

Excerpt from “Missing Parts,” by David Kaczynski, from the anthology *Brothers: 26 Stories of Love and Rivalry*, ed. Andrew Blauner, Jossey-Bass publisher. (<http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0470391294.html>)

Although I had placed my brother Ted on a pedestal - wanting to emulate his intellectual accomplishments, bragging to my fourth-grade buddies when he went to Harvard on a scholarship at sixteen - there was another part of me that sensed he was not completely O.K.

I was probably seven or eight when I first approached Mom with the question, “What’s wrong with Teddy?”

“What do you mean, David? There’s nothing wrong with your brother.”

“I mean, he doesn’t have any friends. Why’s that?”

“Well, you know, David, not everyone is the same. You have lots of friends because you like people and people like you. That’s wonderful! You’re a sociable person. But Teddy likes to spend more time by himself, reading and working on things. That’s wonderful, too. He’s different from you, but everyone doesn’t have to be alike. It’s O.K. to be different.”

“I know but...sometimes it seems he doesn’t *like* people.”

Mom must have sensed that I needed more than reassurance. “Sit down, David, I want to talk to you about something that happened before you were born.”

Mom and I sat down side by side on the couch, the same one she used to read me stories – the Beatrix Potter series, *Wind in the Willows*, *Tom Sawyer* - and teach me about life through her explanations and commentaries. I always treasured this time with Mom

for its intimacy and also for the world of imagination it opened for me. Sometimes she told me stories from her own life. But now she told me one about my brother's early life.

“When Teddy was a little baby just nine months old – before he was able to talk or understand us – he had to go to the hospital because of a rash that covered his little body. In those days, hospitals wouldn't let parents stay with a sick baby, and we were only allowed to visit him every other day for a couple of hours. I remember how your brother screamed in terror when I had to hand him over to the nurse, who took him away to another room. They had to stick lots of needles in Teddy, who was much too young to understand that everything being done to him was for his own good. He was terribly afraid, and he thought Dad and I had abandoned him to cruel strangers. He probably thought we didn't love him anymore and that we would never come back to bring him home again.”

I really can't do justice to my mother's capacity for drama. Perhaps it was because of the stories and fairy-tales she read to me on that old couch, but Mom had a way of entering into the emotions of the scenes she described. By the time she finished, I was deeply moved. There were tears rolling down my cheeks as I thought about the terrible suffering my brother had endured when he was a little baby.

It was an important teaching moment, and Mom took advantage of it. “David, your brother doesn't remember what happened to him, I'm sure. He was much too young. But that hospital experience hurt him deeply, and the hurt never went away completely. One thing you must always remember is never to abandon your brother, because that's what he fears the most.”

I promised Mom that I would never abandon Ted. She went on to describe her and Dad's patient efforts to help their son heal from his hospital trauma - how after they brought him home from the hospital they spoke gently and cuddled him, and tried over and over to get him to smile back at them. It took a long time, she said, before Teddy resembled the happy baby he'd been before he had to go to the hospital.

Often as I grew older, the story of my brother's traumatic hospital experience would come to mind as I struggled to understand Ted's quirks or to forgive his occasional insensitivity. It helped me to realize that you can't understand someone without compassion.

One summer our father, Ted Sr., caught a baby rabbit in our back yard. He placed the little animal in a wooden cage that was covered with a screen top. Several neighborhood kids clustered around to gape at the rabbit, and our father seemed proud to show it off. Dad used to teach us how to identify plants. So it was only natural that he would take pleasure in exposing the neighborhood kids to an educational experience – the chance to view a wild animal up close. My friends were jockeying to get a good look.

Ted was the last kid to join the onlookers, evidently curious to see what all the fuss was about. But as soon as he glimpsed the little rabbit cowering in a corner of the cage, his reaction was instinctive: "Oh, oh, let it go!" he said with panicked urgency.

Suddenly, I saw everything differently. Only then did I notice that the young rabbit was trembling with fright. Only then did I realize that we were being cruel.

Dad, realizing that he had caused his sensitive son distress, quickly carried the cage to a wooded area across the street and released the rabbit into the wild.

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It has occurred to me that Ted and I are almost like disowned parts of each other. Ted the Unabomber represents the violence and pessimism that I reject. David the putative “moral hero” represents the inauthenticity of hope in a world gone fundamentally awry. Ted’s cruelty stigmatizes my good name; but my reputation for goodness comes at his expense. Like all contrived opposites, we reinforce one another. The worst thing he can do to me is to deny any opportunity for reconciliation. Hope of reconciliation is something I am bound to maintain, but it costs me little – only the sneaking intuition that some part of me is missing.

As a young kid I had lots of boyhood pals, almost like temporary brothers my own age who would come and go in my life. Unlike my real brother, they turned out to be replaceable. Many of my post-high school friendships, however, endured much longer. I spent four years with the same college roommate, and we’ve grown even closer over the years.

Several months after Ted’s arrest, I made contact with one of my brother’s surviving victims – Gary Wright, of Salt Lake City, Utah. In one sense, he represented someone whose experience of the Unabomber saga was the polar opposite of mine. Part of me desperately needed to open a door to that “other side” – the victims’ side. Ted would not talk to me, and neither – not surprisingly - would most of his victims or their family members. A lot of worlds got shattered by Ted’s bombs. Probably it was foolish – even self-indulgent of me – to imagine that I could reassemble any of those pieces in the hope of making my world whole again. But with incredible grace, Gary volunteered to help me. In the ten years since our first awkward phone conversation, we too have become as close and indispensable to one another as brothers.

On the evening of September 11, 2001, I was home alone in Schenectady. Linda was away in Illinois caring for her sick parents. We were terribly worried about Linda's brother and his wife, whose apartment in lower Manhattan was not far from the World Trade Center site; and also about our niece attending college in Philadelphia, cut off from news of her parents because of the telephone outage. I suppose being the brother of a so-called "terrorist" made the events of that day more disturbing, if possible, than they otherwise would have been for me. I learned from Linda that our sister-in-law had been on the phone with Linda's mother when she saw the second tower fall. Then the phone line was cut off. I managed to reach my niece at her dorm room and found her as sane and sensible as always, somehow managing to give back more reassurance than she took. I couldn't bear to watch the news. But the silence felt equally unbearable. I wondered what my brother might be thinking about all of this.

The phone rang again. "Hey Dave, it's good to hear your voice! I know you take a lot of trips to New York City. I'm so glad to know that you're O.K." It was Gary Wright.

On a night when just about everyone in America was checking in with their closest family and friends, Gary Wright made a call to the brother of the man who'd tried to kill him. It was reassuring to know that I lived in a world where such a call was possible. In that moment, I knew that Gary would be my friend for life.