

# David Kaczynski at Politics & Prose

January 30, 2016

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David Kaczynski popped into Politics & Prose in Washington, D.C. to talk about his book *Every Last Tie*.

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In this unique and powerful family memoir, Kaczynski, an anti-death penalty activist, recounts how he became involved in the movement when his brother, Ted, was identified as the Unabomber—identified, in fact, by David and handed over to the FBI after the agonizing recognition of what his brother had done. The author details his childhood, reporting that his older brother was a gifted mathematician, but lonely, and that Ted gradually became withdrawn, angry, and prone to erratic behavior. With compassion and understanding, he meditates on the possibilities of reconciliation and the need for deeper understanding of mental illness.

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Non Fiction

**Every Last Tie: The Story of the Unabomber and His Family (Hardcover)**

By David Kaczynski, James Knoll (Afterword by)  
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# Intro

**Moderator:** David Guzinski was the executive director of the Karma Triana Dharma Chakra Tibetan Buddhist Monastery in Woodstock, NY, and served as the executive director of New Yorkers against the death penalty for over 10 years. Every last tie is a heartrending but beautiful book. In it, David discusses his love for his brother Ted, the experience of losing their brother, he knew to mental illness, the decision to help the FBI stop his brother from committing acts of horrible violence, and the aftermath in which he worked to save his brother's life while reaching out to victims and the families, the victims his brother created. This is an open, mindful account of a set of circumstances that could overwhelm anyone. It's a testament to David and his family that he is here tonight to discuss how we walked through this experience and use it to try and help others. So please welcome David Kaczynski.

# Lecture

**David:** Well, thank you very much for coming. It's my first time ever doing a book reading or discussing the book. So, if I'm a little off kilter, that's my fault, and I apologize.

Some things I didn't really know about the publishing industry. I really thought this book would be out last year. I really had no idea how slow the wheels turn. And the subtitle actually wasn't my idea. I just wanted to title it every last time. I thought there might be something undignified and trying to sort of capitalize on the Unabomber name and so forth. But the publisher said, David, it's a really good book. You want people to read it, better, put Unabomber in there. So the subtitle is there.

To set the context, you probably are all aware that a just about 20 years ago, Theodore Kaczynski was arrested in a little cabin in Montana. It was the end of the manhunt for the Unabomber, which was at the time, may still be the longest running, most expensive criminal investigation in the history of the FBI.

Over a period of 17 years, 16 bombs had been placed in public places, sent through the mail. One had actually been put on an airplane. At the end of the day, a couple dozen people had been injured, 3 people had been killed and at the time of Ted's arrest it was leaked that he had been turned into the authorities by his own brother, David Kaczynski. And I'm the person who did that.

Although even that is a very complicated story, given that the first person to suspect that my brother was a Unabomber, the person who really took pains at some cost to herself to convince me that my brother could be the Unabomber was my wife, Linda. And what was interesting about that is she had never met my brother. We were married about the time he became estranged from me.

So anyway, there's a lot of complexities to this story. A lot of things that never really came out in the media accounts of the whole Unabomber saga. So, even though I say the purpose of the book is not to set the record straight in some sense, it is in some sense it's finally to have my own version, in my own words, through my own eyes of what our family went through and told by myself, rather than than other people.

## Why write the book now?

One question I've been asked is why now it's 20 years since my brother was arrested, 18 years since he was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole. Why is the book being released? Why did you write the book now? And again, the answer to

that isn't absolutely simple to me. In the immediate aftermath of my brother's arrest, I became very, very focused on trying to make some good come out of this horrible thing. Kind of engaged in a sort of process of meaning making. And for me, the one thing that I knew clearly, even before I turned in my brother, but certainly through the course of his trial and its outcome and things I learned along the way about our criminal justice system, was that I'm viscerally opposed to the death penalty.

That sort of opposition was reinforced by my experience a year later when I was reached out to by a man in California named Bill Babbitt, who had turned in his own brother and his brother also had schizophrenia had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, had spent, spent years in a mental institution. Before he committed his murder was a Vietnam vet with a piece of shrapnel embedded in his brain. The police had promised his brother. And I was just so struck, my gosh, my brother killed three people. There was clear premeditation. Sure, he has schizophrenia. Here's a here's a man who killed one person, probably completely out of his mind, when he did so, turned in by his brother, and ends up being executed. How can we account for this disparity in our criminal justice system?

And I thought if we shined light on this case, so my wife, Linda and I, we went out to California and spent some time with Bill and his wife. And at that point, it was, Oh my gosh, it was just unbelievable to see the wheels of justice turn mechanically and kill this human being who never, never should have been put to death, even under the system with its protections as we have it today.

