

The mad bomber?

The FBI has a Unabomber suspect in custody. Now the feds
must make their case

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He was a son only a mother could love. Smelly, sullen, obsessed by strange ideas, Teddy Kaczynski sent long, rambling letters home over the years. The postmarks changed every so often, from Michigan to California and, finally, Montana. But Wanda Kaczynski saved nearly every one. All told, the letters ran to hundreds of pages, plinked out on an old manual typewriter. But in all the dense verbiage there was hardly an expression of warmth or emotion. Rather, the letters were variations on the theme that seems to have dominated Theodore Kaczynski's life: his indictment of industrial society and the many ills he believed it is visiting on his fellow man.

As strange and diffident a man as her son Teddy was, Wanda Kaczynski loved and believed deeply in him. And so she reacted with disbelief when her younger son, David, came to her several weeks ago with his suspicions about Teddy. Letters David had received from his brother over the years contained uncanny similarities to portions of the 35,000-word Unabomber "manifesto" that the Washington Post and the New York Times agreed to publish in September 1995.

In the months since, David Kaczynski had come to a conclusion, then made a decision, one friends say must have been the most difficult of his life. David Kaczynski asked an attorney in Washington to tell the FBI about his suspicion that his brother was the Unabomber.

Theodore Kaczynski's name was already in the voluminous computer database FBI agents had established during their 18-year Unabom inquiry. But FBI officials were skeptical at first. "The brother felt it was Teddy based upon letters and writings he had sent to him," says a senior Justice Department official directing the Unabom investigation. "He said, 'I feel terrible about this,' and 'I need to tell my mother.'"

Disbelief. Wanda Kaczynski's reaction was swift. "I don't believe it's him," she told David, according to the Justice Department official, who is preparing to present this and other evidence against Kaczynski to a federal grand jury. "And I will help you prove that it's not him."

What followed was unusual. Wanda Kaczynski had already moved from her small frame home in suburban Chicago to be closer to David and his wife, Linda, in Schenectady, N.Y. The Chicago house was to be sold, but she had left behind cartons of her packed belongings to be shipped or otherwise disposed of. One of the cartons contained the letters she had received over the years from Teddy. Tell the people from the FBI you are talking with to look at the letters, Wanda Kaczynski told David. That will prove he's not the Unabomber.

Wanda Kaczynski didn't even ask the FBI agents to get a warrant, so on a brisk day in the middle of March, the agents conducted what is known as a consensual search of the residence. "That was really a treasure-trove," the senior Justice Department official told U.S. News. "We started analyzing the notes and letters. [Many] looked like the [Unabomber's 35,000-word] manifesto. He wrote about all of the same things in, really, some of the same phrases."

One in particular jumped out at the investigators. In a letter written several years before the Unabomber's manifesto was published, Kaczynski described once again the

need to do away with the trappings of industrial society. “Well,” he wrote, “you can’t eat your cake and have it too.” In paragraph 185 of his manifesto, the Unabomber wrote: “As for the negative consequences of eliminating industrial society — well, you can’t eat your cake and have it too — to gain one thing you have to sacrifice another.” The FBI agents relayed their findings to the Justice Department lawyers heading the Unabom task force.

Besides the striking similarities between the Unabomber manifesto and Kaczynski’s voluminous personal letters, U.S. News has learned other details of the investigation:

Investigators were initially mystified by how Kaczynski financed his travels and purchases during the course of his alleged bomb-making career, but his mother and brother supplied the answer. After the FBI search of her home, Wanda Kaczynski provided investigators with canceled checks. She periodically had sent money to Kaczynski (“a couple thousand here, a couple thousand there,” in the words of one investigator), and he had cashed the checks at banks in Montana.

David Kaczynski sent smaller amounts of money to his brother and in 1971 helped him purchase the plot of land on which he later built his isolated, one-room cabin. “The guy,” explains a senior Justice Department official, “lived largely off family contributions.” That information will be presented to the grand jury now assigned to vote on a more sweeping criminal indictment.

