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Having built & lost a tofu empire, Thomas Timmins turns to writing crime stories

Story by Richie Davis

he "musty odor of the factory as the Factory chugs on ... even as one of the workers has been found upside down in a giant tank of soybeans.

That's the first taste readers get of the major role played by the tofu industry in a trio of mysteries written by Thomas Timmins and recently published in a book titled "The Hour Between One and Two," a self-described "dark comedic mystery."

A former Greenfield food entrepreneur who has stirred more than his share of soybeans, Timmins helped transform tofu locally and nationally from an almost unknown Oriental protein source into a corn plants out of soybean thriving business. Since those heady days, he has cooked up a litany of other businesses while also working to launch his career as an author with a writing genre he calls "tofu

Timmins' tofu business —Tomsun Tofu — came to Greenfield in the 1980s as the town watched its machinetool industry take flight. For a while, it seemed as if Greenfield would shift from "taptown" to "soytown." Now renting a house in Haydenville, where he moved from Greenfield after returning in 2009 after seven years in California, Timmins is now a partner in an Amherstbased energy consulting business and has also run computer and sports businesses in the area and has taught self-designed "Heroes Journey" life skills in the Franklin County Jail.

He released his first fiction work as a free Web download in December for a week. He also released a similar trial e-book last April and attracted 2,000 downloads as part of an me as an author."

in "The Hour Between One and Two" — the suspicious factory owner protagonist, the Chinese salesman, the former Soviet factory worker — may echo people and Soy Dairy and then Tomsun Foods chartered a new culi-Wells Street.

Tofu tales

The 69-year-old, Iowaraised entrepreneur started in the business at 14, cutting fields with a little scythe. Later, he was unloading soy margarine from trucks. In 1972, he moved back to Amherst, where he'd worked a few years before as a founding member of the Yellow Sun food co-op in the Student Union basement at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

It was at Yellow Sun that Timmins — whose then-wife, Judy Roberts, was running Amherst's Equinox natural foods restaurant — met Richard Leviton, the owner of Corn Creek Bakery in South Deerfield and a zen-practicing tofu aficionado. Timmins moved on to become a salesman for the Brattleboro, Vt.based natural-foods distributor, Llama, Toucan and Crow (which has since grown into United Natural Foods, the nation's leading distributor of natural and organic foods) and began making tofu at

home in Brattleboro. In 1976, Leviton and his wife approached Timmins about starting a

Several of the characters

events in Timmins' past, from the days when New England nary course from Greenfield's

old movie theater. "The business just took off!" recalls Timmins. "I had a lot of connections in the natural foods world in the area and in Boston. We made money the first year. Bread and Circus (now Whole Foods) had started in business in Boston and we were selling to them and to co-ops up and down the valley. I had my van and we'd make tofu one day and deliver the next. That was my job for around

> the first year." Using a traditional Japanese technique, they churned out 300 to 1,000 pounds of tofu a week.

ufacturing company and

each investing an initial

the following January, with

\$2,000, they set up Laughing

Grasshopper Tofu Shop in a

Millers Falls storefront, which

had once been the foyer of an

But then, he said, "It became clear: It's a lot of hard, physical labor." The process involved soaking soybeans overnight, grinding them and pouring them into a giant pot, which is lifted onto a candy burner to cook. Then, the beans are put into a 55-gallon pail lined with cloth that's squeezed in a cider press to remove the soy milk. That milk is coagulated into a whey that's transferred to a tray, covered with cheesecloth and pressed again into a 40-pound tofu block that is cut into one-pound blocks, packed

in water and refrigerated for

With help from the fledgling Franklin County Community Development Corp., the business expanded in 1978 into New England Soy Dairy and moved to the former Bete Fog Nozzle factory on Wells Street. In 1979, it ramped up production, selling to the Food Mart and

First National supermarket chains. (Along the way, they considered and gave up the notion of also making soy milk, soy mayo, tofu dips, soy ice cream and cheeses and tempeh —

which was instead taken up by Soy Dairy partner Works, the predecessor of

Lightlife Foods.) The Soy Dairy began selling to metropolitan New York and tripled in growth, with 75 local jobs as well as 25 in Boston and New York. Its product line grew to include egg-roll skins, won-ton wrappers, fresh noodles, soy sauce, ginger-soy sauce and

five-spice powder. The company, which by then had additional investors, was doing so well that it was approached by Dannon and next-day delivery. other major food manufacturers "who were always looking for the next big thing," said

