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Larry McMurtry
1936-2021

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<https://www.texasmonthly.com/arts-entertainment/larry-mcmurtry-death/>

The Larry McMurtry I Knew

I caught my first glimpse of the 'Lonesome Dove' author on the streets of Archer City when I was a teenager. It was an encounter that shaped the rest of my life.

By Skip Hollandsworth



In 1970, when I was a junior high school student living in Wichita Falls, I rode one afternoon with a friend and his older brother to Archer City, a town located 25 miles away. At the time, Peter Bogdanovich was shooting a movie called *The Last Picture Show*, about some teenagers trying to find happiness in a desolate Texas town. Rumor had it that one of the actresses in the film, Cybill Shepherd, was going to be filming a nude scene that day. My friend's older brother told us we had to be there.

When we arrived in Archer City, the three of us gathered with other onlookers at the end of the street. We watched as the film crew moved equipment from one building to another. For the next hour, nothing else happened. Cybill Shepherd did not appear. We figured our trip was a waste of

time. But just before we headed back to our car in defeat, several adults in the crowd began buzzing. One of them pointed at a thin young man quickly crossing the street. He had thick, tousled black hair and wore Buddy Holly–style glasses.

“That’s Larry McMurtry!” a woman exclaimed. Seeing the baffled looks on our faces, she explained that McMurtry was an Archer City rancher’s son and had written the novel on which the movie was based. “Hey, Larry!” someone else yelled. McMurtry turned and gave us a brief wave. I was amazed. I had no idea that a writer could be famous.

I went home, came across a worn-out paperback edition of *The Last Picture Show*, and devoured it. I was floored by the characters McMurtry had created, who were just like people I knew in real life. They talked the same way. They had the same problems. They stood around on Friday nights trying to think of something to do to entertain themselves. And most incredible was the fact that the novel—about Archer City, Texas, of all places—was being hailed as a major work of literature.

By college, I was an unabashed McMurtry fanboy. I wrote papers about him for my English classes in which I always pointed out that he and I were, more or less, neighbors. During my trips back to Wichita Falls, I made regular excursions to Archer City, hoping to run into him. In my early twenties, I decided to compose my own McMurtrian novel about a boy coming of age in rural Texas. “How hard could it be?” I asked, leafing through *The Last Picture Show* for the hundredth time. After learning that McMurtry wrote five double-spaced pages of fiction on his manual typewriter every day of the week, just after breakfast, I vowed that I would do the very same thing each morning before going off to my job as a reporter at a Dallas newspaper. I never got past the second chapter. How, I wondered, did McMurtry do it?

McMurtry, who was 84, died on Thursday of congestive heart failure, as his writing partner, Diana Ossana, confirmed. He spent his final days surrounded by Ossana; her daughter, Sara; his wife, Faye Kesity; his son, James; his grandson, Curtis; and Ossana’s three dogs, all of whom adored McMurtry. Just before he died, Ossana sent me an email. “I keep walking through my house and remembering so many things he did, where he’d sit, typing at the counter, staring out at the mountains for hours at a time,” she wrote. “I know I’ll survive, but at the same time, I don’t know how I’ll survive. This feels like someone is sawing off one of my limbs.”

McMurtry was not always the friendliest man. In 2016, when I visited him in Tucson and Archer City for a Texas Monthly story I was writing, he always seemed bored, and changed the subject whenever I asked him about his accomplishments. He grunted at my queries about his “writing process.” When I called him to ask follow-up questions, he got so tired of talking with me that he hung up the phone without saying goodbye. Not once did I ever hear him laugh out loud.

But, Lord, he was a lot of fun to be around. At dinners, he’d get wound up and talk about everything from eighteenth-century Russian poetry to the joys of Dr Pepper and Fritos. He passed on juicy gossip about movie directors, politicians, and best-selling authors. I felt cheated when he said it was time for me to leave because, of course, he had to get up early the next morning to write.

Day after day, he churned out the pages. The Archer City boy who grew up in a ranch house with no books turned out to be one of the most prolific writers in American letters. He published some thirty novels and fourteen books of nonfiction, wrote or co-wrote more than forty screenplays and teleplays, and produced reams of book reviews, magazine essays, and forewords to other texts.

“Larry is like an old cowboy who has to get up in the morning and do some chores,” Ossana told me in 2016. “He has to get up and write. I don’t think he would know what to do with himself if he didn’t have something to write.”

