

In the spring of 1977, when I was 15 years old, I began taking lessons from Steve Shipps, then Concertmaster of the Omaha Symphony, in Omaha, Nebraska. I lived in Lincoln at the time, and my dad drove me to lessons that year. The following year, 1978-79, I moved to Omaha, leaving high school early to move to Omaha, so I could study with Steve, attend the University of Nebraska-Omaha, and play in the Omaha Symphony. Steve was Concertmaster and had coached me on the music for the recent Full-time Section First Violin audition, which I won.

Almost immediately after I moved to Omaha, my plans for the year fell apart. The head of the music department at UNO (trying to remember his name...) and Steve had assured me that even though Steve was only an adjunct on the faculty at UN-O (teaching one Music Appreciation class), and not the violin professor (who was Paul Todd at that time), I would be allowed to enroll in violin with Steve for credit. However, this plan was not approved by the UN-O administration. I was not willing to study with Prof. Todd, as I had moved to Omaha specifically to continue to study with Steve. If I was not enrolled for lessons with Todd, I couldn't get credit for lessons at all, a real problem as a performance major. I would also have to pay for private lessons with Steve instead of having them covered by my tuition. Then, there were scheduling conflicts between the Omaha Symphony and the University Symphony. The University Symphony conductor was not willing to excuse me, and with the number of absences (five over the course of the first semester) my grade would drop to a D, which would cause me to lose my scholarship. I will never forget sitting in the UN-O Music Department Chairman's office, hearing the news that I could not attend school, and had no way to pay for lessons. Steve and the Chairman were both there, and could only say, "Yes, we told you could do this, and we were just wrong. Sorry. Tough luck."

I was devastated, living on my own for the first time at 17 in a tiny studio apartment. I didn't know what to do. I had already started rehearsals with the Omaha Symphony. After an evening rehearsal a few days later, Steve invited me to come over to his house, along with several other musicians, and hang out after rehearsal. I was flattered, I was desperate, I was in an absolute panic over how I could go to school at all, support myself, or pay for lessons.

Up to the year I was living in Omaha, nothing inappropriate ever happened with Steve, even though I had a teenage crush on him. (This was also certainly because my dad was driving me to lessons and sat reading a book during my lesson.) Steve taught lessons in his basement, a large room with a big couch, with a separate entrance, completely isolated from the rest of the house. While Teri and infant Lindsay slept upstairs, Steve and a group of musicians from the orchestra could party and listen to music as late as anyone wanted.

I was the first to arrive at Steve's house that night, and as the others arrived Steve poured me a strong screwdriver. I'd never had one before, or any significant amount of alcohol. (A couple of sips of my dad's beer, one drink at the only party I went to in high school).

Steve assured me that he would take care of me, that he would make sure I got violin lessons, we could exchange them for babysitting his daughter Lindsay! Because of my experience caring for my brother, 12 years younger than I, while my mom, also a violinist, played rehearsals and taught students, I was Teri's (Steve's wife) favorite babysitter already.

There were several joints (cannabis) being passed around, and several people laughingly assured me that I would not know how to inhale the first time, so no need to worry about getting too high. I instinctively knew how. I was very drunk, and very high, incoherent. Much of that evening is a blackout.

Completely wasted, I wandered into the unfinished part of Steve's basement, where the bathroom was. The light switch was not easy to find, and I was just wandering around in the dark. I think there was a bass player named Craig (last name?) who finally found me and sent me back in to the finished part of the basement. Gradually everyone else left, and there I was in Steve's familiar basement.

Steve had sex with me on that couch, where I always unpacked my violin for a lesson. So, that's how I lost my virginity. I do vaguely remember that moment, though not much else after the first couple of drinks that night. I remember knowing what was happening, seeing and feeling my body from afar, with the feeling that my life was already horribly off course and there was now no repairing it.

After that, I spent a lot of time at the Shipps house. I was only going to school part time, having lost my scholarship. I babysat regularly, often spending the night in the spare bedroom. Sometimes we had violin lessons, sometimes Steve just wanted a blowjob on the couch. I was horribly in love with him, obsessed with him, and simultaneously consumed with guilt and anguish. It was a dreadful year. I was deeply depressed, spending a lot of time alone in my apartment crying. I had no other friends and did not make any. I spent a lot of time tearing off my cuticles until there was no skin around my nails at all. Once I showed up for a lesson and had torn my fingers up to the point they were bleeding. Steve angrily washed and bandaged them, then continued the lesson. I was so grateful he'd noticed even though he seemed irritated at me.

