

Our Towns; Crime, Punishment and the Brothers K.

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August 5, 2001

ALBANY— IT'S not the headline he hoped for in his local paper, but it was inevitable: "Death Penalty Foes Hire Unabomber's Brother."

"I'm not David Kaczynski," said David Kaczynski. "I'm the Unabomber's brother."

Being Theodore J. Kaczynski's kid brother these last few years has been an ordeal of turning him in, fighting for his life, apologizing for him, trying to understand him and ultimately, for David Kaczynski, trying to differentiate himself from the brother everyone — and no one — knows.

"There are times when I wished it would go away," David Kaczynski said. "There's a slow realization that it never will."

If fate has recast him as the Unabomber's brother, he has tried to play the part as David Kaczynski would. He calls it a journey, and last week he left a job counseling troubled youths here to become executive director of New Yorkers Against the Death Penalty. A man named Kaczynski might seem an odd leader for a group that wants to rally the public to the cause of condemned murderers.

But Mr. Kaczynski, 51, is more social worker than advocate, and his roles in his brother's case gave him many perspectives. He led the F.B.I. to Ted, then felt betrayed as prosecutors sought the death penalty, despite his brother's schizophrenia and "what the world looked like from inside his eyes."

Mr. Kaczynski sympathized with everyone. He worried about his brother, who "hates noise, ending up in a noisy prison" or dying in a shootout with agents. He gave his brother's victims most of the \$1 million reward his family got for aiding the F.B.I.

There is a gentleness to Mr. Kaczynski. He is a vegetarian and a Buddhist with a soft, flat Midwestern voice. He'll open the door for you before getting in the driver's side of his plain Chevy Prizm. When troubled youths asked, "How can you turn in your brother?" he didn't defend himself, he said, but told them, "Sometimes you have to be in a situation before you can figure out what you would do."

After his brother's arrest, David Kaczynski tried contacting each of his victims or their survivors, and befriended one. "It seemed important to acknowledge and apologize for what had happened," he said.

Mr. Kaczynski keeps looking for the line between being Ted Kaczynski's brother and the Unabomber's.

The brothers once shared much, including nature as both cause and refuge. In the 1980's, David spent about six years in remote West Texas, writing fiction and living in a shelter dug in the ground, then a tent, and a cabin. He said his brother's retreat to Montana was different.

"Ted's focus would be on the practical aspects of survival, whereas mine was a poetic connection with the desert, the openness," he said. "Ted wanted to try to run away from the noise, the things he found threatening. He wanted to find a place where he could be at peace, but of course the problems were inside him."

Ted Kaczynski rejected his family in angry letters long before 1995, when David's wife, after reading about the Unabomber, raised initial suspicions about him. Ted never acknowledged his brother or mother in court. (Their father, ill with cancer, committed

suicide in 1990.) Ted attempted suicide as his family fought to save him from the death penalty. David said he wondered, “What am I saving him for?”

DAVID and his mother write regularly to Ted in prison, but he never responds. In an unpublished memoir, Ted wrote that David knows he “would unhesitatingly choose death over incarceration.”

David Kaczynski has made his own choices.

He said that he had already opposed the death penalty on moral grounds, but that his brother’s case shattered his “naïve presumption that people would really be pursuing justice.” Only his family’s ability to hire good lawyers saved Ted’s life, he said.

Mr. Kaczynski, who once shunned attention, now has chosen a job for which being the Unabomber’s brother is a calling card. He wants to find value in his burden, and also take every opportunity “to say this is not who the Kaczynskis are, these are not the values my brother and I grew up with.”

David Kaczynski remembers his anguish when the government decided to seek the death penalty. He said he wanted to jump up and scream, “but then they would have said, ‘See, he’s just like his brother.’”

The Ted K Archive

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