But the book isn't about the death penalty, particularly. It really, really is about the family. I'm just trying to explain that for 20 years I was very, very focused kind of externally on the world. How can we draw some good out of this very bad thing? How could we educate people about the death penalty? How could we educate people on the plight of those who have mental illness and can't get treatment for mental illness? Ultimately, after the death penalty ended in the state of New York where we lived, we began focusing on working in communities to take on the problem of violence. We did community based initiatives focused on reducing violence.

And all of that was very, very meaningful, but in some sense external, not not entirely external, because in that process I got to meet many, many people who had had loved ones murdered. I met people in law enforcement I met many, many families who talked to me about their struggles trying to help their own mentally ill family member with little success. So there was a lot of processing going on at that point.

But I think the the sort of major reasons why I began to write this book was that in 2011 our mother passed away. I missed her. I began thinking a lot about her actually began putting pen to paper and writing a little bit about her life. And then a few months later, I retired on schedule from my job as Executive Director of New Yorkers against the Death Penalty. And at that point, you know, going to a Buddhist monastery, meditating every day. I think it's fair to say the the focus shifted a little bit. I began looking backward a little bit more, began looking inward, a little bit more. And the result is the book that that I've written and is now being published.

## **An unconventional memoir**

I will say this and and I maybe warn you if you're thinking about buying the book that it is an unconventional approach. I think to writing a memoir. I think many people will come to this book wanting to have a particular question answered, and that question is, how did a brilliant Harvard trained mathematical genius? With the whole world. Like many chances to contribute to the good of humanity, turn into someone who withdrew became bitter, became paranoid, became violent, and actually ended up sending bombs to people he didn't know.

The book certainly struggles with that question, but it really doesn't attempt to answer the question. I don't have the answer to the question, and aside from that I think it's more meaningful to kind of... what I've really intended to do is invite the reader kind of into the landscape of our family, to get to know the people and the family, their aspirations, their struggles, their. Interactions the way they connect with each other. The way we missed each other at times. And not necessarily to come to conclusions about that family, but to invite people into that process, to bring your own experiences in life into that process and and use it as a way to to think through some of the questions in some sense, I think this book intends to present questions to make them vivid, to invite people to struggle with those questions more than it attempts to answer any of those questions.

At least that's my strategy as a writer. The result is a book that is not linear. It's not chronological. In this landscape, there are, you know, there are incidents that I think are revealing and important and raise questions and give you glimpses of the humanity of the people in our family, including my brother.

I think we have a tendency in the aftermath of horrific crimes to to demonize. And there's no question my my brothers, crimes are inexcusable, horrific, unbelievable damage to so many people, including himself and his own family. But that. You know, demonizing ultimately blocks us from kind of trying to see or understand what was going on in his life and in the lives of the many people he affected.

## **The story of the moral dilemma**

I do go in, especially in the very last chapter of the book, into some depth about the moral dilemma that my wife and I faced when Linda first told me of her suspicion that she suspected that, asked me if my brother. David is there even a remote chance do you think that your brother Ted might be the Unabomber? And I was very dismissive at first. But but as things progressed as when the manifesto was actually published in the Washington Post, and I eventually got to read snippets of it online and began to think, well, maybe Linda's right, maybe we need to find out the truth and began researching. And ultimately we began comparing some of the letters that my brother had sent me over the years, more than 100 that I'd saved and passages in the manifesto.

Well, at this point, we're really actually struggling with two questions. I mean, one question is, is my brother the Unabomber? We hoped and prayed that he wasn't. But the more we looked into it, the more likely it began to appear that he could be. Or there was some chance that he could be. So that was one question we were struggling with. But when we got to a certain point, I remember. Waking up one day with this like awful sense of depression, I almost felt that, like, awakened from a horrible nightmare. But as the cobwebs kind of melted and I really did wake up, I realized while I was in a nightmare a kind of nightmare, I was literally considering the possibility that my own. Brother, whom I knew to be mentally ill, who I knew that I loved very deeply, who I had many, many questions about could possibly be the unit. I remember walking to the breakfast table. Linda had gotten up a little earlier. She was. Eating a bowl of cornflakes and I sat down and caught her eye and I said, you know, Hun, I think there might be a 5050 chance that Ted's the Unabomber. Or that he had written the Unabomber manifesto? I guess it was easier for me to say. And I think Linda knew what it costs me to say those words. She got very upset and then? For the rest of that day, we're struggling with the second question, which is OK what does this? What does this ask of us? We may know the identity of the person who has been sending bombs, who has been killing people. What do we do with this? UM. If you think about that dilemma that we faced, it was horrific in the sense that any choice we made, if you really think about it and we thought about it, we thought, is there any way out of this, but any choice we made could lead to somebody dying. If we chose to do nothing, well, that itself was a choice and the consequence of that choice could be that some other person could pick up a bomb. We might eventually learn that Ted was the person responsible, and in that case would have to go through the rest of our lives with, you know, the blood of this innocent person. And they died because we refuse to act. How do you live with yourself? It seemed unthinkable. On the other hand, the other horn of this dilemma was the realization that, hey, if I turn in my brother and he's guilty, I mean, this is the most wanted man in America. He's killed three people. He's got an IQ of 165. They're probably going to execute. Him what would it be like to go through the rest of my life with my brother's? Blood on my hands. I thought a lot about the effect on Ted, you can imagine. I thought about what I would have to live with, believe it or not, even more so. I thought about the impact on our mother. She had worried for years that, you know, Ted might have problems and many questions as he became estranged from the family. Believe me, moms worst nightmare did not come close to what we were struggling with at that moment. The possibility that he could be a serial. Murderer. I actually thought Mom might die. I mean, I thought she might have a heart attack. She might have a stroke if we went forward. You know, it could be the end not only of Ted's life. My mother's life of our life as we knew it. Hard to see beyond. And the parameters of that situation.