The Soy Dairy began garnering attention in The New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Time magazine and, as the company grew to the point that it couldn't keep up with demand, former Dannon chairman Juan Metzger stepped forward in

Playfully displaying a knife and a plate of tofu, Thomas Timmins poses in his Haydenville home. "The Hour Between One

and Two," which contains a trio of crime stories, is so rooted in the tofu industry that Timmins is calling it "tofu noir."

investor. "He said, A former Greenfield 'Let's build food entrepreneur this company,' who has stirred remembers more than his Timmins and the business share of soybeans. was ramped Timmins helped up another transform tofu locally notch, in 1983, and nationally from to become Tomsun Foods an almost unknown International, Oriental protein which was source into a thriving named by

1982 as a consultant and an

as one of the nation's fastest Michael Cohen at his Tempeh growing companies.

business.

Named for Timmins, Tomsun Foods International introduced a nondairy pudding-like product, Jofu, which was named for Metzger's as well as one of Timmins' sons. It was launched in test markets around the Pioneer Valley, in Stop & Shop and Food Mart and in New York.

INC. magazine

"We had a big test market in Rochester, Wegman's, where they couldn't keep the product in stock. We said, 'We may have a winner here.' But we needed new machinery to make it in volume and a new Jofu refrigerator. But the only way to get enough money is to go public."

In 1986, Tomsun did that, with \$750,00 in private investments and \$4 million in public financing. The business increased in size from 3,000 to 18,000 cases of tofu a week in a matter of six or seven weeks.

Daily Hampshire Gazette/Jerrey Roberts

"That's way too fast for a little company," said Timmins, who remembers that problems with getting products to about 80 major supermarket chains drove the business to seek another couple million

dollars of investment. Then, the stock market crashed on Oct. 18, 1987. The was our death knell," said Timmins, who watched as investors pulled their money. The business closed in 1989.

Speaking of a tofu noir, Timmins recalls getting a phone call from some tofu enthusiasts out of Leominster as his company was ramping up from Laughing Grasshopper to become New England Soy Dairy. "We like tofu. Could we come and look at your operation?" they

"We were very, very naive," recalled Timmins, who greeted the three visitors and showed them everything. Six months later, the tofu competitor Nasoya was in business. The year after Tomsun went belly-up, the Leominster tofumaker was bought by the Chinese giant Vitasoy.

Tracking down eyeballs

"I'm all meat and potatoes, like my old man. He lived to 93," Police Chief Aaron Buhrman tells Genevieve O'Connor, American Tofu Co.'s marketing director, as she serves him a dish of tofu and vegetables. He'd accepted her dinner investigation See TOFU Page D3

Greenfield, Massachusetts

Weddings

Katie Bachinski ---Gil Luis Hermina

Stephen and Cheryl Bachinski

of Northfield announce the mar-riage of their daughter, Katin, in Gil Luis Hermina of Miami, Pla. he couple were married on Jan. 17 in Charleston, S.C.

Katie is a 2000 graduate of
Pinneer Valley Regional High
School in Northfield, a 2013 graduste of Greenfield Community ollege with an associate's degree in health science. Currently, Katie is attending Trident College in South Carolina to become a regio-

Gill is the son of Gilberto and Marilyn Luis Hermina of Miami. GE is a 2008 graduate of South West Miami High School in Miami and a 2012 graduate of New England College, Henniker, N.H. with a bachelor of science degree Katie currently works at the South Carolina Aquarium and East Shore Athletic Club while Katie and Gil Lais Hermina

attending the nursing program at Gil is employed as a manager for GNO

bride will use the name Katie Luis Bermina.

are making their home in Amberel.

Amberel Motors.

Ann Soutt.

Bayetate Medical Center in Greenfield.

The bride will use the name Mrs. Tiffany

Tiffany Ann Ward -Adam F. Scott

Tiffany Ann Ward and Man Freezan Scott of II enks St., Amberst, were The bride is the daughts Martha and Dale Ward 54 Charlemont Road steebury Road, Pelham. The E30 p.m. core ournier officiating. ride was given in mar-

Detectacion, the tender's cospon, gave a reading by the Dall Lama, "Instructions for Life." Plantet was Cheryl Attending the bride was the bride's Sest friend from rollingo, Kristen Deledele, as maid of honor Bridesmaids Tiffany and Adam Scott.

were Bria Thurber, the

bride's sister, and Carly

Sartowics, the bride's best friend from child-Eric Scott, the bridegroom's brother, served as best man. Grosmomen were Jake Thurber. the groom's brother in-law, and Peter Bassett, The reception was at the outside partition

the groom's blend. at the Warfield House with a disc jockey from sheelute Entertainment providing munic.

