

A Family Saga

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Part 1 — A family saga

Both lived in solitude and were searching for answers. Ted is suspected of being the Unabomber. David turned him in.

TERLINGUA — The Kaczynski brothers both sought to solve their father's riddle. One got it right.

It was a game learned at the dinner table years ago. Theodore Kaczynski, their father, loved pushing back after a good meal and playing a game of verbal survival with Richard Radl, his devoutly atheistic friend in Iowa.

What would you do, they asked each other, if you were all alone out there in nature, with nothing to live on but your wits? The two men enjoyed inventing situations in which rational minds did battle with the dangerous chaos of nature.

Wanda Kaczynski, the boys' mother, was also a self-taught intellectual who joined with her husband in equipping the boys with a searching curiosity, biting skepticism and a reverence for knowledge. There was never a simple answer to anything.

So when David and his older brother, Ted, went out into the world — David from Columbia University, Ted from Harvard — they made their father's intellectual puzzle their lives.

Both lived in solitude, David in the searing reaches of West Texas, Ted in the cold mountain forests of Montana. Both considered themselves writers and believed the ultimate vindication of their lives would be books. They started from the same place and set out on the same mission, but their paths took them to the opposite poles of the human condition.

David is now a social worker and family man, admired and loved by the people who know him. Ted is the bizarre hermit accused by the FBI of being the Unabomber.

In the summer of 1987, David Kaczynski was walking in the West Texas desert with his friend, Juan Sanchez. Dazed, delusional from thirst and over-exposure, weighted by the heavy pack on his back, David began turning in circles, turning and turning, telling Sanchez he could see house lights all around them in the desert night. Sanchez spoke to him in a calm, authoritative voice, telling him there were no lights, only stars, and that he needed to keep walking straight ahead, no matter what.

This was the closest David, then 37, ever had come to the edge. It was the test his father had enjoyed talking about, in strictly theoretical terms, when David and Ted were growing up.

But an important difference in the lives of the brothers was that David, the younger one, found simplicity and certitude in his friend who walked the desert with him. Sanchez, a Mexican Indian farmhand who was 24 years older than David, gave him

strong, simple answers to some of life's difficult issues, including loneliness, not available in the rigorous intellectualism of the parents.

One blossomed, one shriveled

Drawn back to the center of life, David Kaczynski blossomed and grew. In the same period, his older brother shriveled, curled into a spiritual ball, never came in from the void until the FBI brought him back in shackles. In the story of David's quest for personal happiness, there is much to learn about Ted's descent into a personal hell.

For the people who knew David during his years of seclusion here in the desert, the most remarkable, haunting aspect of his search for truth was the part he kept almost perfectly hidden from them: that just as he was achieving his own serenity, he was coming to the conclusion that his brother had become not merely mad but a monster. And that it was his job, his duty and his moral responsibility to do something about it.

Ted Kaczynski was arrested April 3 because his brother turned him in. Since then, David has been in deep seclusion with his wife, Linda Patrik, and his mother, Wanda Kaczynski, in their home in Schenectady, N.Y. In his only interview, David Kaczynski told *The New York Times* that he thinks his brother "has been a disturbed person for a long time and he's gotten more disturbed." But he said he admired his brother's "purity" and made a plea for his life:

"It serves no one's interest to put him to death," he said, "and certainly, it would be an incredible anguish for our family if that were to happen."

Joe La Follette, a teacher in San Benito, is a friend of David's who has taken long hikes with him in the desert over the years, discussing literature, politics and life along the way. "Every day that goes by," La Follette said, "I think of what he is going through and what he must have been through already."

Violence denounced

On a very few occasions during their long hikes, David discussed his brother, Ted. On one occasion La Follette, then in his 20s, spoke angrily to David about the U.S. role in Nicaragua. On another occasion he showed Kaczynski an essay he had written about the automobile and how technology was ruining the planet. While they walked, Kaczynski told La Follette he reminded him of his brother in Montana and took him to task for espousing violence.

"He just said, 'I'm sorry you think violence is a solution,' " La Follette said.

Their conversations about Ted, however brief, were enough to give La Follette a peek into David's feelings about his brother, including his fear of him.

