noticed that one of the protruding nails was slightly bent, and they all appeared to be made of chrome. The way they reflected the sunlight struck me as a little odd, but at the time I didn't think anything of it. The object appeared to be two 2" x 4" pieces of wood that were nailed together, and I thought, "This looks like it must have come from a construction site." As I bent down to pick it up, I placed my fingers on the end of the longer of the two pieces, and as I moved it something happened that was very wrong.

In a millisecond, I felt a "click" and I heard something that sounded like the scream of a jet fighter flying overhead. When I looked around, I realized that somehow I had moved over twenty feet and I was jumping up and down as if I were on a pogo stick. I looked up and could see the overhead electrical and telephone wires that were attached to the building and they were moving in a wave pattern while pieces of red tape and debris fell around me like confetti. For some reason everything was moving in slow motion, and it sounded like I was swimming under water because I could barely hear



David Kaczynski and Gary Wright, 2005.

anything. As I was jumping and moving around the parking lot, I slowly began to recognize that I was yelling for help. In that moment, I thought someone had shot me with a shot gun, and my mind raced with the idea that I may not make it through whatever had just happened. At that point, I heard a very deep voice inside my head that I did not recognize say, “You will be all right.” I wasn’t sure if it was my own subconscious speaking to me or something else, but I did begin to feel a little more at ease, and my thoughts became crystal clear.

I looked down at my clothes and could see the remnants of my pants. My shoes had white burn marks on them, and I couldn’t figure out why my voice sounded so strange. I saw blood beginning to seep through my white dress shirt, and I could see what looked like needles threaded through the cloth. They turned out to be wood fragments. As the bomb exploded it burst into thousands of needle-like projectiles. Many of these were impaled in and around my neck making it difficult to move. The surgeon I met at the hospital later told me that I looked like a porcupine.

At this point the rear door of my office opened and members of my family and other co-workers rushed outside to see what had happened. From the looks on their faces, I knew that it must be bad. My father had been a Utah highway patrolman, and one of my brothers was involved with the local ski patrol. They took a quick look at my injuries and then walked me into my office and laid me on the floor until an ambulance arrived to transport me to the hospital. Once I arrived, the doctors

and surgeons discovered that the ulnar nerve in my left arm had been severed. They performed plastic surgery on my face, tried to repair the damaged nerve, and removed pieces of shrapnel from my body. From the trajectory path of some of the nails it was evident that I would probably have lost part of my eyesight if I had not been wearing sun glasses.

When the FBI spoke to me about who they suspected in this crime, I was more than surprised. I have always read a lot of the newspapers and magazines, but up to this point I had never heard of the person called the “Unabomber.”

David

Since he had quit his job as an assistant professor at the University of California at Berkeley in the late 1960s, my brother Ted had been living in an isolated cabin along the continental divide in Montana. At one point he’d written to me with some pride that he’d lived for a whole year, kept his accounts, and managed to survive on just twelve cents a day. He had no running water, no electricity, and no telephone, so most of our communication was through the mail.

One day my wife Linda said to me, “David, I think your brother is sick.” I guess I didn’t have her objectivity. My first response was, “Well, you know, this is the way Ted is. This is the way he thinks.” And she said, “David, read this letter. People who are healthy do not think this way.” It was at that point that we took some of Ted’s letters to a psychiatrist and began to explore whether there was anything we could do to try to find out what was wrong, to see if there was anything we could do to help him or intervene for his benefit in some way.

Some years later, in the late summer of 1995, Linda sat me down and said, “Dave, don’t get angry with me, but—I’ve been kind of burdened with this— did it ever occur to you, as even a remote possibility, that your brother Ted might be the Unabomber?” During this time there was a flurry of newspaper articles about how the Unabomber had sent his manifesto to the press, demanding that it be published. The newspapers were debating whether it should be published or not. It had also been revealed that law enforcement officials thought the Unabomber had come from Chicago, since that was where the first bombs had gone off. There were also connections with the University of California at Berkeley, since two devices had been set off there. Linda thought, “Gee, Ted grew up in Chicago and later taught at Berkeley, and now there’s this anti-technology manifesto.” She knew, through me, that my brother had a long-standing preoccupation with the problems associated with technology.

At that point, I was really dismissive. I said, “You don’t know him. I know him. He’s not capable of this.” But I promised to read the manifesto if it were ever published.

