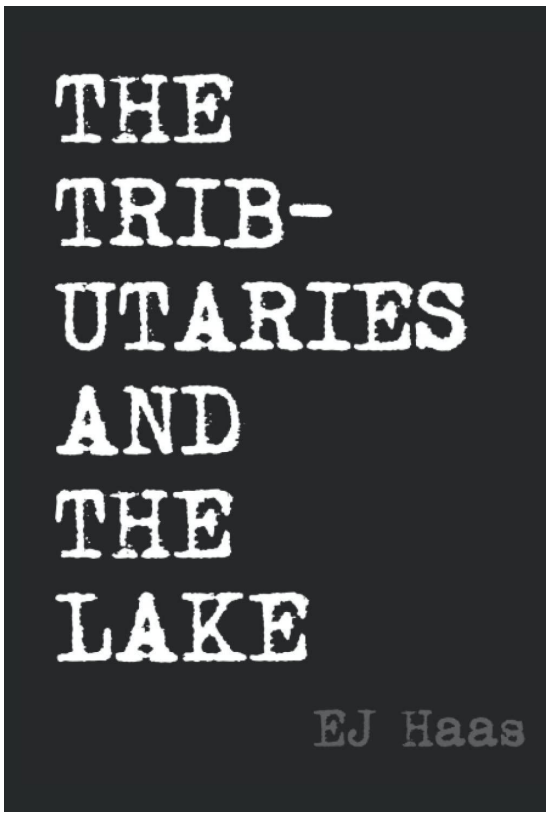
The Tributaries and the Lake (Preview)

E. J. Haas



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*In **memory of** Hugh Scrutton, Thomas Mosser, Gilbert Murray, and **for** David Gelernter, Charles Epstein, Gary Wright, Nicklaus Suino, James McConnell, John Hauser, Diogenes Angelakos, Janet Smith, Percy Wood, Terry Marker, John Harris, and the passengers and crew of American Airlines flight 444 from Chicago to D.C.*

The Tributaries and the Lake

by E. J. Haas

Chapter I: The Second City

On May 22nd of 1942, Wanda Kaczynski became a mother.

Her life hadn't been the easiest, growing up under her own matriarch Mary Dombek who, according to Wanda's younger son David, was a "chronic alcoholic who frequently flew into rages during which she was physically and verbally abusive to her four children." He would later speculate Mary "was self-medicating with alcohol to quell the suffering brought on by an underlying [unidentified] mental illness," but would never meet her: she died in her fifties of a stroke, leaving Wanda the title of "daughter" with no mother to show for it.

Like her husband Turk's parents — like my own great-grandparents, maybe not unlike a handful of your own predecessors — hers had come to America in search of prosperity and contentment.

The four Polish natives immigrated so their children would live during a remarkable time for the United Stales job force, in which Turk (legal name Theodore) made his living making sausages: wages and work conditions steadily improved. Technological advances helped case the average work week from 53 into 40 hours following World War II.

It was the promise of stable, simple living that attracted them both to Chicago.

Today, the third-largest city in America is populated by some 2.7 million people and has one of the world's highest gross domestic products. It bursts with both capital and culture; even the poorest and deadliest neighborhoods' bridges are illuminated by the creations of street artists with skills challenging Banksy's. Each mural conveys some message of hope or unity, or a celebration of the local culture — of an unmistakably Chicagoan persistence to flourish. Even as the rising Lake Michigan encroaches like an impending siege on our borders, and the crime in both our gangs and our law enforcement bodies erupts the streets into protest — we trudge on, just like we do through the brutal winter snow.

In spite of everything against us, the city refuses to do anything less than survive.

And so it makes sense this couple forged their family here, and that they'd welcome their first son in Evergreen Park. Theodore John was born a beloved, "happy baby" who burbled and cried like any other. His little brother David would say he'd been "laughing, active" even. Baby Ted showed no signs of maladjustment and was brought home in perfect health.

Just over sixty years later, on the edge of the same city, arrived a brutally large-headed newborn shortly after noon. With an umbilical cord around my neck, and an illness I still don't know the nature of, I was taken from my mother before she could

see me — which she only did several hours later, following my father's insistent pleas that "she needs to see her baby."

In West Suburban hospital, they named me Ella Jane Haas.

Like Ted, I was loved from the instant I arrived. I took my first screaming inhalation in Chicago — and like him, I was raised in one of its suburbs.

Oak Park, too, boasts a lush creative culture, in high school I walked the same halls Ludacris once roamed, I served four faithful years on the school newspaper for which Hemingway once wrote. Somewhere in this village. Betty White lived a short fraction of her childhood.