“I think of David thinking about his brother all that time,” La Follette said, “remembering all these little clues, and eventually the clues make a big bridge, and David has to go over that bridge. I bet if his brother had known that David knew anything about him during that time, he would have killed him.”

The community here in the vast Chihuahuan desert, west of Big Bend National Park where the Rio Grande marks the border with Mexico, is a far-flung, ragtag collection of eccentrics, desert rats, ranchers and retirees. Terlingua Ranch, where David lived, is a development of 200,000 acres put together in the late 1960s by Dallas businessman David Witt and auto racer Carroll Shelby. It includes the ghost town of Terlingua and has been subdivided into parcels of anywhere from five to several hundred acres. David lived at one extreme reach of the development, on a parcel of land accessible only by four-wheel-drive during much of the year.

Even though people here live far apart, they tend to know each other, and many people knew and liked David. Sandy Fiedler lives here with her husband and children and has known David since the early 1980s. She said, “I really feel for him. Can you imagine? The man who came all the way out here for seclusion, and now he’s got the whole world watching him?”

This is the true American outback, and it has its own privacy ethic. Barbara Maugher, who works in the land office at Terlingua Ranch, said the usual rule is, “Don’t ask.”

“All kinds of people come out here for all kinds of reasons,” Maugher said. “Some people come here to find their dreams, some to lose their dreams. Whatever.”

After David Kaczynski graduated from Columbia in 1970, he returned to the small town of Lisbon, Iowa, where his family had lived for a few years, and took a job as a schoolteacher. Only a year earlier, his older brother, Ted, the one always held up as the family genius, had walked away from a tenure-track university teaching position at the University of California’s Berkeley campus. The consensus of Ted’s students and fellow faculty members at the time was that, genius or not, he was a terrible teacher.

David was a wonderful teacher, according to both his students and his fellow teachers in Lisbon.

“He was a nice guy,” said Doug Whitney, who still teaches in Lisbon. “Quiet, intelligent, common as an old shoe. Used to have this contest every week where the kids would take out the unabridged dictionary and see if they could find a word in it he didn’t know the meaning of. He had to buy ice cream if he lost. Lost one time, I think. But he wanted to write a book, be an author.”

Life in the desert

During his two years in Lisbon, David did complete a novel, which was never published. He left his teaching job and began splitting his time between a summer job driving a bus in a Chicago suburb and winters living in a van in the desert. In 1983

he bought land at Terlingua Ranch. He lived first in a hole — a common arrangement here, called a “pit house” by locals — and then in a tiny plywood cabin he built himself.

Life in the desert for David was a constantly exciting exploration, according to Tim Bennett, a former student of his in Lisbon who kept up his friendship and visited David many times in Terlingua.

“He was very interested in the Indians,” Bennett said. “He always said, if you really think about the Indians, there is so much common sense to what the Indians did. Once we were walking way, way out, where we had never been, and we found some water in a hole from a spring. We stopped there. We were cooking on a mesquite fire on some rocks, and he said, ‘Tim, if you were an Indian, where would you sit to protect yourself from the sun here?’ He answered his own question. He said, ‘Right over there, that’s where I’d be.’

“He went over there, and he found 10 holes in the rock of the type the Indians made to grind wheat in. Then he said, ‘If you were to build a fire around here, where would you build it?’ He said, ‘I’d build it right here.’ We turned and looked where he was pointing, and we found chips of flint all around a fire-ring.”

“Every day had a high point like that for him. He had a life down there that anybody would dream of, a life that somebody sitting in an office in Chicago would dream of doing. He did it.”

David also worked on a second novel during this time, carrying the manuscript and writing materials with him in a heavy pack on his back. But the subject of writing was the one area of his life in which David Kaczynski was not serene.

Joe La Follette remembered when, in the course of one of his long hikes with David, David showed him a short story he had written. “I didn’t like it, and I told him why. He got mad. He got really mad. Then later I sent him stuff I was writing, and he got real super-critical about it.”

La Follette also remembered David’s interest in Indians. David had read the works of Carlos Castaneda, a series of novels in which a young American academic wanders the desert with a Mexican Indian who imparts to him the ancient wisdom of his people.

