

To Unabomb Victims, a Deeper Mystery

George Lardner and Lorraine Adams

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"Why me?" Patrick Fischer, chairman of the computer sciences department at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, keeps asking himself in the days after the arrest of the man authorities believe was the elusive Unabomber. "Why was I selected?"

Across the country, at Brigham Young University, LeRoy Bearnson, an electrical engineering professor, asks the same question. Bearnson has never met Patrick Fischer, yet the Unabomber somehow found his name and used it on the return address of the explosive package that ended up in Fischer's office 14 years ago.

Only recently, FBI agents hundreds of miles apart went to visit both men with a photograph of the bearded recluse Theodore J. Kaczynski, still looking for answers to the puzzle that has baffled investigators for more than 17 years.

The Unabomber's victims were scattered around the country, unknown to each other and probably unknown to the Unabomber himself, except as names culled in outdated directories, newsletters and other publications. Some of the victims' names have been found on handwritten notes and other documents in Kaczynski's tiny Montana cabin, an isolated shack where FBI agents also have found a live bomb ready for shipment and what they believe is a draft of the infamous "manifesto" the Unabomber wrote trying to justify the attacks. Warnings went out only last week to forestry officials and current and former University of California-Berkeley professors whose names were found among Kaczynski's papers.

If Kaczynski carried out the crimes, as authorities now seem confident, investigators still have not found a method to the madness. Interviews with a number of the more than two dozen Unibomb victims show they too are still grasping for clues and more mystified than ever now that the suspect has a name. They never met him. They never even heard of him. And the FBI has shared so little information with them that they can't begin to understand why he picked them out.

"I suppose the guy didn't care which way it went or who got blown up," Bearnson, 61, said of the package that listed him as the sender.

Neither Fischer nor Bearnson thinks there was anything personal about the Unabomber's animosity. To him, they were just symbols in his hate-filled crusade against modern technology and its practitioners.

"He might pick out an individual, but the person was still a symbolic target to him," said Oliver B. "Buck" Revell, a former high-ranking FBI official who oversaw early stages of the Unabomb investigation. "I suspect that once he targeted the university research system, it didn't matter that much who received it. I suspect he felt the country would pick up the symbolism." Since the FBI visited him, Fischer, 60, has thought of several things that could have brought him to Kaczynski's attention. He was a graduate student in Cambridge, Mass., between 1958 and 1962, studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology while Kaczynski was a Harvard math major. At one point, Fischer took a math course at Harvard. Perhaps Kaczynski had been in the same class.

"I asked the FBI that. They wouldn't tell me," Fischer told a reporter Friday. He ruled out the possibility himself a few days ago by contacting the professor who taught the course.

Fischer's father, Carl, taught math at the University of Michigan when Kaczynski was a graduate student there, earning first a master's degree and then a doctorate. But Patrick Fischer doubts they crossed paths. Carl Fischer specialized in statistics and actuarial science and spent most of his time at the business school. Kaczynski's specialty was much more abstruse: complex variables analysis.

"I couldn't have understood his thesis," Patrick Fischer said. He now thinks Kaczynski might have gotten his name out of journals that published Fischer's academic papers.

"My original research was pure math," he said. "Maybe I was regarded as a turncoat by this guy. I went from pure math to theoretical computer science."

The bomb that arrived in Fischer's office at Vanderbilt on May 5, 1982, was delivered in spite of itself. Based on outdated information as well as canceled stamps, it had been addressed to him at Pennsylvania State University. He had moved to Vanderbilt in 1980. Someone at Penn State sent the package on.

"I was in Puerto Rico that day, giving some lectures," Fischer said. His secretary, Janet Smith, opened it. It was a pipe bomb filled with smokeless powder and match heads. "She got some nasty lacerations. She made a full recovery, but it was very traumatic for her. She'd just as soon forget about it," he said.