## Four portraits

So the first chapter in the book, actually the the book is organized in terms of it's like 4 portraits.

The first portrait is of Ted and my relationship with Ted.

The 2nd is a portrait of our mother, Wanda Kaczynski.

The third portrait is a portrait of my father, Ted Kaczynski senior, who passed away. Five years before Ted's arrest.

And the last chapter focuses on my lifelong sort of relationship with with Linda, my wife, who I'd actually met in the 7th grade. We were married at the age of 40, so there's a story there. It was a long courtship, shall we say. And I describe a bit about that in the book. So I mean, it might not be the Crime Story people want to read, but I really wanted to invite people into the family and see, see its texture, not maybe exhaustively or comprehensively, but just kind of get a sense of. Of who we were.

The process of actually going to publication was a little interesting to me too. I had written and published part of the the essay on my brother, which forms the first chapter or part of the first chapter, oh, several years ago I'd been asked by someone who's putting together an anthology on the theme of brothers, and I said I don't think so. I'm very busy. I'll try it for a weekend. And I wrote, you know, that first piece in in one weekend. It just kind of spilled out of me.

The second part came really about six months after my mother's death and I just was thinking about her a lot missing her a lot. I felt a strong need to. To put down my memories on paper and. And then after I'd finished that a few, several months went by and I thought, you know, my father passed away. He missed sort of this whole trauma and tragedy. And there's there's wonderful in some sense that he was spared this agony of all of this. But I realized how I'd seldom thought about him for a long period of time. And there was maybe another reason for that, too. My father had taken his own life. He was diagnosed with terminal cancer and decided to end his life. But that was traumatic for the family. My mother and I were both in the house at the time that he took his life, so trying to make sense of that was part of it. And the influence of my father and myself and on my brother, and the difference in his relationship with me to his relationship with Ted.

Now at this point I got a I think I've been on in some NPR program about the families of murderers. And there's a editor at Duke University Press. Gisella Focado, who heard me and said, David, if you have any sort of manuscript, you would really, really like to see it. And at first I said no, and then a few months later went by. I had this sort of ambivalence, and I said heck, I'll send her these three chapters and at that point, it was the book itself. Even today is quite short, but. It was at this point missing the 4th chapter and she. She liked it. She had some suggestions for expanding it, especially the first chapter about my brother, which I did. And then at some point in this whole process, Linda and I were sitting there and I heard Linda, my wife asked me something that I never imagined she would say. He said. David, why don't you

write about me? I thought that would be the last thing she would want. I don't know if other couples would feel this way or whatever, but at any rate, I took a deep breath and I took a few days away and I decided to write about Linda. The first part is our long, long courtship and lifetime friendship. And the second-half of it really focuses on our struggling with for a period of over three months with the moral dilemma; is Ted Kaczynski the Unabomber? How do we deal with this? What do we do? What does this demand of us? What does this oblige us to do?

## **In conclusion**

It's very strange to me in some ways because I remember. It was probably 10 years ago I was still involved with the anti death penalty movement in New York and I went to my Buddhist teacher and I said this is really hard, you know, it's just so painful to be out there all the time telling the story that people want to hear about my brother and and. How do you how would you? You think it's OK if I resign from this and just go back to social work or whatever? And he did say... And I'm glad he did, he said; David, very few people, even people who practice for a long time, are trained and you know to be bodhisattvas, which is like the the Buddhist version of a person who really wants to benefit other beings, even people who train for a long time, to be bodhisattvas, seldom have the kinds of opportunities. You now have maybe to affect people's thinking, maybe even to affect the law in New York State. You should keep with it. You know, find a better balance in your life. Don't be a workaholic here, but don't don't leave it behind.

So part of my motivation for writing this book is to say, well, maybe I won't have to travel anymore. Maybe I'll just put it in my own words. Sort of close the story, and now I can retreat and retire, and. Yeah, and here I am talking to all of you and going on the radio and things. So I honestly don't know. I feel this strange sort of tension ambivalence in myself. It's also odd to, I mean, all of you could think you know, what would it be like to tell these most intimate, sometimes very painful stories about family members to to the world? UM. Sometimes I feel a little guilty. I'm not sure I would have published this book. While probably wouldn't have while Mom was still alive.

