

# PAUL ARCAND BEHIND THE WHEEL OF A NEW HARD- HITTING FILM

*DRIVING TO THE EDGE* WILL MAKE ITS QUEBEC DEBUT IN LATE APRIL. IN IT, PAUL ARCAND TAKES AN UNFLINCHING LOOK AT THE PERILS OF SPEEDING AMONG YOUTH AND LIVES UP TO HIS REPUTATION FOR ASKING THE QUESTIONS THAT MATTER.

BY ANNIE BOUTET

Journalist and producer Paul Arcand has built a career on getting to the bottom of things. He is known for his hard-hitting on-air interviews with guests. And now, film is providing a medium to explore social issues of interest in a different way.

In summer 2010 while working as a radio show host, Arcand began to notice the high number of car accidents involving invincible-minded young drivers. As a father of two boys, he felt especially concerned. "I would like to have seen this film when my sons were getting their licenses," he says during the interview. And so he decided to investigate.

Determined to make a documentary that would ring true, Arcand cast a wide net from Quebec City to Montreal, including the Montérégie region and Drummondville, where a horrific accident claimed the lives of four young men in 2010. He then spent months getting to know the victims' friends and family. "I wanted to let them express their feelings," he explains. "Young people feel persecuted by adults. And kids age 16 to 24 feel targeted by the media. I wanted their voices to be heard alongside the facts. That's why I didn't turn to the experts to provide any big conclusions."

To research his film, Paul Arcand also spent entire nights on patrol with the Sûreté du Québec and Quebec City and Montreal police forces. "When the police stop a car going 180 km/h,

they don't know how old the driver is. And when it turns out to be an 18-year-old, they try to understand. They attribute it to recklessness, but there's something bigger below the surface," he says.

## Not a lecture

The film encourages reflection as it examines five serious accidents and presents interviews with young victims and their friends and family. Some have narrowly escaped death, others are paralyzed or bear emotional scars, and still more are wrestling with grief.

The numbers speak for themselves. From 2006 to 2010,<sup>1</sup> speeding caused 44% of annual deaths on our roads. Youth age 16 to 24 commit 40% of major speeding infractions. Yet, Arcand didn't want the film to be a lesson for youth. It felt too easy, even banal. "When you're immersed in the subject, you start to see things more clearly," he explains. "People tell you their stories and you can imagine yourself in their place. I did stupid things when I was young like everyone else. But I was lucky, and some people aren't. That was the jumping-off point for the film."

## Everything can change in a second

During his interviews, over and over Arcand heard victims tell of how their lives had changed in a fraction of a second. And of how if it had



been another day or another occasion, it could have been other friends killed in similar accidents. And they all know it. "In some cases, people are reluctant to point fingers," says the filmmaker. "Those affected don't necessarily hate the driver. There is an incredible resilience."

Arcand had to carefully build the trust of his subjects before they would confide in him. Of course, his reputation helped. According to Arcand, it's a question of letting the story unfold naturally. "I listened to parents living with a handicapped child they had chosen to keep alive in spite of the impact on their own

## DENISE ROBERT ON PAUL ARCAND

Before working on the film *Thieves of Innocence*, Paul Arcand had never picked up a movie camera. However, he was the one and the only person Denise Robert could think of when she decided to produce her documentary.



PHOTO: PIERRE BÉDARD

Paul Arcand hosts the *Puisqu'il faut se lever* morning show on Montreal station 98.5 FM. His film credits as a writer, director and associate producer comprise *Thieves of Innocence [Les voleurs d'enfance]* (2005), *Quebec Under the Influence [Québec sur ordonnances]* (2007), and *[Driving to the Edge] (Dérapages)* (2012).

## SUPPORT FROM DESJARDINS

Desjardins General Insurance is sponsoring *Driving to the Edge*. The film, produced by Cinémaginaire and Alliance Vivafilm, will make its Quebec debut on April 27.

lives, and I tried to grasp and portray their thinking on screen. Sure there's an editorial line, but you have to be faithful to their experience," Arcand states.

Even after several viewings, the producer admits that certain moments from his interviews still affect him deeply. "It's heartbreaking. You end up building relationships and getting attached to these people."

### Opening the lines of communication

Paul Arcand hopes the film will spark debate and discussion, because so many of the issues

need to be brought into the open. To gauge the film's impact, it was shown to a group of secondary 5 students. The screening led to intense debate on the minimum age for driver's licenses, curfews, and parental attitudes. The teens admitted they were relieved not be on the receiving end of a lecture.

While some situations call for a tightening of the rules, others require a different approach, believes Arcand. "In Quebec we have a tendency to abdicate responsibility," he explains. "We need restrictions. Personally, I agree with researchers who believe the best way to limit

risk is to gradually introduce young people to driving. It is our responsibility as parents. We don't have to treat them like babies, but we do need to establish a dialogue. Laws alone will not improve road safety." ■

1. Data from the Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec (SAAQ)

"I needed someone who wasn't afraid to get to the bottom of things, because it was a very delicate subject," she says. "Paul has that curiosity. He keeps on asking intelligent questions until he's got all the answers. And he's not afraid."

Actually, Arcand didn't accept right away. "He said he didn't even know how to take a photo. I told him I wasn't after a postcard-perfect movie, that we'd simply replace his microphone with a camera and

surround him with the right people, so all he'd have to do was ask questions." And so a remarkable documentary was born.

Denise Robert says that working with Arcand is very intellectually stimulating, and so she jumped at his idea about making *Driving to the Edge*, which touches an issue they both hold dear. The producer, who has now worked with Arcand three times, has nothing but praise for her partner.

"He's a hard worker and incredibly adaptable. He doesn't mind leaving his comfort zone, and he has tremendous respect for the people he interviews. He's creative, intelligent, and talented. He's determined to seek out the truth to help us grow as a society," she says.



Denise Robert, President of Cinémaginaire Productions