Alongside artistry and academia, we value the character and integrity of our community. It is an expectation, no matter your religion, to love your neighbor and to do what you can for the good of those who need it.

It's easy to wonder where Ted's path diverged from mine — how someone so adored could go on to instill the fear that earned him the "Unabomber" moniker. The widespread consensus, thanks to Dr. Sally C. Johnson, is paranoid schizophrenia.

I'm not sure I agree with her.

Ted and I had similar upbringings, down to the isolative "gifted'' status and little brothers upon whom we doted relentlessly, in a city built to withstand anything from devastating fire to heated political turmoil. Chicago instilled within both of us a burning need to aspire toward something greater than ourselves. He, of course, skipped two more grades than I did; in spite of all our parallels he shone even brighter.

I was still brilliant. By age three I discovered a passion for reading, which first came to fruition in 2020 when I published my first book — but as smart as I am, I'm not a psychologist. I don't claim to be one.

However, I'm not unfamiliar with trauma. This is one more trait I share with Ted despite our drastically different routes to the same destination, both at the age of 16.

I was one of the youngest, arguably least mature, students entering junior year of high school in 2018. I had no interest in men aside from envying them. I'd never kissed, or been on a date with, one. My life revolved around the *Trapeze* student newspaper, the philanthropic art club I co-founded, academics, and golf at which I wasn't too inept. I was on varsity, and so was she.

I'll call her Ruth. She was a teammate one year older and a few strokes worse than me, with whom I was cultivating a tentative but eager friendship.

She was everything I didn't see in myself: popular, extraverted, *liked* instead of admired. She fit into femininity like a key in a lock. She stood aloof on the pedestal I put painstaking effort into shining, too blinded to see it for the heap of din it was.

With our link still in its early stages, she made a proposal: "Let me set you up with someone."

I declined before I knew his name, citing my being busy, and thought that'd be the end of the story. After all, I was too sharp to waste time seeking men I didn't want. I believed myself too strong to let one of them slam my head against the floor and cover me in a Pollock work of my own blood.

The first day of September that same year, I was sleeping over at Ruth's when she alerted me she'd invited "company." Upon my insistence she tell me who was coming, she said one of these guests was an almost-boyfriend of hers.

The other, to my abject adolescent horror, I'll call Jack, and he looked at me with contempt — like a dog docs a meal — from the start. Even more so than at Ruth's initial suggestion, I had a raging urge to stay far away from this boy. Being alone in a room with him filled me with unease.

So while Ruth and her almost-boyfriend went into the other room, **I** pretended Jack didn't exist. I scrolled through the settings app on my phone, pretending to read something important, and replied in monosyllabic animal grunts to every sexual question this stranger asked.

"Do you want to?" he asked.

"No." I shuffled away.

And then, several times in one night, he raped me. There is not much else to tell. I incurred injuries I didn't know' were possible, and I staggered around two in the morning into my local Walgreens to pay in full for an emergency contraception pill I hadn't wanted to need.

It happened approximately ten times over the course of two months.

Nobody wants to go home and tell their parents they've had their first intimate experience with a violent stranger on someone else's basement floor — that they fought and cried and did everything in their power to change the story. So naturally. I didn't tell anybody. It was also the first time in my life I kept a secret from my best friend.

I went home the next morning. I ate the fruit in the fridge. And fifteen months later, I got a phone call from my mother in tears.

"Did you send somebody pictures?" she choked into my car.

I didn't know he'd filmed the rapes until he was threatening to send these videos to my 80-year-old grandmother who worked at the high school. He wasn't quite sure what he was blackmailing me for.

But there is nothing on the planet more unstoppable than a man who feels he has been wronged. I blocked him, lay back in bed, and waited for the world to fall apart beneath me.

Initially, I tried to play dumb.

"No," I told my mom slowly.

"I don't know if this is some sick joke —"

This. I had no options; my grandma had gotten an email.

I began to cry. "He made me. Mom; it was Jack — he, he made me." I let out a gasp. "I'm sorry. Mom, I —"

She kept crying. And from there I would retell my whole story to cops who probably don't remember my name. I'd be denied an order of protection by a judge who never looked up to sec my face; I would endure examinations against my will: as a minor, my parents told me, I had no choice.

I was more exploited in courthouses, hospitals, and police stations than in any basement. From there, the seed of an idea grew that I might be a good lawyer, but that is another story.

This one begins in December 2020, when fresh out of my legal nightmare — in the month Jack was arrested — I read "Industrial Society and its Future."

This is how my path crossed Kaczynski's: his writing concise and ideas articulated, he sounded perfectly lucid to me. I agreed with him, as do many figureheads in academia to this day. Nowhere did his doctrine stray into the territory of a madman's rumblings.