On the other hand, at least I'm telling myself, and we're all very complicated. But what I'm telling myself is maybe this will be of some use to people, people struggling with, with dilemmas, people struggling with mental illness in their family, people struggling with issues, like issues of capital punishment, war, violence in general. I would like to think the book might contribute to a sort of contemplation of the possibilities for reconciliation and peace between peoples.

But again, the the purpose of the book isn't to answer questions or to convince anyone of anything. It's to sort of provide a a sort of experience, a sort of. Chance to sort of enter the world that has been mine for the last 66 years and feel, you know,

draw meanings out of it or questions out of it. And I think that's valuable. I hope it's valuable.

## Relationships of compassion

Let's see, there was one other thing I was going to say. Something that's been very, very meaningful to me and part of the process and it began and then you made it after actually before Ted's trial was the importance of reaching out and experiencing something, developing some kind of relationship with people on the other side of these tragedies, so the book describes a meeting that my mother and I had with the family of somebody that had killed three women, a wife, a sister and a sister-in-law. And what that meeting was like. And again, it's not all forgiveness and happiness.

There were tensions in that meeting, but there was also, for me, a very, very powerful meaning about compassion. That emerged from that meeting. To me, that was very important to describe because it echoes many experiences I've had in doing this work of trying to reconcile. We we have such an adversarial template in our culture, you know, it's kind of like, oh, well, what side are you on? And and we see it in our politics for sure, right? I mean it's like. It's all black and white. It's US versus them, whether it's, you know, internal politics, international politics, it's adversarial. Our legal system is adversarial. I mean, it's you're guilty, you're innocent. There's winners, they're losers. There's two sides. I mean, even our. One of our you know, sports entertainment, it's about winning and losing. You know, it's like we've got this in our mind that this is the way the world has got to be structured. And to me that's fundamentally false view that may block us from making progress that that, that we really possibly. Could make that would be very, very important.

But suffice to say I speak in the book about my friendship with one of Ted's surviving victims. It's a very close friendship with a man named Gary Wright. And the meeting that mom and I had with the family of someone who was murdered. Sometimes I sort of feel like I want to apologize for the book because it is. It has a sort of fragmentary sense. I studied literature and I sort of think well this could be either I was lazy or I'm a postmodern genius. I don't know what it is, so let's hope I'm a postmodern genius. But but it lacks, I mean, I'm not a professional writer either either, so maybe it lacks some of some of what some people might. Expect or look for in a memoir or a biography like this. I would really invite people if you do decide to read the book, whatever expectations you might have about the book, look through those expectations to the book that's actually there. And make whatever sense you can. I think it will be a worthwhile experience for you.

I'd be happy to take some questions if anybody has some.

# Q&A

**Moderator:** Please make your way to either one of these two microphones? Thank you very much.

**Questioner #1:** Thank you. Thank you so much for sharing this story. Just overwhelming, overwhelming. I'm going to ask a couple questions. They're very specific because I'm a volunteer at the museum and I just want a couple things clarified. I've read your account of an interview, but then I've read something else. That said your wife was. On a sabbatical? In this. The you know the manifesto and was there any sabbatical involved in your marriage?

**David:** Oh, we had a couple of Linda, had a couple of sabbaticals. She's a she is a retired academic. So she was a tenured professor of philosophy. But at the actually she first began to suspect during a summer vacation to Paris.

**Questioner #1:** Is that when the manifesto came out?

**David:** When and I don't really go into this in the book, but that was the first time she mentioned it. She had been reading some accounts in the International Herald Tribune about the Unabomber. And I think at that point time, the the manifesto had not yet been published, but it was being released that the media sources were saying it was anti technology and she knew that my brother had this obsession with the negative effects of technology and that sort of sparked this thought. Well, could it be David's strange?

**Questioner #1:** My other question I'm I've read enough militia to your brother, but your brother is at. Oh, the prison in.

**David:** Yeah. Florence. Co supermax, yeah.

**Questioner #1:** What's the and? I've read that there's a court case pending that these folks, the poor folks sent out there serve 23 out of 24 hours in solitary. Is are you aware of that and is there anything you're part of about in relationship to that?

**David:** Right, I did read a article in the New York Times that might have come out about a year ago that sort of went into depth. And I think they even interviewed one of the former wardens, who said that the Super Max who said, you know, he he thought it was. Violation of human rights, you know, kind of over the top.

Some of you may have been reading this week articles on the Yahoo website that describe my brother's correspondence with people, and I can't really comment on the supermax.

It's strange to me that in reading these articles. If they're accurate or and I don't know for sure that in some ways. My brother has more social interaction, meaningful social interactions with people through the mail and in the facility than he ever had

before. And that in some sense, he almost seems to be thriving at the same time. There's no there's no inkling that anything has clicked that he really understands the magnitude of the harm that he caused to people.