Bearnson was told long after the attack that he was the likely target. The package bore canceled stamps when the Unabomber placed it in a Provo mailbox, a trick, authorities believe, to ensure that it would be sent back to the return address.

Bearnson wonders if his name was on the package because of his expertise in technology or possibly because his middle name is "Wood." The Unabomber has always been preoccupied with wood, painstakingly carving bomb parts out of wooden pieces and boxing the videocassette-sized packages with different varieties of wood.

One of his earlier bombs was mailed to Chicago area home of Percy A. Wood, president of United Airlines, seriously injuring him. In April 1995, the bomber killed the president of the California Forestry Association in Sacramento, and a year before a prominent New York public relations executive who lived on Aspen Drive in North Caldwell, N.J. The "wood" connection is tenuous but it is one of the few authorities have shared with the public.

In the 14 years after his name appeared on the bomb package, Bearnson said he was interviewed dozens of times by investigators, reviewing his entire life in a vain search for some connection between himself and the Unabomber. He remembered spending a lot of time doing consulting work in Salt Lake City, a city familiar to the Unabomber – and to Kaczynski – "but if I ran across him, I don't remember it."

He did not learn until recently about the canceled stamps. Last month, the FBI told him the stamps had a green line running through them and that both the clerk at the Brigham Young University postal station where the package was deposited and

the U.S. Postal Service worker who brought it downtown noticed the marks. He said he still has no idea why the package wasn't returned to him for insufficient postage, but he thinks the Unabomber meant that to happen.

"The agents made it very clear that I was the target," he said. "I still have no idea why, except my feeling is that he chose names at random with certain associations."

Fischer, a close student of the case, said he was never told about the canceled stamps until a reporter called. "I don't get anything directly from the FBI," he said. "I get it from the media, or other people." He said he might try to start a Unabomber victims' association, to exchange information.

"The FBI has wanted to get us together, under their auspices," Fischer said, "but they never could pull it off because of scheduling problems. Some of us are talking to each other now, by e-mail."

The Unabomber's first explosive device had an either-or flavor to it as well. A woman found it on the University of Chicago campus, addressed to a professor who was hundreds of miles away, teaching at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y. The return addressee was a professor at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill.

"The woman returned the package to the sender," the FBI has said, "but since he had not sent it and did not know the addressee, he contacted the campus police." A pipe bomb packed in a carved wooden box, it exploded when one of the police officers opened it, sustaining slight injuries.

Over the years, the Unabomber struck at least 16 times, killing three people and injuring 23. His first bombs were "not intended to kill, they were intended to maim or do property damage," Revell said. The Unabomber was disappointed in the results.

"Our early bombs were too ineffectual to attract much public attention or give encouragement to those who hate the system," he wrote in a letter to the New York Times last April, a few days after the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building eclipsed everything he had done. Striving for renewed attention, he said he had taken "a couple of years off to do some experimenting. We learned how to make pipe bombs that were powerful enough, and we used these in a couple of successful bombings as well as in some unsuccessful ones," he said.

The Unabomber struck places as well as people. His bombings at Berkeley, where he taught math for two years in the late 1960s, were among the least personal. They weren't mailed or addressed to anyone. But they were intriguing: The bombs that injured Diogenes Angelakos in 1982 and John Hauser in 1985 were planted in the same University of California-Berkeley building: Cory Hall.

"Cory Hall is not far from where Kaczynski taught," said Capt. Bill Foley, of the Berkeley campus police, who has worked the case since 1985. "He taught in Campbell Hall, and had offices in one of our temporary buildings. If you did a triangle between Campbell and that temporary building you would hit Cory Hall at peak of the triangle."

Cory Hall housed the engineering and computer sciences departments in late '60s, as it does today. It was the one place the Unabomber hit twice.

Angelakos, now retired, was an electrical engineering professor. The bomb that attracted his attention in a fourth-floor faculty lounge just before 8 a.m. on July 2, 1982, was cleverly innocuous. It looked like a turpentine can, something inadvertently left behind by a construction worker. It injured his right hand.

