



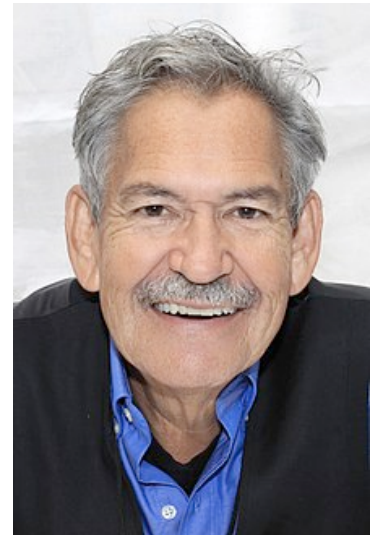
## Benjamin Alire Sáenz Wins Lifetime Achievement Award from Texas Institute of Letters

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Author Benjamin Alire Sáenz has been named the winner of the Texas Institute of Letters' prestigious Lon Tinkle Award for Lifetime Achievement. This is the highest honor given by the TIL, which was established in 1936 to recognize distinctive literary achievement. The award will be presented to Sáenz at the TIL's annual banquet on April 17, 2021 in El Paso, Texas.

"Benjamin Sáenz is one of the most acclaimed and important writers from Texas," TIL President Sergio Troncoso said. "With a sense of joy and excitement, the TIL council voted unanimously to honor Ben with this award. He has been a stellar writer from El Paso who has written soul-searching poetry, bilingual and bicultural children's books, and beautifully crafted prose that crosses many borders. He is a writer's writer with legions of fans across the country."



Winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction for *Everything Begins and Ends at the Kentucky Club* and the Michael L. Printz Award and Lambda Literary Award for *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, Sáenz has been a prolific author with over twenty-five books published. His books include *The Inexplicable Logic of My Life*, *Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood*, *Last Night I Sang to the Monster*, *In Perfect Light*, *Carry Me Like Water*, *The Book of What Remains*, *Dreaming the End of War*, *The Last Cigarette on Earth*, *A Gift from Papa Diego*, and *The Dog Who Loved Tortillas*. For his work, Sáenz has also won the American Book Award, Patterson Book Prize, Stonewall Book Award, Pura Belpré Award, Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award, Southwest Book Award, and two TIL awards dedicated to children's literature.

Born in Old Picacho, a small farming village on the outskirts of Las Cruces, New Mexico, Sáenz was a professor in the bilingual MFA program of creative writing at the University of Texas at El Paso for decades. He has called himself a "fronterizo," a person from the border. In a recent interview for *Entertainment Weekly*, he said, "Anyone who lives on the border, *because* we live on the border we're always reminded of it. There's always going to be someone who's going to remind you that you're not Mexican really, because they are from Mexico. And other times I'll think, 'I'll never be an American.' We cannot rely on nationalisms to give us our identity."

On his reaction to winning the Lifetime Achievement Award from the TIL, Sáenz said, “When Sergio called me and informed me that I had been selected as this year’s winner of the Lon Tinkle Award for Lifetime Achievement, there were a lot of emotions that ran through me. I’m not often left speechless. But I did lose my verbal communication skills for a moment. A gay Mexican-American writer who lives on the border doesn’t exactly conjure up the traditional story of what we believe Texas to be. Awards are a gift and they are very much about the values of the organization that gives them. All I can say is that I am extremely grateful for the gift that the Texas Institute of Letters has given me. My cup runneth over.”

TIL President Sergio Troncoso said, “It is particularly appropriate to be honoring Benjamin Sáenz in El Paso at our next annual meeting in 2021. He has been at the forefront of El Paso’s literary legacy in Texas, one of the most profound in the state. El Paso continues to produce a treasure trove of writers with national and international reputations. Ben has also been a literary activist and mentor. In my mind, he has always been a gentle soul who explores hard truths about the border in his writing.”

Sáenz received a B.A. from the St. Thomas Seminary in Denver and studied theology at the University of Louvain in Belgium. In 1985, he left the priesthood and received an M.A. in creative writing from the University of Texas at El Paso. He is the recipient of a Wallace Stegner poetry fellowship from Stanford University and a poetry fellowship from the Lannan Foundation.

The Texas Institute of Letters ([www.texasinstituteofletters.org](http://www.texasinstituteofletters.org)) is a non-profit Honor Society founded in 1936 to celebrate Texas literature and to recognize distinctive literary achievement. The TIL’s elected membership consists of the state’s most respected writers of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, journalism, and scholarship. The membership includes winners of the Pulitzer Prizes in drama, fiction, and nonfiction, as well as prizes by PEN, fellowships from the MacArthur Foundation and National Endowment for the Arts, and awards from dozens of other regional and national institutions.

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