‘The noble savage’

La Follette said David was enamored of what La Follette called “the noble savage thing,” and he said that role was filled in David’s life by Sanchez, the Mexican Indian laborer he met when Sanchez was working on the grounds crew of the tourist lodge at Terlingua.

“That’s why he made friends with Juan,” La Follette said.

At first Sanchez was a paid tutor, teaching David Spanish. As Sanchez remembers, that part didn’t take very long. “I taught him to speak and read Spanish in three months,” he said.

In 1987, David accompanied Sanchez into Mexico to meet his family. On the way back into the United States, Sanchez had to sneak over the border on foot at night, because he did not have proper documentation. David, who was carrying his manuscript on his back, refused to part company with him and insisted on crossing 25 miles of desert with him.

Sanchez was dubious. He carried only the clothes on his back, a blanket and a bottle of water tied up in a wet sock. He would never have set out the way David did, with a heavy pack on his back and not enough water. But he could not explain to David why he did not want him to come.

Eventually, Sanchez said, David drank all his water and Sanchez's, too. "He was very, very thirsty. He thought he was going to die."

In the view of David's friend, La Follette, who was not there that night, the difference between David Kaczynski and Juan Sanchez was the backpack and its contents.

"David and that backpack, that was his office," La Follette said. "David is a writer, and he had to have his manuscript with him. Juan was beyond that. He didn't need that. Juan is an Indian, and David is a gringo. That's why."

By talking to David and keeping him going that night, Sanchez saved his life. He said David, who had always been respectful of him, showed an even deeper respect after that night, almost a dependence. Sanchez took it as an opportunity to tell the younger man what he thought he needed to hear.

"I told him it was good for an old man like me to live alone in the mountains," Sanchez said, "but not for a young man like him. I told him he needed to find a wife and get married."

When David objected that he didn't know anyone to marry, Sanchez probed and found there was a lost love in his life. Linda Patrik, a girl he had known in the suburbs south of Chicago, had gone on to become a philosophy professor at Union College near Schenectady. Sanchez told David he should propose to her.

When David said he didn't know how to approach a woman in such a way, Sanchez said he could help. Sanchez had learned to write as a young man because he had lost his own first love to another young man who knew how to compose letters of courtship. Since then, Sanchez had written courtship letters for other men on several occasions over the years.

"I told him I would write the letter for him in Spanish, and he could translate it into English," Sanchez said, "and so that's what we did. Twenty-two days later, he received a letter asking him to come to New York."

Within a few months, David and Linda Patrik were visiting each other. On one of her visits to Terlingua, she helped civilize his cabin, working with him to paint and finish it off. In a new concrete footing beneath one corner of the cabin, they scratched a heart and their initials with a stick.

Requests for money

During this same period in the late 1980s, Ted Kaczynski was writing curt, enigmatic letters to David, asking him for money — \$1,000 in one request, \$2,000 in another a short time later, substantial sums for men of the brothers' very modest means.

"There was no explanation of why he needed the money," Sanchez said. "David was worried about him. He asked me to write to him and try to find out if he was sick or in jail or something like that."

In the seven years of correspondence that ensued, Sanchez learned that Ted, like his brother, was trying to solve every puzzle in the universe except the one he needed to resolve — the riddle of his own loneliness. Sanchez told Ted, too, that he needed to find a wife and have children.

In 1990, David Kaczynski married Linda Patrik, and from that point on, Sanchez said, the older brother's attitude was much darker.

"It's like a family in Mexico," Sanchez said. "One brother does better. He gets more. The other is angry."

In years of listening to Ted rail against the modern world, of trying with Juan's help to figure out what was really going on in Ted's life, of walking with young friends like La Follette and listening to them struggle with some of the same issues, David had come to recognize certain recurring themes. Some was generic social criticism of the times, typical of people who revere nature and mistrust technology. But some themes and turns of phrase were emblematic of Ted's thinking.

Both brothers were still writing. Neither had yet published.

Last fall when The New York Times and The Washington Post complied with an FBI request and published the Unabomber's 35,000-word "manifesto," David read it and heard the written voice of his brother.

By then, David had solved the riddle of his own life. He had found the answer not in pure logic or wild nature but in the simple wisdom of an older man and in the timeless grace of traditional Mexican letters of courtship. Ted had found only chaos and cruelty.