I haven’t come close to reading all of McMurtry’s work. The only person I know who’s accomplished that Herculean task is Mark Busby, an English professor at Texas State University. Busby argues that McMurtry, more than anyone else, has shaped the way people see Texas. His novels about the fictional town of Thalia (Duane’s Depressed; Horseman, Pass By; The Last Picture Show; and Texasville, among others) are pitch-perfect depictions of the realities, and hilarities, of small-town Texas life. (When we spoke in 2016, Busby went so far as to compare the Thalia novels to William Faulkner’s great Southern novels about Yoknapatawpha County.) And the novels McMurtry wrote in the seventies about Houston, including *All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers* and *Terms of Endearment*, are, in Busby’s words, “brilliant and moving domestic dramas, something that no one was expecting from him.”

And then there’s *Lonesome Dove*, his 1985 novel about two retired Texas Rangers leading a brutal cattle drive from Texas to Montana in the 1870s. McMurtry had spent years railing against writers who produced clichéd novels about the Old West. He swore he would never stoop to writing a western. But he did, and the novel he produced gripped the public’s imagination. *Lonesome Dove* won the Pulitzer Prize and sold nearly 300,000 copies in hardcover and more than a million copies in paperback. It spawned a sequel as well as prequels, and became one of the most popular miniseries of all time, starring Tommy Lee Jones and Robert Duvall. To Texans, went one joke, *Lonesome Dove* was the third-most-important book in publishing history, right behind the Bible and the Warren Commission Report.

Even when McMurtry was writing novels set in Los Angeles or Las Vegas or Washington, D.C., Texans were always a part of the narrative. He wrote of a former rodeo cowboy who became a womanizing antiques dealer (*Cadillac Jack*) and an erstwhile University of Texas football player who later became a Hollywood striver (*Somebody’s Darling*). Just before he fell ill, he was working on two more Texas-based stories—one a western based on the life of the cattleman Charles Goodnight, and the other a modern-day novel of manners about a Fort Worth socialite. (He never published them.) For all of the acerbic criticism of mundane Texas life and literature that marked his essays, the man loved Texans, big and small.

McMurtry took his knocks for writing too much and not editing what he had written, but even his fiercest critics admitted that he had a Dickensian ability to spin a yarn. Besides the Pulitzer, he won an Academy Award with Ossana in 2006 for *Brokeback Mountain*, their adapted screenplay based on Annie Proulx’s story about two gay ranch hands. (McMurtry famously wore blue jeans to the ceremony and had a less than ecstatic response while accepting the Oscar.) When he wasn’t writing, he served as the president of PEN America, the association of prominent writers. He operated a massive second-hand bookstore that, at its peak, spread across four buildings in downtown Archer City.

Periodically—this is one of my favorite details about him—he’d rent a Lincoln Continental, drive across the country, visit a friend or two, drop off the car at a rental facility whenever he got tired of driving, pay the exorbitant drop-off charge, and then fly home. I asked him what he did with all his dirty clothes on those excursions. Would he stop at a laundromat and clean them? Oh, hell no, he said. He’d stuff the clothes in a Federal Express box and ship them back to his house.

When I went to see him in 2016, he seemed weary. He had had a couple of heart attacks. He stumbled a few times. His memory slipped. “Old age comes on apace to ravage all the clime,” he said at one point, quoting the eighteenth-century Scottish poet James Beattie. “And old age is doing what it can to ravage me.”

I tried to get McMurtry to reflect on the end of his life. I asked him how he felt about the inevitable day that was approaching when he would no longer be around to write his five pages. But he was having none of it. I changed the subject slightly and asked where he wanted to be buried. He said he had bought a plot at a Wichita Falls cemetery, but he recently had begun thinking about cremation and keeping his ashes in an urn. “I expect there will be a little memorial service of some kind, and then my ashes will be placed unobtrusively on a shelf in one of the bookstores in Archer City,” he said.

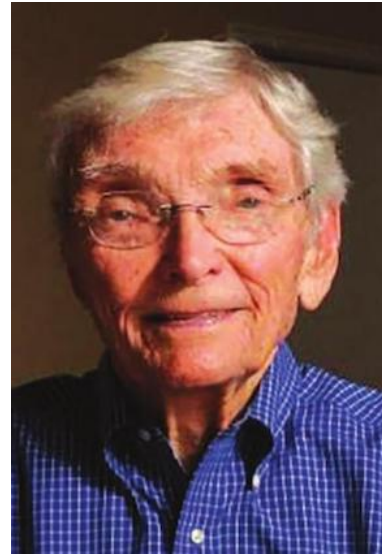
“Your ashes forever among books?” I asked, hoping my question might spur McMurtry to say something sentimental. Predictably, he refused to rise to the bait.

“Well,” he said, “maybe people will want to come up to Archer City and stare at my urn. And maybe they’ll buy more books.”

Leon Hale
1921-2021

In the fall of 1984, the *New York Times Book Review* published an article about the personal essay. Its author, New Yorker and University of Houston professor Philip Lopate, mentioned in passing that the best personal essayists writing for newspapers were Russell Baker, Ellen Goodman and Leon Hale.