Nichole M. Canuel -Garrett R. Phillips

Nichole Marie Canuel and Garrett Ryan Phillips of 64 Overland Road were married Sept. 20, 2014. The bride is the daughter of Joseph and Kim Canuel of Maple Street, Greenfield The groom is the son of Gary Phillips of Grant Street, Greenfield, and Karen Phillips of furners Falls Road, Turners Falls. The 4 p.m. ceremony took place at the First Church of Northampton with the bride's lather officiating. She was given in marriage by her father Teresa Canuel was vocalist, Dana Passquale, organist, and Len Giatas, planist. Altending the bride was her twin sister ressica Lytin Castine, as matron of honor. Bridesmaids were Lauren Franks, Rylee Sourassa and Hannah Morton, Madison Phillips, daughter of the bridal couple, was flower girl, escurted by Toresa Canuel, sister of the bride. as best man, Groomemen were Keith James,

Kolby James, cousin of the groom, served Mike Brenciano and Ryan Castine. Kohen Phillips, son of the groom, was ring bearer The reception was held at the Hotel Northampton with DJ Ryan Interlande providing music. A special song was written and sung nied by sister of the bride, Teresa Camuel. Flowers were by Purget Me Not in

Riviera Mara, Mexico.

fac iyos Postsprayty by the bride's father, Joseph Caruel, accomps- Nichole and Garrett Phillips pher at Bayetate Pranklin Medical Center. The groom is manager of AMS. The newlyweds took a wedding trip

The bride will use the name Nichole Marie Multi's first-grade son, add- D.C. Free resources like The bride is a diagnostic medical sonogra- Philips.

California in 2002 to pursue a writing career, he attended

MILESTONES

From Page D1

to get away from a murder

investigation. "Sorry to spoil

This dialogue is from a

two-minute dramatization on

YouTube that was released in

November - http://tinyurl.

Timmins' push to launch a

been simmering since his

teens. After taking a writing

course in 1984 from the late

Genie Zeiger, when they were

neighbors in Greenfield, and

then from Pat Schneider at

Amherst Writers and Artists,

Timmins developed a writing

program called "The Crooked

Path" at the Franklin County

writers' conferences, took les-

sons from best-selling author

Catherine Ryan Hyde ("Pay

Jail. When he moved to

writing career, a dream that's

com/kq39d78 - as part of

the day with talk about this

it Forward") and other teach-The couple reside in Hanahan, S.C. The ers, concentrating on "action writing" and dark fiction,

Take it inside

When it's cold outside, families can still be active, have fun

Natadie Digate Mulh, a pedistrictan and obesity medi-Group in San Diego, Calif. The couple honeymooned in Jamaica. They bealth benefits as well. The bride earned a bachelor of science degree in nursing. She is a cardiac nurse at opment and brain development," Muth said. 'And belie The groom is paint shop manager at North Instill a lifetong love for physinal activity. one's mood.

think of it.

I," Muth said. "It has to be

something kids are espeying,

Hore are a few ideas from

experts to jumpstart

Get competitive. For





on a planned series of "webi-"I like to write about the

Tofu: The dark side

dark side, the shadow-side

of life, because I'm really a

big optimist," said Timmins.

"It's sort of a balancing act

Following the 2012 death

of his father, he invested

Media, which he used to

his inheritance in Zoetown

publish his tofu-noir trilogy.

"I had tried to publish these

books and had at least 200

rejections," said Timmins,

posted on an entire wall of

his house. "But, you can be

proud of rejections for only

so long." So he decided to

self-publishing.

take a different approach by

with a marketing consultant

who convinced him to get his

writing out to as many read-

ers as possible using social

media and free downloads.

Timmins has been working

who's had the rejections

afraid of it."

"A lot of people are going to put their eyeballs on this, like it or not," Timmins said. "If 10 percent of them like for myself ... most of us try to it and talk about it, I've got avoid the dark side, or we're a whole inventory." He has

The Recorder Saturday, February 7, 2015 D3

another series taking shape, beginning with a new novel planned for publication this spring, and a nonfiction book And, in the future, there may be more "webisodes"

based on the darkly comedic side of tofu.

