

SEEING THE MANY FACES OF GOD LOCAL AUTHOR PENS KIDS' BOOK WITH AGE-OLD QUESTION

By Nadia Lerner

STAFF WRITER

Folks tell Don Shelden he sounds like Frank Sinatra. Flattering — particularly since his vocal talents remained under cover until age 40-something. “It’s been a nice ride; I don’t even read music,” says the New Canaan corporate life insurance exec who always yearned to croon like Ol’ Blue Eyes.

His dream came true when he teamed up with three-time Grammy-winning composer Marion Evans, whom he met at a party during the mid-’90s and who soon became his mentor. Subsequently, the pair recorded two albums featuring Shelden’s vocal renditions of Sinatra classics. The first, “Imagination,” was released in 1999. The CD was followed in 2002 by his second vocals/big band album, “Any Swing Goes.”

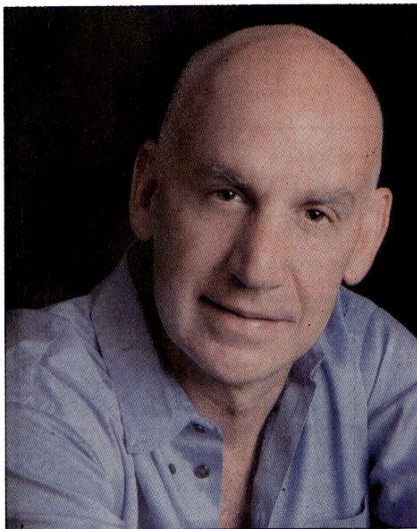
Shelden recently added a new dimension to his life by writing the children’s book, “That’s What God Looks Like to Me.” The book, which includes a CD (for \$14.99), was inspired by the lyrics of an old song by Lan O’Kun and Stan Irwin.

With text set against a series of beautiful images, the book answers the time-worn question about what God looks like — posed by a boy to his father. Pictures of a rainbow after the rain, a prairie of golden wheat, a snow-coated mountain and a meadow of flowers are among the answers.

“It’s a very easy read, not ‘War and Peace,’” Shelden says of the tome whose words — the enduring song lyrics — he found himself singing in the shower one day.

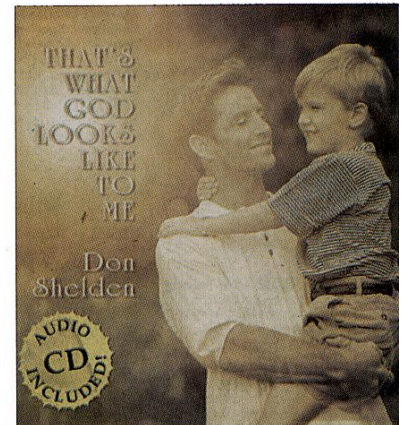
“I was thinking about my youngest boy, who will be seven next month, and it really touched me. Something moved inside me.”

Realizing the words made a perfect fit for



Contributed photos

Don Shelden is the author of “That’s What God Looks Like to Me,” at right.



a children’s book, the father of five decided to go ahead with the project, dedicating it to his son, Will. After Googling the lyrics, Shelden searched for matching images on the Internet. He presented the idea to his friend, children’s book author Danny Tepper, who “jumped all over it” and agreed to be its editor.

“Finding the pictures we felt best represented the lyrics was the hardest part of the book,” says Shelden of the undertaking requiring several months of por-

ing over thousands of photos on the Web.

“It turned out to be a lot less expensive than going out on top of the mountain and shooting a picture.”

The book ends with an image of the father holding his son next to the book’s defining words, “But you my son, you are what God really looks like to me.”

Says Shelden: “I think for anyone of any religion, whether you are Christian or not, the message will resonate across all religious barriers.”

The book is for parents or grandparents to read to their little

ones. “You get that one moment of bonding that’s hard to recapture.”

As for the project’s musical component, Shelden acknowledges that creating the CD was the easiest part. The recording was produced with conductor/music arranger Mike Renzi, who also played the piano during the session. Shelden had met Renzi, a seven-time Emmy Award-winner and musical director for “Sesame Street,” through a mutual friend.

“When you hear it, you’ll be blown away. He’s just a phenomenal artist.”

Meanwhile, Shelden contin-

ues to make music whenever the opportunity presents itself. Since 2002, he and his 17-piece Don Shelden Band have played to sold-out audiences at charity events in the tristate area.

Still, despite his musical successes, Shelden has kept his day job. “I didn’t throw it all out the window — yet.”

“That’s What God Looks Like to Me” is available on Amazon.com, www.thatwhatgodlooksliketome.com or at Elm Street Books in New Canaan. It will soon be available at Border’s Books and Barnes & Noble.