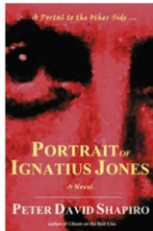


Lexington's Colonial Times Magazine

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**Lexington Author
Peter Shapiro on
writing, and his three
novels [so far] P14**



**Entrepreneurial Women
Make ART their business! P16**

**CARY HALL CONCERTS
ANNOUNCE EXCITING
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Committed to the Craft

Between the initial idea and the finished novel is a whole lot of hard work. Lexington author Peter Shapiro finally made it to the other side and he hasn't looked back.

BY LAURIE ATWATER

Lexington author Peter Shapiro took his dog Penny Lane on a morning walk every day. One morning strange words came into his head—"ghosts on the Red Line." He had no idea what they meant or where they came from, but his imagination immediately began to engage with an idea.

"It's a mysterious process, I have no idea where these ideas come from," Shapiro says. The curious phrase made him think. "What if people actually began to see ghosts of their departed on the subway—what would happen? Not crazy people like Jesus or celebrities or Hitler," he says. "Actual people that they had known and cared about..." From that kernel of an idea, Shapiro says, the writing of "Ghosts on the Red Line" went pretty fast.

"Ghosts on the Red Line" was Peter Shapiro's first published book, but it wasn't his first effort. He spent five years laboring over his first manuscript and never told a soul that he was working on a book. Not even his wife Bernadette. He explains, "I had always wanted to write, but I didn't know whether I could do it and I didn't want people asking, 'How's the book coming?'"

At the end of five years, he had a story, but he knew it wasn't "good enough for prime time."

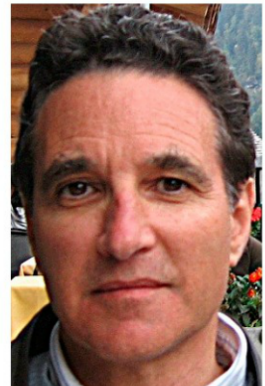
He put it away, but Shapiro had learned a valuable lesson. "I had decided that I was going to whack away at it until I got to the end of a story or decided that I couldn't do it," he says. After five years he knew he could do it.

Hermes Baby and the Left Bank

Like many young idealists, Shapiro had attempted fiction writing in his youth and failed miserably. "Right after college I went to Europe with my Hermes

The Proving Ground

Shapiro had never really abandoned his goal of becoming a writer. He did for many years write more PowerPoints than novels, but when that chapter of his life was over, he turned back to the torture of writing. This time he had some life experience to draw on and that's what he used to develop the lead character Harry West in "The Trail of Money."

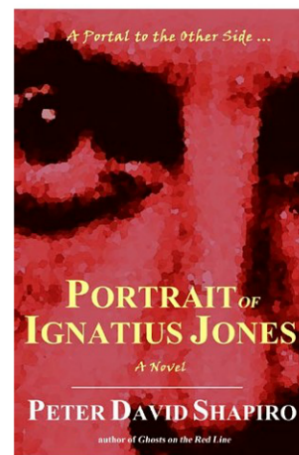
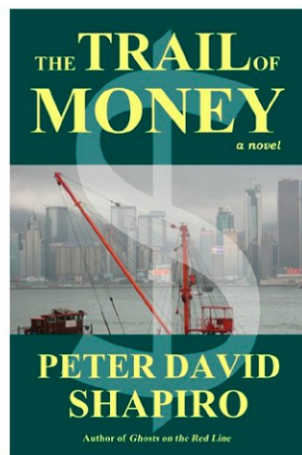
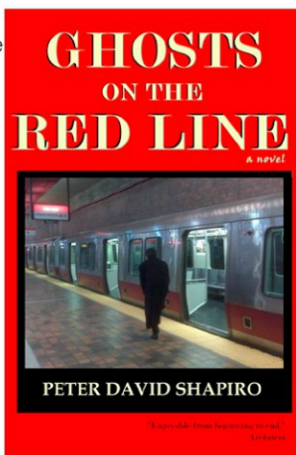


Peter Shapiro

Peter Shapiro's books are available from Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Book Ends in Winchester and the Book Shop in Somerville.

Find lots of fun information on Shapiro's website:

peterdshapiro.com



Baby (a small portable typewriter) and romantic ideas. I always read a lot and like everyone, I was reading about the writers on the Left Bank and the romance of it all," he laughs. "It didn't happen. I put paper in the typewriter and nothing came out!" He sent the typewriter home to Montreal. "I was pretty young; I had the desire, but I didn't have the stuff."

Shapiro went on to have a very successful career as a management consultant with Arthur D. Little where he specialized in cable television and telecommunications for twenty-six years. It was during this time that he and his wife Bernadette Nelson moved to Lexington from Arlington to settle in and raise a family.

Harry is a management consultant and Shapiro drew on his business expertise and his first-hand knowledge of Hong Kong as he developed the character and plot. Hong Kong he explains is "a fascinating and beautiful place—a lively city." Fittingly Shapiro also describes it as a "materialistic city" where they concentrate on making money and "are very unsentimental about it." It was there that Shapiro put Harry West to work on a high stakes business deal that morphs into a mystery and a thriller with criminals and thugs, corruption and lots of money. "When I got to the end," he says, "I realized that it was doable. I could have an arc—a beginning, middle and end! But the book itself wasn't ready for prime time." After

five years he still wasn't giving up. The laborious business of crafting a perfect sentence, looking for a better word, editing and editing again was just part of the process that he had come to love. His commitment to keep writing was about to pay off.