Several weeks later, I read that manifesto, and I was determined to find something that disqualified it as Ted’s writing. Unfortunately, I couldn’t. I still thought there was only a slim chance that he’d written it. I told Linda, “Well, maybe there’s one chance

in a thousand.” In fact, I went to the library and read everything I could, hoping to find something that would eliminate Ted. I looked at the police sketch and felt that it didn’t particularly look like Ted. The description was of someone three inches taller, ten years younger, a different hair color. I thought this was good. It wasn’t a match. On the other hand, through my research I had learned that there was an association with Salt Lake City. I knew Ted had spent a summer working there. So that was another piece of the puzzle: the realization that I could connect him with each of the three places.

Linda and I spent about three weeks combing through the manifesto and bunches of my brother’s old letters, and it seemed as if through that process (not that I found the proverbial smoking gun or anything) I could almost hear my brother’s voice in the manifesto.

I remember waking up on a particular morning and feeling a crushing sense of depression. My first thought was, “Gee, that’s the worst nightmare I’ve ever had.” But then as the cobwebs melted away, I realized it wasn’t a nightmare. I was literally considering the possibility that my own brother might be a serial bomber, killer of three people and the most wanted criminal in America. I walked to the breakfast table where Linda was already seated, eating some cornflakes. I sat down, looked up at her and said, “You know, Hon, I think there might be a fifty-fifty chance that Ted wrote the manifesto.” It was the first time I’d acknowledged such a strong possibility that Ted might be the person responsible.

Gary

When a bomb explodes and razor sharp pieces of metal and debris are moving at over 20,000 feet per second, the physical wounds inflicted vary in degree from superficial abrasions and burns to deep lacerations and potentially the loss of limbs or life. Much of how badly a person is injured is sheer luck and depends entirely on where the deadly shrapnel enters the body.

The physical injuries that I received were spread across my entire body and are consistent with what you would expect to find when a bomb explodes. I required three separate surgeries to reconstruct nerves and to move and graft tendons in my left arm and hand. I had extensive plastic surgery to my face, and hundreds of metal and wood fragments were removed from areas throughout my body. To this day, over eighteen years since the explosion, I still remove pieces of shrapnel that continue to rise from below the surface of my skin.

As difficult as it was recovering from these physical injuries, the emotional and psychological challenges were tougher. For a minute sit back and imagine what it is like to constantly wonder what would make a stranger want to kill you, to continually search your memory for any small indiscretion or act that could trigger this kind of

hostility, and to be overwhelmed with the feelings of rage and the heartache of knowing that you will never again be the same person.

The complex series of emotions that I felt after the bombing ranged from happiness for being alive to anger, frustration, and fear that the stranger responsible for my injuries might strike back at me or my family again. My days were fragmented at best, and my ability to cope with the issues of injury, family pressure, law enforcement, and media drained my patience and severely stressed my emotional capabilities. I spiraled down like a leaf in the wind with no bottom in sight. I became irritated and angry at the slightest things and started to close off the people that were closest to me. As the pressure increased, I began to shut down, withdraw, and internalize my feelings about the event. I only wanted to deal with how I was feeling and didn't really care about how others were coping with the changes in their lives.

I struggled with these feelings for between six and seven years, looking for answers as to why I felt so strange and unsettled. I had generally been a very happy and optimistic person with a great outlook on life, but during the first two years after the bombing, I found that my patience and capacity to cope with issues had dwindled to the point that I was becoming unbearable. At times I was happy, and then suddenly I was so angry it was unbelievable. It was during this time that I made the decision that I would find a way to feel whole again. After speaking with several counselors and determining that they weren't quite sure about why I was having the feelings I was experiencing, I decided to look for answers on my own. I started to read books, pamphlets, and any other material that might be related to healing after a violent event. I soon discovered that the path each person must pass down as he or she progresses through the healing process is as unique as each of the people on that road of discovery. Without a road map or guidance, each is free to move in any chosen direction. Some may progress rapidly while others might struggle and become mired in emotional turmoil.

This was also the beginning of a seven-year drought where the Unabomber didn't send or place any devices. That is probably a result of the now famous sketch of a person in a hooded sweatshirt and sunglasses that was drawn from information provided by my secretary, who witnessed Ted place the bomb at my business.

