

NOV. 14/98  
GLOBE



## SEMI-DETACHED

JOHN BARBER

# It could happen to you

I don't know his name, only that he is about my age and we attended the same private school about the same time. But he learned far more than I ever did at that place. I left before graduating, rebellious but naive in life. Had I stayed, I, too, might have been raped by my history teacher.

I thought about that boy this week while reading about testimony in the sexual assault trial of former Nova Scotia premier Gerald Regan. It was more than 40 years after the fact when a white-haired grandmother first described in public what allegedly happened to her as a child of 14. My schoolmate lived with the memory of a rape for 26 years before gathering his courage and reporting it to police.

Why does it take so long for these stories to come to light? It is undoubtedly true that justice for sexual assault victims is more easily obtained today than it was 30 or 40 years ago, and at less cost to the victims. But when the victims are adolescents, and the perpetrators are adults in a position of authority over them, there are probably other reasons at play.

Almost certainly there is a deeper trauma. The violation is so thorough. It's easy to forget how intimidating authority can be to a young person, how willingly they extend trust. But the predators don't. They use every angle, and the damage they leave in their wakes can be enormous.

Handsome, athletic and outgoing, Clark Winton Noble was probably the most popular teacher at Upper Canada College in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He was different from the rest of the "masters," as they were (and still are) known; he was truly one of the boys. His nickname was Nobby.

I remember being a little shocked at how eagerly he seemed to curry favour with the most popular students. It was as if he aspired to lead their clique. But they were delighted to have such an impressive patron for their exclusive society. And adolescents being what they are, everybody else wanted to join in.

The height of success was to be invited to participate in one of Mr. Noble's educational holidays. I remember looking enviously at a home movie he showed the class one day of a Caribbean cruise on a sailboat that he and a few select students chartered one year during the Christmas holidays.

One image in particular struck me: a dark, fuzzy scene of a classmate lying in his bunk in the cramped cabin, looking dishevelled and woozy. I don't know why that image lingered for so long while others, the outdoor sailing scenes that interested me more, disappeared from my mind long ago; now I know it will be with me forever.

Mr. Noble was popular in class, too. He never demanded much work from his students and he spent a lot of time telling stories about his life. Again, one in particular stuck with me. It was more of an opinion than a story. He was telling us what he thought of our new Grade 10 English teacher. The English teacher was new, and he was as openly gay as any man in that position could be in 1968.

"God, I hate that guy," Mr. Noble told us. He went on at great length to explain why. I recall him using the word "faggot," although I could be mistaken. There is no doubt in my mind, though, that the English teacher's apparent sexual preference was the reason Mr. Noble hated him so.

In 1971, a parent complained to the school's principal that Mr. Noble had plied his 18-year-old son with drink and raped him. In the same year, Mr. Noble left Upper Canada College for a teaching position at another private school, Oakville's Appleby College, where he remained until he retired in 1991.

Mr. Noble's victim was a golden boy, handsome and athletic. His personality changed overnight, according to one of his friends. He has spent much of his adult life under psychiatric care, never held a real job. And it took more than 25 years before he dared call his attacker to account.

After Toronto police charged Mr. Noble with buggery and indecent assault on a male, more victims came forward. Police charged him with two more counts of sexual assault in connection with incidents at Appleby College.

In July of this year, he pleaded guilty in a Toronto courtroom to the two Appleby charges. The Crown withdrew the Upper Canada charge, although Mr. Noble admitted responsibility for it in an agreed-upon statement of facts. He was sentenced to a year in prison and given a conditional discharge.

I bumped into him by accident last year, during the time he was awaiting trial. It was the first time I had seen him since dropping out of UCC, but I recognized him and I could tell he recognized me.

I'm a full-grown man; it embarrasses me to admit how deeply shaken I was by the sight of Mr. Noble's still-familiar, friendly face. My old master.

♦ ♦ ♦

[jbarber@globeandmail.ca](mailto:jbarber@globeandmail.ca)