Everyone who knew the parents remembers them as intelligent, interesting, congenial, morally responsible people. Perhaps the real riddle is why their sons, equipped with so much learning, began their lives knowing so little.

Part 2 — Back Of The Yards

Unabomb suspect's family led humble life in Chicago

CHICAGO — The poor neighborhoods around 49th and Ashland are far less noisy and foul-smelling now than they were when Ted Kaczynski was a little boy here.

But the relative quiet and cleaner air are wages of stagnation and economic decay. The stink in the 1940s was the smell of money.

People who had fled Europe between the wars, people up from rural peonage in the South, people from all over the world fell over themselves then to get into the area called “Back of the Yards” where there were lots and lots of jobs.

The stench of the stockyards was overpowering on some days, something people didn't get used to even if they were born to it. Tom Lebensorger, a retired postal worker, was a little boy living in Back of the Yards when Ted Kaczynski — the man suspected of being the Unabomber — lived there as a child.

“Back of the Yards, for a mile or so around there, you could always smell it, the rendering and the killing and the ammonia, whatever they were doing,” Lebensorger said. “And at 9 or 10 years old, your nose is the best it's ever going to be.”

In 1906, the area served as the setting for muckraking author Upton Sinclair's groundbreaking book, *The Jungle*. Beginning in the 1930s, Back of the Yards was the scene of social activist Saul David Alinsky's first major grass-roots community organizing efforts, which some historians deem a key ingredient in the explosion of social activism in this country and in Europe in the 1960s.

Ted Kaczynski's parents, Theodore R. and Wanda Kaczynski, came straight out of that milieu. They met each other in the late 1930s in a Saul Alinsky hiking club for young, single social progressives. They were both American-born but fluent in Polish, both high school graduates and self-taught intellectuals. They shared the anti-clerical agnosticism of many of their peers, a feeling sharpened by the opposition then of the Catholic clergy in Chicago to most of the Alinsky movement.

Tom Lebensorger's parents met each other in the same walking club. “They hiked in the western suburbs and in the Indiana Dunes,” he said, “and they talked.”

The discussion group was devoted especially to the cause of unionizing the stockyards. Its ideals may have been egalitarian, but the structure of the group was not. Social scientists and graduate students from the University of Chicago did the leading and the coaching. People like Ted and Wanda, ethnic high school graduates not bound for higher education, were their grateful apprentices.

It was a setting in which power, class and wisdom were closely tied to intellectual attainment, in a period of history when social intellectualism was at its height, when

all problems seemed solvable if only people could be smart enough, moral enough and progressive enough to work out the right answers. Theodore R. Kaczynski and his wife, Wanda, lived for books and intellectual self-improvement.

John Suski sold sausage casings to the small sausage-making establishments then scattered all over ethnic Chicago. At that time Theodore Kaczynski was helping run a small sausage-making plant and delicatessen at 49th and Ashland, owned by his brother. The little sausage factory is now a semi-abandoned relic, windows partially boarded, slumped against a viaduct that used to carry freight trains to the yards. The neighborhood is African-American and Mexican-American.

“Knowing Ted, the father, I could never imagine him being a sausage maker,” Suski said. “He was far too intelligent. But that’s what he was doing.”

Kaczynski was one of the early makers to begin experimenting with synthetic casings for his sausage.

“When they started doing that,” Suski said, “they were using formaldehyde to form a casing. Of course, nobody advertised that, so you were getting pickled before you died.”

Many years later Theodore Kaczynski told a neighbor in Lombard, Ill., that he had missed out on becoming a rich man because he hadn’t known to take out a patent on the artificial sausage casing he had developed while working for his brother. Somewhere along the line, Theodore Kaczynski’s pure-minded intellectual progressivism had gotten mixed together with some good old American entrepreneurial ambition.

But it wasn’t necessarily surprising that a life in Back of the Yards might lead to dreams of upward mobility and new frontiers. It was an exciting place. Lebensorger was too young at the time to remember it himself, but he vividly recalls his father’s descriptions of the scene outside the “drovers’ bank.”

