**“I was afraid it was going to happen again.”**

*In 1975, blue-blooded Upper Canada College appeared to be a veritable oasis of scholarly calm. Below the surface, however, it was more of a school for scandal. PETER CHENEY turns back the clock at Canada’s most prestigious private boys academy to uncover the roots of the sensational sexual-abuse case that ended last week in the conviction of a former teacher.*

By Peter Cheney

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As the summer of 1975 came to an end, life was good for a boy we’ll call Brad and his family: There was a stately home in Toronto’s Rosedale enclave, a cottage on Lake Joseph in Muskoka, a pair of Mercedes and private riding lessons. And now the family was climbing another rung on the social ladder – Brad was about to enter the most illustrious private boys school in the country.

Although he was only 12, and his family lived but minutes away, he had been enrolled as a boarding student. This was due to a foul-up: his parents had applied late, and no other spots were left. “I didn’t want to be a boarder,” Brad would say later. “I didn’t understand it, even though they explained it to me.”

His new home was in Upper Canada College’s Peacock Building, an aging brick structure that contained dormitories, dining halls, classrooms and apartments for teachers who served as housemasters. Among them was Doug Brown, who was 27 and newly arrived from Hamilton, where he had just finished a master’s degree in English at McMaster University.

The hiring of Mr. Brown was something of an experiment for UCC. He was from a blue collar background, wore jeans and running shoes, and listened to rock and roll. Even his hero was anti-establishment: Louis Riel.

Mr. Brown had connected with the school when, working as a camp counselor one summer, he had met the son of Dick Howard, headmaster of UCC’s prep school, which is for boys up to grade 8. Mr. Howard and other administrators were aware that the world was changing, and UCC had to adapt. Just how, they weren’t quite sure.

“They were delivering a patrician education in what was becoming an egalitarian society,” says James FitzGerald, a UCC graduate who went on to write *Old Boys*, a book about the school. “They were completely out of touch.”

In effect, Brad and Mr. Brown were joining a 146-year-old version of a colonial version of Eton – rigidly hierarchical, all boys, with cricket, caning, and a mandatory cadet corps. The staff, many of them older and with English backgrounds, gathered for sherry in the evenings.

The code of behavior and discipline was largely modeled on the British military, and one of its exemplars was Tony Hearn, a taskmaster with the hard, unforgiving style of a Coldstream Guard drill sergeant. Mr. Hearn administered corporal punishment with a bamboo cane or a leather slipper, and taught grammar by rote, with an unrelenting precision.

Mr. Brown, on the other hand, was decidedly new school. He saw many on the UCC staff as dinosaurs whose fixation on worn out techniques was turning off boys and stunting their intellectual development. His home room (Five B – for grade 5), Brown was soon a favourite among the boys.

He put in sofas, re-arranged the desks so they were no longer in rows, and lined the walls with maps and posters. He decorated the room with curiosities from his travels – animal skulls, snowshoes and airplane propellors.

The syllabus he used was original and imaginative, mixing *MacBeth* and Bob Dylan, and Pink Floyd with Herman Melville. Where other teachers might force boys to memorize the annual production of wheat in Saskatchewan over the past decade, he would read out the lyrics of a popular song and ask the class to decode them – “look for the subversive meaning”, he’d say.

Where UCC had always represented the pre-eminence of the institution, and the subordination of personal interests to duty and tradition, he represented a new era of individualism in which young people declared their personalities though the way they wore their hair, the music they listened to, and the books they read. His apartment in the dorm was a refuge from the rigid atmosphere that prevailed elsewhere. Boys as young as 12 would drop by to talk about music, and perhaps have a beer from his mini-fridge. There were even Playboy magazines.

Soon, Mr. Brown had a circle of young acolytes. “He was the best teacher I ever had,” one boy now says. “He saved my life.”

Brad arrived at UCC the day before the classes were to begin, moving into a dorm that seemed to be straight out of Dickens. There was crumbling plaster, knob-and-tube wiring, and ancient, hissing radiators that ran in rows down the middle of the rooms. The boys, some as young as eight, slept in six by nine foot cubicles walled off with curtains.

He unpacked his bags and listened as a teacher read out a long list of rules. Then there was a welcoming. Around 9:30, he went to his cubicle and drew the curtain. What happened next changed him forever.

