

Dear Uncle Ted

How I came to know the Ted Kacynski behind the headlines

Geneva Decobert

February 01, 2025

Contents

An Author	3
A Catalyst	4
A Friend	4
A Move	6
A Loss	7

In my home, I keep a Socrates prayer candle, which is a fine enough preface for how I eventually read the work of Ted Kaczynski. Until I sent him my first letter in 2019, I knew him as a great philosopher in the modern age. After writing to him, I came to know him as a friend.

An Author

Unlike the works (still beloved by me) of thinkers such as Heidegger, Hume, and Kierkegaard, Kaczynski's work offered practical and specific points relevant to the modern era. The most well-known of his published philosophical work is *Industrial Society and Its Future*, oftentimes referred to as his manifesto. Published in 1995, the essay details how the development of technology with the prime motivator of profit caused the deterioration of our planet and personal freedoms. *Technology Slavery*, a book published 15 years later, expands on those ideas in detail. In 2016, Kaczynski published the book *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*, which is precisely what it sounds like. The book's first section argues for the need for a revolution against the technological system, and the second section details how that might be done and the potential pitfalls that must be avoided.

While most of Kaczynski's work is nonfictional analysis and practical ideas, a personal favorite of mine is the 1999 satirical short story "Ship of Fools." Titled and modeled after an allegory first explored in Plato's *Republic*, the story follows a ship headed into dangerous northern waters as the sailors take pride in proving their skill. While passengers and sailors bicker about perceived social injustices aboard the ship, the cabin boy repeatedly tries to address their certainly impending demise and suggests that they change course. He's called a fascist just before the ship crashes between two icebergs—a bitterly familiar theme, far ahead of its time.

I was struggling with what course of action to take from here: Should I destroy something evil or create something beautiful?

A lot of people who haven't read Kaczynski's work misrepresent his ideology as luddite or plainly anti-technology. However, referring to him as an anti-capitalist is far more accurate. Make no mistake; he's no plain communist either. He simply picked up on the trend of "progress" being driven by profits instead of the good of humanity early on and saw that trend as leading society on a slow march to oblivion. As the years go on, I think it's clear enough that Kaczynski's early warning was, in fact, timely.

This story, however, isn't about Kaczynski's philosophy or his morally unsound methods of getting it published in national newspapers. No, this is a personal account of my relationship with the man himself. Not the philosopher, nor the killer, but a frankly grandfatherly figure of support: to me, the real "Uncle Ted".

A Catalyst

I considered writing Kaczynski for a long time but doubted he would reply, so I didn't bother for years. It was a trauma that finally made me bring pen to paper: a man who I had been engaged to marry died tragically. He had been sick with Chronic Lyme Disease. Instead of getting him hyperbaric oxygen treatment (70% effective at killing the virus), doctors treated his symptoms and lined their pockets with Big Pharma blood money. My darling was given a cocktail of medications that aren't legally allowed to be mixed: Oxymorphone, Adderall, Ativan, Ambien, intramuscular Testosterone, plus constant antibiotics. He predictably fell into a cycle of abuse. In desperation, I eventually gave him an ultimatum, and he shot himself two weeks after returning home to his family—high out of his mind.

Four days later, I smashed a lawn chair to bits against the cement walls of my basement. A month or so later, I was talked down from a V for Vendetta-style flight of fantasy. I was lost, existentially alone, depressed; but most of all, furious. It was an inhuman state, but I was determined not to let it destroy me. So, after another few months, I reached out to the philosopher, who I knew, at least at one point, was familiar with my level of rage.

Almost 30 years after disappearing from his tenured position at UC Berkeley, Kaczynski landed in Florence, Colorado Federal Supermax Prison. Stephen J. Dubner/Getty

Knowing that the Bureau of Prisons would be involved in this correspondence, I wrote to Kaczynski in a code of my own invention. I told him a bit of my early life story and how I discovered and came to love his work. I told him what had recently happened and that I was struggling with what course of action to take from here: Should I destroy something evil or create something beautiful? Simultaneously, I hoped for a response while expecting none—or worse, federal agents at my door.

