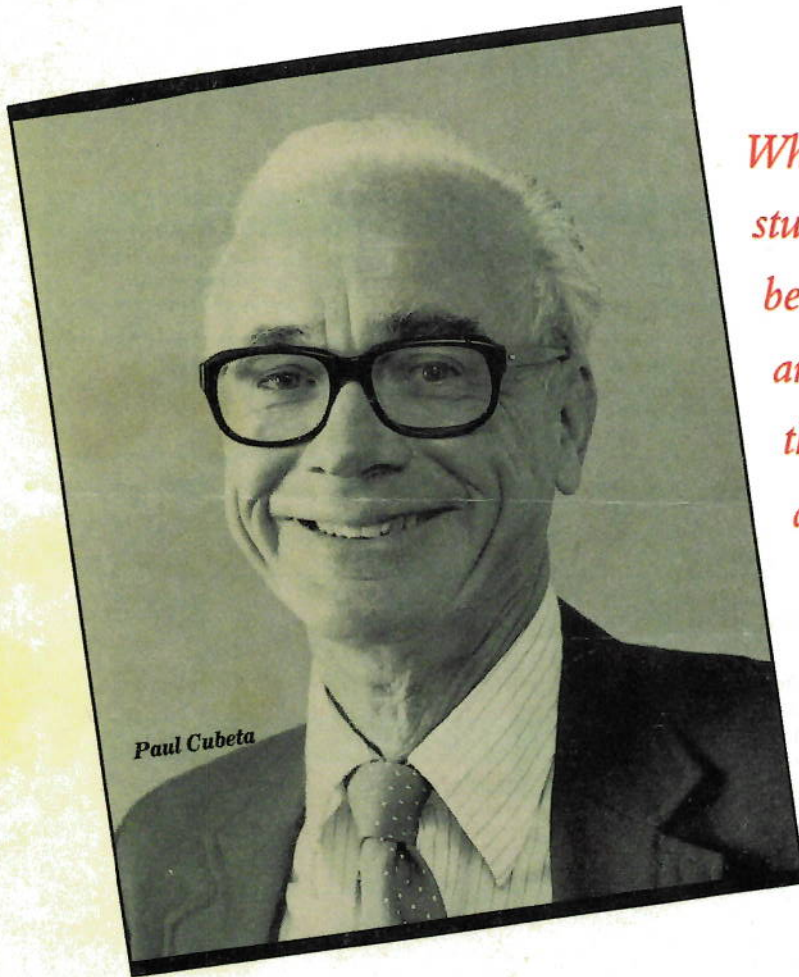


SCHOOL

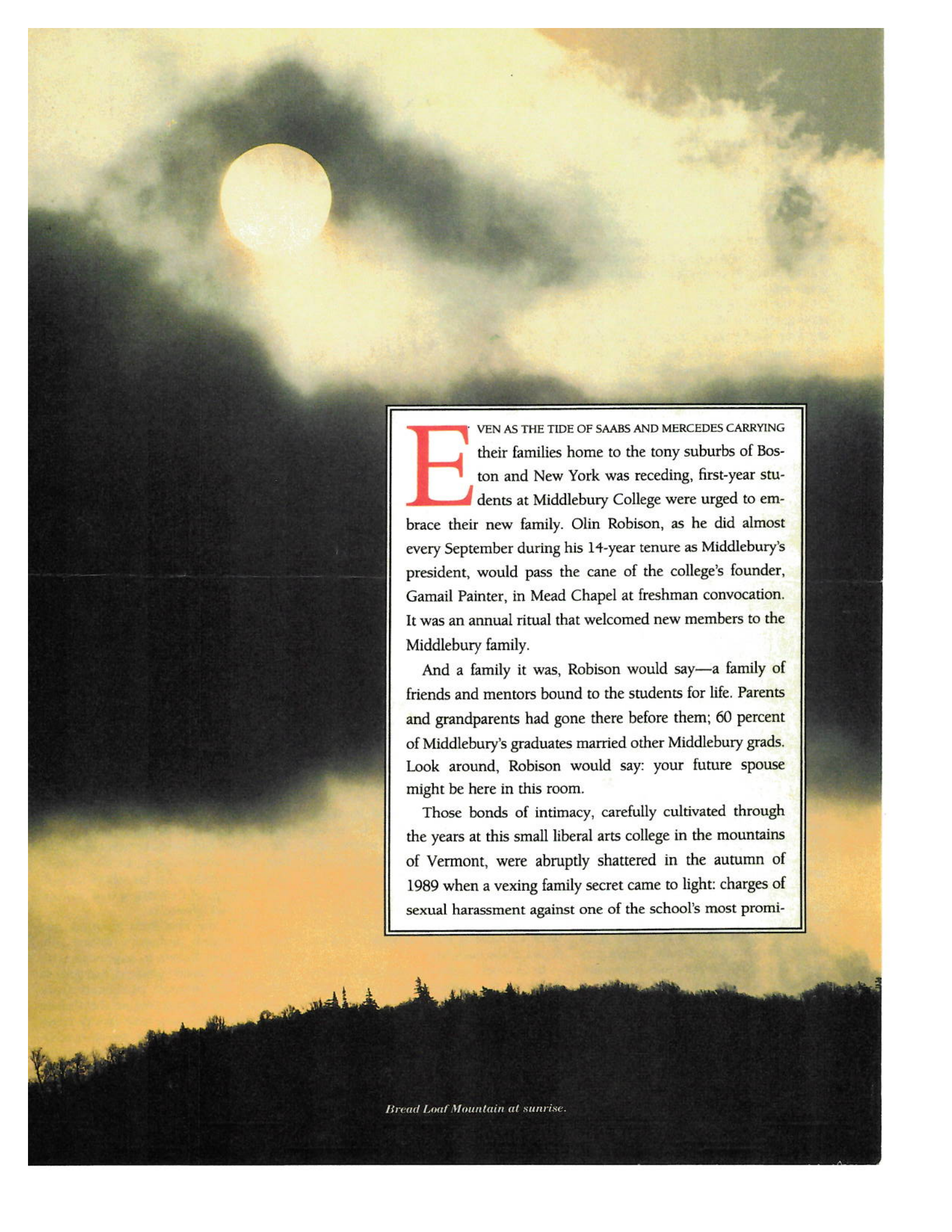


When four Middlebury students said they had been sexually harassed by an esteemed professor, the college reacted just like a family: it kept it secret.

for

SCANDAL

BY WILLIAM MCGOWAN



EVEN AS THE TIDE OF SAABS AND MERCEDES CARRYING their families home to the tony suburbs of Boston and New York was receding, first-year students at Middlebury College were urged to embrace their new family. Olin Robison, as he did almost every September during his 14-year tenure as Middlebury's president, would pass the cane of the college's founder, Gamaill Painter, in Mead Chapel at freshman convocation. It was an annual ritual that welcomed new members to the Middlebury family.

And a family it was, Robison would say—a family of friends and mentors bound to the students for life. Parents and grandparents had gone there before them; 60 percent of Middlebury's graduates married other Middlebury grads. Look around, Robison would say: your future spouse might be here in this room.

Those bonds of intimacy, carefully cultivated through the years at this small liberal arts college in the mountains of Vermont, were abruptly shattered in the autumn of 1989 when a vexing family secret came to light: charges of sexual harassment against one of the school's most promi-

ment professors.

Four men who had attended Middlebury over the previous eight years said they had been sexually abused by Paul Cubeta, a Shakespeare scholar and director of the college's prestigious graduate-level Bread Loaf School of English. Each of the four students had worked as Cubeta's aide at Bread Loaf, and each claimed that the 65-year-old man with a wife, children, and grandchildren had made unwanted sexual advances after trying to get him drunk, often repeating the overtures despite the student's objections.

During a tense seven-hour, closed-door hearing into the charges in October 1988, the four young men recounted in vivid, and sometimes painful, detail Cubeta's attempts to seduce them. Afterward, Olin Robison, a Methodist minister, allowed the 36-year faculty member to take early retirement. Within weeks, however, he had quietly created a new job for Cubeta at Bread Loaf as director of development, with diminished though still significant responsibilities, and a salary commensurate with his old one.

