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Lives Lived

RICHARD B. HOWARD

Master, housemaster and headmaster,
Upper Canada College Preparatory
School. Born Jan. 30, 1921, in Toronto;
died Oct. 26 in Toronto, aged 75.

DICK Howard personally embodied the complexity, paradox and powerful mythology of Upper Canada College.

His legacy is subtle and profound: Thousands of impressionable, pre-adolescent boys — including men as diverse in politics and temperament as Conrad Black, Michael Ignatieff, Ted Rogers, Peter Dalglish, John Bosley, Stephen Clarkson, John Eaton, Rob Prichard, John Godfrey and Avi Lewis — passed under Dick's tutelage as prep master, housemaster and headmaster from 1943 to 1986.

The son of a chief superintendent of the Toronto Dominion Bank, Dick was sent to UCC as a boy, he said, "because my father said it was a school where you met people of importance and made friends with the Establishment." Entering the prep at 7, Dick spent the next 11 years being utterly formed by Canada's most famous private school, to which, after a degree at Trinity College, University of Toronto, he would return.

"I had a very unhappy time in my early years as a boy at UCC," Dick told me in 1991. "I stuttered very badly, which meant I hardly said anything. I wore long boots on the theory that I had weak ankles, which I didn't. I was given quite a ride, which drove me into myself. I had a hard time making friends."

Redeemed by his athletic ability, Dick also distinguished himself as second-in-command of the cadet battalion and "Head of the Town," the day boy with the highest academic average. At age 22, he came back to UCC to teach because he had no other career in view, intending to stay only two or three years. Then a year spent on a Carnegie Fellowship in Europe convinced him that education was his true calling. Assuming the prep headmastership in 1966, Dick presided over, in his own words, "the worst decade in the school's history," when the baby-boom generation swept away so many of the traditional trappings — the cadet battalion, corporal punishment by caning, mandatory boxing tournaments — which so indelibly informed Dick's own character.

His bitterest regret stemmed from his heart murmur, which prevented him from fighting in the Second World War, where most of his close friends perished. Denied the defining experience of his generation, he fell into a severe depression, recovered for many years, then relapsed late in his life.

Many former students remember Dick as a tall, el-

egant figure who stood for something good, someone a young boy could idealize and believe in. Others recalled his broad smile, his casual, fatherly, patrician bearing. Many others saw him as aloof, sarcastic, difficult. I could imagine Dick saying in response: "The best teachers are not interested in being liked."

I felt all of these things about Dick too, and much more. Ultimately I came to see him as a complex character, publicly acting out an ineffable private drama, the return of the repressed, in which we boys — including his son, my classmate — were intimately bound up. We were often "given quite a ride" too.

In 1991, he struggled to be honest about a lifetime devoted to UCC, disarming and impressing me by shunning sentimentality. He turned passionate when he said the school has been plagued by too many "terrible principals" in its 167-year history. When he excoriated the UCC Board of Governors for its complacency, assailing a former chairman for his destructive "stupidity," I thought of a line by Dante that I memorized in Dick Howard's classroom: "The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, during a period of moral crisis, maintain their neutrality."

Well before Dick wrote *Colborne's Legacy: Upper Canada College 1829-1979*, the official history of the school, he had influenced my embryonic literary ambition. As a boy, I learned a vital lesson from him: that tolerance of dissent, at least in theory, is an essential part of the establishment position. When many members of the UCC community fell silent at the revelation that so many unconscionable abuses of power have scarred the school's history, I thought of Dick Howard's honest, angry conscience.

As our interview edged into the darker recesses of UCC's past and present, he suddenly invited me to leave, saying he suffered from a failing heart. Although the truth was written all over his face, it clearly had not set him free.

But I will always take heart from that chilly day when we relived several thousand interlocking lifetimes — his, mine, my father's, my brother's, those of countless, anonymous UCC boys — crammed into a terse, tense 40 minutes, roughly the length of one of Dick Howard's prep English classes. What he *didn't* say, yet painfully communicated, spoke volumes — and for that alone, I am glad. As he urged us to do, Dick Howard did the best he could.

James Fitzgerald
James Fitzgerald is author of Old Boys: The Powerful Legacy of Upper Canada College.



Richard Howard in 1970.