So, I have mixed feelings about it. I don't want him to suffer, at the same time, I think his true happiness might begin with some kind of atonement. But, he does not communicate with the family at all.

**Questioner #2:** Hi, Dave.

**David:** Hi Allen.

**Questioner #2:** So, do you think that any of the modern antipsychotic medications might allow him to begin to see something from a saner perspective?

**David:** You know, it's a possibility. I really don't know. I remember before Linda ever thought that my brother was the Unabomber. She convinced me to bring some of his letters to a psychiatrist. That was four or five years before that. I remember sitting down with the psychiatrist and. He's has reviewed a few of the very sort of bizarre letters, angry letters that my brother had sent to me, and he said, you know, I can't make a diagnosis based on three letters, but it's pretty clear to me that your brother is seriously ill and. Probably cannot be helped without some kind of chemical intervention. And then we we kind of struggle well, could we get that for Ted and you know that as you probably know many people, I think the estimate is about 50% of people who have schizophrenia are don't have insight. They don't know that they're ill and my brother. Clearly falls into that that category. He does not think he's ill. To him, it would have been a fate worse than death to have gone through a trial in which a parade of psychiatrists, you know, talked about his mental illness. And so the question is, could he be helped by that? And my answer is I really, really don't know another sort of corollary question might be if people don't know they're sick, should they be required? You know, should they be committed? And? And of course, the rules for psychiatric commitment and voluntary. Treatment are very fairly strict, not only in prisons, but in society at large. Basically, the person has to be an imminent threat to themselves or others, otherwise they're free to refuse treatment as my brother apparently does. And to me, that's a very tough question to struggle with. You know, I know there are people, many of them family members in my position who see their loved ones struggling without insight, who would benefit from treatment, who refuse treatment. Shouldn't we have some means to impose treatment on them? I actually think. One thing we haven't really tried, I mean, first of all, we have a mental health system that is universally almost described as broken. It's treatment is not accessible for people even who want treatment. It's not affordable for many people who want treatment. There are sort of all these sort of bureaucratic barriers we have to jump over to get for someone to get treatment. My brother, actually. And this is something I mentioned in the book that surprised me at the time. After his arrest, I learned that he had actually sought mental health treatment. Through the mail, he wrote to the County Health Service 60 miles from his cabin out in the woods, and asked if he could do therapy through the mail. And of course, the answer was no, the system

doesn't work that way. Sir. You have to come in. You have to pay for services. Maybe we could sign you up for welfare for? Well, for Ted. Or anyone who's, like, seriously paranoid who has trouble interacting with a person face to face. You know, this is like an insurmountable barrier. I think. Something that we really, really have not tried aggressively. Enough. And when we do try it, it's the first program model to be cut is models of engaging people. Actually engaging people I've toured like clubhouses for people with mental illness where you cannot really even distinguish who's staff and who's who's a client. I mean the the intention is to take away the stigma, to create community, to sort of try to combat the isolation and sense of helplessness that many people with mental illness. Deal. So I tend to I'm undecided about it, but I tend to skew away from involuntary treatment or. In general.

**Questioner #3:** Yeah, I think I heard you on C-SPAN being interviewed. I don't know. I heard you on. The radio sometimes.

**David:** Yeah, I think it was NPR.

**Questioner #3:** Yeah. Ohh. NPR. OK, you had mentioned about having contact with one of the victims, family members or victims. So that was one of my questions. The other is kind of following up. About the Harvard trial and just two questions, Harvard trial. And if they're after this went public by you or whomever that there was this history of this psychiatric trial or personality trial up at Harvard when he was an undergrad. If any official at Harvard has responded, talked to you about this or anyone specifically connected to that trial. And lastly, what you were saying about this kind of adversarial culture that we have, I would have to concur, having lived in several other cultures. And thinking of nature and nurture. If you're even with the mental health of schizophrenia, if perhaps, I mean, I know this is you can't answer it, but I throw it out there anyway. It's something I was thinking about as I was listening to your interview is if he were in another culture without this kind of kind of extremism of kind of all or nothing. Thinking that I think is is strong in that collective American personality. If that just kind of contributed to his going to to the edge and kind of losing. Foot in this so-called reality and.

