

A Brother Lost, a Brotherhood Found

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The two brothers hiked high into the Montana wilderness, cooked beans beneath the stars and talked like they hadn't in years.

By a campfire outside his one-room cabin, Ted read to his younger brother from a book on Roman history. For a time, they were just kids again, Teddy and Davy Kaczynski from Evergreen Park.

Gone was Ted's long-festering animosity toward their parents, or at least any mention of it. He had sent venomous letters accusing them of not loving him, blaming them for his social awkwardness.

But his brother's visit had gone so well that Ted even considered traveling to Dave's own retreat in southwest Texas. On their last day together in the fall of 1986, though, Ted declined.

"I just really don't have the time to come and visit you, Dave," he remembers Ted telling him. "I have too much to do."

Dave was perplexed. Ted's life in the woods didn't appear to hold many obligations.

What Dave didn't know was that his brother, from his remote cabin near the Continental Divide, had been waging a bizarre eight-year campaign of terror. Constructing bombs from fertilizer, razors and screws, the man dubbed the Unabomber had already killed one person and injured 27 more.

Ted's rebuff of Dave would mark the beginning of the end of their brotherhood. Not long after Dave's visit, in his next brutal attack, Ted would unwittingly spark the beginning of a new bond.

Through an improbable chain of events, that victim, Gary Wright, would forge a lasting connection to Dave, becoming his confessor, friend and ally.

Interviews, rare access to letters and Ted Kaczynski's unpublished writings offer a new perspective on the Unabomber and his relationship with his family, including the sibling who turned him in. Thirty years after Ted planted his first bomb in Chicago, a story emerges of brotherhood lost and found.

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'Dad, what's wrong with Ted?'

I. Ted beckoned Dave to the door. It was a summer day in 1953 on South Lawndale Avenue in Evergreen Park. Three-year-old Dave had once again shouldered his way out the back door, only to find he wasn't tall enough to reach the handle to get back in.

But this day he found Ted, 11, fiddling with the screen door. In one hand, his brother held a spool of thread from their mother's sewing kit; in the other, a hammer and nails from their father's toolbox. Dave watched as Ted unwound the thread and hammered the empty spool into the wooden screen door.

It dawned on Dave what Ted had done. He had devised a makeshift doorknob, about chest-high, for Dave – another act of kindness from his protective older sibling.

The Kaczynskis had moved to southwest suburban Evergreen Park from Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood, partly to escape the claustrophobia and danger of urban life. The boys' father, Ted "Turk" Kaczynski, was a sausage maker who passed on his love of the outdoors to his sons.

He and his wife, Wanda, had met at the Settlement House, Back of the Yards' answer to Jane Addams' Hull House. They were blue-collar intellectuals who put great value on education. And both their sons excelled in school; each graduated early from high school and went off to the Ivy League.

When Ted was in 5th grade, a school counselor gave him an IQ test and he scored a 167, well into genius territory. The counselor told Wanda that he could be "another Einstein." In junior high school, he was correcting his algebra teacher. As he progressed academically, though, Ted withdrew further into books, into himself. His intelligence only exacerbated his lack of social skills.

Dave revered Ted, but even at an early age he recognized Ted's nervousness, his suspicion of people. In a book Dave is writing, he recounts asking his father as a young boy: "Dad, what's wrong with Ted?"

"How do you mean?" Turk said.

"I mean, he doesn't have any friends or anything," Dave said. "He doesn't seem to like people."

"Dave, you have to understand that your brother is very intelligent," their father said. "He has different interests from most of the other boys and girls his age. But in a few years he'll go to college where he'll find people who are interested in the same things he's interested in. Someday he'll fall in love and get married and have a family of his own. He'll find himself. He'll be OK. You'll see."

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'He was all shut down'

II. Dave approached his older brother in a storage room off the factory's main floor. He wanted to be discreet.

"You better stop or I'm going to kick your ass," he recalled telling Ted. "I'll fire you if you don't stop."

In the summer of 1978, the Kaczynski brothers found themselves at their parents' new home in Lombard – Dave after graduating from college and working various jobs in Montana, Ted after leaving academia and establishing his mountain retreat outside Lincoln, Mont.

Ted's homecoming proved dark.