A critical element in the prosecution of Kaczynski for the bombings that killed three people and injured 23 during the 18-year Unabomber campaign will be an explanation of how the bombs were delivered to their victims around the country. “Putting him out of that cabin — in Sacramento, Salt Lake City, Chicago — that’s going to be key,” says a veteran Justice Department prosecutor assigned to the Unabom task force. “You’ve got to put him there [if you are going to convict him].” Investigators are searching for receipts or other records that show Kaczynski used Trailways and Greyhound buses to transport some of the bombs before mailing them from different locations.

There has been much speculation about DNA evidence taken from stamps affixed to parcels mailed by the Unabomber, but because the sample was small and drawn from saliva instead of blood, an FBI analysis was able to identify it only to within 3 percent of the population. The analysis indicates that Kaczynski could have been the source of the saliva sample, but it will not be of significant value in convicting Kaczynski of crimes attributed to the Unabomber.

Kaczynski’s name was in the FBI’s Unabom database for several years, but he never emerged among the top rank of suspects — despite the fact that two bombs exploded at the University of California at Berkeley, where Kaczynski had held a teaching post. One reason for the lack of interest, according to three current and former FBI investigators, was that leaders of the Unabom task force rejected a prescient psychological profile of the Unabomber that described him as highly educated, relying instead on an analysis of soldering techniques from the remains of some bomb fragments.

The soldering analysis, by the National Transportation Safety Board, helped convince task force leaders that their suspect was a blue-collar worker with no college

degree who was either a current or former employee in the airline industry. William Tafoya, the FBI specialist who co-authored the psychological profile describing the Unabomber as a highly educated loner, was reassigned from the Unabom task force in late 1994 after being told that his work was unhelpful. “If they had followed his profile,” says a colleague of Tafoya’s, “they probably would have been able to eliminate 10,000 suspects.”

After 18 years, the Justice Department’s Unabom investigation zeroed in on Kaczynski on a freezing day in February 1996. The lawyer representing David Kaczynski told the FBI and the Justice Department of his client’s concerns about his brother, and after some hurried checking, a confidential memorandum was forwarded to Attorney General Janet Reno saying, in the words of one key official, “this could be the guy.”

Surveillance. The FBI moved into high gear immediately. A team of agents was dispatched to Lincoln, Mont., the town closest to Kaczynski’s cabin, and agents posing as property assessors began a detailed examination of the surrounding area, then developed a plan to conduct round-the-clock surveillance. The surveillance team, outfitted with special survival gear for use in subzero temperatures, moved into place in a matter of days while another team of agents began a detailed background check of Kaczynski, from his high school days in suburban Chicago to his years at Harvard, the University of Michigan and Berkeley.

Many questions were unanswered — particularly about a nine-year period after Kaczynski left Berkeley in 1969 and before the Unabomber’s first explosive device was detonated, at Northwestern University north of Chicago, in May 1978. Kaczynski purchased the Montana property on which he built his 10-by-12 cabin in 1971, but investigators say he appears to have traveled widely during the years after that, including, apparently, a lengthy stay in Latin America, where he learned to speak and write fluent Spanish.

Despite those questions, investigators were convinced that Kaczynski was the Unabomber. The similarities were small and large. There was the language used in letters to his family and in the Unabomber manifesto. There were books both the Unabomber and Kaczynski appeared fond of. One was *The Ancient Engineers*, a 1963 text on ancient history. The Unabomber had cited the book in his manifesto; Kaczynski had checked it out of the library in Lincoln.

The evidence was enough for the Unabom task force to authorize the search of Wanda Kaczynski’s home. The search, investigators say, iced Kaczynski’s identification as the Unabomber.

Now all they had to do was arrest him. At approximately 11 a.m. on April 3, Special Agent Donald Sachtleben and a Justice Department lawyer presented a detailed application for a search warrant to a judge at the federal courthouse in Helena, Mont. After the judge signed it, Sachtleben and a team of FBI agents drove the 35 miles from the courthouse to Kaczynski’s cabin. The agents knocked on the door, and Kaczynski was quickly hustled outside. The FBI was worried that Kaczynski might have booby-trapped the cabin, so an explosives team entered first. Once it was deemed safe, a

team of Unabom investigators led by Special Agent Thomas Mohnal began an “eyeball search.”