**Moderator:** Maybe we can stop there and. Unpack those questions.

**Questioner #3:** That's it.

**David:** Sure. I guess the the the one that you know, I feel I have information about is the Harvard study that my brother was recruited to participate in and that could have been damaging to him. I think we tend to be sort of reductionist in our culture. We think what caused the Unabomber, like there might be a singular cause. And I think it's more likely that. You know it's it takes a perfect storm of adverse circumstances to result in someone as sick and as dangerous as my brother. And I think I talked at least allude to different possible factors that might have affected Ted. In the book. One is genetics. We have history of. Mental illness in the family. Second was my mother's very strong belief that Ted's hospitalization as an infant nine months old. Where the hospital had very, very restrictive visiting hours and they were only allowed to see him six hours a week and he was in the hospital for two hours. That and and that seemed

to have affected Ted terribly that that childhood trauma might have contributed. The third factor which I could talk a little bit more about is this Harvard study. When Ted was 17 years old, I think a sophomore at Harvard, our parents received a request from Harvard to sign a consent form for him to participate in a psychological research. Project. I remember mom telling me later after we knew more about all of this after Ted's arrest during the trial that she signed off. You know, she thought, well, Harvard's a great college. The psychiatrists must be very nice people. They're going to help Ted, maybe and. But actually, what this this is. This study would never, ever pass ethical muster. Today, no Institutional Review Board would pass this. First of all, there was no informed consent. Ted was deceived. Every week he came to a lab where he was put in conversation with someone who he thought was another subject in the study. In fact, it wasn't another subject. It was a researcher, a graduate student who was coached to behave in an insulting way. Toward the. Subject. So every week the subject is subject we were supposed to talk about what's the philosophy of life and so forth. And you know Ted would be trying to in his, you know, spit out. You know what I really believe is important and valuable in life in the persona's role was to deride that to even talk about his personal characteristics that he was ugly, that his beard. That's stupid. Even the the director of this study of the overseer of it was Henry Murray, actually a very, very famous psychiatrist. Psychologist who had. Worked with the US government in the OSS in the aftermath of World War 2. OSS, as many of you know, was a forerunner of the CIA. There's a lot of evidence without clear proof that the study that he performed on students at Harvard was perhaps a CIA funded study. But Murray himself described this as sweeping. Aggressive assaults and the dignity of the subjects. So Ted's ohh and they selected people to be in this study by giving them a psychological inventory. You know, sort of test to measure alienation. And they took the most alienated kids. So Ted was one of the most alienated kids. They put him in the study once a week for three years. He was, you know, basically. Abused and his attorneys later said. Ted, why in the heck Ted said it was the worst experience of his life and they said. Why did you? Put up with that, and Ted's response was I prove I wanted to show that I could take it, that I couldn't be broken. And well, maybe by his own definition he wasn't broken. But maybe in other ways he was affected terribly. I recall, actually, him coming home from college one year and I had a really good relationship with my brother and I was in high school and I had a really good English. Teacher and I. Was learning something about philosophy and I started talking with my brother and my. Brother was so. You know, he's so sort of aggressive and attacking my ideas. You know, I thought, well, this doesn't seem like Ted. Why is he being so harsh about all of this? Why isn't he more open, like? And now I think, well, perhaps it's because this study that was his model for, for how you conduct. A conversation about philosophy. On the other hand, I warn people too. It's this reductionism of this, you know, you don't want people to be, you know, the defense actually tried to follow up with some other people. Most of the records of this study were. Destroyed. There had been a church Commission. Frank Church had set. Found out about this CIA

program and mind control and what it was doing. Unwitting Guinea pigs in these programs, and so he subpoenaed records that then the then head of the CIA. Blacking on his name, he since passed away, decided to destroy, so most of the records were lost. The records that the defense did get were from Murray's widow. No Helms, Richard Helms. It was Richard Helms. Yeah, that's right. So but but other people became, you know, they said, yeah, it was really unpleasant, but they weren't necessarily, you know. Brought down by it. You know the 4th stressor, I think is is Ted's isolation. I think it was probably the worst thing for him, you know, he, he, he he goes off, he has these resentments. He's in the echo Chamber of his own mind. He doesn't get the kind of feedback we really need as human beings to not only understand other people. To understand ourselves and and I think those 25 years he spent mostly alone in his his little cabin had to have contributed to. His problems as well. Sorry for the long answer.

**Questioner #4:** Hi I'm I'm curious about your thought process and your considerations and writing the book and thinking if or when your brother read the book. And then also how you told your mother before or after he was arrested and what the experience was like for her?

**David:** Right. Thank you. Let me deal with the question about our mother first. You know, Linda and I discussed the possibility of inviting Mom into the decision making process. And we decided not to. I mean. I didn't think she could be objective. Pretty sure she couldn't be objective. The other part of it, I guess, was what if we didn't know for sure? What if Ted is innocent? We don't want Mom to have a heart attack over this or to have all this stress or sleeplessness. If Ted is actually innocent. I've heard other people, including mom at one point saying why didn't you tell me? You know, I had a right to know what you were going to do. I was at what we talk about stakeholders. I was the stakeholders in this process and you just went. Ben, maybe we we did tell her before Ted was arrested, though the FBI actually wanted to interview her. And so we did go. I went to mom. I didn't want her to sort of displace blame on to Linda and to the daughter-in-law. I had to be the bearer of this news. And I described that in detail in the book. So. Rather than sort of repeat that now, I'll only say that mom was extraordinary. I mean, she was. Obviously devastated, but her first reaction was to say David, I can't imagine what you've been struggling with and then to come up and kiss me on the cheek. I mean, she was. Just I mean, much infinitely stronger, wiser person than I ever could have imagined. About Ted reading the book. I saw somebody who's not mentioned in the book because it's really about the family, but we we had an attorney actually a DC based attorney who kind of advocated for us with the FBI, helped us turn Ted in and then advocated us with the Justice Department to try to see that his life would be spared. And that's not the story I tell in the book, but I did see Tony yesterday. We had a wonderful time talking about things. And he said, David, I've read your book and I find it really interesting because here you have. A book ostensibly about a serial killer that is actually a love story, and I think it's. I don't, I don't. I mean, it's a love story in different ways. I



