

Fathers cope with sons' bomb death, jailing

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Walter Fassnacht, 64, is a retired metallurgist living in South Bend, Ind.

Donald Armstrong, 59, is ill, unemployed and living near Madison.

Unknown to each other five years ago — they've still never met — their lives crossed tragically and indelibly when an explosion rocked Sterling Hall on the University of Wisconsin campus Aug. 24, 1970.

Fassnacht's only son, Robert, a researcher, was killed in the blast.

Armstrong's two sons, Karleton and Dwight, were among four young men charged with the bombing, a protest of the Vietnam war. Karleton was captured in Canada, pleaded guilty and is serving a 23-year sentence in the Wisconsin State Prison at Waupun.

Dwight and the other two have never been captured.

Both fathers responded on the fifth anniversary of the bombing.

"I don't feel bitter," Fassnacht said. "I think that it was probably a part of the times. I guess maybe they thought



DONALD ARMSTRONG

they were doing the right thing to get the attention . . . toward the inconsistencies of the war over there."

"My feeling was that they are the kind of people who say that you're going to be peaceful if I have to kill you for it," he said. "Sure, I think about it (his son's death), but I'm not about to let it get me down."

"I remember the events of getting the message and going up there to help take care of the children (young Fassnacht

was the father of three), and for the funeral, and so on, and warding off the newspapermen," Fassnacht said.

"I of course don't know, but I would hope that Bob's death was something that shocked enough of the kids on campus into realizing how awful the things were that they were doing," he said.

Donald Armstrong has had a cancerous lung removed, contracted heart trouble and lost his job when a local factory closed. He tries to visit his imprisoned son, who is seeking parole, at least once a week. He says he hasn't heard from his other son in "a long time."

"He (Karleton) amazes us," the elder Armstrong said. "Although there was a tragic part of this whole business, a very tragic thing, a person lost his life . . . I don't feel that he has too much conflict with his conscience . . . because I think his intentions were good."

"Sometimes I think that regardless of how good your intentions are, you can't change the world much yourself. He's

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