

# Running to Do Evil

**An interview with Unabomber Ted Kaczynski, whose younger brother turned him in — and what it says about the Boston bombers.**

Stephen J. Dubner

Apr 25, 2013

# Contents

Description . . . . . 3  
Transcription . . . . . 3

## Description

Our latest podcast is called “Running to Do Evil.” (You can download/subscribe at iTunes, get the RSS feed, or listen via the media player above, or read the transcript.) It features a prison interview I did in 1999 with Unabomber Ted Kaczynski, whose younger brother, David, turned him in.

When we all learned last week that the alleged Boston Marathon bombers are brothers, it made me think of the massive leverage that an older brother can exert on a younger one. Ted and David Kaczynski were extraordinarily close for many years, and shared a view of the modern world as impure and overly industrialized. But as Ted went further down the path toward fundamentalism and violence, David not only extricated himself but ultimately made the painful decision to tell the FBI that the terrorist who had become known as the Unabomber was likely his brother.

The prison interview with Ted Kaczynski was conducted for an article I published in Time magazine. Much of the conversation that day concerned the relationship between Ted and David:

## Transcription

**Stephen J. DUBNER:** If you are a man, or a boy, and you have a brother, especially an older brother, then you know that the bond between brothers is unlike any other. Sometimes that bond is almost impossibly wonderful:

**Ted KACZYNSKI:** We used to, very often we used to go out and play catch, or one of us would hit the ball with the bat and the other one would catch it. And I remember one time when we were throwing that ball. We were as far apart as we could get and still reach each other with the ball. We were throwing that ball as hard as we could, and as far as we could. And, of course, the ball was thrown very inaccurately, because we were trying so hard to throw it. And so we would — we were making these running, leaping catches. We made more fantastic catches that day than I think we did in all the rest of our years together. That was more fun.

**DUBNER:** And sometimes the brotherly bond is toxic:

**KACZYNSKI:** I don’t know that it’s exactly true that he wanted me to suffer exactly. It’s more as if he wanted to score a victory over me. Defeat me. Put himself in the victorious position and me in the position of the one who’s defeated and humiliated.

**DUBNER:** You probably don’t recognize this voice, because he hasn’t spoken much in public. But you do know the person the voice belongs to. It’s Ted Kaczynski.

**DUBNER:** Okay. Do you deny — in the context of this interview, do you deny that you committed the crimes attributed to the Unabomber?

**KACZYNSKI:** I can’t comment on that.

**DUBNER:** Ted Kaczynski is the Unabomber, a homegrown terrorist who over the course of 17 years planted or mailed at least 16 bombs. He killed 3 people and wounded

24. He wasn't a religious fundamentalist, but he was a fundamentalist. His enemy was, essentially, modern society. He grew up in Chicago, attended Harvard, but he wound up living alone in a remote cabin in the Montana woods. He was arrested in 1996 after one of the most notorious and longest manhunts in history, and he was sentenced to life in prison. How did he finally get caught? His younger brother, David, turned him in.

**DUBNER:** Were you surprised when you learned that it was David who had turned you in? Were you surprised?

**KACZYNSKI:** Not terribly surprised.

**DUBNER:** I interviewed Ted Kaczynski in 1999, three years after he was arrested for the crimes that earned him the name the Unabomber. He was in the same prison then as he is today, a federal supermax in Florence, Colorado.

**DUBNER:** Just in terms of your life in prison again, I'm just wondering a little bit about your daily routine. Do you get eight hours of sleep a day?

**KACZYNSKI:** Yeah. Usually not all at once.

**DUBNER:** I had been writing a magazine article about his brother, David, the hero of the Unabomber story if there was such a thing. Then I learned that Ted was writing a book – a book that wound up never being published. The book spent most of its time attacking David — as intellectually dishonest and resentful of his brilliant big brother. I requested an interview with Ted, even though he didn't do that kind of thing – and, to my surprise, he agreed.

**KACZYNSKI:** The food here, believe it or not, is pretty good. Sometimes it's oatmeal...

**DUBNER:** We talked for several hours. He sat on a concrete bench in a concrete room, a wall of reinforced glass between us.

**KACZYNSKI:** Let's say it's a Thurs — I take a shower every other day, rather than every day. Because I have sensitive skin.

