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AUTHOR

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Q & A

1. **Why do you write?** Writing is challenging, powerful, and pleasurable—even intoxicating. Writing explores, informs, entertains and endures. It transforms. What is more powerful than that? At its best, writing engages your head and heart in greater wholeness. I spent years writing to move ideas, now I write story; much more challenging and fun. I want to entertain my readers. I believe writing can change a person, even the entire world.
2. **What inspired you to write *Beyond Beauport*?** I love Gloucester and greater Cape Ann, for its beauty and maritime history—a place like no other, with a strong sense of community, and interesting characters. I was a blue collar kid from a rural farm town that travelled the world in a suit. No more. I do know what it's like to love a place and have the wanderlust. A quest is invigorating. I've had my share and follies too.

My protagonist in *Beyond Beauport* goes on a mid-life quest. I was inspired by the rugged spirit of Gloucester women connected to the fishing and waterfront economy, and decided my protagonist had to be a woman with a history and an uncertain future. I was inspired by Homer's Iliad and the Odyssey when I read them one summer and later studied them in college classics courses.

3. **What is Beauport, what does it signify to you?** An idyllic place by the sea with a sensibility that represents a paradise lost, but actually exists, where nature nurtures, and citizens care, with diversity of thinking and respect. Where nobody cares what you did, but care who you are. A special place from where you venture out in the world. But yearn for home with something special to share.

4. **Do you have particular authors who influenced or inspired your writing?** There are many, but for maritime/sea stories I would say Hemingway, Patrick O'Brien, Jack London, Nathaniel Philbrick, Daniel Defoe, Rafael Sabatini, Morgan Llewellyn, Jules Verne, Robert Lewis Stevenson, and Robert Carse.

5. ***Beyond Beauport* is an adventure novel. What makes you feel most alive?** To exercise my free will, with the attitude to be sensible, fear nothing, and try new things. Every day begins with the computer, research, then the gym, writing and other activities. Mind, body and spirit are important to exercise every day. To live the golden rule and make a difference. I am a father, twice married, still friends with my first wife, and my wife Judi of 35 years is my best friend. Soulful relationships over decades take stamina and heart.

On the personal side, I have enjoyed fishing, boating, mountaineering, kayak racing, rowing dories, cycling, motorcycling, camping, travel, and cooking. Not enough dancing. My intellectual pursuits are varied. I am fortunate to have friends around the world to share ideas. The life of a joyful skeptic intrigues me—always seeking, sometimes finding answers. I have had beagles since a boy. They totally get it and are my better selves.

6. **What was your writing process for *Beyond Beauport*?** I wrote non-fiction previously, so this required a new mindset and skills acquired from courses on screenwriting, short stories, the novel form, attending writing conferences, writing groups, critique groups and a lot of reading in my genre. My wife and I consume stories in literature and movies. Cross-genre fiction and historical fiction are my favorites. Transformational stories by and on the sea are of keen interest. I have lived in Gloucester, Massachusetts, America's oldest seaport, for most of my life and love maritime history.

Beyond Beauport is a contemporary sea story with a compelling female protagonist with a genealogical and life mission. I wanted it to have the feel of a timeless sea novel with the pace of what readers expect today. As a former executive search consultant, it was natural to interview people in Gloucester and Cape Ann for this novel. Gloucester families connected to the working harbor, the schooners and fishing are the finest kind, to use a local expression. A unique premise blossomed on a visit to a Florida

museum with an exhibit on female pirates. The characters I created have lived in my mind now for nearly seven years.

My writing improved, as creative sparks emerged from my fractured process. A lot of experimental writing got tamed. I did enough research for a trilogy. I got lost in historical research of non-fiction pirate, maritime history, and wreck diving. I have studied three dozen books on writing craft. Fortunately, critical thinkers and readers gave me unvarnished feedback, then editors. I eventually learned how to better self-edit and embrace revision. So the process was both necessary and humiliating. I believe in process, and now have one that works for me on the fiction shelf.

7. **What research was required for the pirate and privateer history of *Beyond Beauport*?** After learning about Anne Bonny, the wild fearless, Irish redhead pirate of the Caribbean in early 1700s, I researched female seafarers. It took me a while to figure how my main character, Shannon Clarke, would be connected to the Golden Age of Piracy and to Anne Bonny. A genealogical mystery was the inspiration. Charting genealogical connections back to 1700's involved research into true famous courageous captains, privateers, and patriots of Gloucester and Cape Ann, down the east coast, their life and times. This meant serious library and primary research. I have visited and researched locations in this travel yarn of a sea story. To hold actual logbooks of a famous privateer in the American Revolution, amid sea battles, sent a chill up my spine. I have met modern day descendants of some of them and got access to family papers. You only get to use about seven percent of the luminous history to move a novel forward. That takes a lot of painful cuts in hard worked copy. The history itself was as fun as the writing.