As he lay drifting into sleep, he felt the pressure of a hand on his chest. He realized that his pajamas were being pushed down, and the intruder’s other hand was cupping his genitals. Brad didn’t know what to do. “I froze,” he said later. “I played possum.”

Through squinted eyelids, he recognized the person touching him – it was Mr. Brown, and he had begun to stroke his penis. Then he bent over and licked the tip of Brad’s penis. The boy was overcome by a sudden urge to urinate. Mr. Brown kept licking until he sat up, took Brad’s hand and placed it on his own penis.

Then, suddenly, he was gone. But a few minutes later, when Brad got up to the bathroom, he was back, blocking the doorway.

“What are you doing up?” he asked.

“I had a really bad dream,” Brad replied.

The next morning, Brad (which is not his real name; sexual abuse victims cannot be identified) called his father and asked him to come to the school right away. Exactly what followed has been the subject of intense legal wrangling, but Brad’s account is as follows.

After telling his father what had happened, a meeting was arranged with Dick Howard. Brad told his story and then was asked to wait outside. Mr. Brown was summoned, and disappeared into the office until Brad’s father reappeared and told him to go to the car.

Finally, after what seemed like hours, his father opened the door, got in the car, and said something Brad has never forgotten. “Son, you need to be careful what you say about people.”

The boy returned to class in a daze. “I was petrified, I was afraid it was going to happen again.” (It didn’t – in the three years Brad was at UCC, Mr. Brown never spoke to him). And so Brad embarked on a crusade, describing what had gone on in his cubicle. “After a while, I got tired of telling people,” he said, but he couldn’t seem to stop.

Speaking out made him a pariah. “I was shunned. People laughed at me. There were people right from the beginning, who didn’t want to know me.”

And yet several boys told him that they, too, had been molested by Mr. Brown. Two of them said they had formed a mutual protection pact – they would always stay together, so Mr. Brown would never find them alone.

“Good idea,” said Brad. But it would be almost 30 years before the criminal justice system would give him a true measure of satisfaction.

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Outsiders may have considered UCC an oasis of gentility, but reality was far different. Thefts were common, and older boys routinely conducted “raids” on the younger ones, often armed with socks filled with bars of soap or billiard balls – a practice known as “eight-balling.”

The rough stuff extended to some of the teachers. Mr. Hearn, for example, knocked a boy completely out of his chair after he noticed that he was playing with his testicles. Another teacher routinely paddled boys with a cricket bat.

And the school already had a long, secretive history of sexual abuse. John McDonald, a student from 1921 to 1930, recalled for author James FitzGerald that “very quietly, going on all the time, was a homosexual undercurrent” and described one housemaster who “after he canned you, he’d put you up on his lap. He’d then rub your behind and start to cry.”

A contemporary of Mr. Brown, a science teacher, had the boys take off their pants to compare their penises, and a swim coach would punish students by making them swim naked. In 1968, a teacher named Walter Bailey spent an entire double algebra class reading out hard core homosexual pornography. Fired eventually for locking himself in his room and refusing to come to class or answer his phone, he died of a heart attack in 1989.

One of the more notorious predators, Clark “Nobby” Noble, came from an illustrious family of physicians. Something of an Adonis, he was a bisexual pedophile who once explained that he liked young men and women equally. “Double your pleasure, double your fun.”

Mr. Noble left after a 17 year old boy charged in 1971 that he had sodomized him after getting him drunk at a private club. The boy’s father complained to the principal and was persuaded not to go public. Instead, Mr. Noble left to teach at several other private schools (in 1997, he was convicted for having sexually assaulted a boy at Appleby College in Oakville almost a decade earlier.) The UCC boy, once an elite-level squash player, had a complete emotional breakdown, and has been unemployed for over 30 years.

Officials later denied knowing about the Noble assault, but it was fairly common knowledge. Years later, Patrick Johnson, the principal at the time, told Mr. FitzGerald that “Nobby used to take boys on trips out west. God knows what happened on those trips. I heard things through my grapevine. As for the 1971 incident, he said: “I’m amazed the parents didn’t take legal action in that particular case.”

