

**Who was the Unabomber?
Colleagues, classmates say
Kaczynski's intellect isolated him**

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Ted Kaczynski, also known as the Unabomber, once taught math at UC Berkeley. Williams, Kale L

One summer day in 1968, Theodore J. Kaczynski unexpectedly bumped into a colleague on a sun-dappled trail in Yosemite National Park.

The 26-year-old assistant math professor stopped his hike long enough for a brief chat with Maxwell Rosenlicht, a fellow faculty member at the University of California at Berkeley.

"He told me he was going to quit his job," Rosenlicht said. "I said, 'Why? That's a silly thing to do.' He had a good position, and it would be hard to find another job that good if he just up and left."

But he "just shrugged and told me, 'I just have to go.'"

Months after that conversation on the Yosemite Valley floor, Ted Kaczynski abruptly resigned his teaching post.

But unlike many of his peers in the turbulent '60s, the sandy-haired Kaczynski was no temporary dropout: When he packed and left the Berkeley bungalow he rented on Regent Street, he closed the door for all time on the achievement-oriented academic world he was reared in.

When his colleagues next heard of him in 1996, he was living on Humbug Contour Road in the isolated reaches of Montana, his face spread across the television sets and newspapers of America as the FBI's Unabomber suspect.

Many who have known Kaczynski through the years did not detect a fury that might have made him the Unabomber. But most sensed that he never fit in: He was the "brain" younger than his high school classmates, the clean-cut academic among the hippies at Berkeley and the University of Michigan, the mountain man in Montana who didn't know how to use a saw properly.

By most accounts, he was someone largely walled within. Only occasionally did his behavior give glimmers of an aching loneliness, a longing for attention.

It wasn't until after his arrest that many of those he had met over the years looked back and saw a man on a different trail, a man who had almost always stood apart.

It was just something Dr. LeRoy Weinberg got used to. When Weinberg, who lived across the alley from the three-bedroom Kaczynski home outside Chicago, saw Ted on the street, the boy "walked by not even answering my greetings, just staring at the ground."

"Even when he was in high school carrying his trombone down the alley, he would never acknowledge a greeting of any kind," Weinberg said. "Ted was very aloof, unfriendly."

It was the sort of behavior that made Weinberg, a veterinarian who is now retired, glad the boy was not his child. "An old man before his time," Weinberg said.

Even when Ted was very small, his parents in the tree-lined suburb of Evergreen Park realized that he was extremely quiet, introverted – and brilliant.

Schoolmates remember the magnitude of his mind and how that isolated him from others. Ted was known as a brain, and as one neighbor said simply: "I have never known anyone who had a brain like he did."

Apparently, that brainpower had its price. Friend Russell Mosny said: "It was tough on him. He had a hell of a time."

Once in a while, Ted did have a sense of play, such as when he and fellow brain David Eickelman teamed up to blow up weeds in fields. One time the two classmates demolished a metal family garbage can with explosives that they built themselves.

To Eickelman, now an anthropology professor at Dartmouth College, it was ordinary enough behavior for two "bright kids who read a lot of science books and experimented."

But another of Ted's classmates, Jo Ann De Young, had doubts about Ted's pranks with explosions in high school chemistry class – so much so that she asked the FBI to look at the 1958 graduating class from Evergreen High School. She was afraid of naming Ted because she could have ruined his life if she were wrong.

"I know he was very lonely," De Young told one newspaper. "I always felt he was trying to get people to pay attention to him in some way."

Ted was 16 years old when he went to Harvard on a scholarship, living the first year in the dorms and the rest of his years in Eliot House, a four-story Georgian brick campus residence on the the banks of the Charles River.

On campus, Eliot House attracted many of the school's wealthy preppies, while other houses were meccas for jocks or druggies. Among the preppies at Eliot House, though, were some that didn't fit the mold, and Ted the math prodigy was one of them.

In the suite of several bedrooms that he shared with six other undergraduates, Ted had his own room. His roommates grew accustomed to the pattern of his staying by himself in the suite and his leaving the dining hall table when others joined him.

