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# Town Crier

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# Bloody battle of the two houses of horror



CARMINE BONANNO/TOWN CRIER

Old Forest Hill Rd. resident Rachel Brown, above, spends months working on her morbid creations, hoping each year to beat...



CARMINE BONANNO/TOWN CRIER

...the Orbachs of Briar Hill Ave. (Ruvyn Orbach, in front, with parents Lila and Carl behind). Brown has even produced a video documentary, called *Bloody Rivalry*, about the hitherto secret competition, and is showing it on the Internet.

# Ghoulish rivalry has built for a decade

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# Ghoulish rivalry has built for a decade

**SANDIE BENITAH**  
Town Crier

It's been going on for at least 10 years but it doesn't look like the bloody Halloween rivalry between two North Toronto families is going to end any time

soon.

Each year, Rachel Brown, a 24-year-old Old Forest Hill Rd. resident, spends months preparing for the scariest night of the year. While working away in her basement workshop, she often wonders if this is the year her ghoulish creations

will outdo the mastery of the Orbachs, a 70-something couple with a haunt on Briar Hill Ave. that attracts about 1,300 kids each year.

"I don't get as many kids because of the location," said Brown, estimating

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# Haunted house owners have more tricks up their sleeves

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she receives several hundred visitors each Halloween. "The kids on the street have all grown up and moved out and, not a lot of people give out candy."

But Brown doesn't let that stop her. Each year she adds to the haunted cemetery scene in her front yard.

And while most homes in the area are decorated with the latest from Canadian Tire, all of Brown's props are made with her own delicate hands.

"I don't want to have the same props as everyone else in the area. It has to be original."

This year, she will delight kids with a ghost that will float across the property.

Plus, she's created a coffin that will open and close, revealing an eerie light and nightmarish noises. She has also created new tombstones, hand carving each of them with a rotary tool.

But perhaps her most creative creation has been a six-minute short film, entitled *Bloody Rivalry*, documenting the secret competition she's been having with the Orbachs through the centu... er ... years.

The video has become an underground hit, receiving the best news documentary award

from Centennial College and receiving more than 5,000 hits when it was featured as Yahoo's featured fest of the day. It will also be featured at the First Take Student Film Festival. The video can now be seen on YouTube, where it has received about 2,500 hits, or on her website, [www.hauntonthehill.com](http://www.hauntonthehill.com).

In the video, the sweet and unassuming Orbachs are interviewed by Brown who plays a seemingly innocent girl, merely interested in the couple's Halloween spectacle. In an off-camera narrative, she jokes about stealing their secrets and kicks herself for not thinking of certain scary props herself.

In fact, the Orbachs had no idea what the premise of Brown's video was until she sent it to them quite a few months later.

"I haven't heard from them since," said Brown. "I don't think they like me anymore."

Carl Orbach, the 77-year-old mastermind behind the Briar Hill haunt, said that couldn't be further from the truth. Plus, he doesn't see her as a rival.

"I thought (the video) was great," he said. "I take my hat off to anybody who does anything like this."

"Nearly everyone

who does it after a while quits."

Perhaps he is getting tired of rivalries.

He remembered a man who lived near Allen Rd. who had alligators floating around his house on Halloween.

"He was a rival," said Orbach. "The couple separated and so he stopped a couple of years ago."

"He ended up coming over to our house last year."

The Orbachs made headlines in 2004 when their infamous life-like masks they often use as props were stolen from their front yard. After the media made the family's story public, North Torontonians donated dozens of masks to the family. Incredibly, the thieves ended up giving the masks back, leaving them anonymously on the porch.

This year, however, it looks like Brown will beat the Orbachs in the publicity war. She appeared on CBC's Metro Morning radio show and was scheduled to appear on Breakfast Television.

But the Orbachs have their own trick up their sleeve.

"This year, even Starbucks is coming by to serve hot chocolate and coffee," Orbach said.

And so, the bloody rivalry continues.