

# Back home again with Ari Shapiro

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Full-time journalist and part-time crooner, Shapiro talks about his year on the road with Romney

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No one would accuse public broadcasting of being sexy, but fans of Ari Shapiro could make a pretty good case. The Beaverton High School grad (and Yale magna cum laude) manages to make the airwaves a little more tuned in, taking the title of NPR White House correspondent to its sassiest heights when he croons the classics — center stage — with Portland band Pink Martini.

But for nearly all of 2012, Shapiro was embedded with GOP nominee Mitt Romney's campaign for president, broadcasting from across the country on both the candidate and the lives he touched. He didn't just have a front row seat to the spectacle of American politics; he was there, in the wings, watching the most expensive presidential campaign in the country's history as it tripped, stumbled, and ultimately fell on its face.

Shapiro grew up in Portland, and he is now based in Washington D.C. Before joining the White House press corps, he was NPR's justice correspondent for five years, covering among other issues the battles over Guantanamo detainees, the crimes at Abu Ghraib prison and American soldiers accused of abuse.

He has been awarded the American Bar Association's Silver Gavel for his coverage of lost prisoners after Hurricane Katrina, The Daniel Schorr Journalism Prize for his investigation of methamphetamine use and HIV transmission, and was recognized by the Columbia Journalism Review for his investigation into disability benefits

for injured veterans.

And of course, there's the applause that comes with performing with Pink Martini around the globe. And in the space between his alter-egos is home with his husband in D.C.

It's an otherwise normal life, with a fantastic view to history.

**Joanne Zuhl:** *You've seen how the sausage is made in this election cycle. Do you leave feeling better or worse about the democratic process?*

**Ari Shapiro:** I think I appreciate its imperfections. There's a reason that at the end of the day it's worked for as many years as it has. There are lots of problems with the system. But focusing only on the problems ignores the fact that on the whole, this is a really great system of government that has endured for a really long time — for a reason. And so I hope I have a realistic perspective. I don't come away from the election thinking what a mess, what a waste. But I also don't come away from the election thinking gosh everything is perfect.

**J.Z.:** *Did you come away with any unexpected lessons from the experience?*

**A.S.:** I would say that what I learned the most about was not politics but America; the differences between different parts of the country and the issues that are important to Americans right now. I hope this doesn't sound tone deaf, but I think I was lucky to be covering an election during a

difficult time in the country, because no matter where the campaign event was, I would talk to people in the audience and hear really compelling stories about what people are going through right now.

**J.Z.:** *How much did this campaign, the most expensive in U.S. history, come face to face with that America that you're talking about?*

**A.S.:** A lot of it. (Romney) would do campaign events with tens of thousands of people, and many of them, if not most of them, working class, blue collar. I mean, you can't have 10,000 people without having a huge slice across the demographic spectrum. One theme that I really took away was that when people feel able to work but don't have the opportunity to work, it lessens their self-worth. It makes them feel like they are not able to contribute in a way that they know they are able to contribute, and that's demoralizing.

**J.Z.:** *Did you talk to a lot of people in that situation?*

**A.S.:** Oh yeah. I remember one woman in Columbus, Ohio, who was 56 years old. She was laid off from her job at age 50. She told me she had applied for 400 jobs. She'd had three interviews. She knows that the longer she's unemployed, the lower her chances of getting a job offer are, and she says she sees people who are graduating from college who might have a good 40

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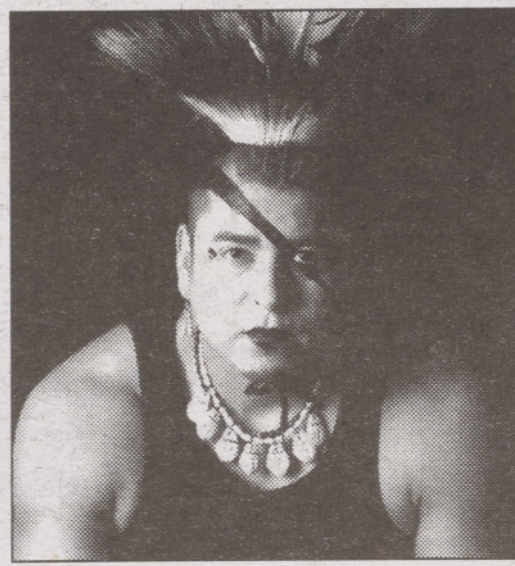
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