

## Nightmare on Avenue Road

Almost 40 years ago, Doug Brown, the notorious Upper Canada College teacher, repeatedly sexually assaulted me. Only now do I understand what he did to my life

BY STÉPHANE BEAUROY

I was a 13-year-old boarder at Upper Canada College when Doug Brown, the now notorious teacher, arrived in 1975. He was only 26, and his anti-establishment flair quickly made him very popular with students. He wore jeans and Greb boots, and he invited boys to his dormitory apartment to dip in to his beer fridge and flip through copies of *Playboy*.

On my mother's side, my uncles attended UCC and my great uncles, too. My mother signed me up when I was three. But I was unhappy there from the beginning. Because of my quiet bookishness, I was bullied and branded a "fag" from Grade 3 to Grade 13. Brown must have seen my vulnerability. He always stood close and stared at me.

Some months after Brown's arrival, I was at his apartment, and he touched my penis for what he said was a compulsory medical exam. Another night, after lights out, I woke up to find him sitting on my bed. He sat or lay beside me—how many times, I can't remember—often reeking of alcohol, reaching under the sheets to masturbate me. I would roll over, or hug the wall trying to escape his hand and stop my unwelcome, shaming erections. Once, I gathered the nerve to hiss, "Go away!"

In my 20s, I joked about my awful childhood. In my 30s, I denied the significance of my early traumas. By my 40s, though, I had abandoned two PhDs in art history and, in the space of seven years, was diagnosed with Crohn's disease and an anxiety disorder. My life was chronically stalled, and I began to accept that the assaults had profound consequences, even if I couldn't explain them precisely.

I played a role in Brown's arrest, almost accidentally. One day in 1992, I got a call from a former UCC student I dimly remembered. He asked if I would have lunch to talk about Doug Brown. He said that I had been the only one to believe him back when he told his father, the headmaster and me that Brown had assaulted him. My former schoolmate, who was an addict and had been in jail, asked me to write him a letter outlining what had happened to both of us to show his therapist. I obliged.

I moved to England soon after to work on my thesis on the early history of photography. As it turned out, the former student sent my letter to UCC and demanded money, which is how I found myself, in 1993, in a phone booth outside my residence in Kent, speaking to the UCC principal and the school's lawyer. They wondered if I wanted to go to the police. I said I had no such plan. The principal asked for Brown's resignation, granted him severance and wrote him a letter of reference.

For the next several years, I heard nothing. I spent my time researching dead ends to avoid writing my thesis, then doing

an internship, chasing freelance jobs and taking short-term contracts, none of which led to permanent work.

Brown wasn't arrested until 2001 when he returned from China, where he had been teaching. Shortly thereafter, several of his victims launched a class-action lawsuit against UCC and Brown, which I joined. There were at least 18 of us in that suit, though I believe we represented just a fraction of his victims given that he taught at UCC for 18 years.

His criminal trial was in September 2004, in a crowded University Avenue courthouse. I borrowed money from my mother and bought a new blazer so I would feel more confident. Seven of us testified. Brown's lawyer cross-examined me, suggesting

I had colluded with the others to fabricate our stories. Brown sat close by, still staring intently at me after all these years. I avoided his eyes and worked hard to reconstruct my memories. In the end, the judge believed our testimonies. Brown was convicted of nine counts of indecent assault and sentenced to three years.

After the guilty verdict, UCC began to make settlement offers in the class action. According to the terms, I can't talk about that experience, but I can say that I have been living off the money I received, in a condo in Little Italy, for the last nine years. Every year, my broker, who happens also to be a UCC Old Boy, tells me that my capital is dwindling. My remaining funds will last years, rather than the decades likely

required. I have to start making money, but I'm 50 years old, and my applications for jobs at Indigo, the LCBO and other potential employers have yielded no work. A friend once set me up with a job at the CBC, but I panicked on my first day. I was afraid to ask for help and even more terrified of looking stupid. I went home that evening and never returned.

Now, finally, I am beginning to understand how profoundly my experience at UCC has marked my life. New research in the neurobiology of trauma suggests that sexual assaults experienced between the ages of 11 and 13 can damage the hippocampus, the part of the brain involved in learning, emotion and memory. Because of this, I have little doubt that my anxiety disorder is related to my early traumas. Autoimmune diseases, such as Crohn's, are also linked to childhood trauma and stress.

I don't think it's too late for me. My therapist has helped bring my anxiety under control, and I'm writing a book about wine tasting and the brain. All those years I spent floundering are ir retrievable, but for the first time in years, I'm feeling hopeful.

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