

# In Illinois, a childhood of math and pressure

Charles M Sennott

5 April 1996



David Kaczynski, brother of Theodore J. Kaczynski, and his mother, Wanda, drive off yesterday in Glenville, N.Y. Story, Page 12.

EVERGREEN PARK, Ill. — He came of age in the 1950s in this Chicago suburb, playing chess, studying the moon through a telescope, lugging around advanced math books, and experimenting with a homemade chemistry set to “blow things up.”

Theodore John Kaczynski has always been an introspective outsider, according to friends and neighbors who knew him. He was the oldest son and namesake of a father who worked at a Polish sausage factory. His mother served on the PTA.

It was his mother, Wanda, who pushed him to succeed in his studies — pressure that resulted in his skipping two grades in high school, winning admission to Harvard College, and ultimately going on to become an assistant professor of mathematics during a turbulent two years, from 1967 to 1969, at the University of California at Berkeley. She also shared some of his political views and his passion for books.



Theodore John Kaczynski (right front) poses with fellow Merit Scholarship finalists  
In this photo from the 1958 Evergreen Park High yearbook.

“His mother pushed him very hard,” said Thomas Lebensorger, who was a childhood friend of Kaczynski in this quiet tract of identical suburban homes, equally spaced, each of which has a small rectangular yard. “He was the kind of kid who did what he was told. And his mother told him he had to study. He was a brain. He was into the books. ! But he always looked kind of glum.”

His father, who committed suicide six years ago after struggling for years with cancer, was an avid outdoorsman who often took “Teddy,” as he was called, and his brother on camping trips. His father and mother, who later moved farther north to Lombard, would often brag to their neighbors and friends about their son’s academic background and how he was living off the land while “writing a book.”

“They were so proud of their son. They used to tell us about his writing a book and they were hoping it would get done,” said Roy Froberg, who lives across from the house where the family lived until Wanda sold the house just two weeks ago.

While packing to move, federal authorities say, the family found writings in a box that were similar to the Unabomber manifesto published last year by The New York Times and The Washington Post. The writings, authorities have said, prompted the family to contact the FBI.

Froberg said Wanda had a “very impressive library” in her home and she shared some of her son’s political views. She was very concerned about the environment and about the corporate and political forces of the world pushing aside the poor. She had articulated some of the views, he remembered, in letters to the editor at a local newspaper.

But he added, “I don’t think I had seen Ted around here in 10 years, though. For a few years he drove a school bus and lived at home,” said Froberg, remembering that it would have been in 1978 or 1979, the time of the first two bombings in nearby Evanston, Ill.

Dale Eickelman, who was a junior high and high school friend, remembers that Kaczynski had an early interest in building explosives.

Eickelman, who is now a professor of anthropology and human relations at Dartmouth College, gave a lengthy interview to a local newspaper here called the Daily Southtown in which he described how, as 7<sup>th</sup>- to 9<sup>th</sup>-grade adolescents, he and Kaczynski would experiment with chemistry to create small explosions.

“We would go out to an open field and, I remember Ted had the knowhow of putting together things like batteries, wire leads, potassium nitrate and whatever, and creating explosions,” the paper quoted Eickelman as saying.

“We would just blow up weeds, nothing more... We would go to the hardware store, use household products and make these things you might call bombs.”

“TV wasn’t available in every household, so inventive youngsters found creative ways to entertain themselves,” Eickelman said.

The Ted K Archive

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Boston Globe (Massachusetts, USA), 5 April 1996, page 1 & 12.  
<[archive.org/details/boston-globe-april-5-1996](http://archive.org/details/boston-globe-april-5-1996)>

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