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Lipkin wins Oregon Book Award



Shelly Lipkin '05

Shelly Lipkin '05 made a few good friends as he penned his recent award-winning play.

Lipkin, of Lake Oswego, earned a 2004 Oregon Book Award for *Vitriol and Violets*, a play he co-authored with Louanne Moldovan and Sherry Lamoreaux.

"You kind of live it," said Lipkin, of the story. "The characters become your best friends, in a way."

Vitriol and Violets is set in the 1920s at Manhattan's Algonquin Hotel, where a group of writers – future Pulitzer Prize and Academy Award winners – gathered each day for lunch. The group, known as the Algonquin Round Table, included writers like Dorothy Parker, Alexander Woollcott, Robert Benchley, Edna Ferber, Harold Ross and Harpo Marx. They played poker and extreme croquet, and even bought a vacation island together.

"These were wild people who had lunch together every day in the Algonquin Hotel," said Lipkin, who also co-produced and acted in the play. "At the time, none of them were famous. They were broke, the Algonquin was a pit, but they were brilliant writers. This was the beginning of Broadway."

It took a year to write the play, which initially opened in 2002. Editing from early performances resulted in the current version.

Lipkin, who is working toward a humanities degree through Linfield's Adult Degree Program, recently finished writing a second play, *Sylver Beach's* [sic], which has doubled as his Linfield senior thesis. He is now writing a third play, a comedy, focusing on how a man deals with his brother's suicide.

"Literature has to entertain people, hold their interest and capture their imagination," he said. "That's what I think of when I write."

With *Vitriol* finished, another play newly completed and a third in the works, Lipkin is making his mark as a playwright. He has been involved in theater since age 20, when he took to the stage as a student at the College of Marin and the

U.S. International University School of Performing Arts. He put school on the back burner after being accepted to perform with the Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

He spent the next 20 years in Los Angeles as a television and film actor, appearing in numerous movies, commercials and sitcoms, before moving to Oregon in 1998. Most recently, he appeared in the Sundance Festival award-winning film *Mean Creek*.

Lipkin was co-artistic director of Cygnet Productions from 2000 to 2003 and served as co-artistic director of West Coast Ensemble Theatre. In addition to his theatrical work, he is an adjunct professor at Marylhurst University and teaches drama for Lakewood Theatre Company. He is also a teacher and consultant at New Horizons Computer Center.

Lipkin said he returned to school "for my soul. I wanted to have a degree," and found a good fit with Linfield's flexible schedule, weekend classes and top-notch faculty.

"I'd heard great things about Linfield," he said. "I've been able to fit it into my schedule. That's the best thing about it. It's a great tool for people trying to do two things at once."

Barbara Drake, professor of English, remembers teaching Lipkin during a creative nonfiction workshop.

"Here was this guy who could act and write and had all kinds of theatrical experience," Drake said. "He had such a knack for making his stories come alive. When he gave a reading in class it was a performance, often a very funny one. He really knows how to use voice, on and off the page."

– Laura Davis



Shelly Lipkin '05, left, as Robert Benchley and Jane Ferguson as Dorothy Parker in a scene from the award-winning play *Vitriol and Violets*, which he co-authored.