“They had a horseback window in the bank, so the people who handled the stock in the yards could ride up on their horses and cash their checks,” he said.

The sight of cowboys cantering up and down the street, shouting greetings, waiting at the bank, their horses blowing and stamping in line, was fascinating to the immigrants and second-generation Americans who waited for buses across the street, sausages in hand.

By the early 1950s, speculators were buying up cheap swampland south of the city, draining it and developing it as blue-collar and middle-class suburban neighborhoods. The families in Back of the Yards—at least the ones in which someone had been putting away a nest egg over the years—began moving south as fast as the houses became available.

As it happened, the Lebensorgers and the Kaczynskis moved to the same suburb, Evergreen Park, a settlement of 10,000 people on sparsely settled land where there were woods to roam and where wild ducks walked in the dirt streets. It was barely five miles south of Back of the Yards, but Lebensorger said it was another world.

He was 10 years old, the same age as Ted Kaczynski. Each of them had lived his first decade in the city, before moving south to Evergreen Park. By then, Ted's younger brother, David, was 2 years old.

"It was really something, really something, to be way out there and wake up every morning and smell that clean air," Lebensorger said.

For people like the Kaczynskis, who moved to Evergreen Park in 1952, it might as well have been Montana.

Part 3 — Visions Of Grandeur

Dad's sense of self-reliance taken to heart

LISBON, Iowa — Theodore and Wanda Kaczynski never strayed too far from the things they denounced. Self-taught intellectuals who lived in the middle class, amateur naturalists who lived in town, they left the Chicago suburbs in the 1960s for this farm town in the upper Midwest and told themselves they were in the Far West.

Perhaps the one thing they should have told their sons was not to take what they taught them too seriously.

Theodore Kaczynski Sr. will never know if there was a connection between his own household lectures on self-reliance and the fate of his son, Ted, now suspected of being the Unabomber. In 1990, rather than face death by cancer, the elder Kaczynski committed suicide.

In their two years here, the Kaczynski parents were nonconformists, but they were neighborly and engaging nonconformists. When Theodore Kaczynski pushed back from the dinner table and took on his neighbor Richard Radl in debate, there was an amiable quality to their talk, as if their intellectualism were more a hobby than a serious occupation.

Radl, a local businessman and state legislator, is now dead of natural causes. He was a liberal Democrat who eventually became a Nixon supporter, according to his son, Bill Radl, 47, a writer on the staff of the University of Iowa College of Medicine. The younger Radl remembers that his father felt an instant kinship for the Kaczynskis when they came to town in 1966 and rented an upper flat in the house across the street.

“My father was a very devoted atheist,” Radl said, “and my mother was mostly quiet. I think, based on my memory of sitting around the living room listening to my father and Mr. Kaczynski talk after dinner, that they enjoyed baiting each other, and each one liked the idea that the other one was willing to argue ideas.”

Mixed with their fondness for intellectual banter was a certain sense, mostly fantasy, that they were both somehow pioneers. Richard Radl had moved his small plastics plant to Lisbon from Chicago to reduce his cost of operation. Theodore Kaczynski came to Lisbon to run a small foam rubber factory for a Chicago company. Both were in their early 50s at the time.

“I think, for both of them, there was this Marlboro-man sense of coming west and making your own way,” Radl said.

A frequent after-dinner pastime of these two armchair intellectuals involved a verbal game of speculation about survival. “One of their favorite fantasies was about surviving

in the wilderness,” Radl said. “There was a kind of science-fiction feel about the way they would pose it to each other.

“What if you woke up tomorrow, and everybody else were gone, and only you remained? Of course, when they talked about it, all the stuff was still around, the cars and the gasoline and so on. They never explained how everybody else on earth got wiped out but their stuff wasn’t hurt.

“They would talk about how they would fix up an electric generator for themselves, and then collect gasoline and kerosene. Eventually they would decide they had to go out and cultivate an acre or so of ground.”

The Kaczynski sons, David, then a high school student, and Ted, who had just finished his doctorate at the University of Michigan, couldn’t wait to bring the fantasy to life. The outdoors and camping were their great delight together.

Another neighbor, Pete Greiner, a farmer who had moved to town in 1966, remembers looking up from his driveway and seeing the two young men headed off for a weekend of canoeing — a winsome sight.

