

# 'Dave, this one's not on you'

**V** Dave Kaczynski met Gary Wright on the telephone. When Dave dialed Gary's number, the voice on the other end of the line put him at ease almost immediately.

"Dave, this one's not on you," Gary said. "You didn't do this. It isn't your fault. You've got to let it go."

Ted's arrest had left Dave with an urgent need: to know what his brother's victims or their families were experiencing.

After Ted was taken into custody, the Kaczynski family had written letters to them, but most sent no reply.

Gary provided immense relief and, unexpectedly, empathy. He had already fought through the sense of grief and loss that had engulfed Dave.

"In a rational sense, I know that I didn't do anything wrong," Dave said. After so many unanswered letters, the phone conversation left him feeling "that reconciliation is not just a fantasy of mine" but "a genuine possibility."

Two years later, Ted pleaded guilty in exchange for a life sentence, avoiding the death penalty and a trial where defense attorneys would portray him as mentally ill.

At his sentencing hearing in federal court in Sacramento, Dave and Gary ended up on opposite sides of the courtroom. A gulf separated the room—victims and victims' families on one end, Dave alone on the other, surrounded by media. Ted never turned around to look at his younger brother.

It was the first and last time all three men were in the same room. As he took the stand, Gary spoke to Ted directly. "I do not hate you. I learned to forgive and heal a long time ago," he told him. "Without this ability I would have become kindling for your cause."

Gary then turned to Dave. "I would like to publicly thank David Kaczynski, his wife, Linda, and his mother for their extraordinary act of courage. ... Without their honesty, integrity and ability to do what was right, Ted would still be in a position to kill or maim additional innocent victims."

During a break in the proceedings, Gary was touring Old Town Sacramento when his cell phone rang. It was Dave, calling from a nearby hotel.

Did Gary have a moment to talk? Yes, he did. In a bit of serendipity, Gary was near the hotel. He walked inside.

They talked for hours about loss, about family, about the speeches made by victims in the courtroom that day.

"On arguably the worst day of his life, he could have called anyone, and he chose to call me," Gary said. "That means something. There was honor, there was value, there was integrity."



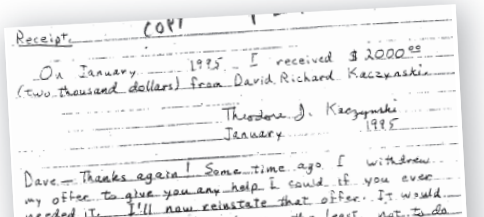
Gary Wright, at the site of the bombing in Salt Lake City, still picks wooden shrapnel from his neck.

Tribune photo by E. Jason Wambsgans



Dave and Wanda sent Ted thousands of dollars between the late 1980s and early 1990s, believing Ted had medical needs. Ted sent receipts. Later, Dave thought:

**"Oh my god, if you look at it, the money we sent preceded those bombings by a couple months..."**



Ted at his sentencing hearing in Sacramento. Read his mental evaluation at [chicagotribune.com/unabomber](http://chicagotribune.com/unabomber)

While in custody, Ted tried to kill himself, telling a court-appointed psychiatrist he'd rather die than be portrayed as mentally ill in court. The psychiatrist diagnosed him with paranoid schizophrenia.

A few weeks later, in exchange for life in prison without parole, he pleaded guilty.

**VII.** Gary and Dave's friendship developed in encounters both searing and small. While traveling in 1999, Gary stayed with Dave and Linda at their home in Schenectady, N.Y. By coincidence it was Dave's 50th birthday, so Gary attended the party. Later, the pair went canoeing on some of Dave's favorite streams in the Adirondack Mountains.

On the night before Sept. 11, 2001, Dave was across the street from the World Trade Center for a business meeting. The next day, after the attacks, Dave went home to an empty house. (Linda was visiting family in Chicago.) He could stand neither the TV images nor the silence. The personal echoes—terrorism to advance a warped ideology—were too much.

Then the phone rang. It was Gary. He knew Dave went into New York City for his job and wanted to make sure he was safe.

"My God, he was almost killed by my brother ... and here he is calling me," Dave recalled. "It meant the world to me."

In the ensuing decade, he and Gary have lobbied against the death penalty and logged thousands of miles telling their story of forgiveness at high schools, colleges, state legislatures, to anyone who would listen.

Though his violent actions first drew them together, Ted is no longer the constant topic of conversation. For stretches at a time, Dave and Gary are just two friends on a road trip.

## New brotherhood

**VIII.** Dave and Gary sat in the spare breakfast nook of a Holiday Inn Express last spring, a study in opposites.

Gary is shorter and more compact, with the lean frame of a cyclist. He's louder, quicker to laugh. Dave is tall, graying and soft-spoken, with a slight limp from a hip injury suffered during a softball game.

