Interview with David Kaczynski, Brother of Ted Kaczynski (The Unabomber)

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It was an honor and privilege to talk with David Kaczynski. David is the brother of Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber. I want to thank David for agreeing to be interviewed. David is an incredibly strong and open induvial. There are few people in the world that have experienced anything like what David and his family endured.

David and his wife Linda exhibited immense resolve and compassion, aiding law officials in stopping the Unabomber. David and his wife acted for the greater good and their actions saved people's lives. It is a position most of us would hope to never find ourselves. Their actions were heroic, whilst also being immensely difficult. David, Linda and Gary Wright (a survivor of one of Ted's bombs) continued to campaign against the death penalty. It is inspiring that people can take such events and turn them into a way to alleviate human suffering.

Ted's beliefs and writings on the influence of technology on society are infamous. His manifesto has inspired many environmentalists and still permeates our culture. My hope is that this interview can shed light on our ability to change the world in a positive way without the use of violence. That coinciding with the development of AI and the ever increasing societal dependance on technology, we can still maintain our humanity.

Please like the video and subscribe to the channel. If this video resonated with you, I would ask that you share it. I hope David's insights can reach as many people as possible and that his and his family's story can be used to benefit people and shape our future in a positive direction.

`https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3iIFJNU8r8`

Finn: Okay, sort of. David, would you mind just telling me a little bit about what it was like growing up with you and Ted?

David: Yeah, Ted was my older brother, 7 1/2 years older. And kind of growing up, I always looked up to him. Our family had a strong emphasis on education and trying to learn, and Ted was very gifted. He skipped a grade in grade school and then went through high school in three years, entered Harvard University, an elite school in the U.S. at the age of 16. And growing up, I kind of wanted to be like Ted. And in many ways, he was a very kind older brother. I have some memories of maybe one of the most vivid is that when our family, I was about three years old, our family moved from Chicago out to a suburb of Chicago. And it was a kind of safe community. We had a large backyard and my parents said, David, you can go out and play in the backyard if you want to. Just don't leave the yard. And it was fine. I could push my way out through the screen door in the summertime, but getting back inside the house was a challenge because I couldn't quite reached the doorknob. And then one day I saw Teddy messing around at the door. And apparently he'd taken a spool from mom's

sewing kit. He removed the thread and a hammer and a nail and he nailed it on. And I think, what's Teddy doing? And he says, here's the spool stuck on the door. And he says, Dave, see if this works. See if he can get in the door. And so he made this little makeshift door handle for me. That's just one memory. There are others, but there was a difference in the sense of our age difference. He was definitely big brother. I was a little brother. He was the leader. I was the follower. But in many ways, we had a pretty close bound growing up.

Finn: And do you ever remember there being any early signs of him being different or noticing that he was maybe not like usual to his classmates.

David: Yeah, I don't know. I might have been seven or eight years old. And one day I asked my mother, mom, what's wrong with Teddy? And, you know, she said, taken aback a little bit, she said, David, what do you mean? There's nothing wrong with your brother. And I said, well, you know, I have friends. They come over to the house. I play with them outside. Teddy doesn't seem to have any friends. Why is that? And I think mom's first response was to explain that there's all kind of different personalities in the world and everybody doesn't have to be alike. She said, David, you're a social person. People like you. like people. That's fine. Teddy likes to read. He likes to be by himself. He likes to work on things. He likes to focus. But I think she realized I wasn't quite satisfied. Like sometimes a car would come with a family member, like an aunt or an uncle coming over to visit. And Ted would be sitting in the living room. He'd see the car and he'd run away like he was almost like he was afraid. But it definitely he saw a visitor as an intrusion into the family's privacy. And so mom said, David, I want to tell you something that happened before you were born. When your brother was just a very little child, nine months old, he got sick and we had to take him to the hospital. His body was covered with like hives and he was itching and crying. And so we took him to the hospital. Apparently, in those days, hospitals were not very welcoming to families. So this nine-month-old child is handed over to the nurse, and it turned out our parents could only visit twice a week for two hours. So essentially, and that was the first time I ever heard the word trauma. My mom said, you know, Ted had a trauma when it was a baby, like a wound, not a wound you could see, not a physical wound, but something in his mind where, it's challenging for him to really trust people. He didn't know why he was in the hospital. We couldn't explain to him. He was only nine months old. He didn't understand language yet. And I remember her saying, Dave, don't ever, ever abandon your brother. He won't say it, but that's really what he fears the most. And of course, I'm actually crying a little bit, but thinking of the suffering my brother had endured, my older, much-loved big brother. And I said, oh, mama, I love Teddy. Of course, I'd never abandon him. And of course, stories like that would echo years later, you know, when we came to this sort of dilemma we had to face when we began to suspect Ted of harming people.

