

Unabomber Sentenced to Life in Prison

Mark Gladstone

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SACRAMENTO — An unrepentant Theodore Kaczynski on Monday was sentenced to four life terms in federal prison as a parade of his anguished victims pleaded for harsh retribution and described how the confessed Unabomber’s blasts shattered their lives.

“Lock him so far down so that when he does die, he’ll be closer to hell. That’s where the devil belongs,” a New Jersey widow told a packed courtroom as she recounted the horror of seeing her husband’s mangled body in their debris-strewn kitchen.

Another victim, a onetime Utah computer store employee who still picks shrapnel out of his arms, urged the court to make sure that Kaczynski is never in a position to harm others again.

A maimed Northern California geneticist—staring directly at Kaczynski seated a few feet away—described the Unabomber as a coldblooded killer for whom there could never be adequate punishment.

Kaczynski was steely-eyed as he listened to the heart-wrenching drama.

A few minutes before the victims began to sketch their personal stories, the 55-year-old Kaczynski delivered his own brief address to the court in a high-pitched voice devoid of emotion—and drew a sharp response from U.S. District Judge Garland E. Burrell Jr.

Kaczynski assailed prosecutors, who last week issued a pre-sentencing memo that cited “personal revenge” as the motive for his crimes. Speaking to a hushed courtroom, the former UC Berkeley mathematician said the government’s memo contained “false statements, misleading statements. By discrediting me personally,” he said, “they hope to discredit” his anti-technology views.

“At a later time I expect to respond to the false statements,” Kaczynski said.

As he had begun to speak, Connie Murray, whose husband was the Unabomber’s final victim, hastily left the courtroom.

The neatly bearded Kaczynski, standing in a cream-colored sweater, appealed to the court to reserve judgment “until all the facts” have been made known.

For one of only a few times in the legal proceedings, the even-tempered Burrell displayed a flash of anger at Kaczynski as he ordered the imposition of the sentence agreed to in a plea bargain hammered out in January.

“The defendant committed unspeakable and monstrous crimes for which he shows utterly no remorse,” Burrell sternly told the packed, high-security chamber. He sentenced Kaczynski to four life terms plus 30 years and fined him more than \$15 million.

The judge declined to make a recommendation to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons on whether Kaczynski should be sent to a maximum security prison, possibly in California or Colorado. But Burrell indicated that he feared that the Chicago native would try to kill again if not closely monitored.

In January, on the eve of his trial in federal court here, Kaczynski admitted to being the Unabomber, responsible for the trail of violence that began 20 years ago this month with a blast at the Chicago Circle campus of the University of Illinois.

As part of the plea agreement, Kaczynski pleaded guilty to five bombings that killed three people and acknowledged responsibility for 11 other attacks across the nation. In exchange, the government agreed to drop its effort to execute the academic turned hermit and instead keep him in prison for the rest of his life.

Procession of Victims

“We feel justice was done,” lead prosecutor Robert Cleary told reporters outside the John E. Moss Federal Building on Monday. The New Jersey-based prosecutor said that listening to the victims was “one of the most emotional experiences of my life.”

The procession of victims began with Nancy Mosser, whose husband, advertising executive Thomas Mosser, was killed by a package bomb sent to his northern New Jersey home two weeks before Christmas 1994.

“He’s diabolical, evil, cunning, a murderer,” Mosser said.

Sitting at the prosecution table, Mosser described how she and her then-15-month-old daughter Kelly had been in the kitchen on a Saturday morning, when the toddler decided to have a tea party in the living room.

“As we were starting it, a thunderous noise resounded throughout the house,” Mosser told the court.

Mosser sought to comfort her husband until paramedics arrived. But it soon became clear that her severely injured husband would die.

Later, she told another older daughter, Abigail, “Daddy’s dead. . . . It was a bomb. I’m so sorry, honey.”

“No, no, no, not my daddy!” the young woman cried.

“Every holiday has pain,” Susan Mosser told the court. “Every Father’s Day, every birthday, every graduation. . . everything,” said Mosser, her voice choking with emotion.

“Please, your honor, make this sentence bulletproof, bombproof, if you will,” Mosser said. Shortly before Burrell issued his sentence, Mosser’s red-haired daughter Kelly was escorted into the courtroom to sit with her family.

Gary Wright, who picked up a bomb outside a Salt Lake City computer store where he worked in 1987, said he would not be consumed by hatred of Kaczynski although the maiming blast has loomed over his life.

“I lost my innocence to this man, and I fight a daily battle to find the carefree happiness of a child that was so unjustly taken away from me,” said Wright, who was 26 when he picked up a burlap bag in the parking lot behind a small computer store where he worked.

Wright, who still finds shrapnel in his skin, said Kaczynski “stole my ability to fully trust in the people around me.”

Charles Epstein, a University of California geneticist who lost part of an arm, said he’s just not sure if there ever can be true justice.

“And, for those who are dead and those whom they leave behind, no punishment can repair their losses. I am afraid, therefore, that we have to settle for imperfect justice—one that will put a stop to your reign of terror,” Epstein said.

Epstein's wife Lois, a Harvard-educated physician, cited what she described as the biblical precepts of her Jewish faith, saying that Judaism rejects a literal interpretation of the passage "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" for a more metaphorical interpretation.

So, she said, for those he blinded, "may your eyes be blinded by being deprived of the light of the moon, the stars, the sun and the beauty of nature for the rest of your life."

Kaczynski, in fact, loved to roam the Montana wilderness under the stars of Big Sky country. He was arrested there in April 1996, at the roughhewn shack that he had called home for two decades.

That shack was trucked to Sacramento to be a defense exhibit in the trial that never was. Prosecutors said it is unclear what will happen to the hovel, a home that the defense said reflected Kaczynski's frayed mental condition.

It was the shy, brilliant Kaczynski's own writings that led authorities to focus on the Montana recluse. After newspapers published the Unabomber's 35,000-word anti-technology manifesto, Kaczynski's younger brother stumbled across old papers of Theodore's that paralleled the treatise's themes.

In rambling journal entries found in his cabin and released last week by prosecutors, Kaczynski wrote: "I emphasize that my motivation is personal revenge. I don't pretend to any kind of philosophical or moralistic justification. . . . My ambition is to kill a scientist, big businessman, government official, or the like. I would also like to kill a Communist."

It was similar passages that caught the attention of David Kaczynski, a New York social worker. David Kaczynski may be eligible now for a \$1-million reward from the government.

David and his mother campaigned to spare Theodore's life, saying that he suffered from paranoid schizophrenic delusions. In January, a government psychiatrist found that Kaczynski suffered from severe delusions, helping pave the way for an end to the much-delayed proceedings.

After Monday's hearing, David Kaczynski issued a brief statement outside the courthouse and offered the regrets his brother never uttered. "To all of these good people, the Kaczynski family offers its deepest apologies. We are very, very sorry."

The Ted K Archive

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