Mr. Brown soon emerged as a headache for the administration. One night he showed up at a drama performance having had several too many and “laughing raucously,” recalled Mr. Hearn, who died in January. “He was out of control.”

The next morning, there were two more sexual abuse complaints, and Mr. Brown was called to the office. According to Mr. Hearn, he admitted that he had fondled the boys and “couldn’t explain why.”

But the school had a tradition of tolerating the eccentricities of gifted teachers. “Mo” Gibson became infamous in the 1960s for putting his hand inside boys’ shirts as they worked at their desks. (“People ask why I fondle little boys,” he explained. “It’s because I have arthritis and it makes me feel better.”) And Mr. Hearn, though credited by many boys for their perfect grammar and diction, was known to return from shopping trips with liquor bottles clinking in his coat or hidden in his groceries. He finally quit drinking in 1969 after toppling off a podium during an address.

Mr. Brown seemed to be a new version of an old prototype. And his teaching seemed to redeem his personal failings. “Without doubt, Doug Brown was the most influential teacher in my life,” says Ben Peterson, son of former Ontario Premier David Peterson. “He encouraged and supported me through a time when not many others believed in my abilities. I was consistently last on my class until Doug Brown gave me the inspiration and confidence to raise the standard of my academic performance.”

But the things that made him a hit with students brought him into conflict with some of his colleagues. Mr. Hearn, for example, found him overly familiar with students and “utterly pretentious” despite his blue collar pedigree, and Mr. Brown once went six years without speaking to two teachers he considered his arch-enemies.

“Mr. Brown was the cool teacher and they were the old guard,” one protégé said. “They hated him because he was relevant, and they weren’t.”

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Brad left UCC in 1978, first for a Toronto public school and then a Christian academy, where he found himself in constant trouble. At home, things were falling apart, driven by a financial collapse that the following year cost the family their house. Brad dropped out of school and, at 16, went to work at a purebred horse farm. But he couldn’t stick with it, or almost anything, for long. He went through such dead end jobs as dishwasher, construction labourer, and glass installer. He moved continually, living with friends, in rooming houses, in cheap hotels and sometimes on the street. He used drugs and drank heavily.

The family moved to Vancouver and, with almost everything seized by creditors, his father took to selling cars, often changing dealerships in a hunt for higher commissions. Rather than ebbing over the years, the anger Brad felt because his father had refused to support him against Mr. Brown grew. “I hated the bastard,” he said later. “I never stopped hating him.”

By the mid-1980s, many of the boys Mr. Brown had visited in the dormitory were exhibiting traits now considering classic symptoms of sexual abuse. Only three had come forward when Brad was at UCC, but there were many more.

One boy went on to become a tour manager for a band, and spent years struggling with substance abuse and an inability to maintain relationships. (“I didn’t trust authority,” he said. “Why should I, after what happened?”) Another boy, the son of a diplomat, became an addict and was charged in California with sex-related crimes against children.

Yet another wound up in New York state chronically unemployed and suffering from persistent substance abuse – he went through more than a dozen detox programs without success.

“He was a mess,” says his father, who was an Italian immigrant who had made a small fortune in business. He had considered sending his son to UCC as the pinnacle of success. But then, while visiting on weekends, he and his wife would take the boy out for dinner only to find him reluctant to wear his UCC blazer. He also lost so much weight he looked “emaciated and estranged” when he graduated in 1981.

“We were a loving family,” says the father. “We didn’t send our son to that school because we didn’t want him around. We sent him there because we thought it would give him a chance.”

In 1984, when he was 21, Brad “found cocaine, or it found me.” He was soon spending more than $2,000 on his habit, most of it raised through petty crime. The following year, he was back in Toronto, hanging out in the seedy Yonge Street strip, when one night, hungry and in need of a high, he spotted a man standing with a teenaged boy in a movie lineup.

It was Mr. Brown, who, when he saw Brad staring, greeted him as though nothing had happened. “Oh hi, how are you?”, he said, according to Brad, who resisted the urge to punch him.

The chance meeting seemed to spark something in Brad – he was angrier than ever. Later that year, after being arrested for a petty crime, he told the policeman what had happened in the dorm a decade earlier. The cop laughed: “People like you don’t go to UCC.”