"New authors are a dime a dozen nowadays," Timmins said, candidly. "How do you differentiate your work? I'm bringing my entrepreneurial stuff to getting the work out, which is the real work in my life, since I was about 15."

Senior reporter Richie Davis has worked at The Recorder for more than 35 years. He can be reached at rdavis@recorder.com or 413-772-0261,

He's also been working with a Jerrey Roberts is a staff photographer film-writer friend of 50 years for the Daily Hampshire Gazette.

By SHELRY SHEEBAN-BERNARD

to be had if you can tap into your kids' creativity, said Dr. cine physician who practices at Chilibren's Primary Care Not only will staying active indoors keep young ones retertained, if offers a myriad We know it's beneficial for children's health, motor-devel-It also can help families band, while elevating every-



ing a little competitive ele- GuNuudn.com and YouTube com host countless dance any activity more engaging. videos (search for terms like The last rainy day they experi-"ants in your pants," "dinosaur enced, Muth ruggested dring stomp," "go funanas" or "silly t can feel kind of cramped, one-minute intervals of racing dance videos" to get started everyone is a little crucky up the stairs and walking back. Hatcher also likes to integrate down (for safety), "It was the bealthy snacks into the reu most fan thing for him, and tines - for example, making said Mira Rasmussen, a San we were both exhausted and Bugs on a Log before dancing Antonio-based exercise phys-out of breath by the end of it," to "Auta in Your Panta." inlegist and committee theirs she said, adding that science 4. Try out some yegs. her for the comprofit Obesity shows small bouts of activity can offer many health benein an apartment, a low-im part activity like yegs migh Turn a card game into fit the bill. There are tons of bancing chemicals in our exercise. During jolloor fumkid-friendly yega resources brains, Rasmussen said, and ily get-togethers, Rasmussen available, such as Alliance flut's especially important. Here to use exercise playing for a Healthier Generation's for children, who prefer quick cards like the FEDeck (fil-'Fitness Breaks with Tara bursts of movement over nur-deck.com), where each card Bustrates a specific exercise So how can you get the such as a squat or a burper. course. Depending on the chil "You can integrate them dren's ages, you can go as into an existing gauss or use simple or intrinste as you want minutes of daily activity for them with playing dice -- for with this one. Muth suggests mample, you rolled a five, you enlisting hids' help in comhave to do five burpees," she ing up with ideas for individ explains. "It's a great way to sall activity stations. They can kind of movement, not neces- bond through a challenge, even create their own signs sarily exercise the way adults. Imughing and encouraging and instructions for each one each other throughout the Ultimately, the goal is just to get the whole family moving. As Muth explains, "As 3. Turn on a silly dance video. Make technology a and then they'll continue to friend instead of a far, suggesta Duniel Hatcher, National thing and keep kids on a struc-Bealthy Out-of-School Time tured path, but it will be more

it Alliance for a Healthier your children in the process Generation in Washington, — let them come up with their

fun for everyone if you involve



Advisor for the nonprof-

Some indoor activities naturally involve exercise. Others, like card games, require a little more imagination to become active.



The Recorder charges a fee for engagement, wedding and anniversary announcements. There are no time restrictions for publication on Saturday's Milestones page. Engagements \$35 up to 8-column inches; weddings, \$50 up to 12-column inches; anniversaries, \$40 up to 15-column inches. Additional column inches are \$10 inch (approx. 35 words per inch). Payments are made in advance: cash, check or credit card. Forms are available at The Recorder offices, 14 Hope St., Greenfield, or online at www.recorder.com. Look for the "Reader Wedding anniversary amountements of 50 or more years are fee. So are 100-year-birthday photos and five-generation photos.

Your autimission should include a daytime phone number. Photographs must have Announcements that are mailed, lased or e-mailed must be followed up with a phone call to confirm receipt & payment. You can also call if you have questions: 413-772-0261, ext. 228. Questions about 100-year birthdays and 5-generation photos should be addressed to Diane Porler at 772-0261, ext. 252, or dpolifer@recorder.com.

to write about the dark side, the shadow-side of life, because I'm really a big optimist ... It's sort of a balancing act for myself ... most of us try to avoid the dark side, or we're afraid of it" — Thomas Timmins