



David Kaczynski and Gary Wright

Experts in Healing From Violence and Trauma

Biography

Photo: David Kaczynski (right) and Gary Wright in 2007. (AP photo for the Chicago Tribune by Tim Roske)

David Kaczynski is the brother of Ted Kaczynski, the man known as the Unabomber, a mentally ill man whose 17-year reign of anti-technology bombings left three people dead and 23 injured. Gary Wright was one of those victims, the son of a Salt Lake City law enforcement officer who picked up a piece of wood behind his computer store in 1987 that turned out to be a bomb placed by Ted Kaczynski.

Each faced the death penalty in intensely personal ways, and both emerged convinced that we can live without the death penalty. And they emerged with a friendship forged in their common commitment to social responsibility and life values.

David, a social worker living in Schenectady, N.Y., had no idea the Unabomber could be the brother with whom he shared a bedroom growing up in Chicago. But when newspapers printed the Unabomber's "manifesto," David and his wife Linda recognized similarities to Ted's ideas. David faced an almost unimaginable dilemma – he could turn in his brother knowing that he might be executed, or he could do nothing, knowing more innocent people could be harmed.

David chose the path of life by taking steps to stop the violence. He led FBI agents to the cabin in the Montana woods where Ted had been building bombs. Despite Ted's history of mental illness, federal prosecutors sought the death penalty. It was only through the work of highly-skilled lawyers – an advantage often denied others facing capital prosecutions – that Ted was allowed to plead guilty and is now serving a life sentence in a federal penitentiary in Colorado.

Gary's nightmare started when he picked up that piece of wood behind his computer store and it exploded. He was riddled with more than 200 pieces of shrapnel, one of which severed the ulnar nerve in his left arm. He faced three years in and out of surgery, rebuilding his body and thinking about what had happened to him.

After helping turning in his brother in 1996, David reached out to Ted's victims to apologize for his brother's actions. One of those victims was Gary. They shared a remarkable telephone call in which Gary said he did not blame David and his family, and in fact harbored no hate for Ted and did not want to see him executed.

Ted's trial was in Sacramento. Driving back to Albany after the sentencing in 1998, David made a phone call and asked to meet Gary as he drove through Salt Lake City. Their friendship was sealed and continues to this day.

David returned to his work with troubled youth in Albany and five years later was hired as executive director by New Yorkers Against the Death Penalty, a group headed by Albany Bishop Howard Hubbard. He has spoken across the country telling lawmakers, church groups and anyone who will listen why the death penalty system is irretrievably broken, inherently unfair and fraught with tragic mistakes.

Gary has found himself an unlikely soldier in that battle. He joined David and two others with a unique view of capital punishment – Bud Welch, whose daughter was killed in the Oklahoma City bombing, and Bill Babbitt, who turned in his mentally ill brother to the police only to see him executed 18 years later– on a speaking tour around New York in 2003. The four men used their tragic personal experiences with violence to urge lawmakers to end the death penalty law that had been reinstated in 1995. That law was eventually found unconstitutional in 2004, and efforts to reinstate it were later rejected by the state Assembly after a series of public hearings on capital punishment

David and Gary remain close friends who share a relationship that crosses boundaries of victim and offender, cemented in the realization that each suffered pain and loss because of the crimes committed.

As Gary, a practicing Catholic, says, “Christ, while he was being executed, forgave the people who were killing him. If He can do it, we should be able to do it even when it doesn’t apply to our family and friends.”

“We have the ability to heal,” Gary said.