Several years earlier, FBI brass had dictated that the same team of agents would investigate all suspected Unabom crime scenes and, where possible, make physical searches for evidence. “We have been using the same guys, the same team, for every scene,” a Justice Department official explained. “We wanted the same guys in there bagging and tagging [evidence].”

Pay dirt. With dusk falling and no electricity in the cabin, Agent Mohnal and his colleagues could only jot their findings in a notebook. Yet even a first sweep yielded eye-popping evidence. There were the jars of potassium chlorate and sodium chlorate, zinc, aluminum and silver oxide — all, in the words of an FBI affidavit, “necessary ingredients in the preparation of explosives.”

There was copper pipe of the type the Unabomber had used in his last four explosive devices. There was electrical wiring, C-cell batteries and a box the FBI team was afraid to open; an X-ray machine quickly identified the contents as a partially constructed pipe bomb. U.S. News has learned that a subsequent search of the cabin uncovered a completed bomb, described in a private Justice Department communication as a “fully functional device which is yet to be rendered harmless but which appears to have Unabom characteristics.”

Such bomb-making materials alone could not identify Kaczynski as the Unabomber, but other items recovered from the cabin made the identification appear to be more airtight. Ten three-ring binders containing detailed handwritten notes in Spanish and English closely track the evolution of the Unabomber’s explosive devices, according to a senior official.

The Unabomber’s inaugural effort, concealed in a simple wood box, employed a device concocted from match heads and wooden initiators. His later efforts were more sophisticated devices concealed in manuscripts, pieces of lumber and elegant wooden boxes fitted with handmade screws. The binders, along with the discovery of several handmade wooden boxes, drill bits and other tools in his cabin, will be among the most important pieces of evidence presented to the grand jury, which will begin hearing evidence on April 17.

At first, Kaczynski was charged only with possession of an unregistered federal firearm, specifically with “components from which a destructive device such as a bomb can be readily assembled.” Such a charge, standard practice in high-profile cases, allows the Justice Department to detain Kaczynski while investigators search for more evidence and scientists at the FBI laboratory in Washington seek more definitive matches between items taken from Kaczynski’s cabin and materials recovered from Unabomber crime scenes.

Christopher Ronay, a retired FBI explosives specialist who worked on the Unabom investigation for many years, describes the process as bringing the new evidence into the laboratory “to reveal whether these [bombs] were all made by the same guy.” The

evidence amassed against the Unabomber over the years is so voluminous that it occupies a special Unabom Room in the FBI lab.

Strange trip. How Theodore John Kaczynski found his way into the cross hairs of the longest, most expensive law enforcement investigation in the nation's history is a puzzling tale. Born May 22, 1942, to Theodore Richard Kaczynski and Wanda Theresa Kaczynski (nee Dombek) in Chicago, young Teddy, as he soon came to be known, was a bookish boy with little apparent need or use for others, including, it appears, his own family. An aunt described him as a youngster as "simply quiet" and "hard to know."

A thoughtful man, a pipe-smoking sausage vendor and an avowed liberal, Kaczynski's father imbued his sons with a strong love of both the outdoors and all things academic, lobbying local officials hard for a grammar school in their neighborhood. (The school was approved and built, but only after the Kaczynski brothers had moved on to higher education.)

It was Wanda Kaczynski who really encouraged her sons, though. A petite woman who dressed modestly and wore little makeup, she was involved in supporting the local schools and pushed both her sons into band and other activities. "The parents lived for the kids," says LeRoy Weinberg, a veterinarian who lived behind the Kaczynskis in suburban Evergreen Park. "Wanda helped the kids at home studying. The kids never played." Weinberg has this to say about young Teddy: "He was a genius, but he turned out a loner, not ready for this world."