Finn: Do you think if he was born today, do you think that maybe they would have diagnosed him? It's just my own opinion. I don't know if it's right, but like he would

have been on the autistic spectrum or do you think that would have fit his personality type or not?

David: A lot of people have mentioned that to me, that they thought, you know, I mean, he was technically diagnosed provisionally at least with schizophrenia, but a lot of people have said, gee, he sure fits an autistic spectrum. And I'm not an expert on any of these things, but I think mom was pretty insightful. I think that trauma can have very long-lasting effects and how one deals with it or how one receives help in dealing with it may be the key. I know my parents really focused on Ted's strengths, which were intellectual. I mean, he was the smartest kid in the school. I mean, he was brilliant. And so they kind of, I mean, Ted later said they pushed him. I don't think so. I think they were just so proud of his strengths. And of course, it was a strength they respected. because of their, they were working-class people who grew up thinking, the way out of whatever kind of social depth they were in, but also the confusion, all the problems in the world that could be solved by learning and reason and rationality. And so they really They wanted, they encouraged Ted to develop his strength. But there's so many different kinds of intelligence. You know, Ted was, as Ted was measured at 166 IQ, but the idea that you could put a number on intelligence, given the many different kinds of intelligence. So in terms of, you know, mathematical intelligence, he was brilliant. in terms of emotional intelligence, social intelligence. He was quite handicapped. And so, his brain took him through Harvard, but he was, I think, re-traumatized, bullied somewhat in high school because he was young, he was nerdy. He wasn't social, didn't know how to handle social situations. When he got to Harvard, here's this working class kid from Chicago with a bunch of very upper class, mostly upper class colleagues who had different social norms. And then at Harvard, lo and behold, he was invited into a kind of lured into a psychological study that would certainly be considered unethical by today's standards. It was developed by a very famous psychologist by the name of Henry Murray. And it was unethical because the goal, what they were studying was never explained. It was concealed from the guinea pigs. And Ted was one of those guinea pigs. But basically, he thought he was having conversations once a week for three years with a peer, somebody else in the study, when in fact, he was meeting a graduate student who's whose coaching was to try to humiliate the people, the guinea pigs in the study. So Ted went through in spite of this. So in addition to the social isolation, he was actually subjected to a kind of abusive psychological experiment that may have damaged him as well. Interestingly enough, they did a kind of psychological test or survey or inventory as these guinea pigs, like my brother, were invited into the study. And according to his defense team and the psychiatrists working for his criminal defense team many years later, that test indicated a strong likelihood of schizophrenia. So the idea that these psychologists would take a vulnerable person and subject him to emotional abuse and to see how he responded is just incredible to me. Harvard University has been very, very close-mouthed. Whatever, you know, files they have on the Murray study, they have sealed and kept out of public view. undoubtedly to save face. But what happened to Ted at Harvard, I think, was,

again, you know, I don't think there's any one cause. You can't say, okay, the childhood experience, the Harvard study. There were some mental illness in the family, I think my mother's mother. Never was diagnosed, but was probably mentally ill based on my mother's stories. So many causes and conditions. And I don't want to say that Ted wasn't a free agent also, that he didn't, you know, do the things he did. But I think it would help people to understand that how we treat people really, really matters. You know, if a hospital takes a baby and isolates the baby and treats it like a thing instead of a growing human being. If A psychologist develops a study that is intended to cause emotional trauma, these things, these things are wrong. We need to wake up from that.

Finn: So it's a...

David: Sorry to be on an outbox here.

Finn: No, It's very interesting, the idea of that experience, what age was Ted when that happened in the hospital?

David: Nine months old. Wow.