Leon who? the readers of the *Times* must have asked. Baker was a Pulitzer prize-winning columnist at the *Times*. Goodman, a relative newcomer at the *Boston Globe*, was syndicated nationally. Leon Hale wasn't a satirist like Russell Baker. He never offered political insight like Ellen Goodman. He was never syndicated, although he deserved to be. Hale, then sixty-four when I interviewed him, had been quietly practicing his art for nearly thirty years, comparatively unnoticed except by readers of the *Houston Post*. When Hale joined the *Houston Chronicle* in the spring of 1984, the *Post* lost a rare artist.



Rare because he made writing a newspaper column about country folks and personal memories look so easy, although of course, it's not. Rare because he wrote with simplicity and sincerity about the pleasures of life, about what it means to *feel*. He will write about how beautiful it was to watch foaming gasoline gush into the glass cylinders of an old-timey pump, or how good it feels to play baseball or to smell wood smoke or have a certain old woman smile at him. In his writing he will make you feel the pleasure of that sensation, and he will almost always guide you indirectly to his overriding and wise theme of the preciousness of small moments and the value of lives that do not play in the great dramas of politics and power.

Perhaps because Hale has been such a fixture in the newspaper during the last sixty years, Houston took him for granted. He was the embodiment of all the people who came from rural places and filled up this city after World War II. Most came to make their fortunes in oil, industry and commerce. Hale came to make a living, as he liked to say, writing sentences. He wrote a lot of them, enough to fill twenty-one volumes at 100,000 words apiece, he once calculated. His columns were collected in three volumes and he found time to write two novels. We watched him wander around the state looking for storytellers and dogs and old-timers who represented the Texas that was rapidly disappearing. We watched his children grow up and heard the talks of his childhood during the Depression in West Texas. We learned about his father, an irrepressible traveling salesman, and glimpsed briefly the sadness of his two divorces. If there is any truth to Alexander Pope's dictum, "Style is the man," then Leon Hale fits it.

He was a tall old dude when I interviewed him in 1984. At sixty-four he'd finally filled out his skinny frame. He looked good in a fresh pair of blue jeans, gray shirt, and soft black loafers. He had thick, gray, curly hair and a high wide, and bony forehead. His eyes were spaced far apart and the right one was pulled down, giving him a lopsided look. It was the result of abnormal bone growth, a condition called fibrous dysplasia, which affected him since he was a child. It doesn't kill anybody and nobody knows the cause or cure, Hale said.

His unusual looks made him shy, a considerable disability for a man whose job was to drive around the state interviewing people. He came to accept it. Besides, he said with a chuckle, if he had been one of these good-looking writers, he might have been unbearable.

Hales lived then in a two-room apartment nears San Felipe, just inside the Loop. The walls were lined with books.

“I like the way they look,” he said. “it just makes me feel good to have them around me.” That’s his theme: feeling good.

On an old chest that serves as a coffee table were a brand-new history of the town of Trinity, a worn-out paperback copy of the autobiography of Mark Twain (his favorite book), Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, and one that looked like heavy going, *The Christian Agnostic*.

If you looked out from the balcony, you saw the thick trunk of a hackberry tree. In the mild autumn weather, it lost its leaves late, and Hale wrote about that.

Most surprising was what was just beyond the hackberry tree: a blank, high concrete wall that completely filled up the view. After Hale got his second divorce and move here about 1980, he was a little fearful about what might happen to him, he says, and that wall made him feel safe. But it became a source of inspiration.

“I’ve come to be fond of that wall there,” he said, “because the way the light changes is something else. Look at it happening.”

In the golden afternoon light, the shadow of the few leaves and branches of the hackberry tree were making a shimmering hieroglyph on the wall.

“I can look out there and I can produce almost anything on that screen that I want,” he said. “I can make it an oceans, I can make it a mountain range.”

Above his long, paper-strew desk was a bulletin board. Pinned squarely in the center were wall calendars for the last four years. They served as his record of the places he had visited and written about. He had been keeping those calendars since 1956. There was a picture of a good-looking brunette, his daughter Becky, thirty-two, who was in the real estate management business in Austin. He dedicated his last collections of columns, *Easy Going*, to “Becky my girl-child, whose laughter has been music to me.”

A picture of a handsome blond young man in a St. Louis Cardinals uniform also stood out. That was Hale’s son Mark, then thirty-four. He was a left-handed first baseman and outfielder who played three years with the St. Louis farm clubs before going on to other things. His daddy said he makes a comfortable living in Montgomery, Alabama, betting on greyhound races. Mark is the father of that cute four-year-old boy at the top of the bulletin board, Hale’s only grandchild, Daniel. When a four-year-old popped up in Hale’s column, as one did a few months ago, it’s probably Daniel.