David

I can never forget the day I told Linda that I thought there was a fifty-fifty chance that Ted might have committed these crimes. We were both very upset. We were consumed with it. The word "Unabomber" seemed too frightening to say out loud. Is he or isn't he? What does this mean? What does this ask of us? We talked about "it" on into the night. As we lay there in bed, sleeplessly, I tried to connect my brother as I remembered him with a person who might be capable of such horrific crimes. Instead, I'm having memories that have an opposite tone. I'm remembering things from many

years back: fond memories, camping trips, playing softball together on an informal team one year.

I told Linda one story that really had an effect on her. When I was two and a half years old, our family moved from the Back-of-the-Yards neighborhood of Chicago out to the suburbs. It was our first house and my first back yard as a little boy. I can recall that during that first summer I'd push my way out through the screen door and play around in the backyard. However, I had trouble getting back inside the house since at two and a half I was so short I couldn't reach the doorknob. But one day Ted, who was about ten years old at the time, came out of the house and began fiddling with something at the back door. I remember I walked up close to him, thinking, "What's Teddy doing?" Always a very ingenious person, he'd taken a little spool of thread from our mom's sewing kit, a hammer and a nail from our dad's tool kit, and he nailed the bare spool onto the wooden screen door so that it made a makeshift door handle that I could reach.

So, I'm reliving this memory forty-two years later, wondering if my brother's the Unabomber. As I lay there, I hear a little sound coming from Linda. The room was dim but there was a little light shining through the shade from the street lamp outside. I looked over and I could see that her face was just flowing with tears.

That was a very important moment for me because it might have been the first time that Linda really saw the full human dimensions of this tragedy; in fact, the first moment that she saw Ted as a human being. Up until then, he had been the weird brother-in-law, the mentally ill guy, the hermit in Montana, now perhaps, even the Unabomber. But on hearing this story, Linda understood what a deep bond I had with Ted, and that this was really tearing me apart. And I suppose, as well, that no matter what happened, no matter how twisted Ted may have become, that nice little ten-year-old boy who cared about his baby brother was part of who he was. It was part of his history. It would always be there. And this was just an enormous tragedy for our family.

But remembering that Ted was human didn't make our dilemma any easier. Actually, it intensified it. We were facing a situation where any choice we made could lead to someone's death. What would it be like to wake up one day and realize that somebody else had been killed and that we had been in a position to prevent it and failed to do anything? We'd have the blood of some innocent person on our hands. How do you live with that for the rest of your life? On the other hand, how do you live with turning in a brother who ends up being executed? How do you face your mother, an elderly woman who's worried for years about her son because of his estrangement from the family and his emotional problems? When you see in her eyes that she knows he's being executed because you turned him in? Those weren't pleasant thoughts.

I think it's important to note that our decision to go to the authorities was a couple's decision. Often, we think that there's got to be one heroic conscience that makes a moral decision. But from that moment on, we were really together in this. Linda had been a philosophy professor at a small college in upstate New York for eighteen years.

Among the courses she taught were courses in ethics. She has always been a very principled person.

I was working as a counselor in a youth shelter for runaway and homeless kids. I had often advised kids, "Even if you don't fully trust the school principal or the police, you've got to find some adult that you do trust if it's a matter of protecting someone's health and safety. You've got to do the right thing. You won't regret it." Well, it's easy to give advice and set standards for other people. But here I was confronted with a situation where I would have to live up to this advice or live with the realization that I'd just been saying those words to make myself feel good.

There was still a lot that had to be wrestled with. But there was a clear sense that we couldn't just sit by and hope for the best, or say that it wasn't our job, that no one should expect a family member to turn in a family member. At least if we took some action, we weren't helpless. We'd do something to stop the bombs. And then, perhaps, if we communicated to the authorities that Ted was mentally ill, it might save his life. But we had to take on that first responsibility first.

At that time, and really for a couple of years after, I was deeply conflicted about the decision. This was my brother. Brothers are supposed to protect brothers. I love Ted. I know that he had loved me. I remember at one of our first meetings with the FBI, one of the agents showed me a map of rural Montana and asked me to point out the place on the map where my brother lived. I remember walking to the map and putting my finger gingerly down on the spot where Ted's cabin was located and feeling ... how painful that was for me.