That certainly was true at Harvard, where Kaczynski roomed in Eliot House, a redoubt of wealthy prep-school graduates. Coming from far more modest means, Kaczynski was assigned a cramped chamber on the fourth floor, in rooms that once had served as maids' quarters. His suitemates encountered a dour but good-looking young man, a mathematics major whose personality added up, in their eyes, to approximately zero. "I can picture him so well sitting there by himself, very taciturn," recalls Richard Adams, who roomed at Eliot House at the time. "You'd be hard pressed to find anyone who thought of him as a friend. It's not our faulty memories. There was just nothing there."

The pattern continued at the University of Michigan, where Kaczynski earned a Ph.D. in mathematics in 1967. In the late 1960s, jackets and ties were not common on college campuses, yet that is how Kaczynski dressed each day. "I don't think he went out of his way to make social contacts," says Peter Duren, an instructor. The professor recalls a compulsively neat student "who dotted his i's and crossed his t's," a writer whose final dissertation, on something called "boundary functions," was "stated so simply that any mathematician could understand it."

Vanishing act. The brilliant loner left Ann Arbor in the summer of 1967 and fetched up in Berkeley for the start of the fall semester, hired as an assistant professor of mathematics, on a sure if not fast track to tenure. He lasted just two years. Despite efforts by the university to lure him back, Kaczynski appeared determined to vanish. Two years later, he bought his plot of land in Montana, apparently traveled widely and made himself invisible.

On May 26, 1978, a security officer at Northwestern University opened a wooden box he found in a parking lot and narrowly escaped injury when the small bomb inside exploded. Thus did the Unabomber announce the start of his long career of terror, and if the evidence being amassed now by the Department of Justice can be trusted, the man behind the 18-year campaign was Kaczynski.

Is it? As a mathematician, Kaczynski's specialty was classical analysis, a field of study that flowered in the 18th and 19th centuries and reached its peak in the 1950s before fading in fashion — just as Theodore and Wanda Kaczynski's son was completing his dissertation.

Profile. The Unabomber manifesto betrays something like the sense of loss and frustration Kaczynski may have felt on completing his studies at Ann Arbor, taking up new teaching duties in Berkeley, then ditching it all for rural Montana. No one seems to know for certain what Kaczynski was thinking, but after the bombs starting going off nearly a decade later the FBI's specialists went to work in earnest on a psychological profile of the bomber.

John Douglas, the former head of the FBI's investigative support unit and the author of a recently released book, *Mindhunter*, conducted a personality analysis of the Unabomber from 1978 through 1980, relying on the findings of FBI laboratory examinations of a handful of bombings. The Unabomber was just starting out, prone to making mistakes, and Douglas wanted to move aggressively in an attempt to lure him out. The FBI brass wasn't buying. "I was doing [psychological] profiling in the FBI when it wasn't cool in the FBI," Douglas says, "and it wasn't accepting it."

That was the beginning of a pattern, other FBI officials concede — a pattern that helped confound efforts to identify and arrest the Unabomber even as his attacks became more brazen and daring. Law enforcement officials have long differed over the value of psychological profiles. "You can't use them as evidence," says one veteran federal prosecutor, "so what good are they?"

But FBI officials have ignored such tools at their peril. During the standoff with David Koresh and members of the Branch Davidian sect in Waco, Texas, FBI managers ignored or discounted advice from analysts and negotiators who urged a more conciliatory approach in order to persuade the cult members to leave their armed compound. The bureau ignored similar counsel during a siege of white separatist Randy Weaver and his family in Idaho.

Over the course of the Unabomber investigation, FBI managers ordered up five psychological profiles — two of them after the publication of the Unabomber manifesto last year. The first two were prepared in 1979 and 1985, and both concluded that the Unabomber was in his 30s or 40s, that he was a blue-collar worker with little or no college education and that he was probably a loner.

For several years, the analysis of soldering techniques that so captivated investigators kept them focused heavily on employees of airlines and aircraft manufacturers at the expense of other suspects. That analysis supported those investigators who paid

heed to the FBI's psychological profiles but believed the correct profile was one that pointed toward a blue-collar worker.

