

A Great Place To Hide

Suspect Lived As A Hermit Where It's Easy To Be
Anonymous

Jim Lynch and Tom Sowa

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The man suspected of being the nation's most notorious and elusive mail bomber is a frugal hermit who lived in a cabin in an area Montanans call a great place to hide.

Theodore Kaczynski, 53, has lived outside Lincoln periodically since 1971, but almost nobody here knew the man.

The Harvard graduate and former math professor at the University of California at Berkeley rarely was seen and rarely spoke. He didn't work and once boasted he could live off \$300 a year.

He had no electricity or telephone. He had no visitors. He drove a truck for a while, then gave that up for a battered bicycle.

Many people in Lincoln knew the thin, bearded man only by his nickname: "Bicycle Man."

Jim Hess, manager of Lincoln's Sportsman Hotel, said the area of about 800 people teems with recluses like Kaczynski.

"You can be anonymous here very easily. We have some people here who are very secretive about who they are and what they do," he said. "You could move in and be here for six months before anyone knew you were here."

Kaczynski lived in the area for about 25 years without anyone getting close to him.

"He is very introverted. He won't tell you anything," said Butch Gehring, owner of a sawmill near Kaczynski's cabin.

Gehring said he is one of the few people who ever spoke to Kaczynski. He described his neighbor as reluctant to talk about himself or his family.

Construction worker Dan Rundell gave Kaczynski his bicycle, worth an estimated \$5 and built from scrap.

"It didn't matter what the weather was. When he wanted to come down, he came down on his bike," Rundell said. He added Kaczynski had three stops: the library, the grocery and the post office.

Rundell said Kaczynski was extremely reserved, but that didn't make him stand out in Lincoln.

"In Montana, it doesn't matter what you drive, where you live or what you have, it matters how you treat people," he said. "And Ted treated people all right. He didn't socialize much. He was just part of the landscape."

Betty Parmer, a part-time writer for the Blackfoot Valley Dispatch, said Kaczynski was known to lie about his past. She said he'd tell people that he was uneducated and from Washington state.

"He created another life for himself," she said.

Parmer also said Kaczynski would take a bus to Missoula and disappear for months.

The FBI describes the Unabomber as a peculiar perfectionist who carved bomb parts out of wood instead of buying easily obtained metal pieces. He used to autograph his bombs with his mysterious trademark "FC" in a location where it would survive the explosion.

Gehring said it's difficult to imagine Kaczynski as the politically strident bomber who killed three and injured 23 during the past two decades with his meticulously crafted explosive missives.

But he also said Kaczynski is easy to underestimate.

"He was of a higher intelligence than anyone ever gave him credit for. He seems to be so well read and so well educated, but on the other hand so introverted."

Mary Biresch, at the Lincoln Post Office, recalled seeing Kaczynski drop in for his mail. She said he didn't get much mail at all, "less than most."

She also said there wasn't anything unusual about the packages Kaczynski sent, then deferred further questions to a U.S. postal inspector in Seattle.

The inspector refused to comment as to whether evidence from the post office is figuring into the case.

Kaczynski also frequented the Lincoln library.

"I knew him and I like him. He's a good guy," said Sherry Woods, the city librarian. She said she wouldn't say anything else about him without a court order.

Gehring, the suspect's neighbor, said Kaczynski never discussed politics or national affairs. But he mentioned an encounter with the suspect that fit the Unabomber's professed concerns over the environment and his reverence for wood.

Kaczynski once got testy with Gehring for using a toxic weed killer.

"He said don't spray that stuff around his property. He said it would cause lymphoid cancer. 'Keep that away from me.'"

In his published railings against technology and an increasingly industrialized nation, the Unabomber also wailed about "environmental degradation or the destruction of wild nature."

Western Montana is a hotbed for environmental issues and activists, with several high-profile clashes taking place right around Lincoln.

Since the 1980s, the region has been torn over proposals that use cyanide to leach gold out of the turned-up earth.

Kaczynski lives on 1.5 creek-crossed acres in the Stemple Pass area, about 30 miles northwest of Helena, the state capital.

Lewis and Clark County officials said Kaczynski is one year behind in property taxes.

Located at the top of a winding gravel road, the cabin, assessed at \$4,200, is in the trees, where Canada geese and deer were feeding nearby Wednesday night.

Kaczynski often cooked on a small iron grate suspended between two bricks in front of his house.

One neighbor, who asked not to be identified, called Kaczynski a helpful man, savvy at living off the land by hunting and fishing. She said he was also an expert on finding edible berries.

She also said he never opened up — and never had visitors.

Staff writer Jim Camden contributed to this report.

The Ted K Archive

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