It is hard to reflect on the emotional and psychological effects of the time with Steve. I didn't blame him; in fact, for many years the way I referred to what happened with Steve was to say, "I had an affair with my teacher." I was drinking as heavily as I could (I was underage, but Steve's liquor cabinet was kept stocked), smoking pot when I could get it. I met a young guy occasionally at UN-Omaha since I was enrolled part time there. I remember trying to make conversation with these other students. The chaos and intensity of everything with Steve made these college students seem like they were from another universe, and a pretty lame one at that! Of course, they were actually my peers, but I simply had no way to relate to them.

Teri Shipps didn't know about Steve and I, although this may have been her just choosing not to see what was happening. I remember Steve coming out of the

shower in nothing but a towel when Steve and Teri were getting ready to go out. Teri gasped at him for appearing that way in front of me; he laughed it off like it was no big deal. I remember at least once when Steve tried to get me in bed with Teri, who was conked out in bed on sleeping pills. He had me rubbing her back, but she just wouldn't wake up. She never acknowledged anything.

Finally, near the end of the school year, I moved back home to Lincoln. My life in Omaha was an unmitigated disaster, and I just commuted to Omaha for the last couple of months of the Omaha Symphony season. I prepared for and took auditions for other universities, and went to Indiana University the following September.

My sister's journal describes conversations I had with her about Steve. I don't remember the conversations with her at all, but even more troubling is that I don't remember many of the details that I describe to her, even though as I hear them in her words I recognize their truth. I worked very diligently to forget.

A year later, I was 18 and was back in Nebraska following a year at Indiana University in Bloomington. I went to see Steve at his house in Omaha with my friend Donna, my best friend from high school and another violinist. We were both preparing for summer festivals and needed lessons in preparation. It was evening, and after Steve provided drinks and cannabis, and then wanted to have sex with both of us. I would probably have done anything he wanted, but Donna was freaked out (the normal reaction) and we left. I didn't speak to her again for about 35 years I felt so humiliated afterward; we have been back in touch with each other recently for which I am very grateful.

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As far as how my teaching has been affected, I think the main way has been that I am extremely careful about my relationships with students. I have never socialized with my students, other than at public, post-concert events. My teaching studio at my home has a large window overlooking the garden and the street. Students don't enter the rest of my house, unless they need a drink or a restroom.

There is no couch in my office at TU or at home. I don't even hug my students, except after degree recitals in front of their parents. I don't discuss my personal life, or my students'. If someone needs to talk, I listen, but if it seems to be an ongoing issue, I try to make sure the student gets help elsewhere, while staying on track with our violin progress. That is one of the most damaging things about using lesson time to have sex with your students, though as a student I had no inkling of this at all, the value of those minutes ticking by. Now, as a professor trying to make sure that students meet both musical and academic requirements, and are prepared for juries and recitals with the correct repertoire, I hate to waste even a moment of lesson time.

As String Department Coordinator at the University of Tulsa I also meet with advisees every semester. I keep the door open for these meetings, since nobody is playing the violin. If there is no music coming out, my office door stays open.

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Maybe as a reaction to this situation, the deepest drive in my teaching is to do the right thing for every student. Perhaps my students are not the caliber of the kids Steve has always taught, but the best compliment I ever received from a student was someone who told me, "The most important thing you taught me was the joy of playing the violin."

After spending the last few weeks revisiting one of the most excruciating and dark periods of my life, the most difficult question to answer is, "How did this affect your emotional life in the years since?" Without going into too much personal detail, I will summarize by saying that long-term relationships with men have been less than satisfactory and generally painful, including my 13-year marriage. I have also had a long-term battle with depression and anxiety. However, I must also emphasize that I am a stable, functional adult, established professionally and financially, with two college-aged sons who are also doing well (and of whom I am very proud!).

The reasons that I have come forward with this information now:

1. Sammy Sussman asked
2. I heard that Steve Shipps has continued to have contact with young female students that they find uncomfortable

I seek no financial or legal action of any kind. Since the Michigan Daily report came out on Dec. 10, 2018, Steve has left the U of M campus and has announced his retirement in May. This is more than I had ever hoped for: that there be no possibility of the same thing happening to another teenaged girl.

I also feel an obligation and a willingness to support younger women who may be less willing to use their own names, but choose to pursue further action, whether legal, civil, or otherwise, to take care of themselves.