"He was the hardest person to get to know I ever met," recalled Patrick McIntosh, a Boulder astronomer. "He would make it clear he didn't want a conversation. He'd walk by with this very fast walking gait he had, and if we made any glance like we wanted to say something, he would seem to speed up. He would go to his room and slam the door."

Not once during the years he knew Ted – from 1959 to 1962 – did McIntosh ever see him on campus with anyone else. He was always alone.

At night, the sound of his trombone would drift through the suite, emanating from behind the shut door of his room. Kaczynski left unfinished cartons of milk and old sandwiches under the trash, and the room took on a smell.

McIntosh said he and other roommates ended up concluding "the guy was not quite grown up, but you become jaded about strange people at Harvard. . . . I felt all he wanted to do was study."

When McIntosh first heard last week that the FBI thought his former roommate was the Unabomber, he said he felt more compassion than he would have as an undergraduate.

"I wish there was something I could have said to pull him out of his shell and all his pain and anger which had been going on all his life," he said. "I guess he was just ripe for whatever was going on in the 1960s."

Ted sat in the front row of Professor Peter Duren's math class at the University of Michigan. He was always wearing a coat and tie.

"Maybe too much is made of this," Duren said, "but this was a time when the hippies were coming in, and I never remember him looking disheveled. He was always . . . wearing the tie and jacket, which was very unusual."

During the lectures, Ted – who was 20 when he began working toward a doctorate at Michigan – asked questions of Duren, and he went up afterward and asked more questions.

Kaczynski always made meticulous inquiries, because he was very concerned about getting all the details straight in any mathematical argument. "At first I wasn't sure how really good he was," Duren remembered.

But then he saw Kaczynski set out on his own to solve a complex math problem proposed by another professor, George Piranian. "He was off doing the problem on the side, without anyone knowing about it. He was really extraordinary. By the time he got his degree, we all had tremendous respect for this guy," Duren said.

Somewhere along the line, though, Kaczynski – who specialized in an area of math known as real analysis – failed to broaden out into more central areas of mathematics. "What he was doing was in a backwater," Duren said.

Thinking back about his former student, whose "Boundary Functions" won the prize for the best doctoral thesis in 1967, Duren sees nothing violent.

"He liked to construct ideas on his own without things being just handed to him, and that is consistent with going off and living on the land in an independent existence," Duren said. "But I see no connection between that and bombs.

"If he is the bomber, he has had a change of personality."

When Ted Kaczynski arrived at the Berkeley math department in 1967, the place was so big that some professors who taught there later had trouble believing that the Unabomber suspect had been there at all.

Located in Campbell Hall, a six-story building on the eastern edge of the campus, the department had 50 full professors and about 300 graduate students. Thousands of undergraduates took courses in the department.

Ted – who still had short-cropped hair and a neat appearance – became one of the faculty’s 28 assistant professors, teaching five courses a year.

Professor John Addison, department chairman at the time, says he cannot remember what Ted Kaczynski looked like. To remember something like that, he said, an assistant math professor would have to do something that really stood out as odd, and Ted did not do that.

By the time Ted quit his faculty post in 1969, he had published six papers and was considered a promising prospect by senior faculty.

Looking back in his records, Addison found a letter that he mailed in 1970 to Kaczynski’s thesis supervisor at the University of Michigan, telling him that Kaczynski’s decision to quit the faculty came “quite out of the blue. . . . He was very calm and relaxed about it on the outside.”

“. . . Kaczynski seemed almost pathologically shy and as far as I know made no close friends in the department,” the letter added. “Efforts to bring him more into the swing of things had failed.”

Addison met with Kaczynski to try to dissuade him from leaving the department – which was widely recognized as one of the best in the world. Ted did not heed the pleas.

“I think probably there was a lot of inner tension there,” Addison said. “My guess was it probably had something to do with the atmosphere on campus and around the country. It was a very turbulent setting at Berkeley.”

