

# In the Kingdom of the Unabomber (TV Episode)

Errol Morris

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From Gary Greenberg's website:

In the Kingdom of the Unabomber is my account of my attempt to break into the writing racket by making friends with Ted Kaczynski. The ploy worked, although not in the way I had in mind. This story, which appeared in Issue 3 of McSweeney's was made into a half-hour documentary by Errol Morris.

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# Synopsis

When psychologist Gary Greenberg wanted to broaden his career, he sought guidance from a more established writer as a means to getting published. But he soon discovered that his mentor was in fact Ted Kaczynski, the notorious Unabomber. Now Greenberg gives a rare account of his correspondence with Kaczynski and his bizarre journey into the killer's paranoid psyche.

# Transcript

## Introduction

**Gary:** I really do believe that sending bombs through the mail to people that you don't know, to blow them up for no particular reason, I really believe that's a bad thing.

I think I knew that going into it, but I you know, that's that was definitely put to the test by getting involved with him.

David Gelernter, professor at Yale, he's opening a package in his office and he's saying gets blown off, just like that. An advertising executive sits down at his kitchen table and gets blown up, and the package wasn't even necessarily intended for him. Guy out in California, Hugh Scrutton picking up something off the ground in the parking lot behind his store and he gets blown up.

Sudden, inexplicable random visitations of mayhem on people who really weren't doing anything, but they had enough to do with the world that he hated, that they made reasonable targets.

'So how do you get a letter from Ted Kaczynski?' I wrote him a letter. You just write him a letter. Yeah, you know, you write a letter, you put a stamp on it, you put it in the mail, and it gets there.

## A shortcut

**Errol:** Why did you write to Kaczynski in the first place?

**Gary:** My frustration in getting published in general had been that nobody knew who I was. That's what I kept getting told. 'Yeah, these are good ideas, but nobody knows who you are.' And short of blowing up people, you know, how do you get your name known quickly, in this society, this culture you attach yourself to somebody whose name is.

**Errol:** Known so instead of blowing up things you attach yourself to someone who blows up things.

**Gary:** Yeah, he takes a shortcut to getting his name out there and I just sort of follow in his way, you know, it's like chasing an ambulance. The ambulance clears the traffic. You stay close behind you get there too. It's sort of like that.

**Errol:** You write to Kaczynski. What do you tell him?

**Gary:** "January 24th, 1998. Dear Mr. Kaczynski, please forgive my intrusion into your life, except what the news media have decided to tell me. Violently objected to the fundamental tenets of the modern that there has been so much interest in finding a psychiatric diagnosis for you to dismiss your protest as the ravings of a lunatic. I told him that I lived in the woods and that I knew a little bit about what that was like. I think that your story needs to be understood in the context of anti modernist protest. I thought that a biography could be useful for everybody, for him and for the world. That was quickly turning him into a caricature. I'd gone to college and discovered that I really liked working with my hands and gotten a gig working as the caretaker of an estate. One day I was splitting one and I thought, you know, I really like splitting wood. I wonder if I can move to my grandfather's property. And split wood. There's no house there, he says. And I said, well, I'll, I'll build something. So I built myself a cabin. It was just too much trouble. It was too expensive. It was too hard to put in electricity and running water and so on. So I just didn't and it all seemed fine. In fact it was great. It was. It was a wonderful thing at that level. We were fellow travelers. We had done something very similar for what appeared to be similar reasons. We had both put ourselves off the grid for the reason that being on the grid felt in some way intolerable.

**Errol:** What specifically would be those similarities?

**Gary:** Well, the most ridiculous one, of course, is the wish to get published. The wish to get heard. He wasn't content to just live in the woods and shut up. He found a terribly twisted way, a horrible way. Of making noise, and by the way, getting himself published by the New York Times and the Washington Post to the tune of 35,000 words. Now, I'm not that desperate. But the wish to be heard. Definitely was definitely powerful. He talks about having had an epiphany. In maybe 66 or 68 kozinski's, epiphany was a recognition that he could kill. That he was capable of it.