“They had a canoe tied up on top of an old beat-up Volkswagen, probably headed out somewhere on the Cedar River,” he said. “They were happy. You could tell.”

Up to this point, the ideas and enthusiasms of the parents had been a glue that held the family together. People here and in the Chicago suburbs where the Kaczynskis lived remember how proudly the boys showed off the fossils they had collected on outings with their parents, how eager the sons were for their father to let them look through his telescope. The anti-materialist, anti-capitalist feelings of the parents were painless enough in a period of general prosperity and peace.

But like Bill Radl, the Kaczynski sons had to carry their parents’ individualism forward into a more troubled era. Radl was arrested as a draft resister during the Vietnam War and eventually won status as a conscientious objector.

Ann Arbor, Mich., where Ted Kaczynski spent the years 1962–67 while working on his graduate degrees, was already a seething cauldron in his last year there. Protests and teach-ins choked the corridors of the main class building, Angell Hall. Tear gas rolled up from the streets where student radicals threw Molotov cocktails at the police from behind barricades. It was a time and place in history when people took everything very seriously, including themselves. There was no room for dilettantes.

In the late ‘60s, when Ted was coming back to visit his family in Lisbon, the Kaczynskis enjoyed some of their last happy moments together as a family. Rather than buy a house, as they had elsewhere, they rented an upstairs flat in what had once been one of a few grand homes in Lisbon. Open country was only a block away on three sides of them. Theodore Sr. was a five-minute walk from his small cushion factory, housed in a one-story metal and concrete building, 40 by 160 feet, next to the tracks in the shadow of the town’s grain elevator.

Today there are affluent new neighborhoods rising on the edges of Lisbon, built for commuters from Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. But the neighborhood where the Kaczynskis lived at one end of Main Street is still a quiet haven. Out beyond the

town, long trains loaded with grain float by in silence, as they must have when the Kaczynskis were here.

Theodore Sr. was a tinkerer, clever mechanically without being really mechanically trained, according to his former neighbor across the street, Pete Greiner. "He invented a new foam cutter for his plant out of hot wire, because the kind they had was leaving the foam sticky," Greiner remembered.

One day when Greiner was trying to fix a large piece of harvesting equipment on his farm, Kaczynski stopped by to visit but was little help. "He was somewhat mechanical but not real mechanical," Greiner said.

He said Kaczynski did not bring up politics with him. "He and I were kind of on opposite sides of the fence, so he just didn't talk about it with me. He was a very congenial man."

Diane Shelton was a teen-ager when she worked for Kaczynski in the foam factory, one of his four employees. It was her first job.

"He was a good boss," she remembered. "He was understanding if you were sick. He didn't yell. I never heard him raise his voice."

She liked him and his unusual family. "I remember Ted (the son) went out one day and found all these roots you could eat and brought them back and showed us. He had one that tasted like potatoes and then another one that tasted like something else and so on. They were all real proud of that kind of stuff."

Wanda attended classes at the University of Iowa, 20 miles south of Lisbon where she completed a bachelor's degree in English in June 1968. Even though her own sons were grown, she was fond of the little children in the town. "She had her house all decorated for Halloween," Greiner said, "all ready for the trick-or-treaters."

The Kaczynskis may have rented because they knew their sojourn in Iowa was not going to last long. In 1968, the foam rubber company closed Theodore Kaczynski's cushion plant, and he and his wife moved back to Chicago to deal with their own economic survival and, eventually, old age.

David, who had enjoyed his years in high school here, came back to Lisbon after college to teach and work on a novel. The novel went unpublished, and eventually he moved to a solitary cabin in the desert at Terlingua in Southwest Texas for another, more serious try.

Ted went from Ann Arbor to the University of California at Berkeley. So shy he could not answer the questions of his students, he failed as a teacher and repaired to his own cabin in the mountains. His mother told friends her genius son was in Montana working on a book that would make his reputation.

Now the ideas of the father could finally be put to their real test. One cannot help wondering if the elder Kaczynski had ever really intended for that to happen.