We had wanted to spare Mom from this for as long as possible. Even when we approached the FBI, we didn't feel certain that Ted was responsible. We hoped that they would find some way to rule him out as a suspect. But eventually I got the call I'd been dreading. An agent we'd been working closely with said, "David, we've done everything possible to rule out your brother as a suspect, but unfortunately he's moved to the top of our suspect list. We're now at a point in the investigation where we need to speak with your mom. Do you think you could arrange an interview for us?"

I remember going to her apartment. It was on a Saturday morning. She opened the door and I saw her face change. Obviously, my anguish must have been written all over me. She said, "David, something's wrong! You've got to tell me. What is it?" I said, "Yeah, Mom. I think you better sit down."

Her first reaction was a mother's reaction, perhaps a mother's intuition. "It's Ted! Is it something about Ted?" I said, "Mom, as far as I know, he's in good health. But I do have something very troubling to tell you." She sat down in this little La-Z-Boy chair, where I always picture her reading or watching television. I was much too agitated to sit down myself. I was kind of pacing the room, trying to find some way to deliver the news painlessly. But there was no way to do that. Before long, I'm crying a little bit. Mom is just sitting there in that chair. Not saying a word. Looking at me, with this fixed look of horror on her face. At that moment I realized that not many relationships are tested in quite this cruel way. How could I be certain that she'd even love me after

I told her that I had reported my suspicions about Ted to the FBI? I got to the end of what I had to say and I said, “Mom, I think there might be a chance that Ted is involved. Mom, I’ve even taken the step of calling the FBI, and they’re currently investigating him.”

I’ll always remember what Mom did next. It was just an extraordinary gesture. She got up out of her chair. She is a very small woman. I’m a little over six feet tall and she’s a little under five feet tall. She walked up to me, reached up her arms around my neck, drew me down and put a kiss on my cheek. The first thing she said was, “David, I can’t imagine what you’ve been going through.”

It was amazing to me that in this most terrible moment, her first concern was for my feelings. And then she said probably the most comforting words I could have heard. She said, “David, I know that you love Ted. I know you wouldn’t have done this unless you felt that you had to.” In many ways, she’s truly a hero of this story. Probably at that moment half the weight of the world came off my shoulders. I realized that I hadn’t lost my mother’s love and that she, Linda, and I were now in this together.

After telling me this, Mom said, “You know, David, I just can’t imagine ... I mean, Ted loves animals. He’s never been violent. I just don’t think he’s capable of doing these sorts of things. Maybe it’s a good thing that you’ve contacted the authorities. They’re going to investigate. They’re going to find out that he’s innocent. All of this will go away like a bad dream.” I think she felt that very strongly at the outset.

I don’t know what happened to Ted. I mean, I can read the diagnoses. I can have them carefully explained to me. It doesn’t exhaust the question that we always ask: “Why? Why? Why?”

Gary

As with any act of violence, people would continually ask me, “How are you ever going to get over this? Can you forgive the person who did this to you?” In the beginning I did not have the answers to these questions, nor did I understand the enormity associated with the healing process that would allow me to answer them. I struggled for about six years trying to bring closure to an event for which I didn’t have a face, a name, or a reason to associate my injuries. I wavered in my ability to accept what had happened, and I wasn’t entirely sure of how I was supposed to get over the restless feelings I had.

One event in particular stands out in my mind. I was driving down the street on a day similar to when I was first injured, and I had a thought that was so crystal clear it actually surprised me. It went something like this: If Christ was tortured, nailed to a cross, crucified, and he could still forgive a criminal and the people who were killing him, how could I hold myself above forgiving the person who had terrorized and attacked me? That single question slapped me in the face with a dose of reality

and honestly allowed me to begin to forgive this person, even though I had no idea who he was.

I believe that forgiveness is a very complicated word because it can take on many forms and have a different meaning to each person. For many people, saying that they forgive someone is an act of saying that what you did was acceptable. I don't believe in this concept. I prefer to believe that it means letting go. Not unconditionally accepting an act of hatred or violence, not forgetting the event or a family member who is no longer with you, but allowing you to love and honor yourself and those around you. Accepting that while your life is forever changed you will permit yourself to live and experience it again.