**DUBNER:** Most of our conversation that day was about David and Ted, Ted and David, the brothers Kaczynski. Ted, the older brother by 7 years, intellectually domineering and socially awkward. David, a more tender touch, more adept at living in the real world — but also in thrall to his big brother's love of nature and his hatred of an over industrialized society. He followed Ted, among other places, into the wilderness. As modern as their story was, it also felt ancient – like Isaac and Ishmael, or a Greek tragedy. More than anything, it was about the enormous leverage that a big brother can exert on a younger one. Now, I don't mean to say that brotherly love isn't real – it is, and as the youngest of four brothers myself, I've experienced a lot of it. But with brothers, there can be a lot of other stuff too. Rivalry. Resentment. Insecurity. There are things that if other people told you to do them, you'd just laugh. Hey, let's set this thing on fire. Or, hey, as soon as it gets dark, let's jump off that cliff! But when your big brother tells you to do this stuff, you do it.

Last week's bombings at the Boston Marathon and the violence afterward were apparently, allegedly, committed by a pair of brothers: Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

The older brother has since been killed; the younger brother is under arrest. As we began to learn more and more about them, I couldn't help but think of the brothers Kaczynski. How the dynamic between brothers is unlike any other. There are some parallels between the two sets of brothers. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, like David Kaczynski, is seven years younger than his brother. In each case, the older brother was a loner, and angry; the younger brother mellower, better-adjusted – and yet they idolized their big brothers. And of course in each case there were bombs. But Dzhokhar Tsarnaev followed his big brother into violence. David Kaczynski did not. While for many years he and Ted were as close as only brothers can be, there came a time when they were as bitterly estranged as perhaps only brothers can be.

The estrangement was the result of David getting a girlfriend. Linda Patrik, whom David had longed for since high school, finally returned his longing. When David and Linda got serious, Ted cut David off. Linda brought David back into the modern world. It was she who persuaded David to consider that his big brother might be the Unabomber, and then to go to the FBI.

When I interviewed Ted in prison, one stipulation was that he wouldn't talk about his actual crimes, since he was still hoping for a retrial. In prison, his neighbors were a who's who of 1990's terrorism – Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber; Ramzi Yousef, from the first World Trade Center bombing...

**KACZYNSKI:** See, I'm in a range of cells where there are eight cells. And they call this celebrity row. These people are not what you would think of as criminal types. I mean, they don't seem to be very angry people. They're considerate of others. Some of them are quite intelligent.

**DUBNER:** Listening back to this conversation from nearly 15 years ago, I'm reminded of two things, two disturbing things. One, that Ted Kaczynski doesn't sound like the kind of angry, anti-social person who would run around killing people – or at least how we think that kind of person should sound. And two, as you're about to hear, that Ted has such a deep reservoir of disdain for David that he makes it sound as if David, the man who stopped the bombings, is the bad guy. Because he, David, hadn't stayed the course. Because he hadn't stayed loyal to his big brother.

**DUBNER:** Is it fair to say that your relationship with David over the years — which obviously had a lot of peaks and valleys — is it fair to say that that was the most profound personal relationship you'd ever had?

**KACZYNSKI:** I would say it's the most — the deepest personal relationship that I ever had between — oh, let's say between my teens and about 1990, when I finally broke off with him.

**DUBNER:** Right. In terms of you and David, how do you think that you two are most alike?

**KACZYNSKI:** That's a tough one.

**DUBNER:** Yeah.

**KACZYNSKI:** Over many years we shared a great many values.

**DUBNER:** Right.

**KACZYNSKI:** And it's not clear to me to what extent this was simple imitation of me on his part. And if it was simple imitation on his part, you wouldn't really call it a similarity.

**DUBNER:** Right.

**KACZYNSKI:** But there are some similarities apart from that. I think we're both basically quiet, somewhat introverted types. Both a little on the shy side. Another similarity between us would be that generally speaking, I think he's a very honest person.

**DUBNER:** You wrote that his adulation of you disgusted you at certain points over the course of your relationship.

**KACZYNSKI:** Yeah.

**DUBNER:** Did you try to communicate that to him? Did you say to him, Dave, this is not a healthy way to be? I'm glad you like me. I'm glad you respect me, but be your own person. Did you ever try to have that kind of conversation with him?

