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EXPERIENCE

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While America Aged

Are We Sitting
on a Retirement
Time Bomb?



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Protecting Moscow from the Soviets

BY LARRY HAMMOND

This review is not about me, but let me tell you a little about me. I am a criminal defense lawyer. So, you can guess how I might have reacted when one of Peter Baird's most unforgettable stories begins like this:

When the doorbell to my apartment rang about 9:45 at night, I assumed it was my estranged wife who had come to pick up our thirteen-year-old daughter. But I was wrong. At the door were two police officers.

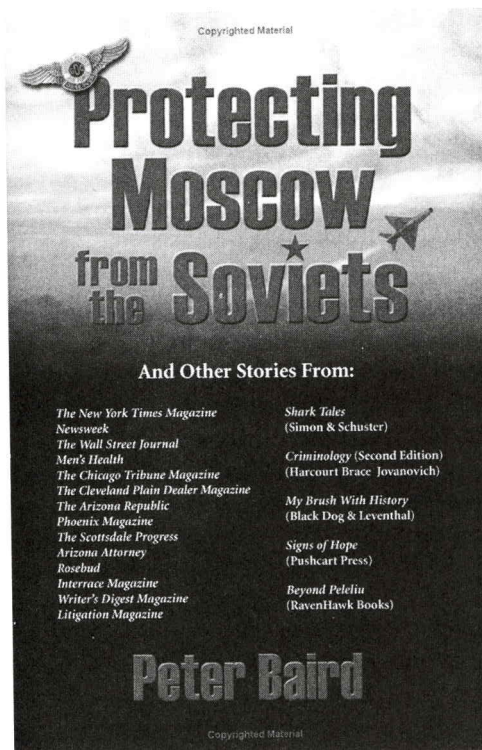
"Are you Peter Baird?" The younger officer sounded grave. "Yes."

"Are you Kendra Baird's father?"

"Yes." My heart raced. "Do you mind if we come in and ask you a few questions?" I knew, from having defended criminal cases, that there were hazards in speaking to police officers without foresight or counsel. But they knew my daughter's name, so I mumbled an "Okay" and stood aside.

"Okay?" "Ask a few questions?" If this man had "defended criminal cases," what was he doing inviting the cops into his home without a warrant? What about when they told Peter they were there to investigate a claim of child abuse? Time, maybe, to think about the right to remain silent? Time, maybe, for this adoptive father—with his own crumbling marital life—to wonder whether his extraordinary legal career might also crumble if he opened his mouth?

You would do well to read for yourself how this encounter ends, but to appreciate the depth of this short story, you must see it in the context of the collection of Peter Baird's writings. "The Night the Police Came" is a story that should resonate with any parent, but it has arresting power for a lawyer.



Protecting Moscow from the Soviets

Author Peter Baird

National Writers Press, \$24.99

Baird is not just a lawyer who has defended criminal cases. He was a member of the Ernesto Miranda defense team—yes, *the* Miranda. He represented the fabulously wronged Salvadorans in the "sanctuary" case that gave Arizona's governor her first taste of the turmoil and notoriety that accompany the cases of the highest profile criminally accused. The hilarious courtroom handmade prayers of the Hare Krishna also mark Baird's criminal defense career.

All of this is on display in *Protecting Moscow from the Soviets*. Indeed, the highlights of his criminal defense career occupy only a fraction of the stories from a career as one of the country's finest

Larry Hammond is one of the founding members of the Phoenix law firm Osborn Maledon. He is a practicing criminal defense lawyer and chair of the Arizona Justice Project—Arizona's law student-based innocence and injustice project.

civil litigators. The collection professes to be part fiction, part history, and part autobiography, but it is a challenge to figure which story fits with which part. Indeed, the closing assurance in the preface is a source of wonder wherever the reader turns: "I have tried to make the facts as accurate as memory would permit and the fiction as inventive as imagination would allow." I have known this man for decades, but I cannot help but marvel that in his life, fact often seems more inventive than imagination would allow.

But this book is accurate and candid. From his descriptions of depression and rejection to his astonishing public-service contributions to cancer research, Peter Baird has truly revealed a life of service, success, and turmoil. One does not traipse from the Supreme Court to the city court without leaving some pretty amusing footprints, and Baird leaves plenty. These footprints will only tell you so much about this remarkable lawyer—just enough to make a reader want to know what his DNA might reveal.

It turns out, of course, that Baird's abandonment of his right to remain silent when the cops were at his door is a metaphor for his entire life. The metaphor may not have been intended. Neither is it likely that the collection was designed to be as revealingly autobiographical as it is. One need not know a thing about Peter Baird, however, to admire this work and to see the value in his stories. Indeed, there is too much value to be digested in a single reading. Too much good humor to be captured the first time through, and too much substance to be plumbed. Like many of his friends, I am sure I have read most of his stories either in manuscript or in one of the innumerable diverse journals and magazines in which they have been published. Until I saw them all together, I cannot say I really began to appreciate how much his life has touched the lives of others.

Were he my client, I would applaud his silencelessness. If you too might have to confess to having lived "life as if it were a giant SAT examination," this

book will be one with special meaning. You may find threads to your own life along Peter Baird's path from "pubescent patriot" to counsel for the damned. You may share my delight at the account of the "conscientious clarinetist," and may be amazed that anyone could grow so well in a world marked with the imprint of a father given to "limitless rage." Somehow, all of this together helps explain how one man can contribute so much to others and take so little credit.

Peter Baird would say that this collection is not really his autobiography, and in fairness it is much more than that. It is easily digestible stories, full of irony and good humor—the kind of book one can read on the bus or while waiting for the wheels of the judicial process to grind toward your client. However or wherever you read it, you will suffer no disappointment, except perhaps when you finish the last chapter and find that the self-acclaimed "rejectionologist" has captured you, but left you with nothing else to read . . . until his next story! ■

Good Friday

continued from page 32

dust jacket proof showed up, it bore the approval of two distinguished historians, one of them James M. McPherson, professor emeritus at Princeton University and Pulitzer Prize winner for *Battle Cry of Freedom*. The greatest dream for me, or probably any writer for that matter, is to become a published author. That dream was realized when three boxes of books arrived from the publisher in the summer of 2007 just before a book festival in my old hometown in Meagher County. There have been many more auspicious venues scheduled since, including Fredericksburg, Virginia, on the occasion of their reenactment of the famous battle, and the reading and signing in New York City on St. Patrick's Day 2008, which still seems unreal. ■