**Errol:** I can kill people and I will kill people.

**Gary:** There's an idea. The first time I received a letter from the Unabomber, I had my wife open it. I called home and she said you got a letter from Ted Kaczynski. There was actual letter from the actual Unabomber in my actual house, in her actual hands. Well, open it. Yeah, go ahead. Open the letter. And she did because she's a brave woman.

**Errol:** Holding the document itself, what was that like?

**Gary:** This should be momentous. I was holding a piece of history here, some kind of an artifact. Handwritten letter from this guy that everybody knows who he is. I didn't quite feel that, though. There was something routine about it. There's something so normal about a letter.

**Errol:** In this first letter, what did he tell you?

**Gary:** You know, it was just sort of a hi. How are you? Get to know you later? First thing he did was he apologized for being so long and getting back to me. Then he told me that he wanted me to know that there were other writers who were interested in his story, but that he was glad to have correspondence with me. It would seem, he

said from the articles I'd sent him. I didn't think there was any such thing as objective truth. Did I really think that was the case? For instance? He said. If a nuclear bomb explodes, the consequences are going to be the same for the people who believe that there's such a thing as objective truth and the people who don't. Fairly provocative example. Given who he was. Something of an obsession. It was what I was doing with my time, my hobby, I guess. Writing letters, reading letters. The letters themselves were time consuming to write and to read. I've sent him a few books, and we've discussed those. He's on my Amazon.com.

**Errol:** You go to Amazon.com and you send a book to Ted Kaczynski.

**Gary:** Yeah, he's on my he's on my list. You know, when you get your mailing list, he's on my mailing list. We talked about his case, we talked about the problem of psychiatric diagnosis and a lot of our correspondence was about whether or not he was going to allow me to have access to him, whether or not he was going to allow me to interview him, to write about him. Essentially, why should I let you? Do this. It's a battle over who gets to tell the story about who Ted Kaczynski is, and he wanted me to enter that battle on his side. When I did venture A speculation or an interpretation, anything that was just a little bit different from what he had actually written to me, he would object. He would feel his control being taken away. When he signs his name, he underlines his name with a scrawl that I wrote looked like the mark of Zorro. Well, it's not the mark of Zorro, he said. It's really just two underlines connected with a third line. I can see how somebody with a fertile imagination might see it otherwise. Fertile imagination is Kaczynski speak for defective.

**Errol:** It was a mark, but not the. Mark of Zorro.

**Gary:** Right. The interpretation is what bothered him. I was taking liberties with his story.

**Errol:** Why talk to you at all?

**Gary:** Then, well, because he was intrigued. He allowed that he liked. And that he enjoyed our correspondence. But he always stopped. Short of saying I had any effect on him. And there's a difference. When I was doing this, I wasn't talking with very many people. How do you convey an involvement with somebody like this without at the same time seeming like an apologist, or somebody who proves of what he did? And that's very difficult to go another step and say, yeah, and I feel bad for him or I I really understand where he's coming from. Yeah, that gets converted pretty easily into a. Somebody else's sense that I approve of. What he did?

## Palace Intrigue

**Gary:** There seemed to be. A little coterie that had grown up around Kozinski. A few people that were on a first name basis with him like me. There was some palace intrigue. People were whispering in Kaczynski's ears about other people. To discredit

others, elbowing and jostling for position, favorite Sun status or something like that. So it had. This feeling of a queen in her court.

