

Sale of Illinois House Led to Break in Probe

Edward Walsh

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The small army of federal agents that has been pursuing the elusive Unabomber for more than a decade could not have known it, but the first apparent real break in the case occurred last Jan. 15 when Wanda T. Kaczynski put her modest frame home here up for sale.

That decision, which was at least a year in the making, set off a chain of events that led to discovery of documents that bore a striking resemblance to the Unabomber's public pronouncements. Today, in a Helena, Mont., federal courtroom, formal charges were made against her older son, Theodore J. Kaczynski, a brilliant student turned mountain recluse who is the prime suspect in the Unabomber case.

Wanda Kaczynski sold her home for \$100,000 on March 15 and moved to the Schenectady, N.Y., area to be near her younger son, David. But sometime in the days before then, as the mother and younger son packed her belongings, they came across the apparently incriminating documents. David contacted federal authorities through a Washington lawyer, who has not been identified.

David Kaczynski has given no public explanation of what he did or why. He was believed to have spent today with his wife, Linda Patrik, and his mother inside the Schenectady house – surrounded by reporters, camera crews and onlookers.

Little is known about David Kaczynski, who reportedly works with homeless and victims of abuse. His wife teaches at Union College. The couple was married in the back yard of their house five years ago in a Buddhist ceremony, according to one report.

Mary Ann Welch, David Kaczynski's next-door neighbor in Schenectady, said she believed he was staying inside the house thinking about "whether he should talk or not." Authorities said there were protracted negotiations with the Kaczynskis about the terms of their cooperation.

Once David Kaczynski decided to cooperate, an obscure, working-class family from the Chicago suburbs was thrust into the national spotlight.

That family, former neighbors recalled today, was friendly and civic-minded, but unusually serious and intellectual, and obsessed with the educational advancement of the two sons, eight years apart in age.

And young Ted, as the Unabomber suspect was known to neighbors, was marked from the beginning as the most unusual of all.

He grew up in Evergreen Park, Ill., a working-class suburb at the southwest edge of Chicago. Dorothy O'Connell, who lived next door to the Kaczynskis in the 1950s, recalled today one incident that vividly set young Ted apart when he came to her home to drop off a pet as the family was about to leave on vacation.

"I told him you should just go off and fish with your father and he showed me a book he was going to read," O'Connell said. "I've never forgotten it. It was 'Romp Through Mathematics from Addition to Calculus.' He was 11. I knew then he was way above normal."

Although not college graduates, Wanda Kaczynski and her husband, Theodore R., were described by former and present neighbors as exceptionally well-read individuals who devoted themselves to their sons' educations. But it was Wanda Kaczynski, more

than her husband, who was seen by neighbors as the real "intellectual" in the family. O'Connell remembered watching the mother read to her older son from Scientific American magazine as they sat on the front porch of the home on Lawndale Avenue.

O'Connell said young Ted was "very nice and polite," but "a reclusive boy. He didn't talk much. . . . He wasn't the type who went out and played ball. He was always studying."

LeRoy Weinberg, a veterinarian who lived behind the Kaczynskis in Evergreen Park, described the future Unabomber suspect as "strictly a loner."

"He never played with the other kids. He was a brilliant student, but even then his brother was much more social. I remember saying at the time that he may be brilliant, but I'm sure glad he's not my kid," Weinberg said.

The family was described as of modest means. The father, who smoked a pipe, worked at a sausage-making plant owned by his cousin in a gritty section of Chicago's South Side, according to Weinberg. Sometime in the 1960s or around 1970, when the older son apparently was launched on a distinguished academic career, the family moved to Lombard, a somewhat more upscale suburb 25 miles west of downtown Chicago.

By all accounts, the Kaczynskis were politically active, liberal and Democratic, while Lombard is a largely Republican suburb. In 1988, the father wrote a letter to the editor of the Chicago Tribune lamenting that the word "liberal" had come to be used "so pejoratively" and suggesting the label be treated "with the respect it deserves."

Wanda Kaczynski also wrote letters the Tribune published in 1988 and 1990. In the first, she defended then-Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev from U.S. criticism. In the second, she suggested the Canadian national health care system would make a good model for the United States.

Roy Froberg, who lives across the street from the former Kaczynski residence, said the father was retired when the family lived here but worked part-time and that the family often took "nice vacations," frequently visiting colleges.

"I think they were what you call pacifists," Froberg said. "We tried to get them to come to our church, but they weren't so interested in Christianity. She was a good Democrat, very active in the precinct organization. They did have a lot of concerns for the welfare of the needy. That was a high priority."

Froberg described Wanda Kaczynski as "very kind," recalling she would fix coffee for him when he visited her home and they would exchange magazines. Her magazines, he said, were "the kind I didn't read. Heavy duty, deep stuff that I didn't get into."

Froberg said David Kaczynski visited his parents about twice a year, and the older son may have been here about 15 years ago. He said he was told by the mother that he lived "in this shack with no heat and electricity," but Wanda Kaczynski seldom spoke of her older son. Except for sketchy knowledge that he had given up an academic career for a reclusive life in the mountains, former neighbors lost track of Theodore J. Kaczynski.

The father, suffering from terminal cancer, committed suicide, apparently in 1990.

O'Connell estimated Wanda Kaczynski is about 76 years old. Those who know her said she was in apparent good health, but after her husband's death she began to consider moving close to David. According to James M. Dee, a broker with J.W. Reedy Realtors here, Wanda Kaczynski contacted him with questions about selling a house in about January 1995.

A year later, the house went on the market, and a week after that it was sold to a young couple, William and Amy Daeschler. Almost universally, the people who dealt with her in this transaction described Wanda Kaczynski as "a nice, little old lady."

"I thought she had a good mind," Dee said. "Sometimes people have trouble remembering things. She was good with numbers."

David Kaczynski attended the closing of the sale with his mother on March 15. It was apparently while he was here for that purpose that the documents that would lead to a suspect in the Unabomber case were discovered.

The frame house bespeaks the modest lifestyle of a working-class family. Painted a dark blue-gray with white trim, it consists of five small rooms – three bedrooms, living room and kitchen – built above a crawl space.

There is nothing about the Lombard house, or the Kaczynskis' life in Evergreen Park, to suggest the startling developments of the last 24 hours. Young Ted "was a 16- or 17-year-old kid when he left" Evergreen Park, Weinberg said. "How can you figure. He was going to be a professor."

Outside the former Kaczynski residence here, Froberg shook his head in disbelief. "It's surprising how a little house with a mother can become news, isn't it?" he said.

Staff writer Malcolm Gladwell in Schenectady contributed to this report.

The Ted K Archive

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