I learned he was born in Chicago, where he excelled at Sherman Elementary School and went to Harvard at the age of 16. He came from a family of "civic-minded" people, where his mother suspected he lived with autism. He was deeply protective of his brother, if introverted and bookish, and excellent beyond comparison at mathematics. He had an IQ of at least 167 in the sixth grade, which he skipped along with the eleventh. Sometimes, he was prone to outbursts of anger fueled by overwhelming rejection. But he loved his family deeply, his brother most of all, and he was kind to animals in a way most children were not.

At college he was subjected to an abusive study, one that would go on to change his life forever and for the worse. But he graduated Harvard with a GPA of 3.12, and he pursued his master's and doctoral degrees at the University of Michigan. And still, there, he was a superstar in his field. He was offered a teaching position, and this compelled him to reject acceptances from the University of Chicago and the University of California in Berkeley.

But he was consumed by a gender identity crisis, one he would claim was purely sexual in nature. In his shame, he first considered killing somebody.

For years Kaczynski had railed against the technological world and its limitations on human liberty, but had done little more than write about it by then.

The year 1967 rolled around, and he began teaching at Berkeley. Despite being abrasive toward students, he was on the path to tenure — and highly esteemed — when he resigned on June 30, two years later.

After two years living with his parents, he and his brother David built a cabin in Montana where he began living off the grid. Supported by his family — with whom he gradually stopped making contact — and the occasional job, he survived without electric power, a water faucet, or a phone. It was here he began his murderous rampage, characterized by mail bombs built with precision and expertise.

Me killed three people and injured several others to make a statement — all the while becoming more withdrawn from his family, to an extent that worried them deeply. He selected his victims because they symbolized everything he went against: technology, its threat to the environment, and its restrictions of individual liberty.

In 1996, "Industrial Society and its Future" was published in the *Washington Post* after Kaczynski promised to cease killing should a major newspaper publicize his per-

sonal philosophy. It was David's wife who recognized the writing, who prompted him to go to the FBI with his suspicion Ted was behind the bombings.

He was arrested on April 3 of the same year. After his lawyers unsuccessfully attempted an insanity defense, Dr. Sally C. Johnson diagnosed him with paranoid schizophrenia.

Wikipedia states "Sally Johnson, the psychiatrist who examined Kaczynski, concluded that he suffered from paranoid schizophrenia. Forensic psychiatrist Park Dietz said Kaczynski was not psychotic but had a schizoid or schizotypal personality disorder. In his 2010 book *Technological Slavery>,* Kaczynski said that two prison psychologists who visited him frequently for four years told him they saw no indication that he suffered from paranoid schizophrenia and the diagnosis was "ridiculous" and a "political diagnosis".

"On January 21, 1998, Kaczynski was declared competent to stand trial by federal prison psychiatrist Johnson," despite the psychiatric diagnoses. As he was fit to stand trial, prosecutors sought the death penalty, but Kaczynski avoided that by pleading guilty to all charges on January 22, 1998, and accepting life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. He later tried to withdraw this plea, arguing it was involuntary as lie had been coerced to plead guilty by the judge. Judge Garland Ellis Burrell Jr. denied his request, and the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit upheld that decision."

This is all confirmed by external sources, including articles published throughout the trial.

I gawked upon learning he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. He was too clear and self-aware, too ideologically sound, to be labeled delusional — and again, I'm no psychologist.

But a friend of mine, whom I'll call Ryan, was studying to become one at the time. He liked my manic rantings and he talked like a therapist, whether discussing his or my vices or whether I was teaching him about the Madonna-whore complex. We talked often about socially deviant ideas and behavior, and so over frantic texts at three in the morning — on my third day without sleep, December fourth of 2020 — I told him what **I** believed.

He agreed with me.

"He eventually snapped," I told Ryan, "as a result of [multiple] traumas.

"It doesn't justify what he did at all, but it shows our country created the Unabomber out of Ted Kaczynski, in a series of failures to take mental health and PTSD seriously, and that at some point he really did lose power over who he became."

"That last part is a good description," he replied.

I'd done a fair bit of learning about Kaczynski's life after reading "Industrial Society and its Future," and it hadn't exactly been the easiest one to lead. Certain events proved very clear turning points for the worse, each warping Kaczynski's worldview' and self-worth into something less recognizable by even David.

The Unabomber, I proposed, was not insane but the product of complex trauma.

Ryan asked a question. “Do you think you’re seeing all this... because of your own experience with PTSD?”

That’s exactly it. The behavior and patterns were familiar to me; I recognized parts of Kaczynski that in me were labeled symptoms. It was his ideology, and the way he chose to promote it, that earned him a “delusional” label — but it was a sound school of thought, and it wasn’t wrong.

