

Living an Eventful Life:

Dean M. Shapiro reflects on a long career in the media and freelance writing

Breakthru Media Staff Report

When his friends tell Dean M. Shapiro that he should write a book about his life, his answer is always the same. “If I did that, the bookstores would have to put it in the

Fiction Section. No one would believe it!”

PHOTO BY AB SYKES PHOTOGRAPHY

An eyewitness to history in the making and even an occasional participant in some of that history, Dean has led an eventful life since August 28, 1963. That's when, as a 13-year-old, he walked proudly with his parents and siblings and 250,000 other people during the landmark March on Washington where Martin Luther King, Jr. made his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

Later on, as a career journalist in print and electronic media, he witnessed, wrote about and participated in other history-making events. Especially during the six years he worked for NBC in New York City.

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Dean M. Shapiro

As a researcher and archivist for NBC Nightly News and the Today Show, Dean worked with some of the top network producers, correspondents and anchors at 30 Rockefeller Plaza and he went on the road with them to presidential primary states during the 1980 campaign. In January 1981 he was on site with network crews when the 52 American hostages arrived at West Point after 444 days of captivity in Iran.

"It was a very memorable time for me, watching history being made and helping to document a major news organization's role in recording those events for posterity," Dean reflected. "When the videotapes arrived in-house from Jonestown, I was the one who received them and logged them in. These were tapes that our cameraman was filming when he was shot to death by Jim Jones' followers. I also handled and logged in the tape that one of our other cameramen recorded during the assassination attempt on President Reagan. I felt like I was holding pieces of history in my hands."

Over a 50-plus-year career in the media, Dean has won a number of awards and he's received lavish praise for his work. Since his arrival in New Orleans in the summer of 1981 he has been an editor and/or writer for more than a dozen newspapers, magazines and digital publications in the city and its suburbs. He estimates that he has written thousands of articles for a wide variety of publications since the start of his journalism career.

Two New Orleans events in particular stand out above nearly all of the others for him: being present in the French Quarter the night the Saints won the Super Bowl and several nights later watching the team's jubilant



Dean with Rockin' Dopsie Jr. at the Slidell Crab Festival in 2017.

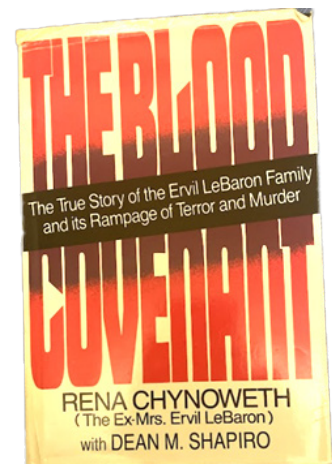
victory parade up St. Charles Avenue with Drew Brees and Sean Peyton holding up the Lombardi Trophy.

"That victory by a local team was more than just a win in a big game," Dean said. "It was a victory for an entire city. Five years after being devastated by a major hurricane we needed something to uplift our spirits and that Super Bowl win did it better than anything else."

Even though he is well into retirement age, Dean is still working as a freelance writer for three New Orleans publications and is "on call" for two others and he loves it. Quoting R&B singer Little Anthony, who he interviewed for Breakthru Media magazine in 2012, he said, "When you love what you're doing it isn't work."



Dean (center) between Muhammad Ali and ventriloquist Wayland Flowers with "Madame" at an Ali roast in Metairie in 1985.





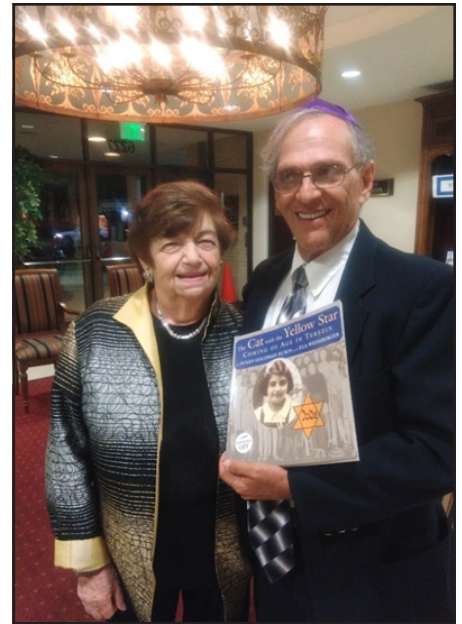
A Shapiro family Christmas in 2022. (l. to r.) Heather, Sophie, Sabrina, Jonathan, Chloe, and Nala in front.

But more than just being a journalist and hobnobbing with celebrities like Muhammad Ali, Leo Nocentelli of the Meters and others, Dean is also a six-time published author of works of nonfiction and fiction and a ghostwriter on two others. One of the books he co-authored, “The Blood Covenant,” was adapted into a made-for-TV movie that aired on CBS network stations in May 1993. That true story, told in the first person by one of the wives of a polygamous cult leader who ordered the murders of two dozen people, continues to spark interest to this day, more than 30 years after it was published.

