

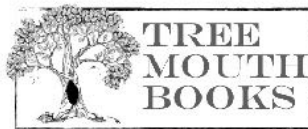
The Magic of Mayfair

by

Jason T. Shapiro

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Jason T. Shapiro

To Andrea:

*Thank you for all your love and support
throughout the journey of writing this book.*

To Alyssa and Ryan:

*Dream the biggest dreams.
Anything is possible!*

I Love You!

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Author's Foreword

I have always believed that the essence of our life is found somewhere between the past and the present. There is a crossroad in time that defines who we were, who we are, and who we will become.

In 2017, I decided to embark on a journey to write a book. Crazy, I know. This wasn't just going to be any book, mind you. I was going to actually attempt to outline the crossroads of my own life and map out exactly how I became the person I am today... Who I was, who I am, and who will I will become? I was going to literally reach into my soul, let words flow from my fingertips, and see what would happen.

It ended up becoming one of the most life changing moments I have ever experienced. Exposing your own personal truth is powerful, painful, and also extremely liberating. Then immortalizing that truth within the pages of a book for the world to read is just honestly frightening. Going to a place of complete vulnerability wasn't easy and at times extremely uncomfortable. However, I have found that self-awareness is the road to self-acceptance.

So, how was I going to begin this story? Well, for most of my adult life I have memorialized my childhood. Why, you might ask? For me, it was a time of pure simplicity, innocence, and joy. My life was filled with people that I loved. Family, friends, and then something else very important in this story. A place. Somewhere so special, that it not only became the title of this book, but the backdrop of my life. This was a place where happiness and magic radiated through the air. I was very fortunate to call Mayfair Court my home.

The next part of the story, would be the task of layering in all those people that meant so much to me. Taking the memories

that I had preserved in my mind for decades and then bringing those individuals back to life. Capturing the core of who they were and how they impacted my life was critical. I worked hard to ensure the words that I wrote represented their truth. Each person had their distinct characteristics and personalities that left a lasting impression on me to this very day.

How would I select the stories that I would tell? Well, that part kind of just happened as my fingers hit the keys. Nothing was predetermined, or sketched out. I simply would expand on a memory I had, or a story I was told. With each strike on the keyboard, I slowly started to see the crossroads of my life appear before my eyes. A map of how I became the person I am today. I had created the blueprint of me.

Lastly, I wanted to share something very unique and special about this book. I was always fascinated with the concept of off-screen narrating. Being that I truly wanted this book to feel like you were watching a movie, it was something I decided to incorporate into this story. What if I was able to pop in and provide context on how I viewed my past, but in present time? It added an additional layer of emotion and authenticity that I am very proud of.

Thank you for allowing me to take you on this adventure. Now it's time for you to experience...

THE MAGIC OF MAYFAIR!

Every house has a secret and every street has a story.

Chapter One

The Magic Begins

Summer of 1983

Our childhood is a distant reminder that absolute innocence and joy exists in its purest form. A road if traveled back, will take us to a place where time stands still and memories of before will surface through our souls.

The blinding rays of the warm summer sun radiate through the air. It's a glorious day! Eight-year-old Jason Shapiro, nick-named Toad by his father, is swimming underwater in an outdoor screened-in pool.

He is wearing swim goggles and nose plugs while his mushroom-shaped hair flows gracefully like seaweed atop the ocean. There is pure silence.

Jason begins to gradually surface and swims towards the edge. Suddenly, he pops out of the water like a jack-in-the-box filled with excitement!

He briskly exits the pool, shuffles across the hot Chattahoochee patio deck, and grabs his He-Man backpack. Jason takes his towel out and quickly attempts to dry off.

Still dripping with water, he walks over to the opened sliding glass door. Cautiously, Jason creeps into his beautiful new house that is still under construction.

The roaring sound of power saws and drills can be heard coming from the bedrooms located next to the pool.

Larry Shapiro is wearing his standard uniform - pleated khaki pants, a polo shirt (tucked into his underwear), and dress shoes. He's talking to the general contractor, with both arms animated, gesturing in the air. Larry has enough energy to run a marathon, twice!