love my brother and I hope that comes through this book. I deeply, deeply loved my mother. I was very torn apart and traumatized and. Hurt by my father's suicide, but I loved my father very, very deeply. So I have a chapter devoted to him. I love my, you know, my my wife is my heart's core. And so it is true. I didn't actually think of it that way, but in some sense, this is a memorial to people I've loved. I read one critic who didn't like the book very much, but who said it may also be a a form of apologizing to Ted. It's interesting. I don't know how he'll read it. I if I were to guess, I would say he would say he's distorting things. This isn't right. It's not this way. This is David trying to make me look bad again. I think. I hope that's not true. And again what Ted says or what he thinks consciously and what he processes. You know more privately may may be different. I don't know. I hope in some ways he's able to read this. I mean he. You know, see. Particularly about mom and Dad and their passing and the way they handled it. These are things that he didn't have an experience of. Perhaps they would be meaningful to him. I hope. I hope the love part shines through. But there's a fine line to walk here, too, because we're also talking about a man who did. Terrible, terrible harm. And you know our society. You know, our news media at least say this is a monster. This is someone we shouldn't care about. If we're caring about this person, if we feel any sympathy for this person, we're disrespecting all the people he hurt. And I think that's again this false sort of black and white thinking, I think I think. You know, in Buddhism we're we're supposed to love our enemies in many of the religions, you know, you're supposed to maybe hate the sin, but love the Sinner and that's. Part of what I'm trying to do in this book, so thank you.

**Questioner #5:** You're the Nexus of two things that I'm quite interested in. One is. The idea of building beloved community and prisons. So and you're in New York, well, alternatives to violence project is. A project that does that, and I wonder if you had any exposure to that. And the other one is there's a book called the Dharma Brothers, which is a a book about introducing Buddhism, Vipassana. Into a prison in Alabama and. Kohl's, the psychiatrist, wrote very good introduction to that. How meditation can help people? Of course, you're I don't know when schizophrenics is involved. Maybe there's not nothing, but I just thought I'd give you the space to talk about that.

**David:** Yeah. Thanks. Yeah, in some sense it was. It was. It it's been interesting to have this very singular issue like you know. I'm opposed to the death penalty. There are lots of reasons why it's a terrible mistake as public policy and in some ways it seems like too narrow of an issue. And yet it's it's it's a it's a. It's an issue that actually contains so many other issues. It's like, you know, it's it's punishment. Essentially the answer. I mean, maybe there's a a place for punishment. But you know, if we have a system that focuses on punishment at the expense of rehabilitation, you know, are we really doing ourselves any favors here? You know, are we just sort of feeding? Anger with anger and you know, obviously an, you know, an act of violence in response to an act of violence. That seems to not make sense to me. I mean, maybe it's a defensive necessity. It makes sense to me, but not as you know, somehow making justice in

the world. The whole situation with prisons is it's it's really, I mean we incarcerate more people in the United States than in any other country in the world per capita. The prison seemed to be very highly focused on security. There's very little evidence attention given to reentry, you know, so people are let out, but they don't have the tools. They don't have the support. They come back in. I mean, you'd think that some resources and energy and creativity devoted to the whole issue of. You know, how do we, how do we help people find their best selves? Could really make a difference. And the meditation piece, I could only say it's been like, really, really helpful for me. OK. Because I think again with this adversarial template we have in our culture, it's like when something goes bad. We were looking for somebody else to blame. And the issue here for me often is, is how do we take responsibility? How do we take responsibility for our own lives, our own misfortunes? You know, I think the tragedy of my brother's case is that he felt this tremendous anger and humiliation and resentment he even wrote at some points in his diary that he was going to take revenge against society in his if society was. Was a human being? Could even you know, be avenge, you know, experience revenge. But it's like sort of lashing out and it to me it seems if if you suffer and I think meditation helps you do this, you. Ideally ultimately find. The seeds of compassion, I mean, if you really look inward, if you really take responsibility for your suffering, the, the the end result is that you understand that everybody suffers many, many people suffer and that if you stay focused on your own suffering, the likelihood is that you're just. It's not. There's no way out of it, but if. You begin to. Feel empathy for others. Compassion for others. Want to go out and help others in some ways. Your own suffer. You feel less isolation, you feel less. Oh, poor me and you feel you know a a sense of meaning, that this is meaningful. You could maybe help people in other ways. And I think our society's whole approach to criminal justice is, is off base in the sense of, you know, we're going to isolate, stigmatize. Punish and essentially neglect not only the people who've committed crimes, but their children, their families, who struggle as a result. I don't have answers to all of this, but I definitely there's a better way and I think at least if we're going to separate people from society, we should make prisons rehabilitative and really give some attention to that. And we're not doing that, by and large in the USA.

