

**He came Ted Kaczynski, he left
The Unabomber**

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It's been 43 years since Ted Kaczynski first stepped onto the University of Michigan campus.

Since then, he's spent 18 of those 43 years – from 1978 to 1995 -mailing bombs. He's killed three people, wounded 29 and received four life sentences without parole.

But he still describes his five years at the University as among the worst in his life. “My memories of the University of Michigan are NOT pleasant,” he wrote me in a letter dated Jan. 16.

Attached to the letter, he included a hand-copied excerpt from his 1979 unpublished autobiography on extra-long legal paper.

“So I went to the U. of Michigan in the fall of 1962, and I spent five years there,” he wrote. “These were the most miserable years of my life (except for the first year and the last year).”

When Kaczynski entered the University, he was a precocious, solitary mathematics student whose brilliance his undergraduate education at Harvard had not yet revealed. It was 1962. He was 20 years old. His name was still Ted Kaczynski.

By the time he'd left, it was 1967. He was 25 years old. He had earned a master's and doctorate in mathematics. And he'd developed an identity with a different name. He was the Unabomber.

The University was not Kaczynski's first choice for graduate work. He also applied to the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Chicago. All three schools accepted him. None initially offered a student-teaching position or financial aid.

His grades at Harvard were unexceptional, especially for someone who had entered the world's most prestigious at age 16. In his last year as an undergrad, he scored a B+ in History of Science, B- in Humanities 115, B in Math 210, B in Math 250, A- in Anthropology 122, C+ in History 143 and A- in Scandinavian. Earlier in his career, he earned an embarrassing C in Mathematics 101. He finished with a 3.12 GPA. Those grades may not seem drastically poor – especially given it was a time before rampant grade inflation – but Kaczynski had a 170 IQ at age 10. He was expected to perform better.

The University of Michigan eventually offered him a grant of \$2,310 a year to serve as a student teacher. He packed his bags and traveled to Ann Arbor.

His grades at the University marked an improvement from his grades at Harvard. He limited himself to two courses per semester to accommodate his considerable teaching duties.

During his five-year career, he came into his own academically. In a turn around from his struggles at Harvard, Kaczynski's lowest grade – save a failure in physics – was a B-. He only received four other B's to go along with his 12 A's.

His teaching, though, was not up to par. After sitting in on his class on Oct. 12, 1962, an evaluator gave him lukewarm marks: a “good” in categories like subject knowledge but only an “average” in subjects like student participation.

There was one isolated rift with a student, who called him a “really incompetent teacher who did not know his subject.” The professors kept a close eye on him for a while. There were no more complaints.

He was the darling of the math department, finishing his master’s degree in 1964.

“Best man I have seen,” wrote Math Prof. Allen Shields in a grade evaluation.

“He just seems a little too sure of himself,” was Math Prof. Pete Duren’s only complaint.

Maybe he had reason to be. Kaczynski had a habit of solving extremely difficult problems and then publishing them in prestigious journals.

Once, as Math Prof. George Piranian told author Alton Chase, Piranian told his students that he had a problem about a lesser-known mathematical subject called boundary functions that no one had solved. Weeks later, Kaczynski placed 100 handwritten pieces of paper on Piranian’s desk. He had solved the problem.

Kaczynski’s academic prowess peaked with his doctoral dissertation, titled “Boundary Functions.” The dissertation was awarded the Sumner Myers prize for the University’s best mathematics thesis of the year, netting Kaczynski \$100. A plaque listing his accomplishment is still displayed near the East Quad Residence Hall entrance. If you Google “boundary functions” name now, the third result is an excerpt from Kaczynski’s thesis.

Every professor on his dissertation committee approved it.

“This thesis is the best I have ever directed,” Shields wrote in an evaluation form.

Kaczynski’s genius was finally starting to reveal itself.

Something else was, too.

It’s chilling to think that while Kaczynski was at the University – walking down State Street on football Saturdays, sitting in the Diag, taking notes in Angell Hall classrooms – his peers and teachers did not see anything in him that would lead them to believe that he would go on to be one of America’s most infamous terrorists.

In a letter of recommendation to the financial aid office, Shields, perhaps Kaczynski’s strongest supporter, wrote “Mr. Kaczynski is a very pleasant person.”