8. **How did you develop, shape and weave the nautical detail and descriptions at sea?** I enjoyed many sails on historic sailing vessels. The Boston Tall Ships, Mystic Seaport, and Annual Gloucester Schooner festivals have provided access to vessels, captains and crews. I've been around power boats all my life, mostly for fishing, and owned several. I am no stranger to heavy weather. I did annual marlin fishing in Cabo San Lucas for over ten years. Later on I enjoyed sailing as crew on friend's vessels as well as sails on historic schooners.

Of late, I enjoy kayak fishing in the Ten Thousand Islands by Marco Island in Florida, in the bays near places Spanish Galleons stopped to take on

fresh water. It is amazing to catch ten different species in an hour. I also enjoy rowing Grand Banks Dories in Gloucester Harbor.

The features of the vessel *Second Wind* were gleaned from designs of several replica brigantines operating today. Brigantines were the vessel of choice for pirates in the 1700s for their agility and speed. It meant a lot to me to hear early readers, sailors and non-sailors alike, say they enjoyed *Beyond Beauport*.

9. **Your main character in *Beyond Beauport* wrote several poems. What was it like for you to write poetry in meter?** I always liked classical poetry and remember the newer witty stuff of Ogden Nash and Edgar Allan Poe, and Walt Whitman. I studied Classics at Holy Cross College. We learned about meter and form, but I didn't do much with it until recently. The *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was the inspiration for the poetry for my character Shannon in *Beyond Beauport* with a classic meter. I enjoy music and lyrical expression. When I practice my guitar, the song, with its melody, back beat and harmony, make me wish I was a songwriter. Lyrical writing is uplift, with narrative descriptive forms that read like poetry and conjure imagery. I read my work aloud to get the beats to work in final edits.
10. **Do you believe that ancestry matters?** Yes. There is no time like the present for people to search for a sense of country, community, family, and legacy, in a narrative to cohere an identity that gives meaning. The popularity of ancestry sites confirms the demand. We can debate the deep seated need. People can certainly develop a healthy self-concept rooted in reality without knowing their ancestral roots.

My wife Judi and I took a sabbatical some years back. Part of it was to explore my Italian and her German ancestry in the places our distant relatives lived. It was revealing of temperaments passed down and enlightening to understand our forebearer's stories.

This experience for me was a basis for one of the story engines of *Beyond Beauport*, with a character who had rejected her early family identity only to discover a famous and infamous legacy that changed her beliefs about family, identity and life purpose.

11. **What have you learned about yourself through writing this novel?**

A lot. Writing satisfying fiction is as difficult as they say and then some. Fortunately, I learned years ago to embrace tough feedback. As a joyful skeptic I take compliments, comments and criticism with equal measure. If you aren't open to feedback or willing to change you aren't coachable.

But with writing fiction you have to kill your babies—those scenes, characters, phrases, and even chapters that don't pace the story correctly. You have to be tough and merciful to your characters or your story will be boring. You have to have conflict, lots of it, and a polarized cast that has snappy dialogue. There are a million ways to confuse the reader and that is the cardinal sin of all writing—Do Not Confuse the Reader!

Then consider the fact that there will be readers of every stripe that get snagged on word choices or transitions in the story. You only want them going back to previous pages because they loved them so much, not to figure out WTF is going on.

Even when readers love your story they become “writers” suggesting other plot lines, more characterization of favorite secondary characters and so on. I have learned that I am stubborn and determined to achieve a goal as ever. It would have been easy to quit on this novel a hundred times. Along the way I developed two dozen briefs for other stories, but would not allow myself to write longer treatments of my favorite new ideas. Sometimes weeks would go by when I wrote nothing. With a better process, I will work more than one project at a time when I need to let another simmer on the back burner. Now I am excited to write the next one.

12. **What is next for you? Will you do a sequel for *Beyond Beauport*?**

I plan to write posts for my readers to delve more deeply into the themes of my novel, maybe show a few of those morsels I found and had to leave on the cutting room floor. Also take the best of my story briefs and work them into short stories that can grow. As to a sequel or prequel for *Beyond Beauport*, I have plenty of material. It would be fun to change the point of view character.