

1969 decision to leave is a mystery even today

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BERKELEY, Calif. — The former Berkeley math professor suspected of being the Unabomber was remembered Thursday as an “almost pathologically shy” individual who seemed bound for a brilliant career before he inexplicably veered into oblivion.

What made Theodore John Kaczynski throw aside his job as an assistant professor in 1969 after only two years remains as much a mystery today as it was then, former colleagues said.

“It struck me as unusual — a person of this obvious capability and brilliance suddenly saying, ‘I’m leaving.’” said math professor Calvin Moore, who along with professor John Addison, then department chairman, tried to talk Kaczynski into staying.

Addison, who spoke alongside Moore at a news conference Thursday, said he, too, was puzzled by Kaczynski’s abrupt decision to leave the field in which he was doing so well.

“One faculty member told me something to the effect that (Kaczynski) may have wanted to do something that had more immediate social value than mathematics.” Addison said.

Addison and Moore said Kaczynski gave no indication he was opposed to an industrial society, theme of the Unabomber’s writings.

Kaczynski, 53, was charged Thursday in Helena, Mont., with possessing bomb components found in his cabin near the Continental Divide.

The charge made no mention of the Unabomber’s string of bombing attacks, which killed three people and injured 23 in 18 years. Federal officials said the charge was designed to hold Kaczynski while agents build a case.

Kaczynski, who graduated from Harvard when he was barely 20, was hired at UC-Berkeley as an acting assistant professor for the 1967–68 school year. He became an assistant professor the following year after earning his doctorate from the University of Michigan.

In 1969, Kaczynski submitted his resignation “quite out of the blue.” Addison wrote in a 1970 letter to Allen Shields, now deceased, who was Kaczynski’s thesis supervisor at Michigan.

“He said he was going to give up mathematics and wasn’t sure what he was going to do. He was very calm and relaxed about it on the outside,” Addison wrote in the letter, which he said Thursday probably was the most reliable summing up of his experiences with the young mathematician.

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

Other faculty members who taught at the same time as Kaczynski said it was strange how little impression he left.

“I know everybody else and have had coffee or something with them, but not this gentleman and I find that more remarkable than anything else,” said Lance Small, now a professor at UC-San Diego.

Records show that Kaczynski was working hard, getting six papers published from 1965 to 1969.

“He was active and good and it is somewhat surprising that he would have left the field, but those were the days at Berkeley (when) people had many concerns,” Small said.

Kaczynski had an equally low profile with police.

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The Deseret News, 5 Apr 1996.
<books.google.co.uk/books?id=kbsRAAAAIBAJ&pg=PA47>

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