Shortly after Kaczynski’s arrest in 1996, Duren told The Michigan Daily that the math department’s star student was a loner but was always polite.

Asked by the Daily three decades later whether he would have thought the 1967 version of Kaczynski could have been Unabomber, Piranian said he would have answered with a “categorical no.”

As is the case among his fellow classmates, many peers have had trouble even remembering him. It appears that only one, a fellow graduate student at the University of Michigan named Joel Shapiro, has been quoted in major media sources.

On an evaluation for a class for which he awarded Kaczynski a B+, Piranian wrote: “Has ability, lacks fire.”

Certainly there was nothing that would have foreshadowed his rise to the position of the most notorious of the University’s 425,000 living alumni (sorry, Jack Kevorkian).

It appears Kaczynski was so quiet that no one noticed him. His meticulous concentration on academics completely consumed him?

Then what made him become the Unabomber?

If you read the selection of Kaczynski's unpublished autobiography he sent me, you'd think that it was the incompetence of his professors at the University.

"The fact that I not only passed my courses (except one physics course) but got quite a few A's, shows how wretchedly low the standards were at Michigan," he wrote.

He later describes how professors often showed up to class unprepared and how they could not complete some of the proofs they assigned.

"The atmosphere to me felt extremely sordid – most instructors and most students did only what they had to do – there was no interest or enthusiasm or even any sense of responsibility about doing a good job," he wrote.

The poor teaching had some psychological effects, his writings suggest.

"Sloppy, careless, poorly organized teaching can destroy the morale of many students," Kaczynski wrote.

Nonetheless, there is no compelling evidence that the professors' incompetence had more than a slight hand in leading him in his descent into madness.

The Unabomber would later take his anger out on all of academia, though for more complicated reasons than poor teaching. His bombing spree started at Northwestern University in May 1978.

Kaczynski's rampage also included bombs sent to Yale University, Vanderbilt University, the University of Utah in Salt Lake City and the University of California at Berkeley, among others. The moniker Unabomber is the media's version of the FBI's code name for him, UNABOM, which stands for university and airplane bomber. The latter is derived from his bombing of several airline officials in 1978 and a bomb he put in the cargo hold of a commercial airplane in 1979. Smoke seeping from the bomb on plane forced the plane to make an emergency landing, but a faulty timing mechanism prevented the bomb from exploding. Authorities said it had the necessary firepower to destroy the plane.

One of his bombs was intended for University Psychology Prof. James McConnell in 1985. McConnell was not hurt. His assistant, Nicklaus Suino, sustained flesh wounds to his arm and abdomen. The link between Kaczynski and McConnell, who died in 1990, is unclear. They never met.

Many suspect that he targeted McConnell after reading his textbook, "Understanding Human Behavior," which clashed with many of the Unabomber's beliefs in the "Manifesto" he published in 1995.

The manifesto claims the Industrial Revolution led to "widespread psychological suffering" and said technology would cause "social disruption and psychological suffering."

There is also no evidence that Kaczynski began developing those left-wing thoughts at the University of Michigan, though he later claimed he was mailing the bombs to advance his social ideologies. It wasn't until three years later that those beliefs began

to permeate his thoughts. In 1970, he wrote a response to a book by Jacques Ellul called "The Technological Society."

Despite the politically charged atmosphere on campus at the time, Kaczynski never mentioned any political beliefs, radical or otherwise, Duren said.

"If he's the Unabomber, that's a different person than the one I knew," he said.

So if it wasn't his dystopian fears that wrangled his shadowy genius from math to murder, what was it?

Near the end of his years in Ann Arbor, Kaczynski moved into a rooming house at 524 South Forest Ave.

At night, he was tormented by the sounds of a couple having sex through the thin walls. Kaczynski, who was in his mid-20s at the time, had begun to suffer from sexual repression.

In a fit of naivete, he reported the sounds to the University, which, of course, took no action. At the time, he also grew convinced his landlord had turned others against him. He had trouble fitting in at the University. He was anti social, disdained others and showed little willingness to communicate with peers.