He started at the same foam-cutting factory where his father and brother now worked. He briefly dated a female supervisor at the factory, but the woman cut off the relationship after a few dates. Ted responded by posting crude limericks about her around the factory.

Dave, who worked part time as a night supervisor, confronted Ted in the storage room. It was a turning point in their relationship.

"He looked at me as a friend," Dave recalled, "and by the time I got done speaking to him, he was all shut down."

The next day, Ted walked up to the machine where Dave was working and posted another insulting poem.

"Are you going to fire me now?" Ted defiantly asked.

Heartbroken, Dave replied, "Yes, Ted. Go home."

Ted did, shutting himself in his room for days. Dave worried he had forced some sort of "psychological break." Though their mother had seen some of Ted's symptoms as possibly schizophrenic, this was a time when little was known about mental illness and even less was discussed openly.

Ted eventually knocked on Dave's bedroom door and handed him a letter. "I'll show this to you, only on the condition that you don't discuss this with me," Ted said.

It was a note Ted intended to send to the woman, explaining himself. It was an apology of sorts, but it also contained the disturbing claim that Ted was so enraged that he had waited in the woman's car with a knife, planning to mutilate her. In the end, Ted wrote, he couldn't do it.

Attacking someone face to face proved too much for him. Ted had already established his method of violence just a few weeks before: In May of 1978 he planted his first bomb in a parking lot. It injured a Northwestern University campus policeman who later tried to open the package.

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'The only person I ever loved'

III. Ted and Dave Kaczynski spent most of their adult lives far apart, but their letters tell a story of two siblings constantly trying to understand and protect one another.

"I have a vivid mental image of you at the age of about 4, running with your face all lit up with joy and enthusiasm," Ted wrote in 1984.

Taped to the letter was a newspaper photograph of a smiling young boy who reminded him of Dave.

In their extensive correspondence, they debated philosophy and psychology. Ted helped Dave learn Spanish grammar. When Ted attacked their parents, Dave defended them.

Ted wrote in another letter that if something ever happened to him, he wanted Dave to know that his younger brother was "the only person I ever loved."

Settling outside the small town of Lincoln, Mont., in the early 1970s, Ted plunged himself into self-imposed isolation. The choice surprised his parents but not his brother. Given the ethos of the time, Dave said, Ted's "dropping out seemed like almost a heroic thing."

At various times in their lives, both men lived "off the grid," without electricity, without shaving. For months out of every year, from 1983 to 1989, Dave lived in southwest Texas – first in a tent, then a dugout he carved in the desert floor, and finally, a one-room cabin.

Both immersed themselves in writing, Ted in his journal, Dave in fiction. But Dave periodically returned to Chicago to work and live with his parents, while Ted's Montana retreat only seemed to fuel his rage.

It also brought out the protective older brother in him. At one point Ted described a dream in which Dave's friends appeared as demons and took Dave to a place of unspeakable torment.

"He said he would kill them in order to keep them from taking me," Dave remembers. He thought of it as a fever dream revealing Ted's innermost fear: that Dave would abandon him.

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He heard a click

IV. Gary Wright never saw the man in the parking lot, but his secretary did. She noticed him through the rear window of the Wright family computer company in Salt Lake City. Behind a pair of aviator sunglasses, his face was expressionless, thin, with a reddish flush and rough-looking complexion, she would later tell investigators.

His hands, whiter than his face, had long, thin fingers. His fingernails, she noticed, were clean. Dressed in a gray hooded sweatshirt, he knelt and placed something in the parking lot, just a few feet from where she stood.

Arriving for work on that February day in 1987, Wright noticed the object: a nail-studded piece of lumber. In retrospect, he thought, the nails should have served as a warning. They seemed unnaturally shiny, jutting from the scrap of wood.

But he didn't want anyone to puncture a tire or a child to get hurt. Students walked through his parking lot every day.

Gary bent down. As he picked up the wood, he heard a click.

He didn't hear the explosion.

A single nail shot up through Gary's chin, piercing his lips and ricocheting off his sunglasses, barely missing his left eye.

The blast liquefied nails and razor blades from the bomb, turning them into corkscrew-shaped shrapnel that tore into Gary's body, searing shut one artery and severing a nerve in his left arm.

The explosion flung Gary back 22 feet as power lines above him convulsed in a wave pattern. Debris and duct tape spiraled down from the sky like confetti.

