

In Letters, Window on Life of the Unabom Suspect

James Brooke With David Barboza

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In a stream of meticulously handwritten letters to a Mexican farmhand he has never met, Theodore J. Kaczynski, suspected of being the Unabomber, carried on a seven-year correspondence that provides the most detailed portrait yet of his reclusive life in the deep woods of Montana.

In a formal and carefully precise Spanish, "Teodoro" Kaczynski, as he signed the letters, wrote of his fascination with Pancho Villa, the Mexican revolutionary, told of bandaging a cut foot by himself rather than visiting a doctor and described scraping by in his mountain cabin with little money or food.

"I am fine here," he wrote on Nov. 28, 1995. "I am poorer than ever, but I am in very good health, and that is more important than anything. As to my poverty, I have \$53.01 exactly, barely enough to stave off hunger this winter without hunting rabbits for their meat.

"But with the rabbit meat and a little flour and other things that I have put away, also a few dried vegetables from my little garden, I will get through the winter very well. And when the spring comes, perhaps I will have better luck with work and money, so that I can go to visit you. We will see."

The correspondence appears to be the first evidence that Mr. Kaczynski maintained any sustained relationships in the years after he retreated to his isolated cabin in Montana, where, Federal agents say, he continued to engage in his bombing campaign.

Mr. Kaczynski began the correspondence in 1988 with Juan Sanchez Arreola, a 68-year-old farm worker from Chihuahua, Mexico, after learning of him from his brother, David Kaczynski. David had met Mr. Sanchez in the early 1980's after buying property near Big Bend National Park, in the Chalk Mountains area of West Texas. Mr. Sanchez was living in the area then and working as a handyman, and he did some work for David Kaczynski.

Mr. Sanchez showed The New York Times copies of 3 of some 50 letters he said had been sent to him by Mr. Kaczynski since 1988. Making a tearing motion, he said he had thrown away most of the rest of them.

Today, Federal law-enforcement officials said they were aware of the correspondence because letters from Mr. Sanchez to Mr. Kaczynski had been found either at the Montana cabin or among the mail waiting to be delivered there.

But Federal agents had not seen Mr. Kaczynski's letters to Mr. Sanchez because they had not yet located him.

In addition to the letters, Mr. Kaczynski sent Mr. Sanchez a bright memento of their postal relationship: a wooden cylinder that Mr. Kaczynski had carefully carved, stained and painted. Mailed as a Christmas gift in 1994, the cylinder bears the motto: "Montani Semper Liberi," Latin for "Mountain Men Are Always Free."

Mr. Sanchez said Mr. Kaczynski's reclusive life style had apparently strained relations with his family, who worried about his poverty and isolation.

He had asked his brother, David, for money, Mr. Sanchez added.

"Teodoro had written him twice in the last year to ask for money, but not saying why," Mr. Sanchez said. "David first sent him \$1,000, then \$2,000."

Last week's arrest of Mr. Kaczynski brought to an end a curious correspondence that linked Mr. Sanchez, a farm worker with two years of formal schooling, and Mr. Kaczynski, a brilliant mathematician who graduated from Harvard and taught at the University of California at Berkeley.

"We only knew each other through letters," the Mexican said, stunned to learn of the secret life linked to his correspondent. With television reception poor in this remote border town, 150 miles southeast of El Paso, Tex., he said today that he rarely watched the news on his old black-and-white television set.

In a gradual role reversal, the Mexican began the correspondence as a supplicant but ended it years later as an adviser.

In his first letter, in 1988, Mr. Sanchez asked Mr. Kaczynski for financial help. While hitchhiking from a job in New Mexico, Mr. Sanchez had broken his leg in a pickup truck accident.

In response, Mr. Kaczynski said he would try to help. The recluse, starting his 17th year in a one-room cabin, sounded lonely.

"I am very pleased that you call yourself my friend," he wrote in his first letter to Mr. Sanchez, dated Nov. 14, 1988.

Writing on the same kind of three-ring binder paper that the Federal Bureau of Investigation now says he used for bomb-making notes, Mr. Kaczynski openly appealed for a friendship by mail, writing: "And I, in turn, call myself your friend."

By last fall, Mr. Sanchez, now a concerned friend of the Kaczynski family, wrote "Teodoro" to offer to send him \$200 for the bus fare from Montana to here.

"I wanted to send him the money so he could see how other people live," Mr. Sanchez said.