That conclusion soon came into question. In June 1993, after a relatively long period of silence, the Unabomber struck twice in two days, mailing bombs to professors at Yale and the University of California at San Francisco. The Unabom task force, which had decelerated to a less active pace, was reinvigorated.

Questionnaire. At the San Francisco field office of the FBI, Special Agent William Tafoya, a veteran behavioral scientist who had transferred from the FBI Academy in Quantico, Va., in advance of his retirement, was assigned as the senior behavioral scientist on the task force. Working with Mary Ellen O'Toole, another veteran FBI behavioral expert, Tafoya prepared a 63-page protocol for questioning every one of the Unabomber's living victims, and, with O'Toole, reviewed all the previous bombings.

Tafoya and O'Toole came to a conclusion that baffled and angered some other FBI officials. The Unabomber, they said, was not in his 30s or 40s but in his 50s. Tafoya and O'Toole also concluded that the bomber had an advanced degree in a "hard science" such as engineering; an earlier profile had suggested that any advanced training the Unabomber had was probably in one of the social sciences. The Tafoya-O'Toole analysis further concluded that the Unabomber was a Luddite, a person hostile to technology, and that he was a loner and a recluse.

In September 1993, Tafoya and O'Toole sent their conclusions, summarized in a one-page memo, to the FBI's Behavioral Sciences Unit in Quantico. John Douglas, the head of the unit who had done the first study of the Unabomber 15 years earlier, agreed with the Tafoya-O'Toole conclusions, but when they were passed on to the Unabom task force headquarters in San Francisco, they fell on deaf ears. "Our profile just didn't ring any bells," Tafoya, who is now retired, recalls. "It wasn't a line of inquiry they wanted to follow."

In a criminal inquiry that is surely unique both for its length and complexity, even some FBI officials concede that giving short shrift to the psychological profiles may have been a costly decision. "Some of the investigators," says a senior FBI official with direct knowledge of the Unabom inquiry, "thought they knew more about profiling than the profilers."

In the end, if Kaczynski is proved to be the Unabomber who confounded the efforts of Justice Department investigators for so many years, he will have himself to thank as much as anyone for finally getting caught. It was the Unabomber who insisted that the Washington Post and the New York Times publish the turgid diatribe he called his manifesto. And it was the publication of the manifesto that prompted Kaczynski's brother to report him to the FBI. Until then, the FBI was not even close to identifying a likely suspect and making an arrest. "We had a lot of people in the net in the last year who we thought were the Unabomber," says a senior FBI official who has dispatched agents to work on the inquiry. "We've had 15 to 20 people in that net at one time."

One element in all five FBI psychological profiles on which there was at least some agreement was that the subject they were after was a lone wolf. There would be no

co-conspirators who could turn on him, no one who could cut a deal with a prosecutor in exchange for fingering a confederate. “The whole strategy of releasing the manifesto,” says the senior FBI official, “was to flush out these leads ... to get from this huge milky way [of thousands of suspects] down to this one glittering light.”

For now, that’s Kaczynski, but after 18 years, the Unabomber case is still not over. At week’s end, after Kaczynski made his first appearance in court to answer the single criminal charge against him, the FBI issued a press release, the only one since Kaczynski’s arrest. The toll-free 800 number for the FBI’s Unabom task force — 1-800-701BOMB — is still in operation, the press release said. The number may be called 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

The Unabomber’s worldview

Last September, the Washington Post and the New York Times jointly published a 35,000-word manifesto by the Unabomber. Excerpts:

The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race. They have greatly increased the life-expectancy of those of us who live in “advanced” countries, but they have destabilized society, have made life unfulfilling, have subjected human beings to indignities, have led to widespread psychological suffering ... and have inflicted severe damage on the natural world. The continued development of technology will worsen the situation.

The conservatives are fools: They whine about the decay of traditional values, yet they enthusiastically support technological progress and economic growth. Apparently it never occurs to them that you can’t make rapid, drastic changes in the technology and the economy of a society without causing rapid changes in all other aspects of the society as well.

