



West Essex Tribune

LIVINGSTON, NEW JERSEY, OCTOBER 17, 2019

Check us out online! www.WestEssexTribune.net

Executive by Day, Writer by Night, Local Scribe Ignites New Passion

Livingston resident Jason Shapiro has written three books in the last two years, all while holding down a full time executive position in the retail industry.

His dual work schedule allows Shapiro to work out emotions and explore his new passion of writing.

Shapiro recently published a novella, *The Magic of Mayfair*, a mostly autobiographical story that revisits a happy childhood punctuated by three sorrowful events. It is currently available for purchase on blurb.com and will soon be available on Amazon. After pitching to a few agents, he said, "I didn't want to wait to get the story out."

Shapiro just signed with an agent in advance of publishing his first children's book, *A Phone Call to Heaven*. The story is about an eight-year-old boy who builds a telephone to call his grandfather in heaven on his birthday. The agent, who is a grandmother, told Shapiro she is "ready to sell a lot of copies."

His latest book, *Brian My Pet Lion*, deals with childhood anxiety.

"All my children's books focus on emotions," said Shapiro. "I'm very inspired by my own children [an eight year old boy and an 11-year-old girl] and create stories through how I see them grow and develop."

A fourth volume is percolating in Shapiro's mind, this one focused on an eccentric inventor uncle.

Dual Inspirations

"I was always infatuated with my childhood and the simplicity, essence of being a child," said Shapiro, who thinks that the 1980s was "the last great decade to be a child."

Shapiro grew up on a cul-de-sac street Mayfair Court, named in the title of his novella. "There was a kid in every house," he said, and "The important people in my life at that time were healthy and happy – my parents, my brother, and my best friend."

Three dark events, however, color the book. "They felt like a 'barrage of uppercuts to my soul,'" Shapiro said, quoting what his character says in the book. First, his brother was di-



Jason Shapiro

agnosed with paranoid schizophrenia in 1998, and Shapiro plans to donate a percentage of his book revenues to help people suffering from mental illness.

"It took me a few years to learn to cope with this, and then the next thing happened," Shapiro said.

He had lost touch with his childhood best friend and, when he called the friend's parents in 2006, he learned that his friend had taken his own life a few months before.

Years earlier, before Shapiro moved away from Mayfair Court, his friend had told him about a letter he left in their treehouse. He went back to the street 30 years later, and had a flashback to the last time he saw the friend. The treehouse is a pivotal scene in the book.

A few years later, as 2013 rolled around, Shapiro's father was killed in a car accident.

"The novella was hard for me to write," Shapiro said. "I knew the premise but not what it would be about. Then the story came together. It took about six months."

"The children's book was easier for me. I have the idea in my mind for a long time before I write it, so it's just a matter of getting it out. My daughter has a love for reading and

writing, and helped me around the editing and proof reading," he added proudly.

"I am so grateful that, at 41, I found my life passion," Shapiro said. "This is what I love. My book will be a movie someday."

"I've always been gritty and scrappy. When I have a goal, I will figure out a way to do it."

Getting to Livingston

Shapiro grew up in South Florida, between Clearwater and Countryside, where *The Magic Of Mayfair* takes place, and then in Coral Springs. He attended Parkland High School, class of 1993.

When a corporate promotion brought him north, he and his wife, Andrea, decided to live in the same town as his uncle, Livingston resident Richard Shapiro, with an easy commute to his offices in Manhattan and Mahwah.

A character based on Uncle Richard made its way into the *Mayfair* book.

Shapiro started his retail career "from the ground up," he said. He started working during high school, and advanced from part-time associate to store manager. In 2013, he took a corporate job with the same company.

"It's rare to get to go from the stores to the corporate side," Shapiro said proudly. He supports multiple retail brands, works with leadership teams and store vice presidents, and covers finance, marketing and other operations.

"Because I worked in the stores for so many years, I love being on the corporate side now, able to help the stores. I can put myself in their shoes and perspectives."

After he gets home he spends time with the family. Then the laptop comes out, the earphones come on, preferably with movie score music, "and I'm feverishly working on something. I go to this vulnerable, free place when I'm writing. The scene is in my head. And I'm writing it out."

Shapiro sees *Mayfair* as a film, one he would like to co-direct. "I've seen every scene come to life in my mind," he said.

On his mirror at home he has a new goal listed: to get an agent for the movie.