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Could it be Ted?

V. Dave studied the Unabomber's manifesto, and his stomach sank. The words "cool-headed logicians" stopped him. Ted used that phrase.

Rummaging around to find family letters, Dave compared them with the language in the manifesto. "Maybe there's a 50 percent chance that he's this person," he concluded.

Dave's wife, Linda, had been the first to make a connection. Vacationing in Paris, she spotted a series of newspaper stories on the Unabomber that presented the serial killer as an anti-technology zealot. Linda couldn't help but see parallels to her brother-in-law.

Over the many years that Linda knew the Kaczynskis – she and Dave had been lab partners at Evergreen Park Community High School – she often listened to them recount stories of Ted's odd behavior.

Linda knew his writing voice intimately from the years the family spent reading his letters. She expressed concern that Ted was mentally ill.

After The Washington Post published the manifesto in September 1995, Linda downloaded a copy from the Internet and read it. "It just seemed as though it was the voice of Dave's brother," she said recently.

Dave didn't know what to believe. How could this figure he once idolized, who looked after and encouraged him, how could Ted become a killer? Had Dave been blinded by family love? Could he have grown up in the presence of evil and not known it?

Soon after, in January 1996, Dave contacted the FBI through an attorney.

For weeks he showed agents letters Ted had written to their family, and Dave traveled to help interview people Ted knew. He held out hope his brother was innocent, but that hope evaporated when Dave got a call from his FBI liaison. The agent said she was sorry: Ted had moved to the top of the suspect list.

Less than a week later, Ted was arrested.

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'Dave, this one's not on you'

VI. Dave Kaczynski met Gary Wright on the telephone. When Dave dialed Gary's number, the voice on the other end of the line put him at ease almost immediately.

"Dave, this one's not on you," Gary said. "You didn't do this. It isn't your fault. You've got to let it go."

Ted's arrest had left Dave with an urgent need: to know what his brother's victims or their families were experiencing. The Kaczynski family had written letters to them, but most sent no reply.

Gary provided immense relief and, unexpectedly, empathy. He had already fought through the sense of grief and loss that had engulfed Dave.

After so many unanswered letters, the phone conversation left Dave feeling "that reconciliation is not just a fantasy of mine" but "a genuine possibility."

Two years later, Ted pleaded guilty in exchange for a life sentence, avoiding the death penalty and a trial where he would have been portrayed as mentally ill.

At his sentencing hearing in federal court in Sacramento, Dave and Gary ended up on opposite sides of the courtroom. A gulf separated the room – victims and victims' families on one end, Dave alone on the other, surrounded by media. Ted never turned around to look at his younger brother.

It was the first and last time all three men were in the same room.

As he took the stand, Gary spoke to Ted directly. "I do not hate you. I learned to forgive and heal a long time ago," he told him. "Without this ability I would have become kindling for your cause."

Gary then turned to Dave. "I would like to publicly thank David Kaczynski, his wife, Linda, and his mother for their extraordinary act of courage. ... Without their honesty, integrity and ability to do what was right, Ted would still be in a position to kill or maim additional innocent victims."

During a break in the proceedings, Gary was touring Old Town Sacramento when his cell phone rang. It was Dave, calling from a nearby hotel.

Did Gary have a moment to talk? Yes, he did. In a bit of serendipity, Gary was near the hotel. He walked inside.

They talked for hours about loss, about family, about the speeches made by victims in the courtroom that day.

"On arguably the worst day of his life, he could have called anyone, and he chose to call me," Gary said. "That means something. There was honor, there was value, there was integrity."

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VII. Gary and Dave's friendship developed in encounters both searing and small. While traveling in 1999, Gary stayed with Dave and Linda at their home in Schenectady, N.Y. By coincidence it was Dave's 50th birthday, so Gary attended the party. Later, the pair went canoeing on some of Dave's favorite streams in the Adirondack Mountains.

On the night before Sept. 11, 2001, Dave was across the street from the World Trade Center for a business meeting. The next day, after the attacks, Dave went home to an empty house. (Linda was visiting family in Chicago.) He could stand neither the TV images nor the silence. The personal echoes – terrorism to advance a warped ideology – were too much.

Then the phone rang. It was Gary. He knew Dave went into New York City for his job and wanted to make sure he was safe.