Ghosts on the Red Line

"The Trail of Money" was still sitting in a drawer when Shapiro got the idea about the Red Line. "I couldn't stop thinking about it," he says. "What would happen if people saw their loved ones? And when the word got out, what would the MBTA do? What would

Continued on page 40

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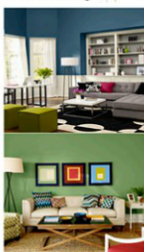


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the mayor do or the Catholic Church? What would they feel?" Now that he had proven to himself that he could finish a novel, the notion of turning this idea into a book was not so daunting.

At the time Shapiro wasn't into the paranormal; he hadn't thought much about it. "Once I got that notion, I had to delve in," he says. "Ghosts on the Red Line" put Shapiro in an unexpected space. He began researching paranormal phenomenon and psychics. He was fascinated by the business of psychics and the amounts of money a well-respected medium is paid and how in-demand they are. He created the character of Frances Gourmelon, the cookie-baking, colorfully dressing and chubby medium who routinely put mourning families in touch with their departed. Shapiro has really no idea where Frances came from or how her name entered his consciousness, but he loved her. "When I started with Frances, I thought of her as color—sort of relief. But Frances is determined and very smart. I liked her more than I thought I would."

And not surprisingly the character of Harry the management consultant from "The Trail of Money" turns up in "Ghosts on the Red Line" when his firm is hired by the city to investigate the strange occurrences. The book was published in 2011 and in its final form incorporated the paranormal, business, politics, organized religion and organized crime! After its successful publication, Shapiro went back to "The Trail of Money" and finished it.

Just Do It

As a second chapter in his life, Shapiro seems to enjoy the writing process and its endless challenges. "The first book was a process of trying to get a story going," he explains. "Knowing how it works, knowing that it is possible, took five years." His writing method was haphazard at first. "As the story went on, I would stumble up against narrative blocks and would have to resolve problems. You want the reader to be willing

to suspend disbelief long enough to stay with you. I'm assembling or creating the story as I go along." Shapiro knows firsthand the frustration of writing, but he has the will to muddle through it. "The key thing is—once I get to the end of the book—that's like twenty percent of the work," he says. "it has to be revised over and over again."

Getting Published

These days publishing is a completely revolutionized industry. Many writers who would never get the attention of main stream publishers can use one of the many self-publishing platforms including CreateSpace from Amazon which is the tool that Shapiro uses. Tools like this also come with Amazon's distribution through its online bookstore. What used to be an impossible feat for a new writer—getting books onto the shelves of bookstores and into the hands of readers—has become possible. Shapiro explains that each book is produced on demand as orders roll in. The author uploads pages and even the cover design through the CreateSpace portal and they are in business. He uses a similar process to get his pages up for the eBook version "with just a few tweaks to fit the electronic product."

Of course, driving demand for the book is a trickier business. Marketing ends up taking quite a bit of an author's time and energy. Shapiro still hits the road for signings and readings as a "local author" and relies on his own website and other "Indie Book" review sites to pick up his work. Still, few writers break out in this world of new publishing. Shapiro says, "There is still an advantage to having a mainstream publisher and that is the books have a chance, there is no guaranty, but they have a chance at being reviewed in major metro papers."

The Portrait of Ignatius Jones

Shapiro is still actively marketing his last book "The Portrait of Ignatius Jones." It's a story that also has strong ties to the paranormal and the afterlife. Believers are not seeing their loved ones, they are communicating

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through the portrait of a psychic who has been dead for over a century!

Shapiro explains that he got the inspiration for the book while visiting the Museum of Fine Arts. "It was really looking at the portraits," he says. "When portraits are done by very fine artists they have a personality. These are people who are many, many, many generations gone—totally forgotten by us, but when you look at their portraits you get a sense of who they are... and that got me to thinking, 'What if you could communicate with someone through their portrait and they could reach out and communicate with you!'"

In "The Portrait of Ignatius Jones", Shapiro further amplifies the significance of the portrait by making the subject of the mysterious portrait a noted psychic from the turn of the century who made a promise to his followers that he would be accessible from the "other side" through his portrait which he had imbued with his aura.

When the portrait is discovered at a yard sale by a low level con man named Charles Phillip Tucker, the tale gets twisty and is lots of fun to follow. Once again Frances Gourmelon enters; this time as a central character. When Charles Tucker realizes the significance of the artist who painted the portrait, and the subject—especially to psychics and mediums—he immediately sees an opportunity for a lucrative scam. He cons a local woman out of her savings and sets about to establish a "Center for Spiritualist Discovery" in a small town in Vermont.

Shapiro has a great time creating the town of "Tudorsville" which is loosely based on his own travels around Woodstock where he has spent a fair amount of time. When the town resists the development of what many see as a cult, Tucker must navigate the permitting process and town politics. Shapiro says his experience living in Lexington was invaluable in creating the scene at the special meeting of the Selectmen in Tudorsville to discuss the development plan.

As the story evolves, it becomes apparent that Charles Phillip Tucker has been sucked in by his own lies. "He thinks he owns the painting, but the painting owns him," Shapiro says.

What's Ahead

Currently Shapiro is working on a fourth book. Not bad for the guy who wondered whether he could ever get to the end of a story!

"Right now, I've sort of changed my process—like a ball player changes his swing. I'm working out what this book will be about. I have a core idea, but I'm still working it out and I've taken a couple cracks at chapter one!" Peter says he is working on character development and writing back stories for his characters. He's not sure whether he will incorporate some of his old characters into this new effort or make



Shapiro at a book-signing in Somerville

a fresh start.

"Now that I've written three books, I know it can be done," he says. "I hope each book is better, more skillfully made. It's a kick to write them and I'm still enjoying it and enjoying seeing them out there. They have them at Cary and it's fun to go there and see that 'The Portrait of Ignatius Jones' is still a 14-day book!"

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