Mark and Becky were children of Hale’s marriage to Helen Vick, the daughter of a Navasota River bottom cattleman. The marriage broke up after twenty-five years, and that divorce was one of the great sadnesses of Leon Hale’s life. He won’t talk about it much.

At the upper right-hand corner of that bulletin board were some words by Ellen Goodman, neatly printed on an envelope: “Writing a daily column is like being married to a nymphomaniac. Just when you think you’re finished, you have to start all over....”

Above the whole bulletin board, like an overarching question was a Latin motto carved in wood: *Ad Quid Venisti?* That means, some monks in Schulenburg told him, Why are you come? and is supposed to be what Judas said to Jesus in the garden on the night of the Last Supper. The words are hung on the walls of far-flung monasteries, Hale says, to remind monks of the reason they endure their deprivations and discipline. It was Hale’s favorite question and came to mean for him, What is the value of living: What are we doing here: That’s what he tried to write about. But of course, it would be too bold, too dreary, and maybe impossible to ask directly.

One thing that makes life worth living is stories. Long before he ever knew he wanted to be a writer, Leon Hale loved to listen to stories. He would hide under the porch of one of the many West Texas houses he lived in and listen to the old folks tell stories. His first selection of columns, published in 1965, *Turn South at the Second Bridge*, paid homage to the storytellers he sought out during his first ten years as a full-time columnist. He says in that book that his purpose in writing about the storytellers is that “they help preserve some of the fun of being a Texan.” He also laments the passing of what he regards as authentic, self-deprecating Texas humor and vulgarization by the professional Texan who is “the worst of all things, a phony.”

In that first collection of columns, Hale’s familiar, easy style is all there, with his simple descriptions and strong rhythms. Once in a while, he laments, he let slip a fancy word, like *sobriquet*. But what is missing from the early Hale is a sense of his own worth as a story-teller. He is too busy collected other people’s stories. He is a little bit like a reporter, gathering the tales of country storekeepers and beach bums and tavern owners and farmers and fishermen and rural bus drivers and the like.

In this second collection, *A Smile from Katie Hattan & Other Natural Wonders*, he hits his stride. The smile from Katie Hattan is not a story, it is a wonder. She is the 104-year-old daughter of slaves. What matters in the writing is not her story but the value Hale places on in it. He has found his theme. *Easy Going*, his third collection, continues the theme. The final essays is a natural wonder itself, about a woman in a housecoat who gave him a gardenia, and how he, an “old guy” is driving to the store to get some coffee cream and it’s a beautiful day and young woman in an open Jeep stops at the traffic light next to him. She’s about the age of his own daughter.

“Before I knew I was doing it, I had my head stuck out the window and was telling her hello, and I asked her what she thought about the day.

“She took that greeting just exactly right. She tossed her head back a little and gave me an answer. She said she thought it was a beautiful day, just perfect. So I tossed her my flower.

“The range was short and I made a good pitch. The flower landed on the seat beside her. She picked it up and smelled it and tucked the stem inside her scarf so that the bloom was close to her ear.

“As the light changed, she turned my direction and switched on a smile that must have fogged film in the drugstore across the street. A smile so brilliant it’s a lucky thing it wasn’t released at night, else every electric light within half a mile would have shut off in shame.”

He then turns and addresses the reader with a confidence and joy that no writer since Walt Whitman has matched. When you finish that essay, you feel good. You feel like you have been loved.

That is the primary pleasure of a good Hale column. There are others, of course. One is his utter sincerity. He believes in what he writes. A former student of his tells of handing in a story assignment about what he most wanted to do in the world. The student wrote that he would like to drive a truck. Hale’s terse comment at the end of the paper was “What are you doing taking journalism classes, then?” Nor is he so in love with himself or his country people that he loses all perspective. A lot of what country people have to say is not worth listening to, he writes in one book. The last few years his attention has shifted increasingly to city people, as he has found his subject is not country people, but Leon Hale thinking about people, any people.

Another pleasure of Hale’s columns is his use of colloquial language. He never overdoes it, but it’s hard to forget the story about the awkward boy who didn’t have the “coordination of a bale of hay,” or the woman who wore her cat “loose as liver: around her neck, or a dog whose “unshirted enthusiasm” for digging holes was contagious. Sometimes he will write a column about exotic words he loves from browsing in the dictionary. You’d think he’d found money.

He’s also a master of description. Almost every Hale piece has at least one good passage of description. It’s his way of preserving things against change and making you see and feel things you wouldn’t have noticed otherwise. For example, a hitchhiker asks him for a ride:

“Then he took half a step backward and stood a few seconds to let me inspect him. He looked all right. Orange hair and pink skin and pale blue eyes behind thick glasses. Almost six feet tall and about as big around as a post oak sapling.