A Friend

When I read the letter Kaczynski wrote back a month later, it brought tears to my eyes. Not because my favorite modern philosopher decided to speak with me, displaying his substantial intelligence by writing back in the same code I had used to write to him. Nor was it because of his plain recommendation to pursue the creation of something positive for the world accompanied by the offer to advise on exactly what this could be. Kaczynski's words leapt from that paper as heartfelt, understanding, and empathetic. He was speaking to me not as a writer or philosopher, but in the way a deeply understanding friend addresses the grieving. He reminded me of my resilience and intelligence and suggested I heal myself before jumping into action. He offered himself as part of an emotional support system.

Your average person sees Ted as a psychotic murderer at worst and a psychotic philosopher at best.

This was the Theodore Kaczynski I grew to know over the next few years. He was stuck in a cement box alone for 23 hours a day with nothing but a 4-inch slit of a window, allowed out for 1 hour to pace in an empty in-ground pool designed to prevent him from identifying his location. And when he got my sob story in the mail, he just wanted to help. Over time, I learned I was far from the only one: Kaczynski spent most of his waking hours writing and writing to others like me in some way.

It's jarring to know him and face the world's discourse around him this way. Your average person sees Ted as a psychotic murderer at worst and a psychotic philosopher at best. Even friends who ostensibly support him have sent me "Uncle Ted" memes that sicken me. I eventually told them to stop. Shortly after receiving Kaczynski's first letter, I was at a Christmas party with people I'd known for years. For anyone who's lost someone beloved and faced their first holiday season after, you can guess what kind of state I was in. While sitting on a couch with a drink and a thousand-yard stare, I idly listened to the people around me discussing the candidates for the 2020 presidential election. After hearing every take I never cared to hear on the likes of Tulsi Gabbard, Kamala Harris, Joe Biden, and Donald Trump, I chimed in quietly from my corner: "I think the only political ideologue who's worth a shit is Ted Kaczynski."

The entire room went dead silent for a few precious moments, and I felt a dozen wary eyes turn in my direction. That's really dark," someone finally said, their tone one of constrained alarm. This reaction brought me a mildly incredulous look as I looked around the room. Oh, right—he was the Unabomber. I shrugged and mentioned his writing, letting them all go back to leaving me alone.

In January, I got a letter from an older woman who lived nearby. Ted had written to her about me, saying that I was struggling and needed a friend. He thought we would get along. Her phone number was in the letter, so I gave her a call, and we met for tea later that week. He'd been right—this woman was a clever, funny, kind, aging punk. We talked for hours, and I felt the now-foreign sense of being comfortable in the company of another person. When I mentioned I'd been collecting plant cuttings and pressing them to send to him, she explained that Kaczynski wasn't allowed anything but ink and paper. She suggested I photocopy my pressed cuttings, and so I did. More photocopies were used as flyers for what ended up being the first show I headlined and sold out as a musical artist.

That show was in February 2020, followed by a series of larger bands inviting me to tour with them. Of course, those tours were postponed indefinitely a month later, but Kaczynski and I had lots to discuss. Around this time, we started talking more about plans of action—worthwhile things I could do with myself.

His suggestion was thick with disclaimers. He understood if I didn't feel up to it or felt it was a bad idea. He was sure to say that even if I didn't accept his suggestion, he would still view me as an intelligent, strong woman and friend. The suggestion? Start a journal detailing anti-tech work being done throughout the world. This journal

would include no opinions or editorials, only an account of what was actually being done. “We are drowning in discourse,” he said, and we didn’t need any more.

Kaczynski suggested I start the journal online and offered to connect me with his publisher so I could have it printed later. I agreed that it was a brilliant idea and started collecting stories. At the same time, however, I was struggling—my music career had been stifled, and my seven-year dog training business was shutting down. I was still grieving and running out of money.

A Move

For years, I’d planned to sell off my dog training business and move far from the city. Now, at the end of my rope mentally and financially, it was time to get out. By December of 2020, I told Ted I was making a move. I also told him about a longtime dream: to build a neighborhood in the woods where people like me could have community. Not a commune, to be clear, but a place where future children could roam and be safe.

“Things have been normal,” we would say. “I’ve been thinking of some normal things, normally of course.”