"My God, he was almost killed by my brother ... and here he is calling me," Dave recalled. "It meant the world to me."

In the ensuing decade, he and Gary have lobbied against the death penalty and logged thousands of miles telling their story of forgiveness at high schools, colleges, state legislatures, to anyone who would listen.

Though Ted's violent actions first drew them together, he is no longer the constant topic of conversation. For stretches at a time, Dave and Gary are just two friends on a road trip.

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New brotherhood

VIII. Dave and Gary sat in the spare breakfast nook of a Holiday Inn Express, a study in opposites.

Gary is shorter and more compact, with the lean frame of a cyclist. He's louder, quicker to laugh. Dave is tall, graying and soft-spoken, with a slight limp from a hip injury suffered during a softball game.

Last year, their journey of reconciliation took them to an anti-violence conference in Connecticut. Such conferences can seem like a macabre gallery, a collection of people sharing horrific stories of loss – of a child, a spouse, a parent – to unspeakable crimes.

Dave is a celebrity here but also a rarity, someone related not to a victim but a killer.

This particular conference proved especially tough on Dave. That same week, Virginia Tech student Seung Hui Cho killed himself and 32 others in the worst school shooting in U.S. history. Like Ted Kaczynski, Cho sent the media a rambling manifesto. News programs started to call Dave.

Sitting in the hotel lobby, he and Gary talked about their friendship.

"Nobody could take the place of my brother in my heart," Dave said, "and that's a very painful place."

In a book they're writing together, Dave expands on the notion: "Gary and I are 'blood brothers' in a literal sense. Our bond forged through violence is as powerful and as deep as any genetic bond.

"... I find a poetic balance in having gained a new brother in Gary."

He wonders if Ted would understand. "Maybe he'd see my relationship with Gary as one more betrayal," he said.

As they chatted, others attending the conference joined them. A television behind them showed clips from Cho's video manifesto, and the talk turned to the subject of evil.

Denise Brown, whose husband was killed in 1998 by a disgruntled employee, didn't believe her husband's killer was evil. She thought he was just sick, mentally ill.

Marc Klaas, father of Polly Klaas, can't help but believe in evil. A man kidnapped and murdered his 12-year-old daughter. He doesn't know any other word for it – and still can't entirely fathom it.

"Evil doesn't give you a lot of opportunities, a lot of windows" to understand it, Klaas said.

A Roman Catholic, Gary feels that deeds are evil, not people.

As a Buddhist, Dave sees evil as "the absence of light, the absence of hope."

"Ted had no hope; he was isolated," Dave said. "His schizophrenia, this cancer of the mind – he was lost to us."

His brother was able to kill people, he thinks, by stripping them of humanity. "I've always thought – and I might be wrong – that my brother couldn't have shot someone from across a table," Dave said.

Klaas interrupted: "But he did kill people."

The gathering fell silent.

"Ted was not evil through and through," Dave said. "He was someone, at the very least, who loved his little brother."

ABOUT THIS REPORT

For this story, Tribune reporter Robert K. Elder interviewed the Kaczynski and Wright families as well as FBI agents, federal prosecutors and Ted Kaczynski's Montana acquaintances. He gained rare access to family letters, photos and Kaczynski's unpublished writings.

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BROTHERS' PARALLEL LIVES

High school

Both excelled, skipping grades and graduating early.

College

Both went to Ivy League universities at age 16—Ted to Harvard, Dave to Columbia.

Adulthood

They purchased land together in Montana, which became Ted's survivalist retreat. When Dave proposed building his own cabin on the land, Ted rebuffed him, and Dave bought a remote piece of land in southwest Texas.

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TED'S EARLY RAGE

In a journal entry, Ted recounted how he rejected his parents' moral teachings:

"One day when I was 13 years old, I was walking down the street and saw a girl. Something about her appearance antagonized me, and, from habit, I began looking for a way to justify hating her, within my logical system. But then I stopped and said to myself, 'This is getting ridiculous. I'll just chuck all this silly morality business and hate anybody I please.' Since then I've never had any interest in or respect for morality, ethics, or anything of the sort."

