

Docket Call

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Following in the Foot Steps of Grisham: Q & A with Trial Lawyer/Fiction Author Richard N. Shapiro

Patrick J. Austin

Some lawyers are content to practice by day and relax by night. Not R.N. (Rick) Shapiro. He is a partner at a busy, thriving law firm in Virginia Beach, a prolific inventor holding 18 U.S. patents, a husband, a father, and most recently, a published author.

Rick authored a fiction thriller titled *Taming the Telomeres*. Telomeres are the protective tip of the human chromosome and are involved in cell division, and the aging of all our cells. What prompted Rick to sit down and engage in the arduous task of writing a full-length fiction novel dealing with biology, national security, and the law? Let's find out...

Q: What inspired you to begin writing a novel?

A: It was on my bucket list to write a fiction thriller. I co-authored a treatise on railroad injury law. I then wrote a non-fiction book entitled *Faceplant*. Nevertheless, I had no idea how much harder it was to write a fiction thriller because every aspect and every character has to be created from whole cloth. However, I really enjoyed the creative process, and I know a thing or two about that from inventing, designing, and developing consumer products.

Q: What have you invented?

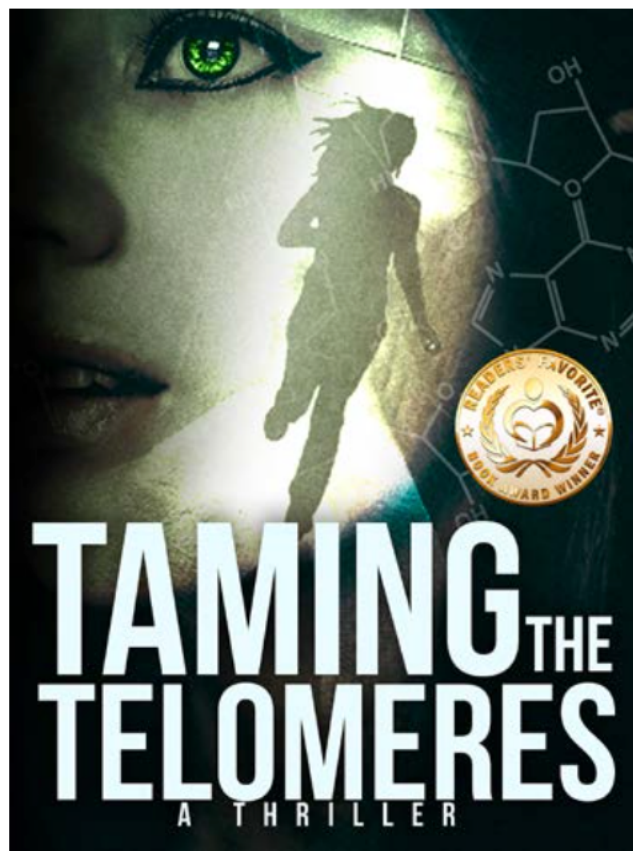
A: My design company Pancake Wheel LLC has focused exclusively in one area of patent art relating to folding wheels and folding wheel axles, and I now hold 18 United States patents. All of my inventions fold and collapse flat; I've licensed a folding-handle design to Radio Flyer wagons, and I just recently co-developed a state-of-the-art folding baby stroller for a European brand called "Nikimotion" that is being introduced in Europe during 2016.

Q: Back to your novel, what influences led to the storyline behind *Taming the Telomeres*?

A: I worked on Capitol Hill before law school, and I clerked for a federal judge after completing law school, so I sprinkled Washington D.C. and Capitol Hill in the storyline. One of the main characters is an attorney named Andy Michaels. He works at a boutique law firm in Georgetown. Having clerked for a judge, I wanted to explore the human side of judges and included what happens behind the scenes for a D.C. Superior Court judge as well as for a judge on the top-secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act Court. These judges face some ethical and moral dilemmas in the book as well.

Q: How has the book been received by critics and readers?

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A: The large majority of the reviews on [Amazon](#) are between four and five stars, and that's after more than 50,000 downloads, so I couldn't be happier with the response from readers.

Q: How did you effectively balance practicing law full-time and writing the book?

A: You have to be very good at compartmentalizing your time. I would typically write in the evenings at home and then on weekends, but for many months I toyed with the overall outline and storyboard of the book before I started writing. Everyone has a different schedule, but being organized is super important.

Q: Did you draw on your own career as an attorney to dream up those ethical dilemmas he faces?

A: You take a little bit of something here and there, but Andy Michaels faces much bigger issues than I ever have faced, such as the interjection of national security during his representation of victim's families after a commuter jet crash. I don't want to spoil anything for potential readers, but the intersection

of terrorism and national security, biological secrets the government is developing, and how they impact Andy Michaels as a trial attorney is central to the plot because Michaels ends up representing several of his own family members, along with other clients.

Q: I understand you traveled to Miami recently to accept the Gold Award for top thriller in the 2015 Readers Favorite International Book Award Contest for *Taming the Telomeres*. How did that go?

A: The event was incredible. It included insider lectures and an awards ceremony. I met some very interesting authors, both from the United States and abroad. We exchanged tips and ideas on everything from software for authors to ideas for promoting our novels. In a bit of irony, the silver-medal winner in my category turned out to be a judge from the West Coast who writes under the pen name Garrett Holms.

Q: What advice would you give to an attorney who may secretly hold aspirations to be a published author?

A: As attorneys, we already have something going for us because most of us should be decent at formal writing. The problem is you have to really forget most of what you learned as an attorney and return



a simple and direct writing style. One of my reviewers said that I write for the proletariat, which I took as a huge compliment because I'm trying to write at a very basic level to appeal to the broadest spectrum of readers possible (not like when writing a legal brief). There are number of books outlining the most common story structures for successful novels. Any aspiring author, including an

attorney, should review at least one of these articles or books before setting off to write the next great novel.

Learn more about *Taming the Telomeres* at [Amazon](#). To learn more about Rick, visit his author site: [rnshapiro.com](#).

Patrick J. Austin is a 2013 graduate of George Mason University School of Law. He now works in the Office of Information Policy with the U.S. Department of Justice and is Editor-in-Chief of the *Docket Call*.

Note: In the interest of full disclosure, Patrick practiced law with Rick prior to joining the U.S. Department of Justice.