Middlebury did that in secrecy, refusing all requests for information on the case, arousing the ire of many teachers and staffers, and, some say, betraying the most vulnerable members of the Middlebury family, its students.

"There was a violation of the trust of the community," said English professor Robert Pack once news of the scandal finally broke, just over a year ago. "The abuse of power, where an individual is victimized, is not a private but a public issue. When power is abused, everyone is a victim."

FOR A COLLEGE THAT THINKS OF ITSELF AS A family, as Middlebury does, charges of sexual abuse carry the same freight as allegations of incest. Taboos inhibit youngsters and adults from exposing a parental figure who may otherwise be a source of legitimate love and support. When those taboos are broken, accusers, not abusers, are often made to feel responsible for destroying the family.

Middlebury is not the first college to greet sexual harassment with silence and secrecy, nor is it likely to be the last. "The interest of the institution is to bury it in-house," says Margaret Doody, former professor of English at Princeton University, who quit her tenured position there in 1989 in part over the way a case of homosexual harassment involving another prominent English professor and a young graduate student was covered up until written about in the *New York Times*. "Administrators have their first loyalty—mistakenly—to the institution, instead of to the students and the integrity of the academic environment."

Middlebury

isn't the first college to
shroud sexual
harassment in silence.
It won't be the last.

Middlebury's family secret was first divulged by the student newspaper, the *Middlebury Campus*, in November 1989, more than a year after the hearing. That fall, the paper's editors repeatedly approached Middlebury officials with rumors about the case. All the officials would say, however, was that it was a personnel matter requiring the confidentiality of a tenure decision or a student disciplinary action.

For the editors of the *Campus*, the administration's commitment to confidentiality dovetailed too neatly with its desire to protect its institutional flank. But before running the story, they wrote several editorials requesting the administration's cooperation. One of them alluded to a Robert Frost poem, "The Gift Outright," a line of which appears on the first page of the Middlebury catalog: "Something we were withholding made us weak / Until we found it was ourselves."