Ted was both supportive and skeptical. He’d known many people who had tried communes and similar methods of “escaping the system,” and was familiar with the pitfalls. While showing the same caring demeanor he had for a year now and saying he understood my need for retreat, he warned that without action, there would eventually be nowhere to retreat to. He suggested I gather myself in whatever rural corner I chose then get back to work.

Soon after, I got a package from Ted Kaczynski in the mail: a book. In our last letters, we’d gone deeper into discussion about my dream neighborhood. He recommended I read *The Farm Then and Now: A Model for Sustainable Living* by Douglas Stevenson, and so he sent it over to my house. Simultaneously, he connected me with some friends who had tried the same thing. The purpose was for me to know how to set up my one-day home better than others had in the past. That was my uncle, always looking out for me.

When I moved in 2021, I did take his advice to adjust and recuperate for a bit. I was still a mess, and I also needed to find employment again. At the same time, an unfortunate development occurred for Ted: the guards at the Florence, Colorado Federal Supermax Prison had forbidden him from discussing politics and demanded he only correspond with “normal people.” His lawyers were fighting it, but in the meantime we had to play things safer to stay in touch.

While limited, we still had a lot of fun in our discussions. Ted pointed out the vagueness of what “normal people” could possibly mean, and our letters became littered with jokes at the guards’ expense. “Things have been normal,” we would say. “I’ve been thinking of some normal things, normally of course.” Eventually, I got a job in

journalism—always keeping Uncle Ted in mind as I worked. I was sure to tell him it was the “normal” kind. His lawyers won out eventually, and our conversations returned to... normal.

For the next few months, Ted continued to connect me with other friends of his. I was put in touch with a young man around my age who also played music and wanted to build a neighborhood as well. Another older woman started an email list and more letters came in from like-minded thinkers around the country. Ted knew better than anyone the importance of avoiding isolation. Admittedly, I still fight the instinct to shut in.

A Loss

In late 2022, I got the first letter from him that I was unhappy to read. It said that this would likely be his last correspondence, as he had developed cancer—the kind you don’t recover from in Federal Supermax. Accepting his fate, he told me he was grateful for our friendship and would spend his remaining days finishing his final book at his new cell in North Carolina.

I was contacted by both his publisher and his friend in the new year. His publisher said Ted had asked if I would transcribe his last work, which I agreed to do. I instead ended up working a new job, which took up too much of my time, but everyone understood. His friend gave me his new contact information, saying he would be happy to hear from me. I live with a deep regret that I found myself unable to reach out again. In my mind, all I could think of was that someone I loved was dying again—and I didn’t want to watch this time. Knowing Ted, he easily deduced this and immediately understood. Plus, he had his book to write. That’s what he was like: an intelligent, perceptive, kind, driven older man.

When he died in June of 2023, some news sources made it look like he took his own life. Knowing the truth, it repulsed me. I’d told Ted about my own suicidal ideation, and he was vehemently opposed to the act even in his situation. The only time he’d even considered it was when he was being threatened with a psychological ward during his trial. This wasn’t a man who quit, but a man who used every resource available to him to try to help whoever he could with fierce love and determination.

I avoided the news and wrote a short eulogy for him online, seen only by friends at the time. It detailed who Ted really was, and what he wanted for the world he was severed from—but still cared for. Today his work and actions have come back to the forefront of our national zeitgeist. It’s a mixed bag, but I take some comfort in the prominence of his philosophy even in those who don’t know him. He’d be happy to see Americans traversing the barrier between left and right, and so am I. In equal measure, though, I wish I could talk about it with my friend, my Uncle Ted: the wonderful man who supported me through one of the most difficult periods of my life.

Geneva DeCobert is a musician, producer, singer, and writer who loves to live in the middle of nowhere. She also publishes horror and science fiction on her Substack, "Dollar Dreadfuls."

The Ted K Archive

Geneva Decobert

Dear Uncle Ted

How I came to know the Ted Kacynski behind the headlines

February 01, 2025

Blaze Media. <www.theblaze.com/frontier/dear-uncle-ted>

Blaze Media is owned by conservative radio talk host Glenn Beck.

www.thetedkarchive.com