**KACZYNSKI:** No.

**DUBNER:** Why not? I mean —

**KACZYNSKI:** It would have been very painful for him to have me say that. And it probably wouldn't have done any good. I mean, I could... in one way or another he would appear to be over-valuing me, but it wasn't something that was so explicit that I could be sure that it was really that.

**DUBNER:** Right. In your dreams... literally, in your dreams and in your thinking... it sounds as if you really felt protective of David for many, many years, yes?

**KACZYNSKI:** Yes.

**DUBNER:** Do you think at some point that he ever began to feel protective of you... do you think that as he moved into adulthood — especially after you had cut off communication, do you think that he ever began to feel protective of you?

**KACZYNSKI:** No.

**DUBNER:** You don't. In what ways, if any, do you think he was jealous of you?

**KACZYNSKI:** He was probably jealous of the fact that I got more attention from our parents. He was jealous of the fact simply that I was dominant in our relationship. Jealous of the fact that I was smarter than he was. I could do most things better than he could. Athletics are one exception.

**DUBNER:** In what ways, if any, were you jealous of Dave?

**KACZYNSKI:** I don't... the only way I can think that I might have been somewhat jealous of him was that when he was in high school he always had lots of friends... he was socially successful. And I wasn't. And I may have had some jealousy about that. But I don't clearly remember that.

**DUBNER:** When we come back, how Ted Kaczynski went even further into the path of radicalism, and how his adoring little brother finally found his way back to the mainstream:

**DUBNER:** What do you regret most in retrospect about your relationship with David? About the way the relationship devolved, I guess.

**KACZYNSKI:** Well, I would say basically that I didn't break off with him 20 years earlier.

**DUBNER:** Today's episode is from a prison interview I did nearly 15 years ago with Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber, for an article that was published in Time magazine. I dug up the old tapes this week because the brothers charged with the Boston Marathon bombings reminded me of the strange, volatile dynamic of brotherhood – especially the pull of a big brother on a younger one. For years, David Kaczynski identified with his older brother's antisocial worldview.

**KACZYNSKI:** I mean, he was certainly alienated from the mainstream system of values. He just particularly hated Reagan and that whole political bunch. And yet I wouldn't say exactly he had sympathy for Hinckley or for radicals in general. And there was a resentment there, and yet here was never any hope or ambition on his part to actually do anything active or take radical measures.

**DUBNER:** In other words, as Ted Kaczynski sees it, his younger brother David wasn't radical enough to be taken seriously. And then, even worse, he went totally mainstream. He got married – to a woman named Linda Patrik, who found Ted creepy, maybe even dangerous. David tried to keep up his relationship with Ted, writing long, heartfelt letters. But eventually Ted shut him out.

**DUBNER:** What do you regret most in retrospect about your relationship with David? About the way the relationship devolved, I guess.

**KACZYNSKI:** Well, I would say basically that I didn't break off with him 20 years earlier.

**DUBNER:** So you still feel that way?

**KACZYNSKI:** Yeah. I mean, I got a lot of satisfaction out of corresponding with him. I mean, it was a good relation — it was in many respects, not in all respects, but in many respects a positive relationship from my point of view. But I don't think it was from my brother's point of view. And in the end it turned out to be disastrous from my point of view, as you can see.

**DUBNER:** Right. What do you think would have changed in his life if you had broken off earlier?

**KACZYNSKI:** Well — I mean — let me put it this way. I think that his attempt to — his sense of rivalry with big brother, his attempt to equal big brother and to win big brother's approval, with very limited success, I think all this was very hard on him. I think that his self esteem would have been in much better shape if he hadn't had me to compete with or compare himself with. And I think he would have — and he always had an easy time making friends. He would have had close relationships with other people, so he didn't really need that relationship with me.

**DUBNER:** Right. If the roles had been reversed... if you had suspected David of being the Unabomber... right?... after all the years that you haven't been communicating very regularly... What would you have done?

**KACZYNSKI:** I would have kept it to myself.

**DUBNER:** Is that what you feel he should have done?

**KACZYNSKI:** Yeah.

**DUBNER:** And what was the first — what was your reaction to that when you first hear that David is involved in turning you in? What does that feel like?

**KACZYNSKI:** Well, obviously I resented it. There was another strain to my feelings there. I don't know if I can explain it properly. But in a way I was almost glad because my own brother turning me in in a sense made me look good.