I learned of the arrest of Theodore Kaczynski on my 35th birthday while working at my office. One of my co-workers said he had just read of the capture of a reclusive man in a remote area of Montana. I immediately looked for myself to verify the information and was still skeptical. Having had a prior false notification of a person being held in custody, I was afraid to accept that they had truly found the man responsible for changing the course of my life. Several hours later, I received a telephone call from the head of the Unabomber task force. He indicated that the physical evidence was very good and that shortly they would be formally charging him with the crimes.

I watched the news that night, and for the first time saw video of the arrest and was able to place a name and face to my assailant. The emotions were overwhelming and I began to cry, realizing I had spent nine years of my life dealing with an unknown enemy who had tried to kill me. I also realized that this was the beginning of another chapter of my story and that I might be involved in a death penalty case.

David

When Ted was arrested, they found, in addition to a carbon copy of the manifesto and other incriminating evidence, a live bomb under his bed, apparently waiting to be mailed to somebody. So there was no question that he was responsible, or that he probably would have struck again. I just look back and thank God that Linda and I had the insight and the courage to do what we did. We were able to stop it.

Gary

Soon after I knew who was responsible for my injuries, I began to realize that the perpetrator's family had also been traumatized by this event. I had only ever seen David or his mom in brief television or news clips, and the way that they approached this tragedy was so admirable. They had always demonstrated almost a reverence toward victims and their families even though they themselves were experiencing a great deal of their own pain. I thought to myself that there isn't a lot of difference

between a victim's and a perpetrator's family when it comes to an act of violence, and I felt a great deal of compassion for the Kaczynskis.

David

After my brother's arrest, there was a period of time where the Justice Department began signaling its intention to seek the death penalty for Ted. I was feeling pretty sorry for myself, and I remember Linda, maybe having heard that one time too many, saying to me, "You know, David, there are other people in a lot of pain over this." My first reaction was to say, "No, my pain is special. You know, I turned in my brother. It's not only pain and loss, it's guilt." And she said, "David, there are people who've lost body parts. There are people who've lost their dearest loved one. There's a lot more pain here than just your own."

My wife and I are Buddhists, and part of our practice involves a morning sitting meditation. On the day following that conversation, Linda set three candles up on the altar in our meditation room. I didn't have to ask what the candles were for. They represented the three people my brother had killed. I think that was my first real awakening to the realization that there was another "side" to this tragedy, and that there was a kind of connection I had with those people on the other side.

It was almost by chance that I got to speak to Gary at all. Linda and I had asked a friend of ours to do some research and find addresses for the victims so that we could write to them. We wanted to communicate how badly we felt about the terrible harm that Ted had caused. We also hoped they would realize that when we asked the government to spare Ted's life, it didn't mean we were treating his crimes lightly. We didn't have Gary's address at that point. We ended up getting only his phone number. I remember thinking maybe I should give this guy a call, then thinking in the next second, no maybe I better not. I hoped that some contact with a victim might be possible—that as human beings we might be able to talk, share perspectives, and maybe help each other. But I was afraid, too, that I could just as easily be greeted with a blast of anger. I was feeling very sad and vulnerable. Now I just feel very fortunate that it was Gary.

When I finally made the decision to place the call, I took a big gulp and dialed Gary's phone number and tried to think of what I was going to say. When the phone picked up on the other end, a voice said, "You have reached the Wright house at the wrong time." It was an answering machine, and I wasn't prepared for that. I left an awkward message explaining who I was and said that I'd like to talk if he'd be open to that. I said I'd call back later.

I guess Gary was a little prepared and it didn't strike him completely out of the blue when I called again. When I finally spoke with him it was just amazing. I was braced for perhaps a blast of anger and instead I just got real warmth. He said that he understood that my brother was ill and that he thought it took a lot of courage

and guts to do what we had done. He also said that he appreciated it. He told me that I should never blame myself for what my brother had done. And I shouldn't blame myself if the worst happens from our point of view and Ted were executed. He said, "If you ever want to talk about this ... I've been dealing with the trauma of this for a number of years. Just give me a call."

Here was a guy just about killed, who then deals for years with uncertainty and worry, wondering if the killer's going to come back to finish the job. Finally, nine or ten years later, he gets a call from the brother of the person who did this, and he takes the call. He almost takes me under his wing, and says, "David, this is just the beginning for you. I've been dealing with this for nine years. You know, it can get better." So, as this very public process was playing out, I had this resource. Someone I could talk to on the "other side" to say, "You're a good guy, Dave, and I feel for you." I can't tell you how much that meant to me, and to Linda, and to Mom.