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WHY HE KILLED

In a journal entry not long before his first bombing in 1978, Ted laid out his plans to kill. Though the Unabomber was perceived as an anti-technology zealot, Ted's motive was purely homicidal. His list of targets was broad, ranging from psychologists to business-class airline passengers.

"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."

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GARY WRIGHT'S RECOVERY

HIS INJURIES: He underwent plastic surgery to fix cuts in his face. It took three operations to restore use of his arm and hand, which for two years he kept in a sling that awkwardly rested on his head to reduce pressure on a nerve bundle.

THE STRESS: With the Unabomber at large, Gary lived in a gray uncertainty that strained him and his family. When strange packages arrived at their doorstep, Gary says he and his wife threw rocks at them, half expecting another deafening "boom!"

"Every day was a new adventure in pain and the unknown," he said.

A few years later, the Wrights had a son, but life did not return to normal. While the bombing didn't cause his eventual divorce, it didn't help either. Something nameless stalked him, a ghost figure who might strike again.

FORGIVENESS: On a summer day six years after the attack, Gary heard a voice say, "Look, you're Christian. You believe in God, right? Well, if Christ can be crucified, be put on a cross by these people, and he forgave them—then you don't have a choice."

He pulled his car over and wept. "I just let it go. I let the whole thing go."

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BROTHERS TORN APART

When Dave and longtime girlfriend Linda Patrik started living together in New York state in 1989, Ted wrote Dave, saying he was a fool to throw away his freedom and life in the desert for a woman:

"So as long as you're selling out, you may as well ... become a lawyer."

Ted never met Linda and didn't attend her and Dave's wedding in 1990—the same year their father committed suicide after battling lung cancer. Ted called home to comfort their mother, but did not attend the funeral.

In 1996, Dave worked closely with the FBI to catch the Unabomber, his brother, before he could strike again.

"I can't express how painful it felt to point out the exact location of Ted's cabin [to the FBI] among the blue whorls on the map, knowing that I might be sending my mentally ill brother to his death."

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SIX-YEAR HIATUS

After being spotted, Ted sent no bombs until 1993. In that time, he repeatedly reached out for psychological help without success.

In 1991, he was taken with his cardiologist. He hoped to impress her by going back to college for journalism. Sensing a romance was unlikely, he later abandoned the plan.

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THE UNABOMBER BEHIND BARS

Since his arrest, Ted Kaczynski has carried on a robust correspondence with a variety of people. He spends his prison time in Colorado filing appeals and fighting for control of his writings. Kaczynski didn't respond to an interview request for this article.

FAMILY LETTERS

In 12 years, Kaczynski has not acknowledged letters from his brother or mother. But they continue to write, Wanda at least once a month. A recent note from her read:

"I want you to know, Ted, that when a child is born, the parents give them the gift of unconditional love for a lifetime. This was true of you. No matter what happens, you cannot divest yourself of concern and affection. It's gonna be there, for a lifetime."

MONTANA FRIENDS

Kaczynski kept in touch with some friends from Lincoln. Despite his Luddite reputation, he asked one of them to "pull whatever you can off the Internet" about media interviews done with attorney Michael Mello, author of "The United States of America vs. Theodore John Kaczynski."

In 1997, the friend wrote: "We don't want you to forget about Montana—or those of us who care about you, Ted. ... You just slowly became a part of our life ... then our hearts, and we miss you."

PRISON ROMANCE

For nearly a decade, Kaczynski carried on a correspondence with a woman named Joyce "Joy" Richards, who bought his land in Montana and visited him in prison until her death in 2006. He called her his "lady love." She told the Sacramento Bee that she hoped to eventually live on the property and build a residence. "I love the Lincoln area, and it is such a nice piece of land," she said. "I want to preserve it."

She told a student journalist from the University of Montana in 2006: "His ideas are what really matter, and I thought his ideas were brilliant."

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- PHOTOS 50 years of unseen family photos
- VIDEO Bombing victim revisits the site
- AUDIO The Unabomber's mother interviewed
- DOCUMENTS Ted's handwritten letters and journals

Visit chicagotribune.com/unabomber

Go online to see 50 years of Kaczynski family photos, video of Gary Wright at his bombing site, audio interviews with Ted's mom, Ted's handwritten letters and journals, and his comments on each bombing.

- The Unabomber's family photo album
- Tales from the Unabomber's mother

The Ted K Archive

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