“I figured he was maybe seventeen. He had on tight faded jeans and white sneakers and a red shirt that clashed with his hair. He carried a small canvas zipper bag.

“He had a pair of cowboy boots. I liked the way he carried them. Their loops were tied together with a piece of sash cord and slung over his shoulder and they rode there, saddlebag style.”

The pace is so deliberate that he makes you slow down and think about everything he describes. He builds up to the things he likes most, the things that make him feel good about the boy, the way he carried those cowboy boots. He makes it look so easy. Just try it.

The wonder is that Hale ever became a writer at all. He grew up poor, as many of his columns attest. The Depression was for Hale and many other Texas a traumatic and soul-making experience. He was born in 1921, the third child of Fred and Leona Hale. His mother was a staunch Methodist woman who saw to it that her children went to church, even if it was only a brief prayer on a country road when they were moving to one of the nine West Texas towns he grew up in. His rhythmic writing style comes in part from the King James Bible his mother made him read. He was

named for his mother, to his lasting regret, because Texans are forever mispronouncing his name *Lee-on*, with the accent on the first syllable.

“Leon is not the worst thing they did to me,” he said. “The worst thing they did to me was give me my first name, which is Carol.” It seems a Sunday school teacher persuaded his mother that without an *e* on the end, Carol was a masculine name.

Because his father spent most of the time on the road, Hale was raised by his mother and older sisters, Maifred and Ima Ruth. He didn’t feel deprived.

“What more does a guy need than three women?” Hale recalled. “I feel like women are wonderful.” Ima Ruth was musical and Maifred wrote poetry, published a couple of books with a vanity press.

“But the talent came out of the father,” Hale said. “He was the musician and storyteller, and I always thought he was a wonderful dud. I always wanted to be like him more than anything.

“He was not the greatest provider in the world. He was a terrifically hard worker but he just didn’t know how to make money and didn’t know how to hold onto it after he got it. But he was always doing neat things, like going and out and coming back with a milk goat in the back seat of the car.”

The laughter and music of his childhood clearly have meant a lot to Hale. It’s a subject to which he returns again and again. What does it mean to be happy and satisfied? The security and love of his family made it possible for him to go out into the world and write about such questions.

Sometimes Hale would travel with his father from town to town, a forecast of his travels as a columnist. But he was not ambitious.

“I remember a picture that one of my friends took of me in front of the bank in Eastland. I had my suit on. Mama loved that picture. That’s what she wanted me to be, was somebody like that, a banker. Or a doctor, a preacher.”

When he became a newspaper columnist who wrote about how much he hates to wear neckties, her support was almost embarrassing. She would clip out everything I did and make scrapbooks.” His earliest memory of writing is an essay contest in the sixth grade.

“I won third place in my class. I was amazed that I had won. I had thought up till then that writing was nothing but a chore. Then there was a great blank until I was a senior in high school and I had a teacher then who is still alive, by golly, and her name is Verna Johnson. She talked to me about writing and encouraged me and tried to teach me that it wasn’t the terrible drudgery that I imagined it was and that it could be rewarding and fun. That was the first inkling I got that it would be kind of neat to write sentences. But it never occurred to me that anybody would ever pay me for writing one. I went through two years of college and it never occurred to me. When I was a junior out there at Texas Tech and I saw my byline in that boldfaced type...it kind of hits you right here,” he said, pointing to his chest, “and some of us never recover from it. I never have.”

The Hales moved to Lubbock so Leon could live at home and attend Texas Tech. (His sister Maifred contributed money throughout most of his college career.) He wasn’t so much interested in school as amazed that he was on a university campus, he recalls. After two years of general study, a

dean called him in and told him he would have to declare a major. Consulting the aptitude tests Hale had taken during freshman orientation, the dean suggested he choose journalism. Besides, he told him, sizing up Hale's academic record, "It's an easy major."

"In five minutes in that dean's office," Hale said, "the course of my life was set."

Hales said he learned little about journalism at Tech but he did learn that he wanted to write a column when he got a chance to do one for the school newspaper. A semester before graduation, he took off to fight World War II. His dysplasia made it hard to get in the service, but he was finally accepted for pilot training by the Army Air Corps. He washed out, though, because he had an incurable habit of using the wrong rudder pedal in moments of stress.

After the war he finished his last semester at Tech and took a job writing for the agricultural extension service at Texas A&M. His familiar, easy style had not yet developed.

"Nobody at Texas Tech told me to write simply," he said, "not even the journalism school. So I made it as complicated as I possibly could."