NOTE: *This is Jason in the present day. I am the eight-year-old boy that you have met in this story. When you see text inside a box like this, you'll know that it is me speaking to you in the current time. I will be popping in every so often to set the scene and provide context on what you have just read. Kind of like the off-screen narrator.*

Annd... That's my father, Lawrence Shapiro! Let's just say it was "Larry's World" and we were all living in it. Even though our house was only about 75 percent built, my dad thought it was a good idea to have me go swimming in a live construction zone while he did an unscheduled "check-in" with the general contractor.

Multiple construction workers are seen in action cutting floor tiles, sawing baseboards, and painting the newly constructed walls.

"TOAD! Grab your bag and towel! IT'S TIME TO GO!" Larry shouts so fiercely that it startles the workers.

Jason and Larry begin to make their way toward the front door.

On his way out, Larry accidentally knocks over two opened paint cans that are sitting on the floor.

He yells over to the painter, “Hey, sorry, Mark!” (Although the painter is clearly wearing a t-shirt that is embroidered with the name Paul)

The painter shakes his head in annoyance and gives Larry the middle finger once his back is turned.

Larry continues marching through the house and then finally exits through the front door. Desperately, Jason tries to keep up with his father as he leaves a large trail of pool water throughout the freshly laid tiled floors.

They both shuffle down the crowded driveway filled with construction trucks and painting vans.

Jason looks up at his father, pulls off his nose plugs, and innocently questions, “Dad, were we allowed to stop by today? It doesn’t even look like the house is ready to move into yet.”

Before Jason can finish his question, Larry interrupts, “It’s my house, Toad! Of course, I can stop by!”

Jason slowly shakes his head and mumbles to himself, “He is so embarrassing.”

Larry reaches into his pant pocket and fumbles around for his car keys. He feverishly unlocks the door and hops into the driver’s seat.

“Toad, move it! We have to go!” Larry mutters loudly through the closed window.

Jason desperately struggles to open the enormous car door of the 1983 Lincoln Continental.

After several seconds of a fierce tussle... VICTORY! Jason finally wins the tug-of-war battle against the car door and gets in.

Larry shouts out, “Would you get in the car already? We gotta go! I told you!”

Before Jason can fully close the heavy door, Larry quickly puts the car in reverse and speeds away.

Chapter Two

Move-In Day

It's a marvelous Saturday morning! Bright rays of sunshine shoot down like lasers from the clear blue sky.

Larry's car slowly turns onto Mayfair Court as the newly installed street sign glistens in the sun.

As Larry is driving, there's a conversation occurring inside the car. Like a door-to-door salesman, he is selling the new neighborhood to his wife, Ellen.

"I'm telling you, Ellen, this area has THE BEST schools in the country! Everything is brand new and it's all within driving distance. Wait until you see the parks and the shopping centers. The library is enormous! The movie theater has ten separate theaters. Are you kidding me?! There are *five* Chinese restaurants all within three miles. The best part, you ready for this... There's a Denny's we can walk to! It's unbelievable!"

Larry continues to drive down the street until he arrives at his house. He quickly pulls into the brand-new concrete driveway with his family.

Frantically, Larry jumps out of the car and waits in the street to wave down the moving truck driving behind him.

Jason and his brothers Eric, (nicknamed Berry) age five, and Adam, (nicknamed Bub) age three, cautiously step out of the car with looks of amazement on their faces.

Suddenly, filled with exhilaration, they all dart away and begin to dash around their spacious front yard.

Jason leaps onto the large rock used for landscaping.

He faces the street and projects his voice loudly. “The Super Shapiro Brothers are here!”

Once finished, Jason does a flying ninja kick off the rock.

Eric follows by jumping on the same rock and repeating the same line as Jason, “The Super Shapiro Brothers are here!”

He leaps off and is followed by Adam, who does his best to mimic his two older brothers.

“My jump was WAY better than yours, Eric!” brags Jason.

Frowning, Eric lowers his shoulders, and trudges away.

“Hey, don’t be a baby, Eric,” Jason teases with laughter.

The oversized moving truck is cautiously turning onto Mayfair Court and heading to Jason’s beautiful new house.

Larry is impatiently pacing back and forth in the middle of the street. He is waving at the driver to park on the side of the road.