Gary

I received a telephone call from a friend of David and Linda's in late October 1996. The friend said that David would like to call me on behalf of his family. Although I was somewhat surprised to hear the request, I thought I would probably do the same thing if I were in his position, and I told her that would be fine.

I was washing dishes one night shortly before Thanksgiving when David called. He introduced himself and said that he wanted to apologize on behalf of his family for what his brother had done. I could tell that he was uncomfortable, and I did my best to make him feel at ease. I told him that while I sincerely appreciated and accepted the apology, he and his family could not bear the burden of his brother's actions. I said that as painful as it was, he needed to let it go and move forward with his life, and that if he ever needed to talk he could call me at any time. David said he didn't expect me to be so kind, thanked me for the invitation, and indicated that he would take me up on the offer. About two weeks later he called again, beginning what was the first of many telephone conversations.

When I tell people that David and I are friends, the response I get most often is, "You're kidding." For a while, I didn't understand why. And then it hit me: "Why wouldn't they think that?" The typical stereotype portrayed in movies and books states that the victim's and the perpetrator's families must hate each other, that there is an invisible line drawn through the center of a courtroom that cannot be crossed, and that a single act defines the value system of an entire family. If logic is applied, we know this is not true.

Ted's case was ultimately pled out and a jury trial was unnecessary. The sentencing hearing itself was very tough, with a lot of emotion and pain that was expressed. It was probably one of the most poignant points of my life. I was allowed to speak directly to Ted. I had the option to sit next to the prosecution, to face the judge at a podium,

or to sit in the witness box. I chose to sit in the witness box and face a man I had never met who had tried to kill me. I read a rather lengthy statement and during my presentation, there was one defining moment that changed the course of the entire proceeding. It was when I said, "Ted, I do not hate you. I learned to forgive and heal a long time ago. Without this ability I would have become kindling for your cause." You have no idea how powerful that statement was. For the first time, I found a chink in the armor of the man responsible for causing so much damage and pain to so many people. He did not know how to handle this statement, and I watched him sit straight up, stop what he was doing and look right back at me. In his eyes, I saw something I will never forget. It was a look of shock and not knowing how to handle the situation. It was then that I realized that the balance of power had been transferred to me.

Many people have asked, how did you get past this. I tell them that I had to make a change in the way I looked at life and appreciate what I have been blessed with, that I found new ways to stretch my belief system because for too long I had looked in the mirror at a face that was grieving. I learned to simplify and appreciate the truly wonderful things in life that I would miss if I weren't able to move forward down a path of forgiveness. I also told them that in working toward forgiveness I realized that the implementation of the death penalty in this case would not help me to heal.

David

After the trial, I received a call from a law enforcement chaplain. She said that there was a victim's family that had requested a meeting with Mom and me, and wondered if we'd be open to that. I asked Mom and she said, "Well, I think we should go."

We were taken to a room in the courthouse. As we walked into the room, we saw three women there. One was the widow of somebody my brother had killed. One was her sister. And the third was her husband's sister. We walked in and kind of said, "We're sorry, we're sorry," and we began to cry. We always realized that no matter how much we said that we were sorry, or how sincerely, it wouldn't undo the harm that was done.

The widow spoke for the family and said that they'd wanted to take this opportunity to thank us. That they knew what we had done must have been very difficult. She also said that she wanted us to know that all they had ever really wanted was for the violence to stop. I think they were telling us that they hadn't needed the death penalty for their sense of justice or closure. That was very, very meaningful to us.

On the other hand, here is my mom. She's facing three women whose lives have been just shattered by her son. I think she felt a deep need to communicate to them that her son was not a monster, but a very, very sick person. So she began talking to them about schizophrenia, trying to make them understand. But you know, it's not with our brains that we understand such things. I don't think they were ready yet for what Mom was trying to tell them. She was seated in a chair, and I was standing

behind her, with my hands on the back of the chair. As I looked over her head, I saw that the faces of the women didn't look pleased. Maybe they thought Mom was making excuses for Ted. In fact, the widow said suddenly, "He knew what he was doing." It was a very intense moment. The room was suddenly frozen in silence. What had been an attempt to reach out in compassion, with the very best of intentions, looked like it was blocked. We'd come so far, but now there was this gulf of pain and loss separating us. You could sort of see to the other side, but there was no bridge to the other side.