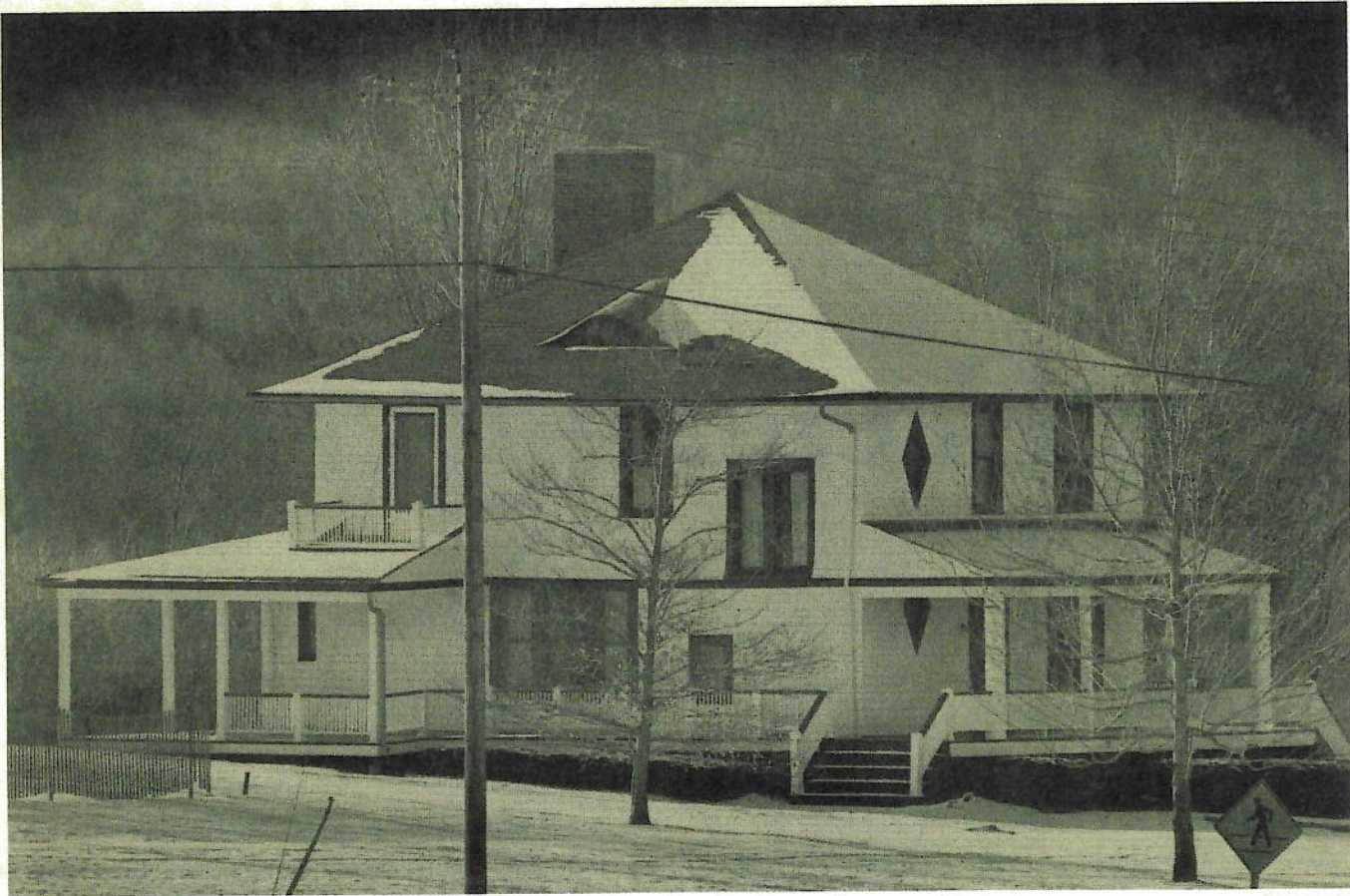
In October, as the editorials grew more insistent, the administration and faculty squirmed. "It was like watching someone pour salt on a slug," says one untenured Middlebury teacher who requested anonymity. In an apparent coincidence, President Robison announced his retirement just as one stinging editorial was hitting the sidewalks, heightening the suspense. Then, in November, the *Campus* secured the cooperation of two of the accusers and

published their accounts. Also interviewed was Cubeta, who said he had been planning to retire anyway and that any charges brought against him were untrue, as there had never been any official finding against him.

"The fact that there was not an outcome," he told the *Campus*, "is an indication that the committee did not find me guilty."

In a subsequent story in the *Burlington Free Press*, Cubeta repeated his denials, but they paled beside the lurid details culled from the transcript of the hearing one of the accusers had given the newspaper. The *Free Press* also dropped another bombshell: an allegation that the school had prior knowledge of Cubeta's sexual misconduct and had ignored it.

In 1977, the *Free Press* reported, two tenured English professors, Robert Hill, who had been known to have feuds with Robison, and David Littlefield, had gone to Robison with separate complaints about Cubeta—one voicing concern that Cubeta had harassed a young male faculty member who was up for tenure, the other echoing that complaint and adding that in the late sixties, Cubeta had also made aggressive moves against a male student. Robison, the teachers said, dismissed both complaints as the petty, homophobic fallout from a pending tenure decision.



Frothingham, where several of the alleged incidents of harassment took place.

"The best you can do is come forth and talk to the president of the college, and he was dutifully informed," Hill told the *Free Press*. "We were specifically saying, 'You've got to keep this man away from making administrative judgments about young men.' His response was to listen. No further inquiry, nothing."