The bomb that struck Hauser three years later, on May 15, 1985, was much more powerful, made of a mix of ammonium nitrate and aluminum powder.

Hauser was a graduate engineering student and an Air Force pilot at the time he walked into a computer lab where the bomb had been left, sitting atop some three-ring binders. Police say it had been there for two or three days. Hauser thought it was a file box for some other graduate student's computer cards and wondered to whom it belonged.

When he picked it up, it burst four fingers off his right hand and severed arteries in his arm. By coincidence, Angelakos was down the hall, heard the explosion, and used a colleague's tie to make a tourniquet for Hauser's arm. Hauser's Air Force career was over. He still does not have full use of his right arm.

Now an electrical engineering professor at the University of Colorado in Boulder, Hauser considers himself the Unabomber's "most anonymous" victim. He hadn't published any academic works at the time. "This was as much a target of opportunity as anything else," he said last week.

Foley said investigators were puzzled for years by the choice of Cory Hall. "Why pick a classroom building in a research area? Why not administrative? Now we're wondering, why not target the math department? What's interesting too is between the two Cory Hall blasts he really didn't strike again," Foley said. "He did mail to Boeing Aircraft in Washington state. . . . It got lost in the internal mail system. They were in the process of returning it to sender because it had bounced around a while, and while they were in process of doing that, they had the bomb squad open it up." That June 1985 package bomb was safely disarmed.

The next bomb, unlike the others, may have been spurred by personal animosity. Its intended target, University of Michigan psychology professor James V. McConnell, seems to have embodied everything the Unabomber detested. He was rich, flamboyant, irreverent and controversial. His success came from expounding theories that could sound chilling, especially to someone obsessed with fears that technology and science were taking over modern society.

Like many proponents of "behavior modification," McConnell believed that people could be molded simply by deciding what they should be and then manipulating their behavior.

McConnell's work originated from research with flatworms. After training some of the half-inch-long worms to navigate a simple maze, McConnell then ground up the trained worms and fed them to untrained worms, finding that they were able to negotiate the maze better than a "control group." Outspoken and popular, he was teaching on the Ann Arbor campus when Kaczynski was a graduate student in mathematics there. There is no evidence so far that he and Kaczynski crossed paths, but even so,

McConnell would have been hard to miss. In 1964, he won attention when a Saturday Evening Post article described his work and suggested that someday humans might be able "to learn the piano by taking a pill, or to take calculus by injection." Two months later, McConnell took his celebrated flatworms on the Steve Allen show.

More fame, and fortune, came in the 1970s with publication of McConnell's jaunty textbook, "Understanding Human Behavior." It was used on 700 campuses and sold more than a million copies. The FBI included the book on a list it gave to bookstore owners in Montana in trying to track Kaczynski's reading habits.

A 1982 People magazine article pointed out that McConnell's royalties of \$250,000 a year had provided him with a \$40,000 Mercedes, a 1,000-bottle wine cellar and a new \$1 million house.

The Unabomber's package arrived at that house, just outside Ann Arbor, three years later, on Nov. 15, 1985. Taped to the top was a one-page letter with a Salt Lake City postmark. "I'd like you to read this book," it said. "Everybody in your position should read this book."

McConnell asked his assistant, Nicklaus Suino, 25, to open it. Suino started wrestling with it on a kitchen counter and it exploded.

The blast blew a six-inch hole in the kitchen counter, and Suino suffered shrapnel wounds and powder burns on his arms and legs. McConnell suffered only a slight hearing loss, but the bombing shook him deeply, as he pointed out in a letter provided by a friend and co-author, Daniel Gorenflo. McConnell, who died in 1990, wrote, "I just wandered around the house, scared, angry and frustrated." Told by investigators that the bomber had never struck any victim twice, he concluded, "it's the next name on the list that we need to give thought to."

