

# Meteoric talent that burned out

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CAMBRIDGE — Theodore J. Kaczynski's decade in academia began and ended in bitter, lonely alienation, bridged by a time when it looked as if he might become a brilliant mathematician.

From an undistinguished career at Harvard, where he made few impressions on anyone, Kaczynski soared at the University of Michigan. His math talent dazzled professors. He published six papers, won prestigious fellowships, and ultimately secured a coveted job with the acclaimed math department at the University of California at Berkeley, where he taught four courses.

But by the summer of 1969, just 11 years after he walked into Harvard College as a shy 16-year-old freshman, Kaczynski abandoned that promising career. He fled into a hermit's life in the mountains of Montana, where authorities suspect he turned his brilliance to bombmaking.

## **Alienation at Harvard**

Harvard classmates and teachers interviewed yesterday said they can see roots of Kaczynski's loneliness and alienation in the time he spent in Cambridge from 1968 to 1962.

At a time when the tone of Harvard's social life was still set by wealthy prep school graduates and athletes, Kaczynski was neither. The son of a teacher and a sausage factory manager, Kaczynski was a math prodigy who graduated from a suburban Chicago public school in only three years.

Back when Harvard still set different prices for rooms, Kaczynski spent four years in the cheap suites. In his first year he lived at 8 Prescott St., a small house outside Harvard Yard that housed fewer than a dozen freshmen.

One of his housemates there, Ronald L. Bauer, now a California county judge, said yesterday that 8 Prescott St. was "the low-rent district for Harvard freshmen."

His next three years he spent in preppie haven Eliot House, where he shared a seven-man suite that once had been quarters for the house master's maid.

## **Unpleasant memories**

Two Eliot House roommates said Wednesday that they chiefly remembered Kaczynski for the disgusting condition of the room where he cloistered himself behind a closed door, his occasional loud trumpet playing, and his annoying, obsessive habit of rocking in his desk chair for hours.

Kaczynski was apparently a forgettable student at Harvard. He did not earn honors, and records give no indication he wrote a senior thesis. His yearbook entry lists no involvement outside studies.

Of a dozen math professors and tutors who were at Harvard at the time, not one interviewed yesterday could remember him.

At Michigan, Kaczynski began to soar, though he continued to make few friends. One of his professors, George Piranian, said: "It is not enough to say he was smart." He earned his Ph.D. by solving, in less than a year, a math problem that Piranian himself had been unable to solve.

The math that Kaczynski was tackling was beyond the ken of most. "I would guess that maybe 10 or 12 people in the country understood or appreciated it," said Maxwell O. Reade, a retired math professor who served on Kaczynski's dissertation committee.

Another of his thesis advisers, Professor Peter L. Duren, said he remembered that Kaczynski wore a coat and tie to class every day — unusual during the ferment of the '60s.

"He didn't strike me as pathological," Duren said. "People in math are sometimes a bit strange. It goes with creativity."

Kaczynski's 80-page dissertation, "Boundary Functions," focused on a pure mathematical problem about functions and circles that Duren said had no apparent practical application. In 1967, he received a \$100 prize recognizing his dissertation as the school's best in math that year.

At Michigan he held a National Science Foundation fellowship, taught undergraduates for three years, and published two articles related to his dissertation in mathematical journals. After he left Michigan, he published four more papers.

## Mystery at Berkeley

In the fall of 1967, when he was 25, UC-Berkeley hired Kaczynski as an assistant professor of mathematics. But he taught there only two years, despite professors imploring him to stay. Several said they thought he wanted to go into "social causes," but they could not remember what.

"He apparently regarded mathematics as not sufficiently relevant for the times," Piranian said.

Calvin Moore, who was vice chairman of the department in 1968, said that given Kaczynski's "impressive" thesis and his record of publications, "He could have advanced up the ranks and been a senior member of the faculty today."

University records were unclear as to whether Kaczynski was married at the time he was employed. A biography was distributed with his marital status blacked out. The rest of the biography was in Kaczynski's neat, almost childlike handwriting.

To many following the case, the critical question in Kaczynski's life is: What went wrong at Berkeley?

"This is absolutely the premier mathematics department in the nation," said Michael Rustigan, a criminologist at San Francisco State University who helped create a personality profile used by law enforcement's Unabom Task Force.

“He has one of the most brilliant careers in the country before him, and then he quits after two years,” Rustigan wondered. “What happened?”

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Contributing to this report were Patricia Nealan in Ann Arbor, Mich., and Martin F. Nolan in San Francisco, both of the Globe staff, and correspondents Jane Meredith Adorns in Berkeley, Calif, and Josh White at the University of Michigan. The Globe library staff and wire services also contributed.

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