But, as had happened many times before, a vague response came in a familiar plain white envelope from Montana. The postage stamp, a red-white-and-blue rendering of Old Glory, was postmarked: "Lincoln, MT Nov 30 1995."

"When spring comes, maybe I will have better luck with a job and money so that I could go visit you," Mr. Kaczynski printed in a book-learned Spanish.

But before spring came to the Northern Rockies, as snow still blanketed the deep woods around his cabin, F.B.I. agents arrested Mr. Kaczynski last Wednesday after a minor scuffle. Next week, a grand jury is to be convened in Helena, Mont., to hear evidence against him on charges of possessing explosive devices.

Here in Mr. Sanchez's house, on a nameless alley in Ojinaga, the aging farmhand unfolded his dusty reading glasses and read the latest letter he had received from his North American friend.

Addressed to "my dear and appreciated friend," it described Mr. Kaczynski's poverty and gave a detailed, one-page exposition on the art of hunting snowshoe hares with a .22-caliber rifle.

Then, sketching a verbal picture of solitude, Mr. Kaczynski warned of a winter lapse in the correspondence. He would mail this letter, he wrote, then added: "Afterwards, I

probably will spend the rest of the winter without going to the village of Lincoln, and therefore will not visit my post office box until spring.”

Ending the “Christmas greeting” on a religious note, Mr. Kaczynski, baptized a Catholic, wrote to Mr. Sanchez, a practicing Catholic: “May God bless you and all your family.”

Reflecting on the roughly 50 letters that he said he received from “Teodoro” over the last seven years, Mr. Sanchez said that Mr. Kaczynski had never talked of trips from Montana or of the 1990 suicide of his father and namesake, Theodore R. Kaczynski. The letters never reflected an anarchist’s hatred for a society shaped by high technology, he said.

“He lived a very poor life. Once he wrote that to travel, he would have to give up eating for a year,” Mr. Sanchez, said, shaking his head in disbelief.

Rosa Sanchez, his wife, made a sound of disapproval, adding: “In 1991, Teodoro wrote that he slipped and cut his foot on a can. He cured it himself, without seeing a doctor.”

In his letters, Mr. Kaczynski asked the older man about Mexican history, especially about Pancho Villa, the revolutionary who roamed this remote border area in the 1920’s.

“I was born four years after Pancho Villa was killed, but I proposed that he come down for a history tour with me,” Mr. Sanchez said. He said he had got a typically vague response.

Over the years, Mr. Sanchez, with his steel gray hair and settled family life, gained the status of an older adviser to the Kaczynski brothers.

Mr. Sanchez met the brothers’ parents when they visited David Kaczynski in the late 1980’s, he said. They seemed deeply disappointed in Theodore Kaczynski’s career failure, Mr. Sanchez said, and the son was angry with his parents in return.

“Teodoro had a good job teaching, and I think his parents started to reprimand him for leaving it,” Mr. Sanchez said, referring to Mr. Kaczynski’s abrupt decision to leave the Berkeley faculty in spring 1969.

David Kaczynski first came to the dry desert area around the Chalk Mountains of West Texas in the early 1980’s. Wearing long hair and a beard, he lived for months at a time in a cellar hole, covered with sheets of metal roofing material.

But only two years later, a photograph shows David Kaczynski smiling, smooth-shaven and short-haired. His left arm is around Mr. Sanchez, whose gloves were dusty from laying adobe bricks.

“David said he mistrusted American women. He said they change men the way they change cars,” Mr. Sanchez recalled.

In 1991, David Kaczynski, at age 40, married his high school sweetheart, Linda Patrik. The couple now live in Schenectady, N.Y.

Mr. Sanchez said the couple had visited him in Mexico in March 1995. “David said: ‘Juan, give some advice to Teodoro. You are an older man, give some advice.’ ” He said David Kaczynski had been worried about his brother, seven years his senior.

But Mr. Sanchez had little luck in his attempts to draw the loner out of his Montana shack. "Teodoro wrote me last year, saying: 'If you want to be my friend, don't give me advice,' " he recalled with dismay.

In failing health, Mr. Sanchez revives his memory of his mysterious correspondent with a handful of letters kept in a leather satchel – and the marvelously carved cylinder on his bedroom wall.

Carefully incised in the hardwood, the decorations include vines stained green, berries stained red and a rabbit stained white. Polished smooth, the wooden cylinder has a small, detachable cap and hollow interior.

"I think it's for carrying pens," the old man said, turning over in his hands what looks like a model for a wooden pipe bomb.

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