LIKE OTHER ELITE PRIVATE COLLEGES WITH tuition and other costs above \$20,000, Middlebury has had to contend with increasing competition for a dwindling population of students. But thanks to a superior faculty and ever-expanding facilities, the college has retained a reputation on a par with Amherst, Williams, and Dartmouth, its major rivals. Much of the credit for that belongs to Olin Robison, although his detractors say his obsession with fundraising and public relations was more becoming to a corporate CEO than to a leader of a scholarly community.

One of Middlebury's chief assets has been its Bread Loaf School of English, which runs during the summers on a woody 2,000 acres near the main campus. And much of the credit for Bread Loaf's success belongs to Paul Cubeta, who earned a doctorate from Yale in 1954 and had begun teaching at Middlebury two years earlier. Cubeta was named director of Bread Loaf in 1964 but continued teach-

ing at Middlebury during the school year.

As Bread Loaf's director, Cubeta tripled the size of the student body, established an exchange program with Oxford, and raised large sums from private foundations. With that money, the school was able to offer generous financial aid for students and hefty salaries for teachers that attracted the best in the field.

Cubeta was at once a tweedy traditionalist and a bold iconoclast—"the anarchist in the court," as one former student calls him—who encouraged students to question conventions even as he embodied the ideal of the liberal arts by quoting huge chunks of Shakespeare and peppering his lectures with classical references.

Students who chafed at the preppiness and latent anti-intellectualism of the predominantly white upper-middle-class school found his classes and offices a refreshing haven. Indeed, he advised more students than any other teacher in the English department. Middlebury graduates trade "Cubes" stories with relish: the time he was teaching *King Lear*, for instance, when he got to the line "As flies are to wanton boys so are we to the gods," and made contemptuous fun of the class because no one would admit to picking the wings off flies as a child.

But as an administrator—first as dean of the faculty, then as vice president for aca-

demical affairs, and also as director of Bread Loaf—Cubeta had a different reputation. Nicknamed "Iago" by some Middlebury colleagues, he was known as a punishing infighter and a cunning Machiavellian. Veteran philosophy professor Victor Nuovo says he was "incapable of carrying out anything efficiently without inflicting harm on someone." Many colleagues who had tangled with him felt they had ended up on the short end of salary reviews or tenure decisions. Cubeta ran Bread Loaf like a personal fiefdom—"a department of one," as a former colleague in the English department describes it.

Most Bread Loaf students were high school English teachers who regarded Bread Loaf as an intellectual and social sanctuary. It was like the Magic Mountain, explains one student, "a charmed place where you felt cut off from the rest of the world, where consequences didn't really matter. The whole air fostered an atmosphere of experimentation—with ideas, with relationships. People had affairs and indulged curiosities they wouldn't have normally. Paul Cubeta wasn't solely responsible for this atmosphere, of course, but he certainly did a lot to foster it."

ON THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE 1988 SESSION, AS Cubeta did almost every year in his key-
(Continued on page 86)

Scandal

(Continued from page 61)

note address, he read from a book called *Ellen; or the Whisperings of an Old Pine*. In it is an account of how the author, Joseph Battell, the wealthy Vermonter who donated Bread Loaf to Middlebury, would take young lovelies from the surrounding countryside into the woods and have his way with them.

As it happened, one of Cubeta's administrative aides that summer, a Middlebury undergraduate named Glen Sanderson,* was about to charge him with attempting exactly that, on a picnic the two had gone on together a few weeks before. Soon, three former Middlebury students, two of them still working as Cubeta's aides, filed similar charges of sexual harassment over incidents from years before. Later, the college confronted Cubeta with the charges and scheduled the hearing for October.

The administrative aides whom Cubeta hired for Bread Loaf over the years tended to affect a Huck Finn air—cutoff shorts, bare feet, and T-shirts—but they worked long hours meeting their boss's exacting standards. With few exceptions, all were English majors who had taken Cubeta's demanding but popular Shakespeare course. All were male, and most were intent on a career in academia. Though bookish, all were athletic, and all had outgoing, winning personalities.

"They were all exceptional people," says one Bread Loaf staffer who had befriended them in the years before they came forward. "Physically attractive, intellectually promising, and generous of heart. Paul had good taste. Very good taste."

Making their charges had not been an easy decision. Glen Sanderson, who would return to Middlebury that fall for his senior year, worried that no one would believe him. The others, who had been out of Middlebury for at least five years, fretted about more subtle issues. They had stayed close friends with Cubeta, and their ties to Bread Loaf had benefited their careers. They were indebted to him for recommendations to graduate school.

Cubeta, says Tom Scott,* now a Ph.D. candidate at an Ivy League school, had made them all feel they were "supernaturally" intelligent, part of a community of special souls.

The three older students also say they had maintained the family secret for so long that it seemed at times easier just to forget it. For years, Cubeta had waged subtle psychological warfare against them, too. When the students had confronted him years before, it had been easy for him to convince them that they were uncomfortable with intimacy or that they wanted to hurt him. At other times, he had im-

plied that it was his first time, too, or that the student had homosexual tendencies.

The students had all been allegedly victimized at dramatic points in their lives, making them vulnerable to mind games. One, Jason Albright,* had gone back to school for his senior year the summer after a family member came out of the closet, news that had devastated him.