By the mid-1980s, UCC had decided to close the prep school’s dorm, and Mr. Brown had moved off campus to a low-rise on Old Forest Hill Road, just south of Eglinton Avenue. In his late thirties, he was still a popular teacher and his apartment was a student refuge.

But there seemed to be a Jekyll and Hyde quality to him – he could suddenly turn from hip companion to intolerant disciplinarian. More than once, he blew up and railed about “stupid little rich kids.” Once, as a class looked on, he reamed out a boy who had forgotten to return a set of keys, forcing him to write a 1,500 word essay on responsibility.

“He was supposed to be different,” one ex-student recalled. “But in the end, he turned out to be the same. Humiliation was a standard method of control.”

If Mr. Brown had thought he might help to usher in a new age at UCC, his hopes were clearly fading. The school’s elitism had survived only to well. At sports competitions against less wealthy schools, UCC boys would yell out, “Hey Gino, your mother cleans my house.” And if the other team scored, they would chant: “That’s alright, that’s OK, you’ll be working for us some day.”

And even with the prep dorm closed, he was still the subject of rumours. A boy who spent a lot of time at the apartment was pulled aside by a senior student, who said, “I can’t believe you hang out with that guy. He’s such a total fag.” And one night, someone took spray paint and wrote “fuck truck” on the side of the GM van lined with shag carpet that Mr. Brown drove.

Yet by 1992, it seemed safe to assume that Mr. Brown would never be brought to account. The boys he had visited had moved on, with mixed results. One was a successful businessman, showing no apparent signs of damage. Others were doing less well. (One boy sent years in therapy, and still felt “overcome with shame.”)

But Brad’s obsession remained. His life seemed to consist of drugs, crime and hating Mr. Brown. During a stay in Toronto, he looked up one of the boys who had formed the protection pact back in 1975 and asked him to write a letter documenting what had happened to them in the dorm. He then took the letter to a lawyer he knew who said he had two options: sue the school or press for compensation.

Needing money for his habit, Brad told the lawyer to see what he could get – and in the spring of 1993, he signed a deal with UCC that gave him $25,000 in exchange for his silence. The participants in the discussions included Doug Blakey, who had been principal since 1991, and ironically arrived in 1975 like Brad and Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown, meanwhile, was shown the door much as Mr. Noble was 22 years before. He was allowed to resign and given a year’s salary as severance and even a cooly worded letter of recommendation.

He went to Montana where he lived on a commune and worked on a project he had dreamed about for years – a book on Louis Riel, the outsider who, like him, took on the established order, and lost. But that winter, he returned to Canada, and just before Christmas, a former student spotted him driving down the street in Toronto. He told the student that he was unemployed and living in his van. The student, who assumed Mr. Brown had been driven from UCC by the forces of conformity, took him back to his parents’ home in Forest Hill where they stayed up all night talking.

“I suddenly realized,” the student recalls, “he wasn’t the one giving the advice any more. I was giving it. So I was having this revelation: I’m taking care of this middle-aged man because there is no justice at Upper Canada College.”

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The secret payments didn’t give UCC the relief they had hoped for. In the fall of 1993, Brad was spotted at the school’s main gate on Avenue Road, panhandling bewildered parents as they pulled up in their luxury cars, and offering to recount his tale of abuse. Security arrived, and left peacefully.

But the money was gone, and soon he was calling or visiting almost everyone he knew in search of cash. He showed up Mr. Blakey’s house at 3am and the headmaster forked over some bills. Not long after, he was back, hammering at the door in the middle of the night, and this time Mr. Blakey had nothing on hand. When Brad wouldn’t quit, he went with him to a bank machine.

Mr. Brown’s prospects, meanwhile, were looking up. He had won a consulting contract with an Ontario government agency, and then gone to the Bahamas to set up an educational program. He later traveled to the Maldives in the Indian Ocean as a consultant, and then to China, where he taught English at a metallurgical institute.

In 1994, he wrote twice to Mr. FitzGerald, who had tracked him down for his book, refusing an interview and lecturing him on the pitfalls of probing the past: “Your various receptors must have been on full power to detect the sound of grinding axes, observe attempts to bring the great low…listen to the sycophantic slurping in the eventuality a son or grandson has to get into the school, find recovered memory syndrome and find the school a one-time haven of torture and abuse.”