Mom, at that moment, kind of instinctively dropped her head and said, "I wish he had killed me instead of your husband." All she had really wanted to accomplish in life was to be a good mother, to nurture her children so that they would be happy, maybe so that they'd leave the world a better place for having been there. Yet here, at least with her eldest son, the result was a disaster. In her mind, I don't think she had anything to live for at that moment. But as I'm looking over her head, I happened to be looking at the widow and I could see that she's just stricken by what Mom had said. In fact, she got out of her chair and knelt down beside my mom's chair. She put her hand on my mom's shoulder, touched her lightly, and said, "Oh, Mrs. Kaczynski, don't do this to yourself. You're not responsible. Don't ever think that you're responsible." That was amazing for my mother to hear.

That experience was so powerful for me. I remember leaving the room that day probably a very different person. Thinking about the dignity that was present there at that moment; the honesty and the good intentions; the empathy that comes from acknowledging another person's loss. I really felt what a fine thing the human heart is, that the human soul is. That there is this core of decency that really redeems us. I mean, it really is the only thing we have to cling to when the worst happens. It was so much in evidence in the room that evening. It made me proud to be human.

Gary

There is no rational reason why I am standing here today. It just wasn't my time to go and I beat the laws of physics. For some reason, I was able to pick up that device in the only way possible that allowed every major piece of shrapnel to miss my body.

It is my sincere belief that there is an incredible amount of compassion and understanding that can be provided through a connection with a person from the perpetrator's family. David and I call this "Building a Bridge" because the bridge connects two families that are looking across a great abyss and feel isolated from one another and helpless or uncomfortable to offer any assistance or consolation.

My conversations with David and his family allowed me to humanize the event and understand things that I otherwise would never have known. They helped me realize that a perpetrator does not represent the morals, values, or dreams of an entire family and that there can be extenuating circumstances that are never presented in the courtroom. That many very good and upstanding people who have pride, integrity,

and incredible values, unnecessarily wear their family's name with a sense of dishonor because of the actions of a single individual.

While I know that it is not possible for everyone to connect in the way that David and I have, it may be possible to have an intermediary ask questions of the perpetrator's family that may bring some comfort and understanding to the event. To ask questions that otherwise might have gone unanswered and could have provided some relief to the victims, their families, and friends.

I am thankful that David made that phone call in October 1996. Because he did, we have been able to support each other through some very difficult times. We have learned a great deal about each other, our families, and the healing process. We jointly speak on the subjects of the death penalty, the difficulties of healing, and the act of forgiveness. Most importantly, we have been blessed with the gift of friendship.

Being a survivor of violence can teach a person so many lessons about life and those around us. I learned that when something terrible happens, in the beginning when things are fresh, there are times for anger, grief, depression, confusion, and the need for retribution. Later, when our mind and human spirit begin to heal, there is also a time for forgiveness and compassion. In some ways, I think I have been blessed to have had each of these experiences because it has forced me to question my beliefs and actions toward others. It has also made me realize that even though this world shows us a side of humanity that is full of violence and rage, there is also a side of us that is able to let go and move forward.

This has been especially true regarding my thoughts on the death penalty. I know without a doubt that if Ted Kaczynski had been executed, it would not have helped me or decreased the amount of time that was necessary for me to heal. In fact, I think it would have extended that period of time and that I would always have felt a severe loss for David and his family. It is something that I would have felt terrible about each time someone mentioned the case. My father has always said, "There are things much worse in this world than death." I believe one of those things is the necessity of a perpetrator to live with and think about his actions. It is so much more difficult to do this than just close your eyes and go to sleep. Besides, if we put another to death, it isn't the person we execute who suffers, it's his family.

My son, a wise sixteen-year-old who studies Kung Fu, gave me a note from a book written by a martial artist that says, "It is compassion rather than the principle of justice which can guard us against being unjust to our fellow man." This is an Eastern principle that has been around for thousands of years, and I think much of the world could benefit from its wisdom, especially when applied to the principles of the death penalty. I have always felt that the human mind is the most powerful force in the universe and that true healing always comes from within.