Finn: So that really, I think, would probably make us hopefully more aware of the fact that these events, you know, impact people right from when they're born. It's not our maybe understanding of when things impact people needs to broaden because I think to have your mother report it as a very significant event obviously shows the degree to which it affected Ted. And it's quite incredible that a nine, like that a nine month old is able, is impacted that deeply by something. So that, I mean, it's a great, I think it's a really good point in terms of medical care and how much it, you know, it's not just about treatment, it's also about how you are treated, which is quite fascinating. And I also know that those tests that happened in Harvard, they were then used as part of CIA treating, trying to get information from, well, allegedly trying to get information from informants. Do you think that's why it's sort of hushed or kept quiet?

David: It's possible. As far as I know, there's no direct proof that this was a CIA-crafted experiment. Henry Murray did work for the OSS after World War II, dealing with prisoners of war and trying to debrief them or interrogate them. And so there's a lot of circumstantial evidence that this might have been part of a larger program, codenamed MK-Ultra. And when news of this began to break, I don't know, was it in the 70s? I can't remember what year news of it began to break. A lot of these records were destroyed to protect, you know, to protect the I guess the secret, secrecy of, it was in a kind of cover-up of what had been done to people. So yeah, MK Ultra was about studying people like they weren't people, like they were, forget their humanity. Let's see, let's experiment on them and see what we can learn objectively about human psychology. especially the breaking points of people. So it's possible that this was part of MK-Ultra, but we don't know for sure.

Finn: There seems to be a very unethical, because I know that part of MK-Ultra was also they used LSD and they would give people extort like incredible doses and then they would then psychologically test them to try to break them. So there seemed

to be very poor ethics at that time around psychology and maybe even just a lack of understanding of the human condition. I don't know.

David: Yeah, some of it was done on inmates in prison, people who were really had no choice at all. My brother voluntarily joined this project because they paid him something like $15 a week, which was, you know, big money to a, you know, a working class kid from Chicago. And there was a promise that at the end, they would have a party that would include some Radcliffe girls and maybe he would meet somebody. And apparently that party never took place. Anyway, so yeah, he was lured into it.

Finn: And he was also only 16 as well, which is, I mean, completely illegal. Well, he should be.

David: Yeah, I think he might have been 17 when he. So it was the sophomore, junior and senior years that he was involved in that study.

Finn: And what do you think that these events led Ted away from maybe just a sort of environmentalist view of the world? So like maybe being anti-industrialization to more of a kind of violent viewpoint. Do you think his relationship with people was what pushed him towards a more sort of hateful rather than a kind of traditional environmentalist viewpoint.

David: Well, again, who knows for sure? I do remember that after Ted graduated from college, it might have been a year after his graduation, we were at our parents' house in the suburb of Chicago. And I remember Ted commenting to me that in general, really smart people tend to have a sadistic streak. And I'm thinking, what, why should intelligence be, sort of coincide with cruelty? I didn't argue with him about it at the time, but I remember being, taken aback enough that I still remember him saying that. So that would certainly be some kind of evidence for that. On the other hand, in some ways, and this is just my sort of way of thinking, that perhaps this sort of scientific mathematical background, I remember him, we would have discussions later on and had a lot of differences philosophically as we got older. And I remember him saying one time that ethics can't be verified. There's no way to verify right and wrong. It's purely subjective. And again, that might be a logical conclusion, but it's not a way to live. It's not a way ever to feel connected with people, with other people. So it's interesting, in a way, I mean, it's like, to me, there's a kind of irony here because ecology, nature, it's all about interconnection. Profound interconnection. And yet, you know, he's sort of never, he sort of dismissed the interconnectedness we have with other people. For him, personal autonomy was the ultimate goal. And part of his critique of technology is that it sort of eroded, ate away at personal autonomy. I think it's true. On the other hand, personal autonomy is a limited value, I would say. in a larger context, as we look at the whole world, it's how we relate to other people that really matters, not how we pursue our own interests or ideas.

Finn: With the state of, I suppose, the world at the moment, what do you think about the potential for there to be, because with, I think, eco I don't know if you call it eco-terrorism, but eco or environmentalist movements are sort of increasing in their following and their actions will become more and more, I don't know, maybe more and

more intense. What do you, how do you think the balance should, like what would you say to someone who is maybe has a similar viewpoint of technology? how do you do it in a way that is ethical and not turn it into sort of a hate and a bitterness?