His bosses at A&M pointed out that the average reading level of the rural population of Texas then was the sixth grade. They shipped him to Auburn University in Alabama for a two-week course in simplified writing.

"I think those two weeks did more to affect my writing style than all the previous four years had. It appealed to me. I didn't have to be on of these people who use big words and complex sentence structure. I could do it straightforward and simple. That meant quite a lot to me."

In 1947 *The Houston Post* decided it needed a farm editor and its editors liked the looks of Hale's press releases. By that time, Hale had married Helen Vick, who was a secretary at the same office in Bryan. The *Post* raised him from \$200 to \$300 a month.

"The reason I went to the *Post* is that they told me I could write the column. But in those days a column was something you did with one hand behind your back after you were finished with your regular day's work. I covered country fairs, I interviewed cotton farmers and Brahman breeders, and when I filled up the Sunday page, then I got the reward of sitting down and doing my column."

After a few years of writing as a farm editor and slipping in occasional columns about storytellers, Hale couldn't persuade his editors to let him write the column full time. So he left for a public relations job with Humble Oil.

"I decided if I had to do something I didn't really want to do, I might as well make some money at it. I thought I would work up to being a hotshot oil company PR man or something, walk among people and spend money as they used to say."

He stayed at Humble, he says, "two years, ten months, three weeks and four days." In the fall of 1955, Arthur Laro, then managing editor of the *Post*, called him back and gave him everything he wanted except money. He could live where he wanted, within reason, write about what he wanted, travel, do freelancing and teach. He moved to Brazoria County, where he raised his children and took a cut in pay from \$600 to \$500 a month.

During the early seventies he managed to write two novels, *Bonney's Place* and *Addison*. Both have been optioned for movies, but neither has been made.

"It's great fun to write fiction," Hale said, "because I don't have to worry about all those journalists' restraints, mainly the libel suits. But then you have the laws of good taste that your publisher puts on you."

The novels offered something else, too. I think they offered him a chance to deal with some of the pain he has felt about the breakup of his first marriage. In *Bonney's Place*, the narrator is a middle-aged man like Hale was when he wrote it. His wife has died and he feels the pain acutely. The narrator becomes enmeshed in this struggle to confront the numbness he feels at his wife's death. *Bonney's Place* deals more emphatically with drinking than Hale can do in a column. *Addison* deals more forthrightly with sex. Addison is a man in his late twenties stranded in a remote Texas army base, away from his pregnant wife in Chicago. Hale knew such a man when he was going through gunnery school in Yman, Arizona, during the war.

"It was my first exposure to a guy being really in love, and I was really impressed by it." Each character has an essential quality of Hale's and that is loneliness. Maybe that is why he puts such an emphasis on friendship and family. Loneliness is a condition of poets, not novelists. In a column Hale asked his readers—his customers as he calls them—to interpret a recurring dream he has had for years. It's of a big, one-story frame house in the country with a wide porch all around it.

"I have sat, in dreams, on that porch many times," he writes. "I look out over rolling terrain that has no trees. But it has wildflowers in great profusion. There are bluebonnets and pink primroses and Indian paintbrushes and half a dozen kinds of yellow-blooming flowers, and they're so thick the colors blend and make a kind of master color that hasn't any name that I know. When the wind comes it makes waves of color that roll up and over the slopes and it's beautiful.

"But the house is lonely. It has nothing to accompany it. No shrub. No barn. No fence. No clothesline pole. No toolshed."

The house is Hale himself, of course. Those wildflowers blending their colors are his writing, each small flower, each column, a striving toward beauty. And if the flowers are not towering and long-lived, like a tree, they have a special beauty all their own. The loneliness is the loneliness of mortality. It's a beautiful and sad dream, the dream of an artist, and I can see why he couldn't interpret it, but wanted to share it with the customers.

Hale took me driving in his station wagon one day, and we visited some East Texas towns where he has written stories. We visited Borski's tavern near New Waverly, where he used to drink beer and shoot pool with his students from Sam Houston State. A man recognized him immediately and wanted to shake his hand. "I sho' like your writing," he said. "I sho' like your writing."

We stopped at a store in Evergreen. When the clerk learned that Hale was from the Chronicle, she hoped he would do something about the vending box that had disappeared from the front porch. He said he would mention it to Circulation.

We visited Coldspring, where in 1947 they had a county fair with the animals tied up to trees in the town square and the poultry exhibited in the basement of courthouse. Grown up and changed now. People from Houston were crowding in, bringing cutesy strip shopping center and trailer houses. Hale was thinking of a woman who lives so far out in the country that she once visited Crockett, didn't like it and never again visited a town, let alone a city. We drove over to the shore of Lake Livingston, where Hale and some friends used to watch the dam being built. The construction of lakes changed East Texas forever.

