

Kaczynski Lived A Life On The Fringe

Ex-Colleagues At Berkeley Mystified By His Changes

Tom Sowa

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The man suspected of sending lethal bombs from coast to coast lived a drab “bachelor’s life” in a handmade Montana cabin, his former neighbor said.

And two former colleagues at the University of California at Berkeley recalled that Theodore Kaczynski, suspected of being the Unabomber, had an uncanny talent for numbers but showed almost no interest in having contact with other teachers at the school.

Reporters on Thursday scoured the country for anything explaining why Kaczynski traded a promising career for a mysterious existence on the fringe of society.

Irene Preston, who lived near Kaczynski outside Lincoln, Mont., in the mid-1970s, said she visited him once and found a cramped, messy home.

“He also was a little on the stinky side — from no bathing,” said the 84-year-old Preston.

At that time Preston shared a house with another Lincoln resident a few hundred yards from Kaczynski’s wooden cabin five miles outside Lincoln.

The three played pinochle several times at her house, said Preston, who now lives in town.

“He never talked about his past or about teaching or anything like that,” she said.

His house was cluttered with books, papers and “stuff” spread about a table, a few chairs and a small bunk bed, she said.

“He was always respectful. And I never saw anything like tools — except a hoe and rake.”

After her housemate, Kenneth Lie, died, Preston was loading some wood off her property into a truck.

“He helped me get it loaded, and that was the last time I saw him up there,” Preston said.

After she moved into Lincoln, Preston said she’d wave from time to time whenever Kaczynski went by on his bicycle.

Two past administrators at the University of California at Berkeley remembered Kaczynski as a brilliant mathematician who surprised them by choosing to leave the school in 1969.

John Addison and Calvin Moore were chairman and assistant chairman of the school’s mathematics department the two years Kaczynski taught there.

The men said they had brief, infrequent contacts with him. “He certainly did not establish any solid friendships in the time he was here,” said Moore.

During the 1960s, Berkeley changed from an institution renowned for academic excellence to the country’s seedbed of left-wing political activism.

Moore, who still teaches in the department, said those who hired Kaczynski were impressed with his graduate school work.

After earning a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan and having six articles published in journals, he seemed destined for great success in his field, Addison said.

When Kaczynski wrote a note to Addison announcing he was quitting, both men tried unsuccessfully to get him to stay.

Both men said neither can find a “major change” or critical experience during the mid-1960s that might have transformed Kaczynski from quiet professor to bomb-building outcast.

The Ted K Archive

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