David: Yeah, and I would be the first to say that I'm strongly in sympathy with my brother's critique of technology. And it's interesting, I think a lot of science and technology is, it's predicated ultimately, I mean, some philosophers have said this, predicated ultimately on some value of control. We want to control nature. We want to turn nature into a resource. We want to be the managers of things, when in fact, what we really need to do is to be a participant, a really full-hearted participant in nature.

So, I think Ted's analysis, it said this illusion of control really is an illusion because in the long run, technology becomes a system of its own and we lose personal autonomy. Ultimately, the danger is that we lose control of this system that we sort of have a birthed, but becomes larger and more important than us. So I'm not sure what the antidote is, but I do think underlying the antidote would be some profound respect I was very struck, and I've read the book a few times by a book by the philosopher Martin Buber called I and Thou. And he, you know, it's a little bit of a simplification, but he says there's two kinds of relationships in the world. There's an I-it relationship, and there's an I-thou relationship. And I guess my faith, my hope would be that by beginning to understand the importance of respect, of our interconnectedness with nature, with one another, across cultural boundaries would be the clue to, you know, having a more, a more, a wiser relationship with technology and learning how we need to limit technology because it's very limited in what it can do. When you make control an end in itself, you end up being controlled. That was basically, that becomes your value system. And, if you look at the world and the dividedness, I mean, politically in our country, we're about to have an election, which is the most divisive I've ever seen. Hard to talk even with my friends who might vote the other way. It's very, very difficult. You see violence in Europe. You see violence in the Middle East. And you wonder, what's the antidote to this? What's the antidote to violence? I remember as a child growing up, and excuse me if I'm rambling, but as a child growing up, I was, you know, I remember watching on our public television station some of the early films of the liberation of the concentration camps in Germany. And there had these pits with bodies thrown into them. the survivors were barely more than skeletons. And it just, I thought, my God, how can human beings do this to each other? It seems inconceivable to me. What could cause this? And lo and behold, I end up years later sort of facing this problem, this crisis in our family that perhaps my brother was sending bombs to people and killing them. So the question kind of remains unanswered, but I do think we need to take responsibility for creating healthier communities and a healthier sense of the I, the ow, of the value of not only of every human life, but of all life.

Finn: And how did you process and deal with the emotions of that situation? Because I don't think there's, people, you can look for books and things on how to deal

with stuff, but I don't think there's any book written that is quite like the circumstance that you had. So how did you go about processing and dealing with that?

David: Well, you know, my, My wife, my love of my life, Linda, was the first to suspect. And at first, my way of dealing with her suspicions was to be dismissive. I just could not imagine my brother would do these things. And I've seen, you know, there was some news about the manifesto, and I remember telling her, well, you know, there's a lot of people who share this aversion to technology. It doesn't mean, you know, Ted might be one, but that doesn't mean he's the Unabomber. But then the manifesto was published and my first, Linda again encouraged me to look at it at my first experience with it was the first six pages online. And I thought for sure I was going to read this, these six pages and turned to her and said, see, hon, I'm right. This definitely is not Ted. And instead, oh, my God, I just started feeling what does sort of sound like him, you know? I remember her asking me as we walked away from the library where we had this computer, what do you think, Dave? Do you think your brother wrote that? And I said, well, maybe there's one chance in a thousand. And that wasn't enough to stop her. She said, one chance in 1000, that's, we need to look into this. And anyway, within a week, we ended up getting a copy of the 78-page manifesto. Almost all of my brother's letters to me over the years I had saved. And so every night after work, Linda was a college professor. I was a social worker. We'd come home from work, eat dinner, and then sit down in the evening and comb through Ted's letters and comb through the manifesto. And it was like a roller coaster ride for me. I mean, it's sort of between denial and I didn't know if I was projecting my fears. or if I was in denial and not acknowledging. I remember waking up one morning after a few weeks, maybe even a month, and I woke up and I thought I just had a terrible, terrible nightmare. And then I realized it wasn't a nightmare. I was literally considering the possibility that my brother was the most wanted person in America, a serial killer. And I remember going to the breakfast table. Linda had gotten up a little earlier. She was eating some cereal. I sat down and I said, you know, hon, I think it might be a 50-50 chance. Ted wrote that. And at that point, you know, the dilemma really hit us. It really began to intensify. And the dilemma, you know, it was like, almost like it was crafted by a demonic being because it was like any decision we made could lead to somebody's death if we didn't. Nothing. And Ted was the Unabomber. We might wake up someday and realize some other innocent person had been killed. We go through the rest of our lives with blood on our hands. And there were a lot of innocent, you know. I mean, I think they were all innocent ultimately. I mean, certainly in any legal sense, some of them were involved in technology, but there was like. an airplane with a bomb on it, with hundreds, I don't know, 100 people on board. Fortunately, the plane didn't blow up, and they were able to land it safely, and nobody was seriously injured. But what would it be like to wake up someday and realize, We had done nothing. We had been bystanders and we failed to act and another person died. We'd have to go through the rest of our lives with blood on our hands. On the other hand, in the US, there is a death penalty. If I turned in my brother, he was convicted. He'd killed three people.