**Errol:** Mirror, mirror on the wall who does Ted Kaczynski love most of all?

## Sucking up to the Unabomber

**Gary:** Isn't that sick? Yeah. A psychiatrist in Los Angeles approached. Kaczynski about. Similar thing to what I had, in fact reading his letter to Kozinski. It was a caricature of my worst self portrayal, and of what I was doing in this whole deal. Talk about palace intrigue. There was flattery. There was blatant sucking up going on in this doctor's letter. But my letter was just a more subtle. Version of sucking up to the Unabomber? It was just naked ambition. Whereas my ambition has some clothes on. So this was a turf war inside the palace. I decided to whisper in Kaczynski's ear. It turned out that this doctor had done some very, very minor media thing. Regarding the OJ Simpson trial. So I casually dropped that fact into a letter. That I wrote to Kaczynski. You know, he's a prominent forensic psychiatrist who appeared in the national media on the OJ Simpson trial, blah, blah, blah, right? I essentially assassinated him. Through the mail, purely out of ambition. Kaczynski had a nightmare recurrent nightmare that he would wake up to find his cabin in the midst of a shopping center parking lot. The most profane location of technological civilization, the shopping center. And that nightmare, of course, prefigures his imprisonment. That's where he found himself. He woke up and he was in the midst of technological hell when the airplane went overhead and he shook his fist at it. It wasn't only because it was a noisy distraction, Kozinski experienced the whole of technology. It was like a metaphor. Guided all his thinking and all his experience, that technology was. That technology was evil.

**Errol:** As such, he Ted Kaczynski was speaking on behalf of all mankind.

**Gary:** He put himself in that position with all the hubris that that entails. It's just the classic story of biblical prophecy. You say to the people if you continue doing such and such, then so and so is going to happen. Ezekiel lies outside the city on his side for 40 days at a time to get attention. Hey, look, you've fallen by the wayside. You're not following God's commandments, and you're going to be in trouble. John Brown was saying if you continue to run a society based on the enslavement of human beings. And bad things are going to happen. Who is this? Guy standing at the city gate saying everything you know is wrong. Everything you do is bad. But doesn't mean they're wrong. John Brown was not wrong. Slavery is evil. And Ezekiel well, Ezekiel turned out to be quite right. Right. The city fell. Could be said that Kaczynski was just impatient. But he wasn't willing to wait to let technology destroy the world. So that people could then realize that he. Was right all along. One of the worst things I've ever done in my life, this is a. Terrible thing to. Confess I use disposable diapers for my son. Oh, big deal, you say so disposable. Diapers. Everybody is terrible. I don't think



I should go to hell and burn for that. I don't think I should be killed for that. But my implication in the horrors of technology, the burgeoning landfills, the use of chemicals in the environment to both produce and take care of these diapers, the connection can be drawn. And I'm culpable. The scary part about technology, and I suppose this was true about slavery, is it works. I change my kids diapers, I throw them away. I never see them again. It works.

**Errol:** You're corresponding with Ted Kaczynski.

**Gary:** Yeah, things are going swimmingly.

**Errol:** The halcyon period.

**Gary:** Yes, they were the good old days. We were right and back and forth 2 \* a week. I was on a phone with Michael Mello and I was on the phone with Richard Bonnie, who was another lawyer involved in this thing. My life was Kosinski central. It's just like a little support group, you know? I mean. You just can't go around telling everybody. Oh, yeah. I had a letter from Ted Kaczynski today. You can't just tell anybody so mellow. And I had a little whirl. Where we could talk about this guy with a common understanding where we didn't have to go through the business of explaining how well I don't really think people should get killed and all this stuff. We could just take for granted that it was OK what we were doing. Kozinski's getting legal help. He thinks he's going to get psychiatric help of me to debunk his diagnosis.

**Errol:** He's going to get anti psychiatric psychiatric health.

**Gary:** And I'm going to get. I'm hoping I'm going. To get published. And it's feeling like that's really going to happen. So what we have here is a situation where everybody's self-interest is being taken care of all at the same time. It's Adam Smith's utopia. I wrote the preface. To Michael Mellow's book the Forward actually where I sort of systematically picked apart these psychiatric evaluations. I sent that to Kozinski. And all of this time he and I were engaged in this long cat and mouse game about whether or not he was going to sit for. An interview with me. Would I be the first person to get an interview with the elusive Unabomber boy? Wouldn't that put me on the map landing the the great white whale of the interview with Kaczynski, lunch with people in New York, a contract? All sorts of \*\*\*\*. Think of this as an audition. Here's how I'll write about you. And I sent him the forward. And he loved it. Superb. I got an A from Professor Kozinski on my paper on the basis of this audition, I got the job of coming out to Colorado to interview him.