[M]odern man has the sense (largely justified) that change is IMPOSED on him, whereas the 19th century frontiersman had the sense (also largely justified) that he created change himself, by his own choice.

There has been a consistent tendency ... for technology to strengthen the system at a high cost in individual freedom... [P]ermanent changes in favor of freedom could be brought about only by persons prepared to accept radical, dangerous and unpredictable alteration of the entire system.

When motor vehicles were introduced they appeared to increase man’s freedom. They took no freedom away from the walking man, no one had to have an automobile if he didn’t want one, and anyone who did choose to buy an automobile could travel much faster and farther than a walking man. But ... [w]hen automobiles became numerous, it became necessary to regulate their use extensively. In a car, especially in densely populated areas, one cannot just go where one likes at one’s own pace[;] one’s movement is governed by the flow of traffic and by various traffic laws. One is tied down by

various obligations: license requirements, driver test, renewing registration, insurance, maintenance required for safety, monthly payments on purchase price. Moreover ... the arrangement of our cities has changed in such a way that the majority of people no longer live within walking distance of their place of employment, shopping areas and recreational opportunities, so that they HAVE TO depend on the automobile for transportation. Or else they must use public transportation, in which case they have even less control over their own movement...

The positive ideal that we propose is Nature. That is, WILD nature: those aspects of the functioning of the Earth and its living things that are independent of human management and free of human interference and control... As for the negative consequences of eliminating industrial society — well, you can't eat your cake and have it too. To gain one thing you have to sacrifice another.

With regard to revolutionary strategy, the only points on which we absolutely insist are that the single overriding goal must be the elimination of modern technology.

AN 18-YEAR MANHUNT

1 May 25, 1978: A package found at the University of Illinois at Chicago is returned to a professor at Northwestern University, who gives it to campus security. On May 26, it explodes, injuring a security guard. Theodore Kaczynski applied for an Illinois driver's license six weeks after the explosion.

2 May 9, 1979: A box left in a common area of Northwestern's Technological Institute explodes when a student opens it, injuring the student.

3 November 15, 1979: A bomb explodes in a plane's cargo hold during a flight, forcing an emergency landing at Washington's Dulles International Airport. Twelve people suffer smoke inhalation.

4 June 10, 1980: United Airlines President Percy Wood is injured after opening a package bomb sent to his Lake Forest, Ill., home.

5 October 8, 1981: A bomb is found at the University of Utah at Salt Lake City. A bomb squad defuses it.

6 May 5, 1982: A secretary at Vanderbilt University in Nashville is injured when she opens a wooden box containing a pipe bomb.

7 July 2, 1982: A professor in the engineering department at the University of California at Berkeley picks up a small metal pipe bomb and is injured. Kaczynski taught math at Berkeley from 1967 to 1969.

8 May 15, 1985: A bomb explodes in a computer room at the University of California at Berkeley, seriously injuring a student.

9 June 13, 1985: A package bomb mailed to Boeing Co. in Auburn, Wash., is discovered by employees. No one is injured.

10 November 15, 1985: In Ann Arbor, a University of Michigan professor and a research assistant are injured when a package bomb is opened. Kaczynski earned his Ph.D. at the University of Michigan in 1967.

11 December 11, 1985: Businessman Hugh Scrutton is killed in Sacramento, Calif., when a bomb explodes outside his computer store.

12 February 20, 1987: In Salt Lake City, a computer-store owner is injured when a bomb explodes outside his store. A witness spots a man believed to be the Unabomber.

13 June 22, 1993: A geneticist at the University of California at San Francisco is severely injured by a bomb sent to his home.

14 June 24, 1993: A professor at Yale is seriously injured by a package bomb mailed to his office.

15 December 10, 1994: Thomas Mosser, an advertising executive, is killed by a bomb sent to his North Caldwell, N.J. home.

16 April 24, 1995: Gilbert P. Murray, president of the California Forestry Association, is killed while opening a mail bomb in the group's Sacramento headquarters.

17 April 3, 1996: Kaczynski is detained by federal agents in Lincoln, Mont., after two weeks of surveillance.

The Ted K Archive

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