At the time, Kaczynski said he didn’t know what he would be doing. One faculty member, Addison said, recalled that Ted “wanted to do something of more immediate social value.”

That sentiment was not unusual for a time when protests against the Vietnam War regularly consumed the campus and when many students wondered whether they were wasting their time.

It was an era in which the university’s yearbooks featured anonymous quotations such as: “I waited like the bird for someone to write me down. No one came, only trees, and the sunlight darkening my sensitive sides.”

And: “I don’t know, I have to. . . .”

Two years after Ted Kaczynski wandered off from Berkeley, he bought land with his brother in Montana. But he often left the property to travel in the Midwest and elsewhere.

In 1978, Ted returned to his childhood roots near Chicago to earn some money at a foam rubber factory where his father and brother worked.

His own brother reportedly fired him after Ted posted limericks and made crude remarks around the plant about a female supervisor who had broken off a brief relationship with him.

The whole episode was wrenching for Ted.

Authorities say the factory incident might have occurred at about the time the Unabomber's first bomb went off on May 26, 1978, at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill.

Not long thereafter, Ted was back at his mountain hideaway – the back-to-nature life that apparently did not please his parents.

Juan Sanchez Arreola, a Mexican farmhand and friend of Ted's brother who corresponded with Ted since 1988, recalled that Ted had given up a good teaching job "and I think his parents started to reprimand him for leaving it."

Sanchez also said David Kaczynski had told him that "Teodoro is on bad terms with my mama and papa – he doesn't want to have anything to do with them."

Ted got around in Montana, sun or snow, on a 1960s-style bicycle. He built a crude drying shed where he hung the game he shot.

In those pursuits, he was like many of the solitary mountain people who live outside Lincoln. But in some ways, he bore out his family's fears that Ted was not cut out to survive in the wilds.

One time in the mid-'70s, Ted was hauling a load of wood in an old pickup. He overloaded the truck with poles, and they spilled out on the road and into a ditch.

"He wasn't very mechanical when it came to driving or working with a chain saw," said Glen Williams, a 65-year-old retired baker who helped him pick up the mess. One time, Williams said, Ted bought a chain saw that was too small – proper only for trimming limbs – and he burned it out cutting down big trees.

All in all, though, Williams thought his friend was a good neighbor, and it bothers him that Ted might be the Unabomber.

"If he was into bombs, maybe he had his mind on those. I guess it might have been his problem – that he kept his anger bottled up. I never saw him mad once."

For days in late March and early April, FBI agents kept up their surveillance of Ted's cabin. But he stayed inside.

Finally, armed with a court order, agents moved in, knocked on the door and arrested him on a bomb-making charge. "He was mighty ripe when we got him," said one federal agent. "We had to clean him up that night pretty good. It was like he hadn't bathed in weeks."

This man, agents said, was the Unabomber, the man who last summer issued the 35,000-word manifesto that began with these words: "The industrial revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race."

About the time the manifesto was published, the Unabomber wrote the New York Times and asked the question everyone wanted answered: "What is the motivating force in our case?"

"The answer," he said, "is simple. Anger."

But after Ted's arrest, he showed no signs of anger. Just his trademark calm.

As Ted was arraigned at the Lewis and Clark County courthouse in Helena, Mont., reporters and camera crews surrounded him from all sides. At one point, the force of the tumultuous throng almost knocked him down.

But nothing in Ted's serene demeanor indicated he was appalled by all this attention – once or twice, a small smile even crept onto his face. It was almost as if the brilliant boy from Evergreen Park had finally found his niche.

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Kevin Fagan is a longtime, award-winning reporter at The San Francisco Chronicle, specializing in homelessness, enterprise news-feature writing, breaking news and crime. He has ridden with the rails with modern-day hobos, witnessed seven prison executions, written extensively about serial killers including the Unabomber, Doodler and Zodiac, and covered disasters ranging from the Sept. 11 terror attacks at Ground Zero to California's devastating wildfires. Homelessness remains a core focus of his, close to his heart as a journalist who cares passionately about the human condition.

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A critique of his ideas & actions.



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