Last year, their journey of reconciliation took them to an anti-violence conference in Connecticut. Such conferences can seem like a macabre gallery, a collection of people sharing horrific stories of loss—of a child, a spouse, a parent—to unspeakable crimes.

Dave is a celebrity here but also a rarity, someone related not to a victim but a killer.

This particular conference proved especially tough on Dave. That same week, Virginia Tech student Seung Hui Cho killed himself and 32 others in the worst school shooting in U.S. history. Like Ted Kaczynski, Cho sent the media a rambling manifesto. News programs started to call Dave.

Sitting in the hotel lobby, he and Gary talked about their friendship.

"Nobody could take the place of my brother in my heart," Dave said, "and that's a very painful place."

In a book they're writing together, Dave expands on the notion: "Gary and I are 'blood brothers' in a literal sense. Our bond forged through violence is as powerful and as deep as any genetic bond."

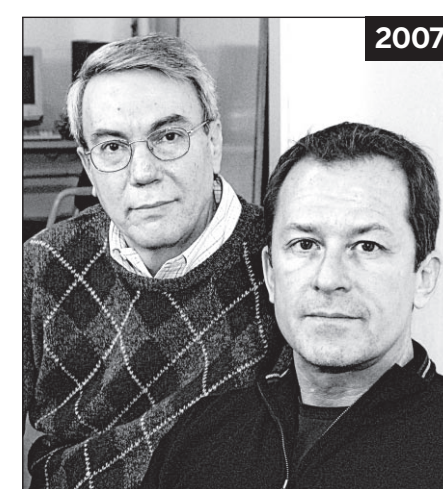
"... I find a poetic balance in having gained a new brother in Gary."

He wonders if Ted would understand. "Maybe he'd see my relationship with Gary as one more betrayal," he said.

As they chatted, others attending the conference joined them. A television behind them showed clips from Cho's video manifesto, and the talk turned to the subject of evil.

Denise Brown, whose husband was killed in 1998 by a disgruntled employee, didn't believe her husband's killer was evil. She thought he was just sick, mentally ill.

Marc Klaas, father of Polly Klaas,



Dave (left), now executive director of New Yorkers Against the Death Penalty, and Gary, on a speaking tour.

can't help but believe in evil. A man kidnapped and murdered his 12-year-old daughter. He doesn't know any other word for it—and still can't entirely fathom it.

"Evil doesn't give you a lot of opportunities, a lot of windows" to understand it, Klaas said.

A Roman Catholic, Gary feels that deeds are evil, not people.

As a Buddhist, Dave sees evil as "the absence of light, the absence of hope."

"Ted had no hope; he was isolated," Dave said. "His schizophrenia, this cancer of the mind—he was lost to us."

His brother was able to kill people, he thinks, by stripping them of humanity.

"I've always thought—and I might be wrong—that my brother couldn't have shot someone from across a table," Dave said.

Klaas interrupted: "But he did kill people."

The gathering fell silent. "Ted was not evil through and through," Dave said. "He was someone, at the very least, who loved his little brother."

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### THE UNABOMBER BEHIND BARS

Since his arrest, Ted Kaczynski has carried on a robust correspondence with a variety of people. He spends his prison time in Colorado filing appeals and fighting for control of his writings. Kaczynski didn't respond to an interview request for this article.

#### FAMILY LETTERS

In 12 years, Kaczynski has not acknowledged letters from his brother or mother. But they continue to write, Wanda at least once a month. A recent note from her read:

"I want you to know, Ted, that when a child is born, the parents give them the gift of unconditional love for a lifetime. This was true of you. No matter what happens, you cannot divest yourself of concern and affection. It's gonna be there, for a lifetime."

#### MONTANA FRIENDS

Kaczynski kept in touch with some friends from Lincoln. Despite his Luddite reputation, he asked one of them to "pull whatever you can off the Internet" about media interviews

done with attorney Michael Mello, author of "The United States of America vs. Theodore John Kaczynski."

In 1997, the friend wrote: "We don't want you to forget about Montana—or those of us who care about you, Ted... You just slowly became a part of our life ... then our hearts, and we miss you."

#### PRISON ROMANCE

For nearly a decade, Kaczynski carried on a correspondence with a woman named Joyce "Joy" Richards, who bought his share of the Montana land and visited him in prison until her death in 2006. He called her his "lady love."

She told the Sacramento Bee that she hoped to eventually live on the property and build a residence. "I love the Lincoln area, and it is such a nice piece of land. I want to preserve it," she said.

She told a student journalist from the University of Montana in 2006: "His ideas are what really matter, and I thought his ideas were brilliant."

#### ABOUT THIS REPORT

Tribune reporter Robert K. Elder spent a year interviewing the Kaczynski and Wright families as well as FBI agents, federal prosecutors and Ted Kaczynski's Montana acquaintances. He gained rare access to family letters, photos and Kaczynski's unpublished writings. Graphics by J. Mystkowski and Steve Layton. Design by J. Mystkowski.