The window rolls down and the truck driver politely asks, “Hey, Mr. Shapiro! Can you please move your car out of the driveway so I can back in?”

Aggravated, Larry throws his arms up in the air and responds, “It’s a brand-new Lincoln! I have to leave it in the middle of the street?! Unbelievable!”

Reluctantly, Larry re-parks onto the side of the street and quickly springs back out of his car.

Ecstatic, he shouts, “Toad, Berry, Bub! Wait until you see the size of the bathrooms. They’re massive! The family room has a fireplace and the backyard is the size of a football field. This house is the BEST!”

Everyone sprints into their magnificent new home except Jason. Instead, he decides to stay behind and sit down on the large rock in the front yard.

In awe, Jason smiles as he admires all the custom-built houses and perfectly manicured yards.

Suddenly, he hears the echoing sound of children playing from behind his house. He pauses and listens intently.

Bubbling with curiosity, Jason bolts down the side of his house toward the backyard. He makes his way to a row of freshly planted shrubs that separates his house from the one behind it.

With caution, he slowly peers through the leaves and notices two young boys sprinting down the street. They're playfully squirting a group of young girls with water guns. Laughter fills the air as the girls creatively try to dodge the water, desperately trying not to get wet.

Just as Jason builds up enough courage to take a step through the shrubs, suddenly he hears a roar so loud it rattles the patio screen door.

“TOOOOAD?! WHHHHHHERE ARE YOUUUUUUU?!”

“Oh, crap!” Jason grumbles as he sprints back to the front of his house.

“Yeah, Dad?” Jason responds as he wipes the sweat off his forehead.

“Come on in! I want you to see your new room! It's humongous!” Larry yells out with joy.

Annoyed, Jason replies, “OK, I'll be right there!”

“You have five minutes, Toad, and then I want you in the house! GOT IT?!” Larry sternly questions.

Frustrated, Jason shouts back, “YEAH! I got it.”

Just as Jason begins to head back to the shrubs, out of the corner of his eye, he spots four legs standing on the opposite side

of the moving truck. Pausing, Jason bends down and attempts to look underneath the truck.

The first set of legs he sees are small and skinny, wearing scuffed up pink flip flops with a small flower on the top. The second pair of legs appears to be a little bit longer, with golf ball size knees, wearing the coolest pair of ROOS sneakers Jason had ever seen.

Curious, Jason hesitantly makes his way toward the moving truck. He briskly walks around the cab, in hopes of solving the case of the “mysterious legs”. As Jason turns the corner, he doesn’t see anyone.

“That’s so weird,” Jason whispers to himself.

Slowly bending down, he peers all the way under the moving truck. Jason sees the same set of four legs, now on the other side of the truck. This time he quickly sprints back around, but no one is there.

“What the heck?” Jason shouts out with confusion.

Perplexed, he gives up and decides to walk up his driveway. Just as he begins to leave, Jason hears giggling and laughing. Quickly, Jason turns around and sees a young boy with the same mushroom shaped haircut. He is wearing grey shorts and a white tank top, both covered with dirt and grass stains. The little girl has short brown curly hair, wearing denim shorts with a Care Bears T-shirt.

“Hey, what’s your name?” questions the boy with curiosity.

“Yeah, what’s your name?” repeats the little girl as they both start to chuckle.

Jason hesitantly steps forward and replies, “My name is Jason, but people call me Jay. What’s yours?”

“James!” the boy responds, “But you can call me Jimmy.”

Jason points to the little girl and asks, “What’s your name?”

She gazes at Jason, giggles with her hand covering her mouth, and begins to skip down the street.

“Her name is Christina, but you can call her Tina. She’s my little annoying sister,” Jimmy quickly answers.

“Well, I have a little annoying brother, so we have something in common already. Why did she run away?” Jason questions as he starts to chuckle.

“She gets really embarrassed around boys,” Jimmy responds with a grin.

“Hey, are you allowed to come over to my house?” Jimmy questions with eagerness.

“I’m not sure. I’ll have to ask my dad. We just moved in today. I haven’t even been inside my house yet,” Jason replies as the boys laugh in unison.

“Stay here! Let me go check,” Jason directs.