Most wanted person in America. He'd be a prime candidate for the death penalty. What would it be like to go through? the rest of my life with my brother's blood in my hands. At one point, at about this time, I said, Linda, give me two weeks. Just give me two weeks to try to think this through. And I thought maybe in two weeks I'd have some tremendous epiphany, some inspiration. We tried with the idea of going to visit Ted. He'd already estranged himself from the family. I did write him a letter asking him if I could visit any He wrote back a very angry letter saying, I don't want anything to do with you or anything to do with anyone in our stinking family. Maybe he's just trying to hold us at arm's length. I don't know. Or he maybe really hated me at that point. But, you know, I began to realize, Linda was very concerned that if I went to visit Ted, I could end up being killed. Anyway, I began to think at this point things could really spin out of control. especially since he'd forbid me to visit him. Ultimately, Linda had this inspiration. She said, look, there are people who can analyze language. We're amateurs, but maybe we could find some professional who could look at the manifesto, look at some of Ted's letters on the topic of technology, and give us an idea what the possibilities are. She actually had a childhood friend who had, lifetime friend who had become a private detective, Susan Swanson. And Susan was able, we didn't tell her who the letters were written by. I think she might have assumed it was written by one of Linda's students or something. But we, she contacted someone who, former FBI agent, a criminal investigator who would gone into this field of language analysis. And he took two weeks and then said, send me more letters, please. I can't make a judgment yet. He recruited some other experts to look and got back to us finally and said they thought there was a 60% chance that the letters my brother had written were authored by the same person who wrote the manifesto. And so, talk about control. There was one thing we could control, I guess, and that would be if my brother was the Unabomber, we could prevent the next person from dying. It was even more complicated than this because the Unabomber had promised that in return for his publication of his manifesto in the Washington Post, he would stop bombing people. So that was another aspect of this dilemma. On the other hand, when Ted finally was arrested, they found underneath his bed, in this little cabin he had out in the woods, another live bomb ready to be mailed to somebody. You know, looking back, probably probably it was good that we did what we had to do. And I think I think what's you know, it's of course, I was the brother. I had the most at stake here. Linda had never met Ted. He had sort of estranged himself from me when he heard about my that I was going to leave the desert to marry an old high school girlfriend. He anyway. It was. It was like it wasn't just my responsibility. It was Linda's responsibility too. Did I? Did I have a right to forbid her to do what she thought was right? Anyway, it was complicated, but I looking looking back, I don't think I would have made a different choice. I think what we we did, what we had to do. We had some promises from law enforcement, federal law enforcement. One promise was that we would be treated as confidential informants, that nobody would ever know that we were the ones that had fingered the Unabomber. And of course, that was leaked, that