**Gary:** And you know, it's just like there was a kind of gratification about that. I mean, here I am. Somebody with no resources except a typewriter or computer and and and a stamp. Enough computers, enough stamps. And sooner or later, the guy says yes. God, we're in a terrible mess here. I don't know what we're going to do. I don't know if this can be fixed. He gotten a letter from Kozinski expressing anger and disappointment in me for lying to him about certain arrangements. He thinks you have a contract to write an article about him for the New York Times Magazine, which I that just wasn't true. And I said, Ohh well, it sounds like a big misunderstanding. You know, it's like bound to happen. Then I got the letter. What Mel hadn't told me was that the

source for all this information was. Michael Mello. Kaczynski, you know, quoted me in classic Ted Kaczynski. Footnotes and everything else. He quoted me. Passages from Michael Mellon's letters to him, which made it clear that Michael had been talking about me to Kozinski for months. I was on the inside and yet simultaneously I was on the outside. For a moment there I could see from his point of view. Here's a guy he's in jail. He doesn't really know what's going on. On he's never met any of these people. He's got an obscured view. He's got all sorts of people whispering in his ear about everything. He's gone a long way toward trusting me. He gets this information. It's disturbing to him because he feels really exposed, really vulnerable. I sent the letter off. I just said, hey, you know, this is what's been going on. There's no New York Times magazine article. There's no agent. I've been discussing these things. It's not made-up out of whole cloth, but there's been some embroidery here. Your explanation is perfectly acceptable. He says it's quite satisfactory, and then he expresses relief. I'm glad that you are able to explain yourself because I have come to think of you as one of my favorite correspondents and I, you know, essentially he didn't want to. Have to write me off. In the mean time, Michael Mello, his response to that was to write essentially a poison pen letter. He said to Kaczynski that he was forced to conclude that I was untrustworthy and irresponsible and a braggart. Because I must have been telling mellow stories. That was a fatal blow, and I knew that as soon as I saw it. A couple weeks later, I got another letter retracting the apology. You know, I've been aware of these inconsistencies for some time, but I refrained from saying anything because I wanted to see how far you would go. Essentially, he was done with me. When I had gotten the interview, it probably at some level inflamed some jealousy. I don't think that either of these men is particularly small minded, that they would just in some kind of yago like fashion, you know, stab me in the back. But I also think that that was one of the things that was going on.

**Errol:** He's my unabomber. Yeah, he's my Unabomber. No, he's my Unabomber.

**Gary:** And of course, with me getting the interview, he was my Unabomber, right?

**Errol:** What if you got a letter that said, Gary?

**Gary:** Come and write my biography. I'd have to say no. My immediate response was a kind of turning of my stomach. I have real trouble with the truth here. But I somehow erected a shield. I don't think I ever lost my perspective entirely. But I definitely got to a point where I was working hard to gain the trust and the sympathy and the acceptance of a man who murdered people.

## Post Script

I got this letter from him. It's a very provocative letter. It's a chilling letter, ongoing argument about whether or not there's such a thing as objective truth. He says. "I thought we'd settled that long ago," and indeed it was the subject of his 1st letter

to me. “This is something that you would do well to remember, either about nuclear explosions. Or about other little tricks that physics can play. Best regards, Ted.”



# Credits

<b>Directed by</b> Errol Morris	
<b>Produced by</b> Dorothy Aufiero Frances Berwick David Collins Errol Morris Vienna Steiner Michael Williams	producer executive producer producer executive producer executive producer producer
<b>Music by</b> John Kusiak	
<b>Cinematography by</b> Martin Albert	
<b>Editing by</b> Doug Abel	
<b>Art Direction by</b> Steve McNulty	
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<b>Editorial Department</b> Rachel Clark Eamonn Conway Jeremy Dawson Greg Dildine Steven Hathaway Ryan Murphy Karen Schmeer Dan Schrecker	apprentice editor on-line editor title designer colorist assistant editor assistant editor consulting editor 13 title designer
<b>Music Department</b> Doug Bernheim Wayne Sharpe	music supervisor composer: theme music
<b>Additional Crew</b> Heidi August Diane Bernard	production accountant research coordinator

# The Ted K Archive

Errol Morris

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**[www.thetedkarchive.com](http://www.thetedkarchive.com)**