Jimmy responds with anticipation, “OK, but hurry up! I wanna show you something!”

Dashing into his house, Jason almost knocks over a moving man walking out of the front door. Upon entering, he instantly feels an overwhelming sense of comfort. Jason can smell the scent of brand-new carpet and freshly painted walls. He notices Eric sorting his baseball cards on the wide-open floor in the family room.

“Where’s Daddy?” Jason asks with an agitated tone.

“He’s out in the backyard,” innocently replies Eric.

With impatience, Jason runs through the house and bursts out of the opened sliding glass door. He sees Larry in the distance at the next-door neighbor’s house. He is reclined, relaxing in a lounge chair. Jason decides to cautiously walk over.

There he goes! (Larry's in animated conversation)
We haven't even been here for an hour and he's already made his way into our neighbor's house. My dad always treaded a fine line between being outgoing and the "over bearing friendly guy" with no social boundaries.

Larry springs off the lounge chair and grabs a cup that was sitting on the patio table. He walks into the neighbor's house, opens the refrigerator, and takes out a gallon of water. He begins to comfortably fill up his cup as the neighbors look at each other shocked and confused.

Causally, Larry walks back out onto the patio and yells to Jason, "Toad! What's going on?! Come inside and say hi to Bruce and Maddie Stevens."

Bruce quickly corrects Larry and reminds him, "It's Pattie!"

Apologetic, Larry swiftly corrects himself, "Oh, sorry Bruce, I mean Pattie!"

Jason slowly lifts his hand and gives a slow reserved wave.

"Hey, Dad, a kid down the street just asked if I could play. Can I go over to his house?" questions Jason with anticipation.

"Wow! You're already meeting new friends, Toad! THAT'S SUPER! I told your mom how great this neighborhood is! Yeah, that's fine, go ahead. Just be back in an hour. We're going to Denny's for an early dinner! There's a special on the Grand Slam!" Larry explains with excitement.

"Thanks, Dad!" Jason replies as he quickly waves goodbye to the Stevens. He sprints out of the patio and runs toward his

front yard. Breathing heavily, Jason stops and looks around the street but doesn't see Jimmy.

Several kids are riding bikes in the cul-de-sac at the end of the street. Apprehensive, Jason decides to bravely walk toward the group of unknown bike riders.

As Jason approaches, one of the riders quickly darts over, pedaling at full speed. At the last second, the boy on the bike firmly squeezes the handbrake and skids over directly in front of Jason.

There's a baseball card in the back tire between the bicycle spokes.

"Who are you?" the boy questions with concern.

"Um, who are you?" Jason responds back with an annoyed tone.

"My name is Kevin. My house is at the top of the street. I know every person that lives here."

With sarcasm, Jason replies, "That's really amazing, Kevin! I'm Jason. I just moved in today and I only know *one* person on the street."

"OOF, not good," replies Kevin as he intently stares at Jason with a goofy smile.

Jason asks, "Hey, do you know a kid named Jimmy?"

"Yeah, of course I know him. I told you, I know everyone. He lives over there, in that white house," Kevin responds pointing with the same goofy smile.

"Great, thanks!" responds Jason as he shakes his head and begins to quickly walk toward Jimmy's house.

Kevin yells back, "If you want to be in my bicycle gang, just let me know! Right now, I'm the only member, but I'm recruiting!"

“That sounds awesome! I’ll let you know,” Jason replies. He then immediately mumbles, “NOT!” to himself as he scampers away.

Relieved, Jason finally approaches Jimmy’s house.

“Hey! I’m over here!” a voice shouts out.

Confused, Jason cautiously looks around but doesn’t see anyone.

“Jay! Over here!”

Jason begins to follow the voice that’s heard from the side yard.

“Um, Jimmy, is that you?” Jason yells back as he continues walking.

Unexpectedly, Jason stumbles upon the most breathtaking oak tree he had ever laid eyes on. It is full of the greenest leaves. Sunlight is flickering through the thick branches leaving gorgeous silhouette shadows on the ground.

“I’m up here!” the voice blurts out.

Jason looks up but still doesn’t see anyone.

Without any warning, branches begin to feverishly shake and rattle at the top of the tree. Suddenly, Jimmy’s head pokes out of the large cluster of leaves.