we were the people responsible. Our house was surrounded by Reporters, oh my gosh, it was like, it's like no exit hell, emotional hell for a little while. At 1.2, I had to tell my mother. I didn't want to involve her in the decision. It's one thing to put your brother into prison, perhaps into the death row. What would it be like for a mother to do that? Anyway, when the FBI was interviewing us, they insisted on interviewing Mom. And so I had to tell her before the interview not only what we suspected, but what I'd done. I kind of left Linda out of it. I didn't want Mom to, you know, pin it all on Linda, her anger, her resentment of the disloyalty we had to the family. But I remember mom, as I'm talking to mom in her apartment, she's looking at me like she can't believe what she's hearing. And then I finally, you know, I said, mom, I've actually gone to the FBI. I've shared what we, what we, what I suspect, and Ted is under investigation. And at that point, mom got up out of her chair and walked up to me. I mean, I was terrified I was going to lose her love. And she just walked up to me. She put her arms around me, pulled me down and put a kiss on my cheek and looked at me and said, David, I can't imagine what you've been struggling with. I can't imagine what you've been struggling with. And there was never after that any any recrimination. She cooperated with the FBI. We worked as a family not only to share clues that might help them investigate my brother, but also to make it clear that he might have some some mental problems. Mom, I remember vividly mom telling them about the hospital experience. And actually, I remember one of the FBI agents, there were three of them interviewing her, and his mom was talking about the hospital experience and pouring out her heart and her love for her child. One of the agents actually began to tear up a little bit. You know, she had more than a job to do. She was a human being as well. Anyway, All things considered, looking back, perhaps things worked out in the best way possible. Ted was given life imprisonment, not the death penalty, which was kind of a surprise, but we had worked, we worked for a year and a half advocating, going on, you know, television shows, speaking to newspapers about why My brother should not get the death penalty. And we had two main arguments. One was his mental illness. And secondly was the idea that if you punish families for doing the right thing, for caring about other people, that's going to deter other families from doing the same thing, from following our example. So in some ways, you know, having our identities, our role in the investigation leaked, had a positive result as well. It gave us a voice to advocate for Ted's life. And in fact, he published more books about technology when he was from his prison cell. He corresponded with people about his ideas. And so in some ways, he was allowed, able to live, I'm sure not a happy life, but a meaningful life, continuing his mission in a more constructive way. with persuasion and writing and being connected with people. He even through letters and eventually through bars, developed a relationship, first relationship he ever had with a woman in his life. And they considered themselves married. So Maybe I'm just trying to sort of ease my own conscience, but I think looking back, we worked as carefully and as conscientiously as we could with love of Ted in mind, but moral responsibility in mind. And I think it made a difference in the long run. Later on, I sort of developed from that, I became

friends. There was this guy in California who called me. His brother was on death row, and it turned out he had turned in his own brother. And a lifelong friend of mine is now Bill Babbitt, and he'd turned in his brother Manny, who had killed one person. Manny, to speak about trauma, was a Vietnam War veteran with a piece of shrapnel stuck in his brain. and severe trauma, severe PTSD, three stays in mental institutions. And yet he was in the supposedly progressive state of California. He was put on death row. And unlike me, Bill had to watch his brother be put to death. So that made me really think, oh my God, this system is so unfair. My brother When my brother was at Harvard, Manny Babbitt was in Vietnam. Both were turned in by their own brothers. Both had all-white juries. Only problem is Manny Babbitt was not white. My brother was white. And Manny Babbitt was strapped down to a gurney, brought into the death row– the execution chamber on his 50th birthday and put to death with his brother watching. And so that's sort of my own story. And that story in my lifetime opposition to the death penalty really got me to the point of thinking, OK, this is this is something meaningful. We could try to transform all this tragedy. Obviously, the tragedy is there, especially for those people impacted. But we could try to try to try to make some good come out of it. And so at least, the death penalty is much less used in the United States than it used to be. And in the state of New York, where Linda and I lived at the time, our advocacy and the advocacy of many others, including religious groups, led to the abolition of the death penalty in the state of New York. So that's something to look back on as a positive thing. On a more personal level, I became very good friends with one of Ted's surviving victims, Gary Wright, who lives in California, had been severely injured by one of Ted's bombs. And he and I became close friends, in fact, when we were advocating against the death penalty. In New York, he came and toured the state with me to try to talk about, you know, what's, how can we actually turn things around? Answering violence with violence isn't the answer. What we have to do is practice friendship and love and concern for one another. It's a powerful, powerful message, I think.