The older students kept returning to Bread Loaf, but they grew increasingly uncomfortable with their secret. What prodded them to come forward, they say, was comparing notes with one another after Sanderson's alleged encounter. They found out that incidents they had thought were isolated were almost identical, down to the lines Cubeta had allegedly used. That discovery filled them with "cold fury," as one accuser puts it.

They worried that Sanderson, who was determined to go it alone if he had to, would not be believed without corroboration. Still, it took them all summer to decide, and they continued performing their Bread Loaf chores, including their morning meetings with Cubeta on his porch.

THE HEARING INTO THE CHARGES took place on a clear, cool day toward the end of October 1988. To avoid the attention it might get in Old Chapel, Middlebury's administration building, it was held in a conference room in a far corner of the campus.

Around an eight-sided table sat the four students, four friends they were allowed to bring in for moral support, three members of the Committee on Reappointment—colleagues who had known Cubeta for decades—and college provost Bruce Peterson, who presided over the hearing. Alone, across from his accusers, sat Paul Cubeta, a handsome man with a trim physique, a full head of carefully combed hair, and lively eyes behind heavy-framed glasses.

Each of the four students was asked to give his testimony. Then each was questioned by the hearing committee and cross-examined by Cubeta. Then Cubeta was allowed to testify on his own behalf.

The first to testify was Sanderson, Cubeta's student while a junior the autumn before. When Cubeta first invited him into his office, Sanderson said, he had gone enthusiastically, although he said he often left a little disturbed at the odd intimacy and moodiness of their conversations. But he happily accepted the offer to be an aide at Bread Loaf that summer and agreed to go up for a visit before the semester.

Cubeta took a picnic lunch, a half-gallon of scotch, and a bottle of suntan lotion to a secluded area of the Bread Loaf campus called the Glade. For the first 45 minutes, Sanderson told the hearing committee, everything was fine. Then the conversation turned to the limits of male

*Not his real name.

friendship, and Cubeta began talking about the repressive climate of universities when he was a student, in the fifties. Responding to Sanderson's unease, Cubeta hid behind what Sanderson called "a facade of obviousness," denying an ulterior motive before Sanderson even mentioned one.

Soon Cubeta was edging closer to Sanderson, making him uncomfortable. Afraid of offending his teacher, Sanderson said nothing. But as he grew more apprehensive, he testified, Cubeta grew more bold, kissing and fondling him.

Still unsure what to do, Sanderson said, he pondered whether it was wrong to kiss a man or whether he had just been conditioned to think so. He was also confused by his recent reading of *Women in Love*, by D. H. Lawrence, whose message, as Sanderson understood it, was that men need strong relationships with each other if they are to relate successfully to women. Cubeta, an Italian American, explained that Italian men have different, more physical ways of expressing themselves. By this time, however, he was making more strenuous advances. Finally, Sanderson testified, he told the professor it was time to go.

A few days later, Cubeta wrote Sanderson a letter, saying he looked forward to their summer together, a summer he hoped would "build on discovery, never threatening or silenced in denial." Sanderson, however, anticipated the summer with dread and confronted Cubeta when he arrived to start the semester, calling him a "dirty old man." According to Sanderson, Cubeta responded by accusing the student of harboring a secret attraction to him and to men in general.

All through his testimony, Sanderson's voice wavered, and in his summarizing remarks, he almost broke down. He explained that he had been caused great mental anguish, but he didn't feel justified in venting his anger, he said, "simply because I am not dealing with someone who is in his right mind."

NEXT TO TESTIFY WAS JASON ALBRIGHT, who had graduated in 1983. Considered one of the brightest students in the English department, Albright said it had pleased Cubeta greatly when he finally took a course from him in the fall of his senior year.

Albright had welcomed Cubeta's friendship: the teacher had been sympathetic to his confusion over his relative's homosexuality and had helped him with his career plans. Even so, Albright said, he was worried that their student-teacher relationship had become blurred. After Albright wrote a poor paper about *Coriolanus*, for example, Cubeta expressed his disappointment for three hours, telling Albright he saw him as a son. When Cubeta offered Albright and his girlfriend jobs at Bread Loaf

that summer, however, he accepted.

The first week of that session, Albright also accepted an invitation for drinks at Frothingham, the Bread Loaf director's residence. The director pressed him to drink, teasing him whenever he demurred. Their conversation ranged over many subjects but settled on Cubeta's experiences in the navy and the nature of friendships between men. Cubeta encouraged Albright to talk about himself and his ideas on love, a conversation that eventually got into the disorienting effect of his relative's news. During this time, Cubeta wandered around the house turning off lights. Then he moved back to the sofa alongside Albright and took his hand as if to console him.

"I was upset, and he put his arms around me," Albright said, his cheek muscles twitching. When Cubeta started to kiss him, Albright froze. "He began to French-kiss me. I stiffened and wouldn't open my mouth. I tried to shut him out, to ignore what he was doing, to just sit there and endure it." Eventually, Albright said, he got up, went home, crawled into bed with his girlfriend, and cried himself to sleep.

When he approached Cubeta for an explanation later that summer, Albright again found himself in a compromising position. Cubeta, he said, tried to seduce him in the field outside the house, all the while telling him he was denying his true feelings. Albright tried to stay cool, saying he wasn't ready for a physical relationship. As the years went by, however, he said he grew angry at the way Cubeta had exploited his distress. But "to respond defensively to Paul's advances," he explained, "was for me an attack on the very defenses Paul seemed to offer me."