Part 4 — Without God

Kaczynskis' neighbors say worship of knowledge didn't feed the soul

LOMBARD, Ill. — Six years after the death of Theodore Kaczynski, father of the man accused of being the Unabomber, his passing is still an awkward, even painful subject for Roy Froberg, a man who barely knew him.

Kaczynski, who always maintained a careful distance, broke his rule and shared a confidence with Froberg one day in 1990.

"He had just come back from the doctor from having his check-up," Froberg said. "He came over, and he said, 'It's terminal.' Just like that. He had lung cancer. He said they had checked him, and they had told him he wasn't going to live."

Having opened himself that far to Froberg, a neighbor across the street for 22 years, Kaczynski offered nothing more. "He just went back in his house. A few days later, he was gone," Froberg said.

Kaczynski, whose major fascinations in life had been knowledge and survival, waited until his wife, Wanda, was out of the house and then shot himself to death with a pistol. He was 77.

Froberg is still pained to have been so close and yet so far from the man at such a crucial moment. But he says that, with the Kaczynskis, there was always a line.

"For years," Froberg said, "I watched this man come out of his house to smoke his pipe. He had a little area he stayed in when he was smoking, on his own property, and I never saw him once step out of that little space while he was smoking."

After her husband's suicide, Wanda Kaczynski continued to be active in her neighborhood and community. Tough enough to volunteer at a nearby grade school but sweet enough that the kids called her "Grandma K," she, too, maintained a line.

Froberg, a retired patternmaker, said, "The picture that comes back to me of Wanda is, we were having my 60th birthday party in the back yard, everybody in the neighborhood, people drinking beer, having a good time. Here comes Wanda to join us, and she has brought her own lunch in a little brown bag."

A few days before Christmas in 1991, Wanda came to Marian Froberg, a retired school librarian, to ask if she could recommend a church in the area where a person might attend Christmas Eve services.

"But then she made a point of telling me it was for her new daughter-in-law," she said. "David and his wife were going to visit, and Wanda said the daughter-in-law might want to go to church, like it was important to know it wasn't her or her son."

Marian Froberg remembers Wanda as a deeply moral and compassionate person, who helped spur on the Frobergs' daughter to continue her education and worked

with Marian to help infirm and lonely widows in the neighborhood. The two women struggled over the moral issues involved in helping their elderly friends stay in their homes rather than go to nursing homes.

“We found ourselves dealing with the issue of when you need to keep helping and when you are just making a person dependent on you in a way that may be dangerous to that person,” Froberg said.

But in all this Wanda Kaczynski made it plain to the Frobergs, who are Lutherans, that she did not share their faith in God. “She believed that the Bible and the Christian story were a myth,” Marian Froberg said, “along with other important myths that people might study.”

In a long, awkward conversation recently, while the sun went down outside their modest frame house and their living room grew dark, the Frobergs struggled with their feelings about the Kaczynskis.

“They got their values from worshipping knowledge,” Marian Froberg said. “Even in their old age, a vacation for them was traveling to youth hostels on college campuses around the country where there was some course they could take.”

The Frobergs, who are religious and spend time studying their own faith, wonder if knowledge and a strong social conscience were enough to give the Kaczynski sons a framework for their lives.

“If you’re just going to go on the minds of other men, without God, then that’s the end of it,” Marian Froberg said.

They wonder if the themes of survivalism and self-sufficiency, combined with a rigorous intellectual agnosticism, may have been more than what the troubled older brother, Ted, could handle. Or less than what he needed.

“Could you say he had a God complex?” she asked. “He was in control of everything?”

“It’s kind of a disease,” Roy Froberg added, “and it’s gone out of control. He’s smart, so he’s got the answer.”

The Frobergs’ questions might be explained away as the obvious response of very religious people, but similar questions come to the lips of many people who knew the family, in different places and under very different circumstances.

Tom Lebensorger, who knew both brothers when they were still boys in Evergreen Park, Ill., said, “There was not much evidence of a Judeo-Christian background in their home, and I think that left the boys kind of on their own.”

Sandy Fiedler, who knew David, the younger brother, during his years of sojourn in the desert near Texas’ Big Bend National Park, paused during a day’s work recently and speculated about both brothers: “If you have no God, then there is no higher order, and you’re taking it all into your own hands. If you see a problem, and you know you’re smart, the way they were, then you must be the one who’s supposed to solve it.”