Finn: Another guy, didn't Gary, he was, he, forgave Ted when he during the trial. Is that correct?

David: That's correct. During the trial, he actually, from, he was given a victim impact statement and from the witness box, he looked directly at Ted and said, Ted, I forgive you. And he explained that, you know, forgiveness isn't just a transaction. I don't know what it meant to Ted. Gary seems to feel that Ted was really startled by it. But for Gary, it meant letting go of hatred, letting go of hatred. And what he told me is that he didn't want to go through life with his, you know, he has two kids growing up with an angry, hateful father. He wanted to show love and compassion, and he's really quite a guy.

Finn: What are your, like, maybe potentially like spiritual beliefs or beliefs about life? Like, do you think that this was something that, I don't know how to put this, but this was a part of your maybe path in life, that this was something that, you said something about turning tragedy into something positive, which I thought was quite

incredible. What Do you have any, what are your beliefs around the events or just I'd be interested to hear that.

David: Yeah, it's interesting. My parents sort of raised us as agnostics, you know, never took us to church. On the other hand, I remember my mom talking to me about the importance of ethics and empathy. It was part of our upbringing. It always meant something to me. I always carried that with me from mom. And my father described himself as a pacifist. So there were these, you know, sort of strains coming from my family in the 19 70s, I guess, maybe it was. After I graduated from college, I got very interested in philosophy, which was one of the things that connected me or reconnected me with Linda, who became a philosophy professor, my wife. And I remember being profoundly affected by the philosopher Martin Heidegger, who raised this question of the meaning of being. And ultimately, later in his life, he actually had a kind of friendship or a conversation with Martin Buber, my other philosophical hero. And then here's the irony. Years later, I learned that Martin Heidegger had been a member of the Nazi Party, had been a supporter of Hitler. So it's like, wow, how complex we are. How's this possible this man with these ideas could support a fascist? I don't know. Again, the quandary of what is it in our human nature that gives birth to violence and hatred. It was Linda who introduced me to Buddhism, and I consider myself to be a Buddhist. After we retired, she from teaching and I from my career in advocacy, we worked for three years at a Buddhist monastery in upstate New York, a Tibetan Buddhist monastery. And I very much respect the idea, a very profound Buddhist idea of interconnectedness, that we're all interconnectedness. You know, in philosophy, sometimes they talk about subject and object, subject and object as being split like a wall between the two. And in Buddhism, the view is, oh, no, we're a mirror of the world and the world is a mirror of us. I'm simplifying things. And then there's the Buddhist practice where you even, it's called Tang Len, where you even try to think about your adversaries or people who have hurt you in a compassionate way and sort of breathe in their suffering and to understand that the source of violence is fear, suffering. In Buddhist terminologies, the kleshas, the things that we need to try our best to let go of.

Finn: The wheel of suffering.

David: Yeah, So it's a practice. And, Buddhism has this notion of karma and some Buddhists talk about past lives. And, is there kind of destiny here? Is there a karmic path we're on? Did I meet Ted in the past life? Were we here for a purpose? I'm My parents would approve. I'm very agnostic about all of that.

Finn: Yeah.

David: I don't know.

Finn: It's just I'm also I also practice Buddhism. I go to I do go to temples. I mean, among other things, it's not I kind of like to do lots of different spiritual practices. But I do have from watching and researching this topic, I find it fascinating because just it appears to me like you went I don't know if many people would do what you did or would have come to that place of where they would have been able to actually

do what you did. And that's why it strikes me as incredibly just an incredible sort of shows what people are capable of because it's, I do find it, I know inspiring is not the right word because of the context, but just you had to manage the relationship with your brother, but at the same time, you also had this compassion for other people and the victims, and you knew that if you didn't act, something could happen. So it's, to me, it strikes me as an incredible, I don't know what the right word is, but path or decision that you had to come to, one that I'm, can't imagine was easy, but that also in a way is inspiring because for you to be friendly, to be, I've gotten so close with one of the victims, you know, Gary, it's testament that we don't have to be violent, you know, humans. We can also connect and have love and compassion.