“So, whatcha think?” Jimmy questions with pride.

“Whoa! How the heck did you get up there?” asks Jason with excitement.

“Come around the other side and I’ll show ya!” Jimmy directs.

With immense curiosity, Jason replies, “OK! I’m coming!”

He quickly darts around the tree and then suddenly stops in his tracks with amazement.

“WOW! That’s so freaking incredible!” Jason blurts out in awe.

He sees several 2x4's nailed into the tree trunk creating a ladder to climb.

“Come on up!” hollers Jimmy.

“OK, I'm heading up now,” Jason responds with a huge grin.

He begins to dart up the 2x4's like a skilled tree climber and makes his way to a flat wooden platform.

“This is so dang cool!” Jason shouts out with joy as he carefully stands up.

“Thanks, I built it a few months ago,” Jimmy responds.

“How'd you do it?” questions Jason with curiosity.

Well, I took some of the wood and nails from the house being built across the street. Then, I used my dad's power saw when he was at work. He still hasn't noticed I even built this,” Jimmy giggles.

SO COOL!” Jason replies with a smile.

“Yup! It's pretty awesome if I do say so myself,” Jimmy grins with pride.

Suddenly, like a squirrel, Jimmy shoots up the next set of 2x4's, to an even higher level in the tree. When he gets to the top, he sits on a smaller hidden platform.

Jimmy shouts back down, “This spot up here, only I can go! It's pretty high up and REALLY dangerous!”

“I can barely see you!” yells Jason.

“Hang on! I'll be back down in a minute!” Jimmy informs.

The top of the tree begins to sway as leaves start to trickle to the ground. Without any warning, Jimmy leaps down onto the lower level platform where Jason is.

“That was sooo cool! You looked like a GI Joe soldier jumping down from a building!” Jason blurts out as both boys start laughing loudly together.

“Jimmy! Honey!” a soothing motherly voice echoes out from the screened-in patio below.

“Yeah, Ma?” loudly responds Jimmy.

“Who’s up there with you? I see another person!” questions Jimmy’s mother.

“His name is Jason! He just moved in today! He lives on our street!”

“Jimmy, sweetie, come down! Do you want a snack before we leave?” questions his mom.

“YEAH! Coming down now!” Jimmy responds.

“Jay, let’s go. My mom’s cookies are THE BEST!” he boasts.

The boys scurry back down the tree, open the screen door, and run over to the white plastic tubing patio furniture. They each hop onto a chair and sit down. The outdoor ceiling fan is spinning on high and the kitchen window is wide-open.

“Do you boys want lemonade, or Kool-Aid?” Jimmy’s mother questions from the kitchen.

“What do you want, Jay?” Jimmy politely asks.

“I’ll have Kool-Aid, but what flavor is it?” questions Jason.

“It’s Berry Cherry!” loudly replies Jimmy with confidence.

With a smile, Jason responds, “AWESOME! I LOVE Berry Cherry!”

Moments later, Jimmy’s mother cautiously opens the sliding glass door. With a warm sweet smile, she greets Jason and Jimmy with a plastic pitcher of Kool-Aid and a plate of fresh baked cookies. They’re still warm from the oven.

“Hi, sweetie, how are you?” questions Jimmy’s mother. “My name is Diane Gallo.”

“Nice to meet you, Mrs. Gallo,” Jason replies.

She clarifies, “So, you just moved in today?”

“Well, the movers are at my house right now. So, we really haven’t even moved in yet,” Jason mumbles as he eats the homemade cookies with pure contentment.

“That’s so exciting! Which house did you move into?” Mrs. Gallo asks with curiosity.

Jason struggles to respond mid-chew, “It’s a few houses up the street. It’s blue, with a brick front porch.”

“Oh, you moved next door to the Stevens. They’re very sweet people,” she confirms with a smile.

“Yeah, my dad is good friends with them.” (Mrs. Gallo has a look of confusion on her face)

“Well, you’re going to love living here, honey. It’s a fabulous neighborhood and there are lots of kids that live on this street. Jimmy will introduce you to everyone. So, I would love to meet your parents sometime. Do you have any brothers or sisters?” Mrs. Gallo inquires in a caring tone.