AFTER ALBRIGHT CAME DAN WILLIAMS,* another graduate from the early eighties. Williams had met Cubeta in the fall of 1980, when he was a junior, and had attracted the teacher's attention with his offbeat sense of humor. When Cubeta wrote on a paper, "You write with a pebble in your mouth and a stone in your shoe"—the type of cryptic remark for which he was well known—Williams went to his office for clarification, the first in a series of long conversations that developed into a strong friendship. Cubeta praised his poetry and even invited him to read one night by the fire at Cubeta's house when his wife was away.

To Williams, Cubeta was a "cool and worldly" father figure, a renowned scholar with whom he could be as candid as with any "drinking buddy" his own age. When Williams was offered the Bread Loaf job, he leapt at it and, despite the subsequent harassment he described, worked there for many years, a "wood-sprite workaholic."

Of all the witnesses, Williams had been the most affected by his experience with

Scandal

Cubeta. School officials worried that the stress of the hearing would be too much for him, and they were right: he had a hysterical panic attack midway through his testimony. He had covered it all up for seven long years, he sobbed, and it was tearing him apart to testify against "my boss, my friend, my idol."

Williams told the committee that when he arrived at Bread Loaf, he was informed that his quarters weren't ready and that he would have to spend the night in a room Cubeta had made up for him at Frothingham. At the end of a fireside chat accompanied by several drinks, Williams testified, Cubeta tried to kiss him. "I froze. I went into shock," he said. "I pretended that I had passed out. I never understood how all this happened without me running away or shouting out, or even pushing him away from me. I went into shock."

Cubeta helped him to bed and tried to crawl in, Williams said. "He opened my underwear and fondled my genitals. I sat bolt upright in bed and he left."

Williams told the committee members that he thought Cubeta routinely brought new aides to Bread Loaf early to seduce them. He said that if they looked carefully, as he had, they would be shocked at the number of people at the school who knew, "who could have prevented all this."

THE LAST STUDENT TO TESTIFY WAS Tom Scott, a 1983 graduate who met Cubeta as a freshman, when the professor was his adviser. Like the others, he had had many conferences in Cubeta's office, talks that Scott recalled as being marked by "an unusual intensity." Many conversations concerned Scott's father, an ex-marine, and Scott's interest in theater, dance, field hockey, and other "effeminate things." Scott said Cubeta may have thought those were signs that he was either gay or "ferociously repressing it."

At the end of Scott's freshman year, in the spring of 1980, he joined Cubeta on a picnic on the Bread Loaf campus for a discussion of some of Scott's fiction. Cubeta brought food and drinks, and the two talked and drank in the sun outside the secluded Robert Frost Cabin. The professor praised the 18-year-old's work and then turned to the topics of friendship and trust, continuing, Scott said, "a certain very pleasant intimacy." Three drinks made Scott a little woozy, clouding his memory of what happened next. All he remembered was talking inside the cabin and then waking up outside. Later, as memory filtered back, he recalled being kissed, objecting to it, and becoming ill.

As they drove back down the mountain, Scott said, Cubeta made a curious remark:

"This will be some story for you. An old man takes a young man out in the woods to seduce him and winds up being seduced himself." For years, he accepted Cubeta's interpretation: he had seduced his teacher.

The last witness to testify was Jane Lorentzen, the nurse at Bread Loaf who had helped bring the accusers together. Lorentzen told the committee that there had been "rumors and innuendo" about Cubeta during the summers of 1986 and 1987 but that it wasn't until the summer of 1988 that she began to believe something was going on. She said Cubeta had asked her to keep an eye on Sanderson and to refer all complaints of sexual harassment to him directly instead of to the college health service. He also seemed preoccupied with another student's emotional troubles, which struck her as a reprise on a familiar, disturbing pattern. She described it as "the identification of a vulnerable person, the creation of a special friendship by Professor Cubeta, then the creation of a feeling of indebtedness, followed by a seduction bid that involved the use of an intoxicant."

AFTER CUBETA WAS FIRST CONFRONTED with the charges, at the end of the 1988 Bread Loaf session, he seemed shaken but passed up a chance to retire early, calling it "a tacit admission of guilt." Instead, he chose the hearing, even though he maintained, quoting Emily Dickinson, that the ordeal produced a pain that "swallowed being." He expressed his relief at being judged by admired colleagues who would be his friends "whatever the outcome" and whose anguish at being there "must be close" to his own.

Cubeta tried to shake hands with his accusers and delivered his rebuttals as if they were journal entries addressed to each personally. At one point, he looked at Albright and said, "Jason, our bond can stand anything," prompting Tom Scott to jump up, pound the tabletop, and swear. The four students, who Jane Lorentzen thought were being "revictimized" by having to listen to Cubeta's testimony, were excused from the hearing, leaving Cubeta to deliver the rest of his defense to the committee alone.

Cubeta denied the charges. His rebuttal to Sanderson disputed certain basic testimony. "I have to say I am incapable of having an erection," he testified. "I do not croon. Nor do I remember humping against your leg." Whatever brief moments of physical contact they had, he said, were bids "to close space, emotionally and physically," which were misperceived as sexual overtures. He said Albright and Williams had also misinterpreted his motives.

