

Memo to Mangione: Don't read the Unabomber's manifesto. Read the obituaries

Debra J. Saunders

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I've been having flashbacks about Unabomber Ted Kaczynski, who killed three innocent people and wounded 23 during a 17-year-killing spree. In 1998, Kaczynski pleaded guilty and agreed to a sentence of life without parole. He killed himself in 2023.

It turns out Luigi Mangione, who stands accused of killing UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson last year by shooting him in the back on a New York City sidewalk, is a fan of Kaczynski. Mangione, who has pleaded not guilty to a federal murder charge as well as stalking charges, is expected to go to trial next year.

Mangione, 26, gave a four-star review to the Unabomber's 35,000-word manifesto, "Industrial Society and Its Future."

"It's easy to quickly and thoughtless write this off as the manifesto of a lunatic, in order to avoid facing some of the uncomfortable problems it identifies. But it's simply impossible to ignore how prescient many of his predictions about modern society turned out," Mangione wrote on Goodreads.

"He was a violent individual — rightfully imprisoned — who maimed innocent people," Mangione added. "While these actions tend to be characterized as those of a crazy luddite, however, they are more accurately seen as those of an extreme political revolutionary."

Apparently Mangione sees himself as a fellow big thinker.

The Unabomber story is personal for me.

Kaczynski murdered Gilbert Murray, president of the California Forestry Association and the colleague of a friend. The bomb that killed Murray in 1995 had been sitting on a receptionist's desk before the timber lobbyist carried the package into his office.

Also, when I was a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle, the FBI went through my reader hate mail in the hope that the Unabomber might have written to me. As far as I know, he did not.

At the time, investigators were convinced that the serial killer lived near the Bay Area — not Montana, where he was living. But Kaczynski had lived in the Bay Area when he was a tenure-track mathematics professor at UC-Berkeley.

Investigators got his residency wrong, but they were creative in their attempts to identify a man who, I learned from Eric Benson's podcast Project Unabom, wrote in a journal that he would kill people if there was "very little chance of getting caught."

So rather than admire the serial killer's banal critique of modern society, I look at what he did, as reported in Project Unabom.

— In 1979, he planted a bomb that detonated during an American Airlines flight with 80 passengers. The plane did not crash, but some passengers suffered from smoke inhalation.

— He applied for welfare while law enforcement was trying to solve the case.

— When he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to life without parole, he refused to apologize.

— He shot a neighbor's cow in the head.

— In 1985, he achieved his first kill, Sacramento computer store owner Hugh Scruton.

— He put a wire across a road near his Lincoln, Montana, home because he didn't like motorcycles.

— He wrote three autobiographies. In the second he said he was going to start killing people.

— He never forgave his brother David for getting married.

— He told David that most really smart people have a sadistic streak.

— He was thinking about dating and starting a family after he placed his 12th bomb.

— At the age of 50, he was accepted as a journalism major at the University of Montana.

— In 1978, his first bomb blew up in a security guard's hands.

This is the man whose manifesto Mangione finds "prescient." But really, the manifesto is a hater's rant, a conceit to dress up the desire to kill other people and cause pain.

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The Ted K Archive

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