We spent the night at a little house on a ranch near Winedale that Hale eventually bought. It was owned by a customer who phoned him up one January and said, "I know a field where there's twelve acres of violets in bloom." They've been friends ever since. The house had a nice front porch where Hale would tap out his column the next day on a portable computer. It would be the about the enthusiasm of the black Lab that was with us. We sat by a big log fire and he talked about the past, about the Sunday school teacher who changed him forever by telling him he wasn't going to hell. Hadn't he committed all the sins? Hadn't he been up the skirts of all those women in his imagination? Hadn't he stolen O.E. Owens' cap pistol that time and buried it in the backyard? It was a great relief to be unburdened by the prospect of hell.

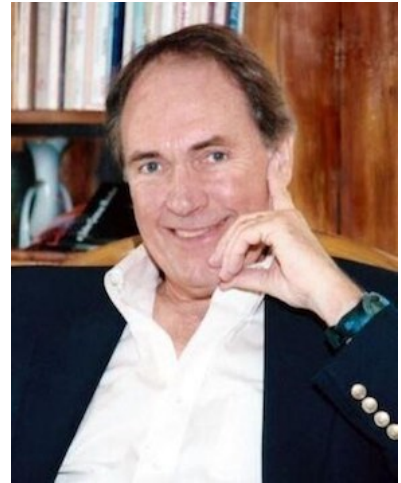
Midnight and Hale had gone out into the night. The moon was three-quarters bright and lighting up the frost on his white station wagon. His friend's longhorn bull bellowed from the meadow. I stepped onto the porch. Hale was out there with the dog at the edge of the woods. A hoot owl called, followed by a long silence. Then I heard Hale calling, calling him back.

---Michael Berryhill

James Hoggard

1941-2021

To get the full measure of Jim Hoggard's stature as a man, a writer and teacher, you might've gone with me when he invited me to read from my novel *Buffalo Nickel* at Midwestern State University. I figured he'd round up a dozen students from his classes and give them credit for showing up. But it turned out to be the biggest audience I'd ever had alone (then and even now), and they were adults, for the most part, maybe 150 people. They weren't there for me, really - I had no fan base - they were there because Jim Hoggard, the author and professor and much-admired fellow citizen, had encouraged them to come. And they were from the *town*, not the university. As I came to understand, Jim and Lynn had spent years cultivating friendships and nurturing the arts and culture in Wichita Falls, and those people in the audience trusted them to deliver a program they'd appreciate. He'd been exceedingly generous to put them in my hands.



He was a true native son. At the time of his birth in the Wichita Falls Hospital, his father was serving as associate pastor at First United Methodist Church. In Jim's obituary from the Wichita Falls *Times Record News*, writer Ysabel de la Rosa describes a Texas boyhood "running trap lines in the wilderness that became the Tanglewood subdivision, getting sprayed by skunks, chased by rattlesnakes," as well as swimming and fishing at Lakes Kemp and Kickapoo. He became a dedicated Boy Scout who reached the rank of Eagle and was inducted into the Order of the Arrow.

Jim played center on the Wichita Falls high school football team, the Coyotes, when they won the state championship in their division in 1958, and the famed Texas "Friday Night Lights" spirit can endear you to your town for decades. He was always fit - we had talks about cholesterol and whether statins or some other more organic concoctions were a good remedy for the bad sort; summer after summer he suited up (or, more accurately, suited down) on a two-wheeler and competed in the famed *Hotter 'n Hell Hundred 27* times, and he ran nine marathons. (All that speaks of admirable discipline and a whole lot of grit, too.) He and Lynn enjoyed hiking, especially in the mountains at Red River, New Mexico, where they had a cabin.

As an adult citizen of the city, Jim held posts on the boards of the Wesley Foundation, a campus ministry sponsored by the United Methodist Church, and of the Wichita Falls Symphony, and was active in many community programs and groups such as the Downtown Rotary Club. He was described as a "dedicated member and constant presence" at the Wichita Falls United Methodist Church (his father's denomination).

Following his high school graduation, Jim went to Southern Methodist University, where he was mentored by Texas writer Marshall Terry, with whom he became lifelong friends. While his major study was in English literature and creative writing, he also had an ear for other languages, and he studied German, French, and Spanish. He did further graduate study at the University of Kansas before launching himself on a long and fruitful career as a teacher and writer.