In another three years, the forces that eventually reunited Brad and Mr. Brown in a Toronto courtroom began to stir. Brad learned that his mother had been diagnosed with cancer. The news had a galvanizing effect. He approached the Toronto Police’s sexual assault squad. A detective took a videotaped statement, but cautioned him that there wasn’t enough evidence.

After that, Brad headed out to Vancouver, where he underwent drug treatment and managed to stay clean. He enrolled in a community college, rented a house, bought a car and a horse. Most significantly of all, he found “a girlfriend who didn’t drink or use drugs”, as he would later recall with pride.

Once again, Mr. Brown also underwent a reversal of fortunes. Detective Marie Drummond of the Toronto force called him in the Maldives to say a former student had filed a sexual-abuse complaint and spoken of other such cases. There was no basis for charges, “but that may change,” she warned.

Back at UCC, Principal Blakey was under pressure. The mother of one of the boys Brad had conferred with had come to see him about Mr. Brown’s actions in 1975. As well, he had been contacted by the target of Clark Noble from 1971, and the former student was going to the police. (By now, Mr. Noble was facing the Appleby College charges.)

After an “internal investigation” that lasted several weeks, Mr. Blakey called the police and on August 2, 2001, Mr. Brown was arrested after returning from China to visit his mother. The charge was based on complaints from Brad and two other students, but when the story became public, more alleged victims came out of the woodwork. By the time Mr. Brown went to trial this year, 10 had filed criminal complaints and at least 17 had joined a class action suit against him and UCC.

As well, police had charged two other teachers with sexual assaults on students, as well as a young teaching assistant whose home computer contained a collection of child porn.

Not long after Mr. Brown’s arrest, Brad’s period of stability came to an end. His mother died on September 10, 2001, and the next day, as the funeral home attended to her body and planes crashed into the World Trade Center, he felt himself coming adrift: “I’d lost my reason to stay clean.” He was soon using again, and within months lost his car, house, girlfriend and horse.

By last summer, with Mr. Brown’s trial set for September, the idea of telling his story in front of a packed courtroom prompted Brad to consider seeking drug treatment yet again. It would have been his 22nd attempt, but he never checked into the program. Even so, he kept his appointment with the detective who flew to Vancouver to escort him to Toronto for the trial.

In the witness box, Brad, now 41, found his view of the 57 year old Mr. Brown was impaired – which, as he would say later, was just as well. The Crown Attorney led Brad through his story, which he told with a film noir realism, providing details that painted a vivid picture of both Mr. Brown’s assault, and his own long fall from grace.

Six other men testified against Mr. Brown, recounting assaults that took place from 1975 to 1981. Outside the courtroom, one of them acknowledged that the arc of his life had been far different than it might have been. “Long is the way, and hard,” he said, quoting from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, “that out of hell leads up to light.”

Given the nature of the case, credibility was a key issue in the trial. In the witness box, Mr. Brown denied every allegation made against him, admitting only that he once sat on a bed in a bid to intercept boys heading off for a fight. And Brad, who had briefly gone off drugs before testifying, said afterward that he felt that a weight had come off his shoulders.

But the moment soon passed. At 3 the next morning, he was calling reporters he had met at the trial, saying “bad things would happen” if he didn’t find some money. One coughed up $70, but the next turned him down, and Brad cried softly into the phone, “Thank you for saying no.”

A few days later, he was back in Vancouver and the Toronto courtroom was packed as Mr. Justice Harry LaForme of the Ontario Supreme Court passed judgment.

“If I believe Mr. Brown, I must acquit him,” the judge said, and then proceeded to give Brad the vindication he had waited for so long. Almost three decades after his father wouldn’t believe him, Judge LaForme applauded his courage and honesty.

“He did not sugarcoat any of his past or make excuses for it. He never quarreled with counsel or was the slightest bit evasive when responding to questions, regardless of their sensitivity or regardless of their potential humiliating nature…His sad and tragic life was offered up as an open book. He did not shirk from the requirement to tell all, and he blamed only himself for it.

“In sum, even rogues are capable of being truthful.”

*Peter Cheney is a Globe and Mail features writer who has reported extensively on the controversy at Upper Canada College.*