

For Immediate Release

Press News From

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Publishers of
Peter Pigeon
of Snug Harbor

Rocky Hollow Press
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National Roll-Out of *Peter Pigeon of Snug Harbor* is set for National Pigeon Day, June 13, 2009.

The 2006 COAHSI Literary Award Winning book (which takes place on Staten Island) is published by Stapleton publisher, Rocky Hollow Press.

Former East Village performance artist & rock musician, Ed Weiss reinvents himself as children's book writer/illustrator on Staten Island.

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On May 2, 2009, in Stapleton, Staten Island, exactly 215 years after the neighborhood's most famous resident, Cornelius Vanderbilt, was born — in an old house that dates back to the Commodore's lifetime, Rocky Hollow Press launched a website to introduce its new illustrated novel, *Peter Pigeon of Snug Harbor*, to the world. Despite the fact that the book's protagonist is a bird, he has a lot more in common with Vanderbilt than one might immediately presume.

The Staten Island Ferry, the modern successor to Vanderbilt's initial commercial success plays an integral part in the story. And in fact, notes author Ed Weiss, it was on the ferry that the story was inspired. "I was going from Saint George to Whitehall and on the back deck of the ferry there was this pigeon just staring back at Staten Island. And he had this look like — oh my god what have I done, I should never have left." At the time, Weiss, a native New Yorker, was living in Brooklyn and house hunting in Staten Island, and had relatively little experience with the ferry. "I didn't really realize then, that actually a lot of pigeons take the ferry. So the bird caught my attention. And then he had this poignant expression on his face as we pulled away from Staten Island and I just couldn't get him out of my head."

As Weiss and his wife continued house hunting, they stumbled upon Snug Harbor. "I'd heard of it," notes Weiss, "but only vaguely, and when I saw it, it really blew

me away. Obviously, it's a beautiful place, but more than that it had this quality of unreality." That quality was exacerbated when Weiss saw photos of the early residents. "Those sailors seemed to inhabit a world somewhere between Robert Louis Stevenson and the Pirates Of Penzance — It struck me that it was literally a storybook setting." So he set his story there. When Weiss learned that Snug Harbor had transitioned from an old sailors home to an arts center, the narrative came together in his mind. "That's kind of a switch to put it mildly. And life is kind of like that. Boom— all of a sudden things change. And then it occurred to me, no wonder the pigeon was worried if he had to go through something like that. And I started to connect him with Snug Harbor, and then the story just came to me, and at some point I realized, it was a story about growing up and finding out where you fit in the world."

Not set in any particular time period, Weiss's story begins when a baby pigeon (later named Peter) is found in the snow by sailors that resemble the ones in the earliest recorded photographs of Snug Harbor residents. As Peter grows up, the Sailors (including Peter's mentor Captain Hardtack) are forced to leave, and he's befriended by the very modern artist Maria Maria.

"Maria Maria is kind of an amalgam of people I knew in the East Village when I lived there in the 1980s. Totally dedicated and completely nuts." It was in the East Village, that Weiss began writing. "I was in this serial at the Pyramid Club called *Chang In A Void Moon* [a long running piece that featured dozens of actors including future film star Steve Buscemi] and John Jesuran [the author who later won a Macarthur "genius award"] wrote me out of it pretty quickly, I don't think he liked what I was doing. But, anyway, I enjoyed the serial form and I thought — hey I could do that. So I started writing and writing and writing, it seemed to go on forever." By the time he finished, Weiss had 13 episodes and 500 pages of a script he called *The Onyx Fool*. "The first place I went to with it was 8 BC and they wanted to do it. I remember the feeling of terror mixing with elation when they gave me the go ahead. " At the time, 8 BC, had emerged as the most exciting club in the East Village. Other headliners included performance artists: Eric Bogasian, Karen Finley, Ethyl Eichenburger; and rock bands, such as They Might Be Giants, and the Butthole Surfers.