David

If we think about what justice consists of, it's got to be more than retribution. I think if there's been one very disturbing trend in the past ten or fifteen years it is the equation of justice with retribution: the notion that there is no meaning to the word justice beyond imposing retribution—the harsher the better, it seems. What we've got to do is to take back the ideal of justice from the impulse of vengeance. We've got to recover the principle of human dignity. We've got to recover from hatred and all the various forms of denial that go with it. We've got to say, "Look, we're all in this together. We are all human beings."

I don't think vengeance has a place in a system of justice. I think justice, for me, is that which draws out our humanity and our essential human dignity. In my view, there can't be justice without wisdom, and there can't be real wisdom without compassion. If you recognize that it's a human being there, that there is a kind of human presence there, you respond to those people in a very different way, at a deeper level. You can and should hold them accountable. You can grieve for their loss of humanity. You may even feel impelled to help them, although they've done something terrible. The notion that we're going to beat down people, who probably got in this situation because they were damaged to begin with, is contrary to my understanding of justice. For me, justice is born out of the heart. It's a deep human dimension. It's ultimately that which connects us all. And I think to say, "Well, certain people are disposable, or certain people we just need to get rid of," violates that principle of justice, the inclusiveness of a community of justice and a community of conscience.

I think it's a real tragedy that my brother, with his promise, with some of the sensitivity that I know he had, surrendered to his demons and left the world a far worse place, a poorer place for having been there. I think it was the delusions, the confusion, the fear—all of the things that came with his isolation and his mental illness—that distorted his understanding of his place in the world. I think he felt ultimately very disconnected. It's really the sense of connection that heals us, that creates justice, that creates community. And Ted was so isolated he lost his sense of being connected to others.

David Kaczynski is executive director of New Yorkers Against the Death Penalty (NYADP) and the brother of Theodore Kaczynski—the so-called Unabomber—who was arrested in 1996 after David and his wife Linda approached the FBI with their suspicions that Theodore might be involved in a series of bombings that caused three deaths and numerous injuries over 17 years. Despite his diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia, Theodore was charged capitally and only avoided the death penalty after his family waged a two-year campaign to convince the U.S. Justice Department that Theodore's delusions had precipitated his violent behavior. Under pressure from

the media and advocacy groups including the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, the Justice Department offered a plea bargain that spared Theodore's life, but it never publicly acknowledged that Theodore's mental illness was a mitigating factor. In 1998, David and Linda received a one million dollar reward from the Justice Department for their role in the Unabom investigation, which they subsequently dedicated—minus attorney's fees and taxes—to the victims and their families. With help from the Community Foundation for the Capital Region, they set up the Unabom Survivors Fund, which distributed \$680,000 to victims of the assaults. Prior to joining NYADP, David was assistant director of the Equinox shelter for runaway and homeless youth in Albany, where he counseled and advocated for troubled, neglected and abused youth in the Capital District. As director of NYADP and as a board member of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, he is currently focused on a campaign to ban the death penalty for people with serious mental illnesses. Through his life and his work, David has sought solutions to human problems through understanding and compassion as opposed to violence and coercion. His story touches on the things we must learn and the balances we must achieve to keep our sense of humanity alive through adversity and crisis. David is currently writing a book on violence and healing with Gary Wright, who was seriously injured by one of Theodore Kaczynski's bombs in 1987.

Gary Wright has worked in the information technology and biopharmaceutical industries for more than twenty-five years. Much of his career has been spent in the development and launching of new companies and their associated products in the international and domestic marketplaces. In this position he traveled extensively through Europe, South America, and Asia Pacific. In 1987 he was nearly killed by one of Theodore Kaczynski's bombs. After three surgeries, his physical recovery was nearly complete, but he continued to struggle with emotional effects of the trauma. Eventually, Gary's deep sense of spirituality led him to a path of healing. When David Kaczynski telephoned him in the autumn of 1996 to apologize for the harm his brother had caused, Wright not only accepted the apology but reached out to him with an open heart. Over the years, the two have become close friends. Together they have appeared on many television programs, and Wright frequently speaks publicly regarding the issues of healing and forgiveness after a traumatic event. He is the father of two children: daughter Shadell, 24, and son Garet, 16. He is an avid road cyclist and traveler, and he supports and enjoys the arts.

The Ted K Archive

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