

Writer finds decades-old letters from Unabomber seeking travel advice

Emily Crane

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A journalist and travel author says he's only just discovered he gave the notorious Unabomber travel advice more than 40 years ago — after the killer sought recommendations for a secluded spot in South America “as remote from civilization as possible.”

Jack Epstein, who wrote a budget travel guide for South America, told the San Francisco Chronicle last Friday he recently uncovered two letters written to him by Ted Kaczynski in the late 1970s.

Kaczynski began making and planting bombs back in 1978 – a year before he wrote the letters to Epstein. He wasn't publicly identified until his arrest 17 years later.

Epstein has since speculated that Kaczynski was seeking the travel advice in case he needed to flee from US law enforcement.

In one letter dated May 24, 1979, Epstein said Kaczynski asked him for advice for a secluded spot in South America because he and his brother wanted a “wilderness retreat.”

Ted Kaczynski thanked Jack Epstein for his “helpful and courteous” reply. CNN via Jack Epstein

“We want to get a small plot of land, in a location as remote from civilization as possible, on which we would live self-sufficiently as we are able.

“By ‘wilderness’ I mean a place where the nearest neighbor is, say, five miles away (air-line), and preferably further.”

He went on to say he had read Epstein's guide book and that the author's knowledge of “South America seems extensive.”

“I would therefore like to ask whether you think South America would provide any suitable locations for a wilderness retreat such as I have described. If so, what areas would you suggest we investigate?” Kaczynski wrote.

Ted Kaczynski was arrested in 1996 at a remote cabin in Montana. Sygma via Getty Images

Kaczynski then sent another letter on Aug. 27, 1979, thanking Epstein for his “helpful and courteous” reply.

Epstein said he doesn't recall what advice he gave Kaczynski.

“I didn't know back when Ted Kaczynski and I were exchanging letters that he would become one of America's most infamous domestic terrorists,” Epstein said.

Epstein said he only made the unexpected discovery in a stash of files while he was clearing out his attic as part of a pandemic project.

Kaczynski, whom the FBI dubbed the Unabomber during its probe, planted his first homemade bomb at a Chicago university back in 1978.

Ted Kaczynski speaks during an interview in a visiting room at the Federal ADX Supermax prison in Florence, Colorado, in 1999. Getty Images

He spent the next 17 years mailing or delivering bombs that ended up killing three and injuring nearly two dozen.

Kaczynski, 79, was arrested in 1996 at a remote cabin in Montana after he publicly released a 35,000-word anti-technology manifesto.

He is serving a life sentence at the Federal Correctional Complex in Florence, Colorado.

The Ted K Archive

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