When it came to Scott, however, Cubeta went into detail, saying that Scott's presence at the hearing had left him "desperately distressed." The seduction had been

all Scott's doing, Cubeta said: he, not Scott, was the victim. They had embraced inside the Frost cabin and then had gone outside, where Scott threw him down on a blanket. The force of the overture and "the awful look" in the student's eyes had frightened him. Nothing sexual came to pass, and the two merely embraced until Scott passed out. It was only years later that the two spoke about the incident, at which time, Cubeta claimed, the student admitted that it was only part of a phase of "macho experimenting."

That the three older accusers had accepted jobs year after year proved that there had been no harassment, Cubeta argued. That they had waited years before coming forward lessened the gravity of their accusations. The students were gang-ing up on him, with one feeding the other's dark interpretation of what had been merely a series of innocent misunderstandings. Wasn't there a statute of limitations on such accusations? Didn't most of the charges in question even predate the college's sexual-harassment policy?

Cubeta didn't help himself when he defended his effort to "close emotional and psychological space" with Sanderson by invoking the memory of a tortured relationship with another student, who had eventually committed suicide. There was a great similarity between Sanderson and the student, whom Cubeta referred to only as Daniel.* He suggested that, like Daniel, Sanderson was unstable and that Cubeta was worried that he might hurt himself.

Cubeta explained that he and Daniel had been very close; in fact, the student had written him a letter shortly before his suicide and had offered him his papers and journals. The student's death left Cubeta feeling guilty, he explained, as if he had let the student down. Then, to the astonishment of the committee and the witnesses, he read the letter aloud.

"What I looked forward to, the letters in my mailbox, the sensitive nature of the friendship, the office visits after hours, the walks, the talks, the embraces, but the love, the affection, the acceptance in a world of constant rejection, the giving, oh, the giving," would have no meaning without the love between them, the student wrote. "But now the paranoia sets in," the letter continued. "Does he have many friends like me that pass through his life like zephyrs on the sea?"

Cubeta seemed to be reading the note to demonstrate his sensitivity. Others in the room who had known Daniel heard a different message.

Daniel was a 1985 Middlebury College graduate who, like the others in the room, had met Cubeta in his Shakespeare course and had grown close to him. Like the others, he had been offered a job as a Bread Loaf aide after graduation, but he was not

rehired for the next year. He had performed poorly and had made many at the school uncomfortable with his morbid and often violent poetry. In July 1986 he committed suicide in his parents' Connecticut home, leaving a telephone message for Cubeta shortly before he killed himself. "Where were you when I needed you?" Daniel reportedly asked.

In another suicide note left at his parents' home, Daniel said he was ending his life because he was mentally ill and was certain he faced a life of institutionalization. But others in the room wondered if Daniel, too, had been a victim of abuse.

"Our mouths just fell open," Albright said later.

FROM THE BEGINNING, PROVOST PETERSON had likened the hearing to a grand jury investigation. If the committee thought the allegations were well founded, it could inform the president and ask that he turn the matter over to the board of trustees, the only body with the authority to dismiss a tenured faculty member. And that was exactly what the committee decided, although it did so with a note of tender collegiality.

"Whatever the outcome," philosophy professor Stanley Bates said, "I want you to know that I don't consider you a moral monster."

The committee was not as tender in its recommendation to Robison. Whether Cubeta's conduct reflected an emotional disturbance or an abuse of power, he was obviously unfit to teach, they concluded.

Even so, it took the school seven weeks to inform the alleged victims of the hearing's outcome. Peterson told them that a new director had been named; that Cubeta had requested early retirement from teaching, which had been granted; and that Cubeta would "continue a limited role in fundraising activities." What they were not told was that Robison had created an entirely new administrative position for him at Bread Loaf as director of development, raising funds and administering scholarships. This they learned later in the year, as the full extent of the new job became clear.

Robison's decision to reappoint Cubeta appears to be connected to his skill as a fund-raiser. Several of the large grants he had landed, such as the \$1.5 million from the Bingham Trust to bring rural schoolteachers to Bread Loaf, might have been imperiled had he been cut. "It seemed a smart thing at the time to keep him in control," says Peterson, who advised Robison during that time. "They were complicated grants. He knew the details, and he knew how to run them."

In a letter announcing the changeover at Bread Loaf, Cubeta depicted it as a natural step and said it was not "adieu or farewell." He was also the subject of a flatter-

ing profile in the Bread Loaf newsletter that spring celebrating his 25-year reign. In fact, according to Bread Loaf staff, Cubeta was still making important decisions for the school even after his successor, James Maddox, took office.

"All of them felt incredibly used," a Bread Loaf nurse says of the four students. "They all felt they had bared their souls inside that hearing room but they were no longer considered important. Not only did it seem like Cubeta had gotten off scot-free but that he had been promoted, too."

Although the allegations involved possible criminal violations, the school had not gone to the authorities, nor did it inform the students that they could. "Did I tell the students that they could have gone to the courts if they wanted?" Peterson said later. "I don't think I should have to. Why should I? I assumed they know all about the U.S. court system. They are, after all, college graduates."

The college did offer the students 10 hours of free psychological counseling several months after the hearing. "Give my 10 hours to Mr. Cubeta," Sanderson wrote back to Robison.