But some people, including the one clergyman who knew them well, take strong exception to the notion that the Kaczynski family suffered from a kind of religious deficit.

The Rev. Mel La Follette, an Episcopal missionary to the poor Mexican Indian people of the Texas-Mexico border region, knew David and met his parents on their visits to Texas. La Follette, a colorful figure who looks like he stepped out of a Willa Cather novel, lives in a mobile home in a dusty sun-baked border village, where he listens to classical music and somehow manages to raise lush roses.

“As for the theory that the family’s problems are somehow the result of their having an agnostic view,” La Follette said, “I would use the term, ‘bullshit.’

“They were not without belief. They had tossed over the institutional church, but that didn’t mean they had tossed over a moral framework. I would think David is the shining example of that — somebody who is willing to turn over his own brother to the authorities. You don’t do something like that without some kind of moral grounding.”

La Follette has his own simple explanation for the difference in the ways the two Kaczynski brothers turned out. “It’s how it is,” he said. “You raise two different kids in the same environment, and they will turn out completely different.”

La Follette’s own son, Joe La Follette, now 30 years old and a teacher, had his own years of rebellion and struggle when he was younger, during which he spent many long days and nights hiking the desert with David Kaczynski, discussing life and literature, debating the big issues. If there was a central logic or theme in David’s life, he said, it may have been the idea that in poverty and solitude there is purity.

“Look at what he read,” Joe La Follette said. “He read all these books by people who didn’t make a living. I think he said to himself, ‘If I’m going to write, I’m going to be poor.’ It was part of being pure. He was out there studying, boiling the intellectual juices. Sometimes when you’re a really smart person, you need a place where you can go deep.”

Wanda Kaczynski proudly and defensively insisted to the Frobergs that her sons would achieve recognition when their books were published. It was probably a hopelessly naive view of the way things work — that her sons, the geniuses, would labor like monks in their cells until one day the world, discovering their brilliance, would beat a path to their doors.

But she was their mother. The purity and isolation she and her husband preached seem to have done no great harm to David — by all accounts an interesting, productive person.

It is the way these same notions may have worked in the mind of the other brother that is chilling. For whatever reason, he seems from the beginning not to have owned the basic human skills involved in building a happy life. For him, the worship of pure knowledge and a cool tinkering intellectualism were not enough. Alone in his cell with only these things for comfort and guidance, he may have become a monster.

Ironically, it is in staying out there so long, in failing to change or grow, even in becoming wild and bizarre, that Ted Kaczynski achieves a certain resonance for members of his generation.

Bill Radl, who knew the Kaczynskis when they lived in Lisbon, Iowa, went on to his own problems with the times — an arrest for draft evasion, an eventual conscientious

objector status. He lives in a sunny house full of art and hardwood floors in Iowa City, where he is now the mellow, graying late-parent father of a little girl who bounces through the kitchen with a four-word report on her soccer practice.

“I can’t help thinking about this guy,” Radl said of Ted Kaczynski, “out there all that time. I think he’s a guy who came of age in the middle of a bunch of crap and got himself in a corner.

“If he did what they say he did, then that’s absolutely horrible. But I think a lot of people my age are also going to think of him as sort of a last holdout. The true believer.”

In his interview with The New York Times, David confirmed earlier reports that Ted once wrote a long letter to his mother, attacking her bitterly for his own unhappiness. David said his mother had written to Ted first, out of concern, asking him to share with her the things that made him unhappy.

What came back, David told the Times, was a long twisted epistle, reasonable in tone at first but increasingly wild and bitter as it progressed, in which Ted cataloged the hurts and disappointments of his life, going back to being picked last for a team in high school. He said his mother had been interested only in his brilliance. He told her he had never had a single friend.

It is clear in David’s account that his brother saw his own unhappiness as the fault of others who should have known or cared enough to steer him on a better path. If Ted Kaczynski is the Unabomber, his revenge for being unhappy was the injuring and maiming of 23 human beings and the taking of three lives.

The Ted K Archive

Jim Schutze
A Family Saga
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alt.fan.unabomber. Originally published in the Houston Chronicle.

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