

Why I'd have the Unabomber at my table

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WHO, dead or alive, would you invite to dinner?

It's a good question for human interest or people profile stories because the possible answers are endless and sometimes revealing.

The couch has ever-changing dinner companion wish lists.

Mostly dead, because we don't really use the kitchen and there's no space for guests. We aren't "visit people", much like this week's choice: Theodore "Unabomber" Kaczynski.

His 16-bomb spree between 1978 and 1995 killed three and injured or maimed 23 others. Everyone was terrified because his targets were not linked in the world of victimology and no one could be sure they wouldn't be next. His attempt on a passenger plane thankfully fizzled. He made no mistakes to lead law enforcement back to him.

A genius mathematician, Kaczynski was only caught because he demanded his 35 000-word manifesto against industrialisation and damage to the environment be published in mainstream newspapers. His sister-in-law, who never met Kaczynski, recognised ideas and phrases in the manifesto that he had used in letters to his brother and they notified the FBI.

At his trial, in which he faced the death penalty, he refused to allow his lawyers to use an insanity defence because that would be a denunciation of his beliefs. He took a plea deal that avoided the death sentence, was jailed for life and died by suicide in June.

A docuseries selling itself as the Unabomber in his own words caught my attention last weekend. It was fascinating.

A declaration: bombing in any form is abhorrent, for whatever cause. Full stop. And it's going to take more introspection and dinner debate to determine where on the scale we fit in his revolution and anarchy philosophy. In a country that is permanently on the edge of peril, that idea is chilling.

That out of the way, he had a point or two, and his warnings were prescient.

Consider the timing: in 1971, when he abandoned a stellar career as an assistant professor of mathematics in California for a reclusive life in an isolated Montana forest shack with no electricity or running water, the first personal computer was unveiled – according to computerhistory.org, John Blankenbaker's Kenbak-1, with 256 bytes of memory and a single circuit board. Forty were sold.

Others started attracting broader interest in 1977, one year before Kaczynski sent his first bomb.

The internet, smartphones, wi-fi, artificial intelligence and climate change came long after.

I do hundreds of searches a week to fact check or find out about stuff and have a few trusted sites I rely on, including for shopping. Many of these are subsequently mirrored in targeted emails, ads or other links that try to lure my clicks.

Some even suggest stuff I have bought or checked for prices or availability.

It will be interesting to see what pops up in the mail next week; one of my searches found a book Kaczynski published in 2016 called *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How* (updated in 2020), which will have to replace the dinner chat I would have liked to have about power, climate change and how we are electronically tagged. Maybe the FBI will pop in.

It's ironic because, being housebound, I constantly wonder how I would live without this double-edged technological umbilical cord. And how people in similar situations managed before this connectivity was available.

Ted, I would ask, how did you know? I may not like him, but I would be a curious listener.

The Ted K Archive

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