"My strongest interest now is simply to put an end to the entire business," Peterson wrote to the students, a sentiment shared by Robison. "I trust now we can put all this behind us," the president wrote, "and while you get on with your careers, we will continue to try to make Middlebury the sort of place that we can all be proud of."

TO THE BEST OF ITS ABILITY, THE school kept a lid on the story. Even deans inside Old Chapel were not aware of what had gone on at the hearing or how the case was eventually resolved.

Other faculty members heard bits and pieces but were essentially left in the dark. And many preferred it that way, as if further explanations entailed a violation of privacy or academic freedom. Many assumed it was a delicate matter that was being handled with appropriate discretion. A few others, schooled in the British tradition of the "gay don," wondered what all the fuss was about. Many faculty members assumed that the students had not been Middlebury undergraduates but older students, which lessened the offense in their minds. Others heard that the sex had been consensual. Many wondered how they could have come back year after year to Bread Loaf. Some even saw the reappointment as a vindication of Cubeta.

"Installing him in his new position was a signal that the kids were out to get him unfairly, or that the whole thing was an unjustified attempt to smear a colleague, or that it was all a homophobic witch-hunt," explains one history professor.

Adds English professor Robert Hill,

Scandal

"When you get right down to it, faculty are very protective of one another."

If it was typical of the school's institutional culture to discourage self-criticism, it was doubly so when sex was involved. And so a "Puritan hush-hush," as D. H. Lawrence described it, fell over the college.

"People decided they would rather not speak out," says sociology professor Margaret Nelson, who heads the women's studies department. "There was fear, general fear about speaking out, period, plus a worry for inflaming homophobia. Why was this case such a big deal when it happens so often the other way around?"

To Hugh Coyle, a junior administrator at Bread Loaf, faculty inaction smacked of an offensive double standard. The year before, when a Middlebury fraternity was suspended after hanging a bloodied female mannequin out a window, there had been a stream of faculty memos condemning the act. "It was ironic that they made such a big fuss over a symbolic issue of harassment when here was real flesh and blood and yet they said nothing," Coyle notes.

Coyle, a Middlebury grad himself, worked for Cubeta as a Bread Loaf staff member the year the students made their allegations. Cubeta was money to Middlebury, he had warned the accusers. But when Cubeta was reappointed, Coyle grew angry. He believed Cubeta was pathological and compulsive, and would strike again if given the chance.

Coyle was able to convince the new director that Cubeta should be banned from the Bread Loaf campus that summer. But there was still the worry that he might invite students to his home. To force the college's hand, Coyle and other Bread Loaf administrators offered to resign. The reappointment was withdrawn, and Maddox opened the 1989 Bread Loaf session with an oblique reference to the "painful" events that led to Cubeta's departure.

But the college continued to pay Cubeta and kept mum about why he retired early. Cubeta told some at the school that he might even teach in the Washington, D.C., area, where he was spending the winters as a fund-raising consultant.

For nearly six months, Middlebury was able to keep the case under wraps. Although leads and rumors were abundant, the local *Addison Independent* did not discuss the case. Then came the story in the *Campus*.

THERE WAS AN UNBROKEN STRING OF frigid days in the first week of December 1989, shortly after news about the case broke. The reports sent the school reeling.

"It was a shock, a deep shock," says Liz Zale, then a senior. "People generally don't

think bad things can happen around here." One of Cubeta's alleged victims was threatening to file a lawsuit seeking compensation for the cost of his senior year.

Although Middlebury director of counseling services Gary Margolis wouldn't comment on the case directly, he notes that there are times when institutions operate like dysfunctional families, "where there are injunctions against confronting the issues, of talking about them, in order for people to avoid shame and embarrassment. A college can be just as dysfunctional as a family, unable to come to terms with its darkness, with its shadows, in the Jungian sense—those aspects we'd rather sweep under the rug."

"There's a lot of denial," an English professor says, describing how his colleagues are reacting now that the basic facts are out. "It's a scary story. A man everybody worked with for 30 years had a dark side to him that no one knew about."

In early December 1990, Olin Robison, dogged by questions of what he knew and when he knew it, announced that a committee of three trustees, including a nun, would review how he had dealt with the matter. He also wrote a letter to the Middlebury community—his first public acknowledgment that anything had happened—defending the college's handling of the case. "At no time to my knowledge has the college failed to respond swiftly and decisively to charges of sexual harassment," he wrote.

The administration denied any prior knowledge of Cubeta's misconduct, or that Hill had gone to Robison in 1977 about student harassment. "You have to be god-damned careful not to act on hearsay or rumor," Hill says. "But two senior faculty members coming forward with their concerns is certainly not the same as rumor."

Still, the Cubeta case was a watershed. For beneath the defensiveness a new sense was emerging that the college had handled the case shabbily, that it should act promptly to restore its lost honor by making full disclosure to the community. Now that more information was available, many faculty members felt impatient with Old Chapel's "PR games," as one untenured instructor puts it, games that compromised "the moral health of the community."

According to professor Victor Nuovo, the issue was abuse of power, pure and simple—a teacher forcing ideas on a student. "Someone who acts in that way loses the right to occupy his position," he says. "If you are tempted by that power, then you don't belong in a community like ours, and a community that doesn't respond quickly to remove someone like that is acting irresponsibly." □

William McGowan (Middlebury '79) is a journalist in New York City.