

Kaczynski's Brother and Accuser Expresses Sadness, Relief

William Booth

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SACRAMENTO, Jan. 23—Even in the most horrible moments, as he sat slumped on a hard bench in the front row of a federal courtroom here, his arm wrapped around his aged mother, and heard the Unabomber described as a deranged and gleeful serial murderer, David Kaczynski felt the almost indescribable connection that can exist between two brothers.

"Sitting behind him in court, I felt that bond very powerfully," David explained today, sitting for an interview the day after his brother's trial ended with a guilty plea.

The connection David Kaczynski was talking about, he said, is stronger even than his feelings of sadness, regret and relief in the aftermath of Theodore J. Kaczynski's guilty plea in exchange for life in prison – and even though the plea meant Theodore escaped death by lethal injection.

"Ted wrote to me once that I was the one person whose death would give him grief," David said in his soft, measured voice. "I think he loved me. I know I love Ted very much."

The FBI amassed thousands of leads during almost two decades of a bizarre terrorist campaign. It was the most extensive manhunt in FBI history. But agents did not have a clue who the elusive Unabomber was until David, at his wife's urging, read the famous 35,000-word manifesto, saw the themes echoed over a lifetime and turned his brother in.

In a sense, it was David, a 48-year-old social worker from Schenectady, N.Y., who closed the case. It was also David who pressed hard for the government to consider that his brother, 55, was not only guilty of heinous crimes, but deeply mentally ill, and so should not be executed.

"Though he has done evil things," David said, sitting in the wintry gray light of a hotel window. "He is not an evil person."

He knows that this may be hard for many people to understand, especially families of the three killed and 29 injured by his brother's bombs. Several victims have expressed satisfaction with the plea agreement, although at least one, Yale computer scientist David Gelernter, has argued strongly for a death sentence.

"I wouldn't expect them to understand Ted's mental illness," David said, "and I wouldn't presume to understand how they must feel."

During the weeks in court, although they were 10 feet apart, Theodore never looked at David, never responded to his attempts to visit, to write, to connect.

Before Theodore appeared in the courtroom, the two had not seen each other since 1986, when David visited his brother's shack in the Montana woods and was disturbed to see a bullet hole through the front door. The last letter Ted sent to David, written in 1995, ended with this: "So get this straight . . . I DON'T EVER WANT TO SEE YOU OR HEAR FROM YOU, OR ANY OTHER MEMBER OF OUR FAMILY, AGAIN."

David Kaczynski has previously criticized the government for its desire, as he put it then, "to kill my brother at any cost." David said today, after prosecutors accepted the guilty plea in exchange for life in prison without possibility of release: "I don't think that is true now."

Lead prosecutor Robert Cleary acknowledged the nation's debt Thursday, calling David "a true American hero." Others, too, have felt sympathy and some understanding of what it must have been like to have a deranged hateful brother, who murders, and then to bring about his capture, and finally learn that the government would seek the death penalty. David said he has received thousands of letters over the past two years, "almost all of them positive."

David Kaczynski, however, does not consider himself a hero. He does believe, however, something good may arise from all the bad.

The public is safe from the lethal delusions of a paranoid schizophrenic who learned to build increasingly sophisticated bombs and who had threatened to begin blowing up commercial airliners. David believes that his brother, too, will be safe in prison – from others and from himself. Kaczynski apparently attempted to commit suicide in his jail cell two weeks ago by strangling himself with a pair of underwear.

David said he and his 80-year-old mother, Wanda, also hope that Theodore is offered treatment for his mental disease, although he is not glib about the possibility of a cure or even control of his brother's schizophrenia.

"A mentally ill person is not going to be cured, to become sane, when he's caught," David said. "It will take time, if it ever occurs." He added, "But I would hope someday he could see the enormity of what he's done."

David and his mother granted a lengthy interview to Sally Johnson, the federal prison psychiatrist who examined Kaczynski last week. David has read the report and said he was "amazed how accurate and insightful she was."

"There is a perception that Ted is driven by an ideology, but that isn't really it," David said.

The anti-technology ideology, he suspects, is part of an elaborate scaffolding of delusions – just as his feelings that society was out to destroy him, that his family betrayed him, that his mother and father are responsible for his lifelong feeling that he could not function around people, especially women.

Even after he read the manifesto, David said he was not convinced his brother was the Unabomber.

"I had no idea. I had never seen him violent," David said. "Not toward me. Not toward anyone. I tended to see his anger turned inward."

Like other family members of schizophrenics, David said: "I think there's no question we repressed our own feelings about the severity of his illness . . . There is a tendency to be in some form of denial."

David believes that his brother's wrangling with his lawyers, which caused the trial to be repeatedly delayed, was not a manipulative ploy to derail justice. When asked if Theodore feared or sought the death penalty, David answered, "both."

He said that the conclusion by government psychiatrist Johnson that Kaczynski was indeed a paranoid schizophrenic helped push the plea agreement forward.

As for himself, David Kaczynski has been living with his mother in a rented Sacramento apartment, which his mother paid for with her savings. He is likely entitled to

a portion of a \$1 million reward offered by the government when it sought the Unabomber, but he said again today that he will never use any money from the case for himself. Instead, he expressed the intention to create a trust fund for the families of the victims. The same holds for any book in the future.

In a few days, he plans on driving himself back to New York in his pickup truck and to return to his job as a social worker at a nonprofit provider of care for troubled teenagers and the homeless in Albany.

"It feels like the weight of the world has been lifted from my shoulders," he said. His mother, he said, feels as if she coming out of "a long sickness, as if the fever has broken." In a few months or a year, he suspects no one will care about his role in the Unabomber case anymore.

The Ted K Archive

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