

COMMON PEOPLE

Local writer paints haunting picture

STURBRIDGE - Local author Rita Schiano's most recent novel, "Painting the Invisible Man," is ripped from 30-year-old headlines. Identified as a contemporary historical fiction, the story eerily reflects the 1976 unsolved murder of the author's father.

Set in Providence, R.I., the story is told in a first person narrative through the main character, Anna Matteo. While researching the online archives of The Providence Journal, Schiano said, Anna makes a keying error that leads her to a path she'd been avoiding most of her life - on a journey inside the world of her late father, Paulie Matteo, who was killed gangland-style more than two decades earlier.

The way it begins for Anna in the novel is how the real-life story began for Schiano - a simple keying error.

In 2001, Schiano was researching the archives of the Syracuse Post-Standard for a client. She accidentally charged 10 articles instead of the one she needed to her credit card. After retrieving her client's news article, Schiano, a native of Syracuse, N.Y., began typing in names of people she knew.

"Why I typed my father's name, I'll never know," she said.

Thirty-seven articles from the 1990s came up that referenced her father.

"It wouldn't have been all that strange had my father not died in 1976," she said.

The headline that caught her attention mentioned FBI tapes where the man under surveillance "bragged" about getting away with murder. The

man on the tape had been acquitted in 1979 of the murder of Schiano's father.

"At that moment I knew I had to explore this story," she said.

And it seems that the moment she made up her mind, a series of events kept pushing Schiano in that direction.

"In the novel Anna quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen,'" she said. "Every time I backed away from writing this story, something would push me forward."

For Schiano, the writing of the book was tremendously cathartic.

"I had to confront truths about my father that I had chosen to ignore for most of my life," she said. "Anna's self-exploration was intensely personal."

Despite the personal element of the story, Schiano believes the life lessons portrayed are universal.

"Anna's life experience, in and of itself, is unique to her. Yet the exploration one's personal history is what readers will relate to. Everyone has a story, everyone has a history," she said.

Fans of The Soprano's and this genre of book will find "Painting the Invisible Man" intriguing. Schiano offers an inside look at what it's like to grow up in a different kind of family.

"Most of us aren't like Meadow Soprano or grow up like the Gotti's," she said.

Schiano's first novel, "Sweet Bitter Love," was published in 1997. Since then, she has contributed several short stories to journals and anthologies, and has teamed with Paul Gemme of

Auburn to develop a one-hour television drama, T.I.M.E. Share Inc., that is currently making the rounds in Los Angeles, Calif. Schiano's words are not restricted to page and screen either. In 2001, Maggie Moran, CEO of KidsTerrain Inc., commissioned her and New York songwriter Jamie Notarthomas to write a song for children that addressed the horrific events of Sept. 11. Their song, "Tiny Acts of Kindness," has played on children's radio programs throughout the country. A second song commission for KidsTerrain, "The Magic in Me," was featured on the NPR Radio children's show The Zucchini Brothers.

Schiano is also known throughout central Massachusetts communities for more than just her writing. From 1989 through 2000 she co-owned The Casual Cafe, an Italian-Japanese restaurant in Sturbridge.

"Painting the Invisible Man" is now available for \$14.95 via the Reed Edwards Company on the book publisher's Web site, www.reededwards.com.

A helping hand



Turley Publications submitted photo

U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Kelly Jette, daughter of Joel and Gail Jette of Wales and granddaughter of Joseph and Marilyn Bolaske of Wales, applies medication to the nose of an Iraqi infant on June 21 at the Civil-Military Operations Center Medical Clinic at Camp Striker, Iraq. Jette is assigned to the 447th Expeditionary Medical Squadron. The Civil-Military Operations Center medical clinic provides free medical service to impoverished Iraqi citizens.

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