

New home is full of treasures to plumb

Relocated to Staten Island, Ed Weiss has crafted a story about some of his newfound favorites — Snug Harbor and a pigeon on the Ferry

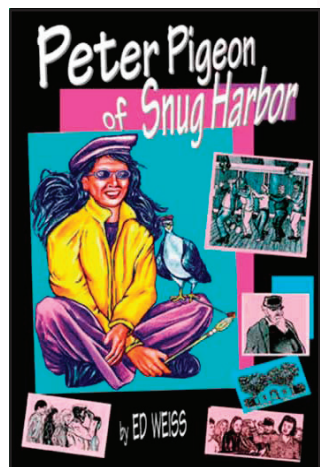
Peter Pigeon of Snug Harbor

“blends fantasy and reality seamlessly!”

says the Staten Island Advance

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By KATHRYN CARSE
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

STAPLETON — Ed Weiss attended an event about a month ago that seemed to dovetail perfectly with his serendipitous book tour.

The event was National Pigeon Day in Central Park.

Weiss' book is “Peter Pigeon of Snug Harbor.”

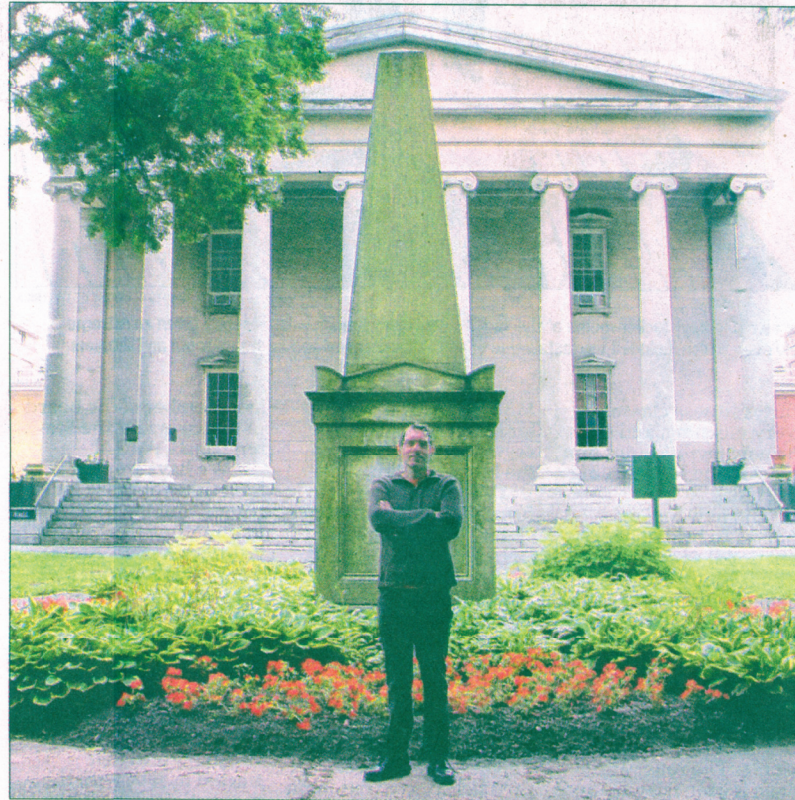
The Central Park rally in support of birds that are often referred to as winged rats appealed to Weiss as a New Yorker.

“There was a cross section of people brought together by this one thing that they share. The demographics were unclassifiable — every age group, income and ethnicity was there. It's the way I like to think of New York, how it was when I was growing up,” said Weiss, who was born in Manhattan and grew up in Brooklyn.

After graduating from Vermont's Bennington College as an art student, he lived in the East Village where the mix of creativity and scrappy lifestyle allowed him to reinvent himself a few times — as performance artist, playwright, and songwriter, with a platinum coif, in the band Bleach House.

He and his wife lived in Brooklyn before moving to Stapleton about five years ago in search of more affordable housing. He also found a mix of people and a place rough around the edges that feels comfortably familiar.

It wasn't long before this 50-year-old began reinventing himself yet again — this time as an



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE/FRANK J. JOHNS

Ed Weiss, a Stapleton transplant, is the author of “Peter Pigeon of Snug Harbor,” a story inspired by a pigeon he spotted on the Staten Island Ferry, and of course, the cultural center. He familiarized himself with Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden, Livingston, by walking the grounds.

author. He has written a book inspired by a pigeon. When he and his wife were taking the ferry back to Manhattan one day after house hunting, he was struck by the long look of a solitary pigeon, perched on board and gazing back toward the Island as if he would never return.

The moment stayed with him, even after he discovered on subsequent trips that the pigeon's station on the boats is of the

“flying rat” variety, rather than that of a Rock Dove, its official avian name.

Weiss remembers going through the Richmond Terrace gate to Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden in Livingston and being captivated by the name, then the grounds and stories of its original inhabitants — the retired sailors, the Snugs. It seemed “like a storybook,” he said.

Weiss got to know

Snug Harbor by walking the acreage. He developed a sense of the Snugs through photographs and an essay written by novelist Theodore Dreiser which describes some earthy creatures known for “swearing and drinking too much and snoring in church.”

Weiss entwined the pigeon, the Snugs and various phases of his life to develop a story with char-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ED WEISS

To purchase a copy of “Peter Pigeon of Snug Harbor,” visit rockyhollowpress.com, or call 718-442-5756.

acters that are timeless and believable — a sea captain, an artist, and a pigeon with a penchant for hats. The bird doesn't talk, but it interacts in a way that humans understand.

The story begins when Captain Hardtack, a gruff old salt, surprises the retirees with his tenderness toward a pigeon found during a snowball fight. The half-frozen squab is named Peter, and is nursed back to health by the captain who then imbues the little bird with all his knowledge of ships and the sea.

The story is loosely bound to the history of Snug Harbor, a home for “aged, decrepit, and worn-out sailors,” writes Weiss. The plot includes the actual relocation of the Snugs to North Carolina, which in Weiss' tale, is a turning point in the relationship of Peter, the pigeon, and the captain who decides that as painful as the parting will be, Peter is better off staying

behind where he can live free and uncaged.

Earnest Peter's adventures include discovering the Staten Island Ferry — and steering it — and meeting Maria Maria, a “totally dedicated and completely nuts,” artist who came to Snug Harbor in its reformation as a cultural arts center.

“Nobody wants a message,” said Weiss who followed his instincts from watching movies and reading “The Wind in the Willows” and comic books as a kid. He said he always “hated reading description.”

Weiss illustrated the book himself, drawing on rusty art-student skills. The result is some 40 black-and-white drawings of characters, scenes and parts of Snug Harbor that blend fantasy and reality seamlessly.

After a few attempts at finding a publisher, Weiss and a few others decided to start their own press. It's called Rocky Hollow Press, an old name for a section of Stapleton, near the intersection of Van Duzer Street and Clinton Street, close to where he lives. He came across the name in his research about his new home, a place he is getting to know as much, or more, than the folks who have lived here all their lives.

— To purchase a copy of “Peter Pigeon of Snug Harbor,” contact Rocky Hollow Press, 16 Clinton St., SI, NY, 10304; call, 718-442-5756; or visit www.rockyhollowpress.com.

People and Places appears periodically in the Shore sections of the Advance. Kathryn Carse can be reached at carse@siadvance.com.