**Moderator:** So we have time for two more questions 2. People at the microphone.

**Questioner #6:** Hi, Dave. Excuse me. One of the things that may this may be just simply obvious, but I want to reiterate the obvious perhaps. How much in your life because I've known. You a long time. How much the personal? And the public is connected and the work that you were drawn to, to work against the death, death penalty obviously had its. Push that's deepest push from your effort, which is at the core of all the actions you've done to save your brothers life. And I don't simply mean save it in a material sense, so that is obviously very important that there might be a change or a term. That might in fact allow him to flower, as the brother you knew when you were very young. And I know that hope is still alive in you. It's beyond.

Maybe your power or. Any individual power, but it's still a possibility since he is still with us. That he might, in fact have a. Turn of heart.

**David:** The man who had just asked that question is my oldest best friend. We've known each other. 45 years we were college roommates together. You know, they're brothers of the flesh, and there's brothers of the spirit. And Joel is my brother of the spirit and has made a a great difference in my life, actually introducing me to spirituality when I was not very open to it as a, as a young person and being a tremendous, tremendous support. In May, through the you know the the darkest times, so I want to acknowledge that Joel. He's actually mentioned in the book, in the acknowledgments in the first chapter, but. Yeah, I mean inner and outer, public and private. I mean, there there was, I think balance is really important in a certain sense. You do see people who have like a public mission that is so driven by. Pain that it can become sort of neurotic or displacing that pain and. And so I think it's really important to keep it in balance I think I remember a quote from Thomas Merton who wrote a biography and Merton, as you probably know, was a peace activist but also a Trappist monk, a prolific writer, on issues of peace and so forth. And he said I wrote something much more articulately than I could describe it, but that's like. The form of contemplation that's superior. To you know, quiet, inward, turning, contemplation is contemplative action, but it places a tremendous burden on the person who's engaged in contemplative action that it be that it be pure, that it be have as much self consciousness and awareness and contemplative richness as possible. Otherwise, there's a possibility that you know you turn into some. Sort of a. You know some somehow. You're you're you're you're your twistedness gets inflicted on others. I don't know. I do pray for my brother on a daily basis and that's I. Feel pretty helpless. I don't know what else I could do.

**Questioner #7:** Thank you for sharing your family story. I had a question as A and I asked this as the sibling of somebody who has a developmental disability and I think a lot of times when you have somebody with special needs in your family, whether it's mental disability or mental illness, there's an. Famous effort on the part of siblings and families to try to help and I'm just interested in your perspective on how you and maybe other families you've talked to have balanced, you know, between what might be their own needs and the need to care for the the sibling.

**David:** Oh wow, that's a good question. And I think my parents did it pretty well. At one point, I remember the defense attorneys, psychologists working for the defense asked well, in the Kaczynski family who who was the favored child, who was the favored child, and his answer was I was so Ted, you know, despite his feeling, you know, and. And maybe this is some of the contradictions in Ted that he felt he was abused and so forth. This also felt he was in some ways, I think there was in some sense more attention given to Ted and some burden placed on me that I talked allude to, at least in the book, by Mom who felt, you know, Ted needed support. He. You know he needed a brother. He needed someone, and this was his. Her phrase, David. Don't ever abandon your brother. That's what he fears the most. And there was some sense of burden about that. Like mom, I've got my own life. I remember the last time

I saw Ted. I was living almost a parallel life in a little cabin in West, TX out in the desert, far from a paved Rd. Kind of. And but I visited my parents and I was about to go back and she said, Dave, on the way back to Texas, maybe you want to stop off in Montana and see Ted. Which you know more than doubled my trip and I and I did. And I saw Ted. And, you know, we we had a decent time together. And Mom was happy to know that he was at least healthy. I don't know. That's that's a tough one. When someone has special needs, how do you? I think balance is really important because some parents overcompensate. I have a cousin whose sister was mentally ill and has since passed away and she really feels like she was really in the shadows in that family. All moms energy went toward protecting and trying to help the child that needed the most help, and she was kind of short changed in the process. I will say that with 7 1/2 years difference between Ted and me, I think. That helped a lot you know that we were not close in age. But I don't know. But I think balance, balance, balance, balance is would be my mantra.

**Moderator:** Thank you so much.

The Ted K Archive

A critique of his ideas & actions



David Kaczynski at Politics & Prose  
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