David: Yeah, it's well said. Well said. Yeah. Yeah, I was going to say something, but it's sort of slipped out my mind as I was listening to you. But I I guess what I what I would like to emphasize, too, is the role Linda has played in all of this, our partnership, our her leadership when it in the early stages when she was really I I could have put this in a drawer and, you know, just let my denial take over and and nudged me to the point where we could no longer do that. And her support, I mean, it was very traumatic in many ways to be the focus of public attention. And, a lot of people respected what we'd done. Some people thought being so disloyal to a family member was horrible. So we got some hate letters over the years as well. You know, in some ways, she would have elected it all to just be over. And yet when it came to doing other things like going to help the Babbitt family advocate for Manny's life unsuccessfully as it turned out, when it came to taking over the leadership of New Yorkers against the death penalty, where I'd have to tell the story again and again and again. She was supportive. She saw the meaning. She saw the value in that. And I believe she also saw how healing it would be for me to be able to bring something positive out of the tragedy. She's just an amazing, amazing person. I'm so blessed to have had her in my life. And I think the part of the lesson here is it's not about all about individuals. It's about relationship. Relationship is really the key, both on an interpersonal level and on a wider human level. It's the chemistry of relationships that really determine our future. And if the chemistry is exclusive, keep those people out or whatever, there's something wrong. You know, we're headed down that at waterfall into violence and fear and division.

Finn: There is a, there's, I do know there's another Buddhist saying about, you know, when we believe that we're a separate soul with a separate, you know, individuality that we create a violent situation. And I do feel like, I do, it's quite paradoxical though, because I think For many, I do know that at the moment there is a big movement towards getting away from technology, returning to nature. And that's quite, can be quite a nice idea. But then I also think like, it's, that's why it's such a difficult balance because Ted had so many things that he pointed out that I think many people would agree with. But it's the direction that he took it in that almost doesn't seem, it doesn't seem like it's fully connected to the nature or the sort of peace that he professed without technology.

David: Yeah, and I think I've seen this with some other folks who have, you know, sort of go on a mission. They have a mission that sometimes they're is a blurring of the boundary between, say, personal problems or personal negative feelings and the idealism of the vision itself. And I think, you know, when you try to serve your, you know, personal problems, deal with your personal, let them inject into your mission. It can create the kind of conflict we see in Ted between the ideal that he espoused and his methodology for achieving it.

Finn: And I just want I'll finish up here, David. And just so the last question I'll ask you is, as I mean, I obviously I think I think that Ted's case is a case of both, nature and nurture, like things combining together. What do you think as a society, how, if there was someone like Ted born today, how do you think as a society we could handle that kind of a person and help them not go towards a more violent path and help them be more integrated, like you said, maybe in Ted's final years, he was able to write and wasn't, damaging society.

David: And be able to be connected with people. Yeah. I think, part of the issue is we have such a competitive streak, certainly in our culture. I mean, whether it's business or I used to love sports. I still love sports, but it's based on competition. Even achievement in school, you compete to get on the honor roll, to have the best grades, to get to the best colleges. This sense of competition often ends up isolating people and making them feel less than. I think that one reason Ted was, could be so critical of other people was because, he felt himself being criticized and maybe even agreed with the criticism in some way that he felt less than in some ways. And I think we just have to embrace those folks. We just have to listen to them. We have to, you have to find ways of including those people who have withdrawn. It's funny because, you know, I've spent, I spent 10 years living in the desert before my marriage, kind of withdrawn in the same way that Ted was withdrawn. For me, it helped. So it's not, you know, everybody needs sort of some privacy, some sacred place to withdraw to. I mean, we see it in Buddhist retreats, people. People do that as well. On the other hand, if I would fault myself, I look back, what I feel most regret for is not understanding, not picking up, because Ted never talked about his feelings much, but not picking up on how much he was suffering before it got to the point where he turned violent. I think we need to just open our hearts and try to help one person that we think of as vulnerable or as afflicted with negative feelings about themselves that then get turned into resentment of others. The loving community, how do we create that? I mean, it's a good question, but we could do it on a small scale by being kind. kind to each other.

Finn: David, thank you so much. That was fantastic.

Finn Conaty
Interview with David Kaczynski, Brother of Ted Kaczynski (The Unabomber)
Oct 30, 2024

<www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3iIFJNU8r8>