**DUBNER:** How so?

**KACZYNSKI:** Well, I mean, it's —

**DUBNER:** That you had eluded everyone but someone who knew you close —

**KACZYNSKI:** Well, I didn't say I eluded anyone for anything. I mean, I have not — I mean, I pled guilty, but that was because I was forced to do so. But it was that — I mean — if someone — I mean, if A screws B, then it tends to make B look good, even if otherwise he might look so great. I don't know.

**DUBNER:** Right, right.

**KACZYNSKI:** So maybe that's — That was perhaps an ignoble thought on my part. But that thought was present, I have to admit.

**DUBNER:** When Ted was arrested, David fought hard to keep him from getting the death penalty. This made Ted angry; he wanted the death penalty. So where the rest of the world sees David Kaczynski turning in his older brother as an act of heroism, Ted sees resentment. And where the rest of us see David pleading for his brother's life as an act of mercy, Ted sees it as further punishment.

**KACZYNSKI:** I'm not depressed or downcast. It's — let me see. Let's see if I can explain this. There's sort of — different levels of how you feel about your life. Let me try to explain it this way. When I was living in the woods, there was sort of an undertone, an underlying feeling that things were basically right with my life. That is, something might go wrong, I might have a bad day, I might screw something up, I might break my axe handle and do something else, and everything would go wrong. But still somehow underneath the superficial unhappiness or bad feelings there was an underlying feeling that my life was right. I was able to fall back on the fact that here I was a free man in the mountains surrounded by forests and wild animals and so forth. And that this made my life right even if things were for the time being going badly. Here it's the other way around. I'm not depressed or downcast, and I have things to do that I can do that I consider productive, like working on getting this book out. And yet the knowledge that I'm locked up here and likely to remain so for the rest of my life is — it ruins it. The undertone in this case is an extremely bad one. And I don't want to live long. I would rather get the death penalty than spend the rest of my life in prison.

**DUBNER:** Would you take your own life given the opportunity?

**KACZYNSKI:** I will not comment on that. I mean, on a superficial level it isn't really that bad. But just the knowledge that I'm locked up and I'm not free sort — to me it's just not a life worth living.



**DUBNER:** Right. What do you say — if you have a re-trial and are acquitted, and have your life back, what do you say to society to relax them, to not let them worry about the Unabomber is at large?

**KACZYNSKI:** Well, I don't know that I would have to relax them. Just let them worry.

**DUBNER:** Ok. If David were to come visit you, if David's in the room now, what do you want to say to him?

**KACZYNSKI:** Nothing. I just wouldn't talk to him. I would just turn my back and wouldn't talk to him.

**DUBNER:** Yeah. Do you still love him?

**KACZYNSKI:** No.

**DUBNER:** We asked David Kaczynski to talk about his brother for this show; he understandably chose not to. Ever since Ted's arrest, David has worked hard to try to repair some of the damage done by his brother. While Ted never has never expressed regret or apologized to the victims, David did. He donated money; he toured the country speaking against violence. It is bizarre, to me at least, listening back to this tape of Ted. He makes it sound as if he is the aggrieved party. Can you imagine having an older brother like that – who tells you that up is down and down is up? Soon you might start believing him. And if he has bad intentions, violent intentions, well, you might start believing that those are your intentions too. We don't know enough yet about the Boston bombers to say for sure if Dzhokhar, the younger brother, was pulled into his older brother's orbit or whether he followed willingly. But we do know that David Kaczynski didn't do what the younger Tsarnaev brother allegedly did. He didn't join forces; he didn't capitulate; he didn't run to do evil. This episode has been talk, all talk, about actions, terrible actions. Talk may be interesting. But let's be clear: it is our actions that matter. All this talk offers no solace whatsoever to the victims of Ted Kaczynski, to the victims of the criminals in Boston. I wish we could do better. But at this moment, words are all we have.

The Ted K Archive

Stephen J. Dubner

Running to Do Evil

An interview with Unabomber Ted Kaczynski, whose younger brother turned him in  
— and what it says about the Boston bombers.

Apr 25, 2013

The podcast transcript & recording.

Context Books arranged this interview as publicity for Ted's book Truth versus Lies.

**[www.thetedkarchive.com](http://www.thetedkarchive.com)**