We knew it then, more so than ever.

“When motor vehicles were introduced they appeared to increase man’s freedom. They took no freedom from the walking man, no one had to have an automobile if he didn’t want one, and anyone who did choose to buy an automobile could travel much faster and farther than a walking man,” he writes. “But the introduction of motorized transport soon changed society in such a way as to restrict greatly man’s freedom of locomotion. When automobiles became numerous, it became necessary to regulate their use extensively. In a car, especially in densely populated areas, one cannot just go where one likes at one’s own pace one’s movement is governed by the flow of traffic and by various traffic laws. One is tied down by various obligations: license requirements, driver test, renewing registration, insurance, maintenance required for safety, monthly payments on purchase price.

“Moreover, the use of motorized transport is no longer optional. Since the introduction of motorized transport the arrangement of our cities has changed in such a way that the majority of people no longer live within walking distance of their place of employment, shopping areas and recreational opportunities, so that they HAVE TO depend on the automobile for transportation. Or else they must use public transportation, in which case they have even less control over their own movement than when driving a car. Even the walker’s freedom is now greatly restricted. In the city he continually has to stop to wait for traffic lights that are designed mainly to serve auto traffic. In the country, motor traffic makes it dangerous and unpleasant to walk along the highway.”

COVID-19 had shifted life to the internet, so that in order to be alive one had to be online: nearly half of our senior year of high school took place in Zoom rooms. Access to a computer and smartphone was no longer a luxury, but a necessity — and in using these devices, you accepted the truth your data would be sold to organizations you never knew the names of, or why they needed it. You became a commodity in the technological system.

Kaczynski came as close as any man can to predicting the future.

If anything, he was more clear-minded than the rest of us.

“So what makes you think he was traumatized?” asked my friend.

Chapter II: Mama

When I think of Wanda Kaczynski, I have difficulty trying to crown her single most remarkable virtue. The many dimensions of her extraordinary personality confound me more than the average case.

At nine months old, baby Ted broke into mysterious hives. She and Turk — always the caring, attentive parents rushed him to the hospital where he would stay in near-isolation for a week.

'Tie was terribly afraid," Wanda would later explain to David. "He thought Dad and I had abandoned him to cruel strangers... [that] we didn't love him anymore and that we would never come back to bring him home again."

Time is different when you're young, without the years an adult has behind them. To a child, everything is of utmost weight. Every disappointment is the greatest in the world; minutes arc longer: it is one 21-millionth of a 40-ycar-old's life. At six months old, a minute is an entire 262-thousandth.

That difference in proportion is colossal. And without the language to understand what's happening in the world around you, an abrupt separation from your parents into a frightening and hostile environment is the most terrifying experience you've been through to date.

It may have been for Wanda and Turk, too.

"I ponder endlessly over it," she said to the *Washington Post* in 1996. And her younger son did, too.

In his essay "The Walking Wounded," David describes his learning about what came to be known as Ted's "hospital experience."

"I was probably seven or eight when I first approached Mom with the question 'What's wrong with Teddy?"' David wrote.

"What do you mean, David?" his mother had responded. '"There's nothing wrong with your brother."

There may have been. At that point, Ted's baby book detailed some concerning changes in demeanor that never reverted.

"Feb. 27, 1943... Mother felt very sad about baby," she wrote. "He is quite subdued, has lost his verve and aggressiveness, and has developed an institutionalized look."

Thirteen days later: "Baby is... quite unresponsive after his experience. Hope his sudden removal to hospital and consequent unhappiness will not harm him."

It continued to affect both her and Ted. There is evidence that at the age of four, seeing a photograph of himself as a helpless, restrained baby was still ingrained into his memory as deeply upsetting.

"Oh, my God," thought Wanda. "He's having the same feelings that he had when he was held down that way."

"I mean, he doesn't have any friends," David said to Wanda, roughly ten years on. "Sometimes it seems like he doesn't *like* people."

End of Preview

E. J. Haas
The Tributaries and the Lake (Preview)
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<amazon.com/Tributaries-Lake-EJ-Haas/dp/1735760234>
For decades, our perception of "Unabomber" Ted Kaczynski has been characterized by a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia — a label that may have saved his life, but doesn't quite seem to add up in terms of diagnostic criteria. *The Tributaries and the Lake* explores the possibility other factors were at play in this man's head, including potential trauma and a deeply painful sensation of being ostracized. I compare my own psychology to that of Kaczynski, raising the question "Have we been wrong this entire time?" With input from brother David Kaczynski, and the inside perspective of someone with PTSD, my first nonfiction work attempts to delve into the life and torments of one of America's most notorious criminals.