“I have two brothers. Their names are Berry and Bub,” Jason grins as he responds.

“Berry and Bub?” Mrs. Gallo questions for clarification while chuckling.

“Yeah, my dad has nicknames for all of us. My nickname is Toad.”

Mrs. Gallo laughs and replies, “He must be some character if he came up with all of those names for you boys.”

“Yup! He is, but sometimes he can be sooo embarrassing! Overall, he’s a good dad, I guess,” Jason responds with a shoulder shrug.

“Awww... That’s very sweet. Well, Jimmy has to go visit his grandfather, so we’re going to be leaving soon. You’re welcome back here anytime, sweetheart. Jimmy, say goodbye to Jason and

go write down your phone number for him,” directs Mrs. Gallo as she walks back inside the house.

“OK, Ma!” shouts Jimmy as he sprints into the kitchen to grab a pen and paper. He quickly returns and hands Jason a ripped corner of a magazine. “Here’s my number, Jay. I’m going to pull out my bike ramp tomorrow if you want to come over. Do you have a bike?” Jimmy questions.

“Yeah! I have a Mongoose,” Jason states with pride.

“Cool, what color?” Jimmy inquires.

“It’s blue with matching tires and silver pegs on the back. My little butthead brother Eric has a red one. It’s the color I actually wanted,” Jason informs with frustration.

“Jeez, Jay, it sounds like you don’t like your brother too much. Well, my bike is a Diamondback. It’s black, with pegs on the front AND BACK!” Jimmy boasts.

“SON! Say goodbye, NOW! We’re leaving!” yells out Jimmy’s dad with the tone of an angry marine drill sergeant.

“I gotta go. I’ll see you later. I don’t want my dad to ground me for a week. You can leave through the screen door,” Jimmy directs.

“OK. I’ll see you later!” Jason shouts as he walks out of the patio door waving goodbye.

“Hey, Jay... I’m glad you moved here,” Jimmy responds with a warm smile.

Jason replies with certainty, “Me too,” as he starts to head home.

On the way he pauses and intently stares at the treehouse with admiration.

Jason makes his way onto the sidewalk at the same time Mr. Gallo is pulling out of the driveway in his 1982 Blue Buick Regal. Jimmy and his sister turn around and wave through the back

window as they drive away. Tina playfully sticks her tongue out as Jason laughs and shakes his head.

And that was the day I met my best friend. It's amazing how lifelong friendships can start from the most unexpected places, at the most random times. You see, back in the summer of 1983 every day was an adventure. There weren't cell phones or home computers yet. There wasn't Facebook. The internet... What the hell was that? (laughing) Most importantly, I'm happy to report there were definitely, NO playdates! You simply walked outside and played with whoever happened to be there. You got into arguments and then always seemed to eventually work it out. When you got hurt, your friends would all pitch in and carry you home. Your mother would simply point to the ice packs when you walked through the door. Then when you woke up the next morning, you got to do it all over again. Were the 80's the last great decade to be a kid? If you'd ask me, I would tell you it was.

Early evening sets in as Jason walks back to his house. He eagerly opens the front door and strolls past several moving boxes neatly stacked against the side of the wall.

"I'm home!" Jason proudly shouts.

"Toad, you've been gone for hours! Where were you?" Larry wonders with excitement.

Elated, Jason responds, "I met a kid that lives at the end of the street! His name is Jimmy!"

"That's OUTSTANDING, Toad! See, we haven't even been here for a day and you've already made a new friend. Listen,

Mommy unpacked your clothes and put them on your bed. No showers tonight. Go outside and rinse off in the pool. We're going to go to Denny's for an early dinner! I have a coupon for a free Grand Slam! You and your brothers can split it." Larry explains with enthusiasm.

Jason shakes his head and mutters, "Rinse off in the pool?" Begrudgingly, he grabs a towel out of a moving box, opens the sliding glass door and then flings it closed. Jason walks towards the pool. The glowing light from the full moon is reflecting on the calm water surface. Looking up at the sky, Jason sees a shooting star in the distance. He takes a deep breath, holds his nose, and smiles with contentment. Suddenly, Jason does a massive cannonball into the deep-end of the pool.