Dean is also the author of 11 screenplays on a variety of historical figures and subjects that he is currently trying to shop to producers and others in the film industry.

Born in New York City, Dean grew up in Orangeburg, NY, 20 miles northwest of the city. His parents, Sophie and Henry Shapiro, were educators in the NYC school system. “I owe much of who and what I am today to my parents,” he said. “My dad was also a writer who composed a children’s musical play that was performed on Broadway in 1954, so I inherited my writing skills from him. My mom and I used to walk in the woods and pick flowers and berries, some of which we would transplant into our home garden, so I inherited my lifelong love of nature from her. And my mom and dad were both very progressive, so I inherited those qualities as well.”

Dean attended public schools in Orangeburg and, after graduating from Tappan Zee High School in 1968, he enrolled in a two-year junior college close to home.



At Temple Sinai in New Orleans with Holocaust survivor Ela Weissberger. Dean is holding a children’s book Ela wrote about her experience in a play at the concentration camp in Terezin, Czechoslovakia.

That institution, Rockland (County) Community College, played a pivotal role in Dean’s life and future career. In his second semester at RCC he signed up for a journalism class and began writing for the student newspaper. As he stated, “For some reason which I can’t explain, writing seemed to come naturally for me once I became a student activist and had things



With Dionne Warwick at Borders Books in Metairie in 1999 holding a copy of her first hit record, “Don’t Make Me Over.”

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEAN M. SHAPIRO

“When you love what you’re doing it isn’t work.”

Re&B singer Little Anthony and Dean M. Shapiro

to write about. I loved seeing my name in print, especially on the front and the editorial pages.”

The following semester Dean was named editor-in-chief and was frequently under fire for controversial political stands taken by the newspaper during a turbulent era of student unrest. Three years later, in his junior and senior years at Ramapo College of New Jersey, he was the student newspaper editor there as well and he received the Editor of the Year Award from the New Jersey Collegiate Press Association. In his final semester he interned for a weekly newspaper chain covering municipal council meetings in nearby northern New Jersey and he graduated from Ramapo with a B.A. in History in 1974.

Three weeks after the 1980 election, Dean made his first trip to New Orleans. On his first day he met Lorraine “Lainey” Goodey whom he would marry a year later. He left New York and moved to the New Orleans area in July 1981 where he wrote for several weekly publications in the city’s suburbs under the banner of the now-defunct Guide Newspaper Corporation. During that time he was one of the first reporters on the scene of the PanAm plane crash in Kenner. He later became the managing editor of the River Parishes Sun in LaPlace, LA for two years before that weekly newspaper folded.

In the years that followed, Dean worked as a book editor for Pelican Publishing Company, as the Publicity

Director for the New Orleans Opera Association and as assistant to the director of the Mayor’s Office of Tourism and the Arts during the administration of former N.O. mayor Marc Morial. For the past 20 years Dean has been working as a freelance writer, providing content to local print and digital publications.

Explaining how he got into freelancing, Dean said, “It wasn’t like I woke up one morning and decided, ‘I’m going to quit my job and do this.’ I was let go from my last office job and couldn’t find another one. It was like this for almost a year and then I met someone who referred me to a textbook company from Cincinnati. They were looking for freelance writers to provide content for books they were publishing for junior and senior high school students. It paid good money and lasted for a couple of years, and I convinced myself, ‘Hey, I can do this freelance gig.’ Other lucrative work also started coming in and twenty years later I’m still making a living at it.”

During their 16-year marriage the Shapiros had two children, Heather, now 41 and a certified paralegal, and Jonathan, 37, a computer technician in Mobile, Alabama. The couple divorced in 1997 and Lainey died 14 years later. Today Dean is

the proud grandpa of 15-year-old Sophie and 10-year-old Chloe, born to Jonathan and Sabrina Shapiro in Mobile.

In his spare time he enjoys walking on the levee along the Intracoastal Canal in front of his apartment and taking pictures of flowers, birds, butterflies and other interesting sights. He also enjoys attending live stage productions, operas, classical and dance performances and performances by his favorite New Orleans musicians.

Summing up the 43 years that Dean has lived and worked in New Orleans and the surrounding region, he offered this observation:

“I am definitely on board with those who say ‘If you get old in New Orleans it’s your own fault.’ Where else will you see 80 year old men and women scrambling for beads thrown from a Mardi Gras float or waving handkerchiefs during a second-line parade? Like most other cities in America, we have our problems, but we also have a lot of great things going on year-round. New Orleans is fun, friendly, exciting and a culturally stimulating place to live and work. I don’t think I could live anywhere else.”

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Dean in 2014 with daughter Heather in front of the house in Orangeburg, New York where he grew up.