The "next name" in the Unabomber case, Hugh C. Scrutton, 32, was the first one to be killed. A bomb that looked like a piece of debris killed him when he picked it up outside the back door of his Sacramento computer rental store. It was a crude device, filled with tiny pieces of nails for maximum effect.

Scrutton had Berkeley connections. He was a summer math student in 1967, the year Kaczynski started teaching there.

Capt. Foley said, "We're trying to determine through old course catalogues whether Kaczynski taught at that time or started in the fall of '67."

A friend of Scrutton, John Lawyer, said FBI agents were exploring that and other angles when they visited him in Plains, Mont., last month. The FBI asked about the extent of Scrutton's travels through Montana and Salt Lake City. "They are setting out to reconstruct the lives of victims," Lawyer said, "trying to make any connection they can." Homicide detective Bob Bell of the Sacramento sheriff's department, who headed the local investigation into Scrutton's death, said the process is called "victimology," a chore that ranges over everything from girlfriends to tax forms.

Another possible tie-in to Berkeley concerns Gilbert B. Murray, the timber lobbyist from Sacramento, who was killed April 24, 1995. Murray graduated from Berkeley in 1975. But the package he opened was addressed to his predecessor at the California

Forestry Association, William Dennison, a 1959 Berkeley graduate who lectured at Berkeley between 1971 to 1988.

Finally, there is the letter the Unabomber sent to Berkeley social psychology professor Tom Tyler last spring.

On May 1, 1995, the San Francisco Chronicle published an article about the Oklahoma City bombing and the Unabomber. The first person quoted in it was Tyler.

Tyler said he was not at Berkeley when Kaczynski was. The envelope the Unabomber sent was addressed to him as "head of the social psychology group," the same incorrect title he was given in the Chronicle.

The letter, accompanied by the Unabomber's manifesto, was straightforward.

"I said in the article that the Oklahoma City bomber and the Unabomber were examples of people who had exaggerated feelings that the government was out to get them," Tyler said. "The Unabomber objected to that characterization of him."

He asked Tyler to read his manifesto, one of six copies he sent out at that time, including ones to the New York Times and The Washington Post, which published it last fall.

The Unabomber has expressed regret over some of his targets, such as the passengers of an American Airlines plane he tried to blow up in 1979 on a flight from Chicago to Washington. Placed in a mailbag, the bomb caught fire without exploding.

"The idea was to kill a lot of business people who we assumed would constitute the majority of passengers," the Unabomber said in a letter to the Times last June. "But of course, some passengers would likely have been innocent people – maybe kids or some working stiff going to see his sick grandmother. We're glad now that that attempt failed."

The Unabomber also mentioned the injury done to Fischer's secretary and said: "We certainly regret that." But he made clear that he had no compunctions about his most recent victims: Murray in Sacramento and public relations executive Thomas J. Mosser who died at his North Caldwell, N.J., residence in December 1994. "[W]hen we were young and comparatively reckless," he wrote, "we were much more careless in selecting targets than we are now."

Earlier last year, after the Oklahoma City bombing, he tried to regain attention, openly admitting that he killed Mosser.

"We blew up Thomas Mosser last December," the Unabomber said in the letter the Times received on April 24, 1995, "because he was a Burston[sic]-Marsteller executive . . . Burston[sic]-Marsteller is about the biggest organization in the public relations field. This means that its business is the development of techniques for manipulating people's attitudes."

Once again, the Unabomber seems to have relied on an outdated publication or directory. Mosser had left Burson-Marsteller nine months before he was killed for its parent company, Young & Rubicam Inc.

But that may have made no difference to the Unabomber. To him, the public relations man was just "a symbol."

Staff writers Pierre Thomas in Washington, Jacqueline Salmon in Ann Arbor, William Claiborne in Salt Lake City, Benjamin Weiser in New York, and Thomas Heath in Sacramento contributed to this report; staff researchers Alice Crites and Margot Williams also contributed.

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