He began to have nightmares. In them, he was constantly hounded by organized society, which he usually manifested as psychologists. The psychologists tried to control his mind with tricks, causing him to grow angrier and angrier. Eventually, this man who did not bend – not even in the world of dreams – would break. He would kill the psychologists as well as their allies, and afterward, feel relief and liberation. Then, though, his victims would spring back up. As time went by, he grew more successful in keeping them dead by concentrating hard enough.

According to a detailed psychological profile done of him by psychiatrist Sally Johnson, Kaczynski experienced a period of a few weeks in the summer of 1966 during which he was constantly sexually aroused.

In a severe twist of logic that is telling of his jumbled thought processes during his time at the University, he reasoned that the only way he would ever be able to touch a woman was to become one himself. Kaczynski began to fantasize about being female.

When he returned to Ann Arbor in the fall, he went as far as to make an appointment at the University Health Center to see a psychiatrist to discuss whether a sex change would be a good choice for him. Kaczynski's plan was to trick the doctor into believing that the operation wasn't merely for erotic purposes, but was rather intended to make him into the more feminine person he was destined to be.

As he was sitting in the waiting room, he experienced a sudden change of heart, and instead he lied to the psychiatrist, telling him he had come because he was depressed about the possibility of being drafted into military service.

He deplored the shame sexual cravings had caused him. As he walked away, Kaczynski felt a flood of humiliation. He felt disgusted. He felt like he had lost control of his libido. He felt like he didn't want to live anymore.

Something snapped.

The Unabomber finally had the answer. He felt like killing the psychiatrist. The very thought improved his mood. He did not care whether he himself lived or died, so maybe it would make him feel better to kill someone else, too.

“Just then there came a major turning point in his life,” he later told Johnson. “Like a phoenix, I burst from the ashes of my despair to a glorious new hope.”

It was then that he decided to spend his life killing. He would avoid capture in order to continue to kill. Kill. Kill. It is easy to imagine the word running through his head as he walked home across campus from the health center. Kill. Kill. It was a thunderclap of clarity. The story arc of his life had revealed itself to him. He must have felt like he had finally worked to the end of some unsolvable proof and was left with a simple answer: kill.

The Unabomber decided he would go to Canada, he later told Johnson. He would hide in the woods with only a rifle to keep him company.

“If it doesn’t work and if I can get back to civilization before I starve then I will come back here and kill someone I hate,” he wrote.

Kill.

First he had to get enough money to buy a cabin and some land to carry out his plans of delicious revenge. He graduated from the University in 1967 and was hired as an assistant professor at the University of California at Berkeley.

In 1969, having made enough money to fund the construction of a secluded cabin in the wild of Montana, the Unabomber resigned from his post at Berkeley.

Back in Ann Arbor, the news reached Shields that his former prize student had quit. A concerned Shields sent Berkeley a letter asking what had happened.

“He said he was going to give up mathematics,” a professor wrote back. “He wasn’t sure what he was going to do.”

THE KACZYNSKI PAPERS

Atop the Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library sits the Special Collections Library in a series of peculiar rooms. Inside, an avalanche of paper decays and the smell of academia taints the air. Buried within is the Labadie Collection, which houses papers on anarchy, socialism, communism and other non-mainstream topics. And buried within that is the papers of Ted Kaczynski.

Kaczynski donated many of his papers to the University in 1999. Now they fill more than 15 boxes. It is open to the public. You can sift through his papers while looking out over the Diag below.

The papers are mostly letters he’s received since his 1996 incarceration. The bulk of the correspondence is supportive. Kaczynski claims he submitted them all to the library without weeding out the negative ones. Some are evangelical, others seek for a piece of notoriety such as an autograph, while others ask for romance. Some assert his innocence. Many are from media such as 20/20, The Roseanne Show and the New Yorker requesting interviews. In one letter, NBC’s Katie Couric congratulates Kaczynski on a 1999 legal victory of his. “I’m sure you’re very busy these days working

on your defense,” Couric wrote before asking him for an interview, which he did not accept.

There is also a long list of books the FBI found in his Montana when he was arrested. The books include “The Elements of Style,” “Field Guide to Rocky Mountain Wildflowers” and “Cossacks and the Raid,” among many other obscure titles.

One of the dark green boxes contains a 1996 day planner. Among the sparse entries is on March 7: “Shower change of clothes” it reads. There is nothing until March 12, when the same line is repeated.

The Ted K Archive

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www.thetedkarchive.com