*The Onyx Fool* received enough attention to get a backers audition at the Mark Taper complex in Los Angeles. But before, long Weiss drifted away from writing for the stage and towards writing songs, playing guitar and singing in rock bands. Of the many bands he was with, his personal favorite was Bleach House (<http://www.myspace.com/bleachhouse>), two members of which (Dave Marchese

and Steve Schiltz) went on to found (RCA recording artists) Longwave. To make ends meet while he worked on his music, Weiss found work as a freelance writer doing what he describes as "mainly some pretty dull stuff." But both the writing and the music were halted by a bout with radial tunnel syndrome (a computer overuse injury similar to carpal tunnel), so Weiss returned to an earlier vocation of bartending and occasional research and editorial jobs.

"But every couple of years when some new dictation software came out, I would give it a shot and write an article or something, just to see if it would work well enough to make a living at writing again. I'd gotten a new version of Dragon Dictate and I couldn't get this story out of my head. So I thought why don't I just write about my friend on the ferry." Ironically, progress on *Peter Pigeon*, which takes place exclusively on Staten Island, halted when Weiss and his wife moved into their house in Stapleton, "I had the book roughed out by the time we moved, but between all the paperwork, fixing up the house and trying to earn a few dollars, I didn't have any spare time to finish it until 2005."

On the completing the manuscript that year, he discovered that the Council on the Arts & Humanities for Staten Island had added a literary category to their annual Junefest arts festival for the following year. Weiss submitted his manuscript and received the literary award (which included a \$1000 prize.) "I know it's not the Nobel Prize for literature, but It meant a lot to me to get that award," Weiss remembers. It didn't mean much to publishers though and without an agent, he found it hard to get his foot in the door. "I did my homework and looked for publishers that were willing to read unsolicited manuscripts and sent out a bunch of letters. But unfortunately nobody wanted to read it."

Undeterred, he made plans to bring it out himself. "I wasn't going to let Peter go that easily, I had gotten kind of attached to him." There was one major hurdle to overcome. "It was always meant to be an illustrated book and I didn't have any illustrations." An art major in college, Weiss had in fact exhibited paintings in New York and Seattle, but "hadn't done a line drawing for 20 years "and he had no experience of children's book illustration.

Another thing he didn't have was any money to hire an illustrator. "It's something I learned years ago, when I was performing in the East Village and we never had any budgets for anything. If you need a set, build it; if you need a flier make it; if you need a sound system, grab your home stereo. I needed illustrations, so I figured out how to do them and I went to work." By 2008, he had finished 40 drawings for the book.

Aiming for a Christmas release, *Peter Pigeon of Snug Harbor* was shipped to the printers in fall 2008. But due to some typical snafus, the books were received too late and a spring/summer 2009 sendoff was decided upon. June 13, National Pigeon Day was the obvious choice. "But we also wanted to celebrate our Stapleton roots with a shout out to our homie Vanderbilt who was born on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, so we launched our website on that day," notes Weiss. The name "Rocky Hollow Press" is also a bit of a shout out. It is derived from the historical name for the hollow at the base of Grymes Hill currently occupied by Van Duzer Street.

Described in its backcover copy "as an award winning new book in the tradition of classic New York stories like *Stuart Little* and *The Cricket In Times Square*," Weiss originally thought that *Peter Pigeon of Snug Harbor* would appeal mainly to kids. But after doing some test marketing with sample copies, he was surprised to find that the book was also enjoyed by adults. "I thought kids would like it, but I've really been surprised by the response from grownups." The enthusiasm of a group of octogenarians particularly surprised and delighted him. "They really seem to love it. Maybe it's the large type."

When asked whether he felt that the launch of *Peter Pigeon of Snug Harbor* would meet with success equal to that achieved by his Stapletonian predecessor, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Weiss had this response —"Don't hold your breath."

*Exactly, 90 pages in length, and profusely illustrated with line drawings, **Peter Pigeon of Snug Harbor** is available in paperback at bookstores and through the website <http://www.rockyhollowpress.com> for a cost of \$7.95.*

*For more information about **Peter Pigeon Of Snug Harbor**, contact Eva Sandstrom at Rocky Hollow Press, 718 442 5756, [rockyhollowpress@gmail.com](mailto:rockyhollowpress@gmail.com) <http://www.rockyhollowpress.com>.*