If the people of Wichita Falls appreciated him, his students did so as well. When Lynn put the news of Jim's death on social media, many of the responders were Jim's former students. Here's a small sample of dozens of such comments: *"For me, he was somehow both larger-than-life and down-to-earth. He was my professor, my writing teacher, my advisor, my mentor, and, in later years, my friend.".... "He was such a phenomenal professor! I took a class of his in the late 70s. He was just amazing!".... "Yesterday, we lost one of the most incredible mentors and professors I've ever known, and it's difficult to put into words how much he meant to me. I had the pleasure of working with James Hoggard in my undergraduate and Master's programs. He encouraged me and challenged me in ways that no one has since....".... "I was so lucky it was he who got to me first and woke me up to rhizomatic learning and to the world of literature and contemplation, both serious and playful, at exactly the moment I needed it in my life."* (Inspiring the admiration of a student who can come up with the phrase *rhizomatic learning* is definitely a condition to aspire to. Not sure what it means, but the idea of something spreading underground, unseen but interconnected, weblike, is powerfully suggestive.)

Midwestern State University, his academic home, recognized his value and talent in the classroom by naming him Hardin Professor, McMurtry Distinguished Professor of Excellence, and the Perkins-Prothro Distinguished Professor of English. The seminar room where he taught three specialized literature courses that he had developed was branded by his name in his honor. Big-bucks donors may get their monikers on campus buildings, but earning your signature as it were on the header of your classroom door strikes me as a sign that you've been of truly extraordinary value to your peers and your students.

Jim earned the respect of his fellow writers, as well, by way of his prolific and excellent output over the span of decades and in multiple genres. There were novels - *Elevator Man*, *Trotter Ross*, and *The Mayor's Daughter* (my fav), and two collections of short fiction - *Riding the Wind and Other Tales* and *Patterns of Illusion*. (One high honor for his short fiction was to be included in an edition of *Best American Short Stories*. He also had a National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship that supported the making of that second collection.)

He published many chapbooks of poetry, including *Eyesigns*; *The Shaper Poems*; *Two Gulls, One Hawk*; *Break an Indelicate Statue*; *Medea in Taos*; *Rain in a Sunlit Sky*; *Wearing the River*, and *Triangles of Light: The Edward Hopper Poems*. More recently he produced *Where Three Winds Meet*, and *New and Selected Poems* as part of TCU Press's series on Texas poets laureate.

There were also seven volumes of his translations from Spanish by poets Oscar Hahn, Tino Villanueva, Raúl Mesa, and Geta de León. Jim's work in poetry and translation earned him these awards: he was The Texas Poet Laureate in 2000; he won the Hart Crane and Alice Crane Williams Memorial Fund Award for Poetry, the PEN Texas Poetry Award, and the Soeurette Diehl Fraser Translation Award from the Texas Institute of Arts and Letters.

That he was deeply admired and appreciated by his writing peers can be seen in his induction into the Texas Institute of Letters in 1979, and he ultimately earned the Lon Tinkle Award for Lifetime Achievement. He was also elected a Fellow of the Institute.

To say a task or chore is "thankless" usually means that is vitally necessary but probably tedious beyond all measure and profoundly, well, black-beanish. As a person with a long history (but faulty memory) with the TIL, I can explain why all officers and councilors of the purely voluntary

organization have a two-year term, but *the Treasurer is there for life*. Once you find someone, uh, generous enough to accept the post, you don't want to kick them out after two years. It's the hardest, most time-consuming job that pays nothing we have to offer. There are donations and dues to collect; there are bills and awards to pay; there are banquet bills and vendor invoices; there are endowments to protect; there are taxes and other legal forms to be filed; there are investments to watch over; there are reports to be prepared for the TIL itself. Our present sucker Treasurer, Kip Stratton, reports that Jim was "the de facto treasurer" for 26 years. Previously treasury records "were kept on a much-folded piece of paper. Jim, of course, brought a lot of order to the treasury." During his tenure, the TIL's assets were in low five figures but now are knocking at just under seven.

Being the TIL Treasurer is no "thankless" chore if that means nobody feels grateful for your doing it. Thank you, thank you, thank you, Jim Hoggard.

Lynn and I are among those fond of this particular poem of Jim's. I like it partly because there's a subtle hint of where it occurs, it masterfully suggests a formal template without succumbing to it, it's appropriately seasonal, and there's that killer last line. The poem is in Jim's collection, *Where Three Winds Meet*.

May

It hasn't in years but if spring
lasts even a month this time
it will happen in May when winecups bloom,
when purple thistles rise
near the tiny vervain,

when at this place where three winds meet
Indian blanket and Mexican hat
sway beneath overcast skies
with sawtooth daisies and buttercups,
brown-eyed Susans and dock.

If spring lasts even a month
it will happen in May when winds
become breezes, if it happens at all,
it will happen in May when the world
flares open its petals,

its wild little mouths loud with hymns.

---C. W. Smith

Robert Bonazzi

1942-2020

Texas Institute of Letters member Roberto (Robert, Bob, Baba) Bonazzi was born Dec. 9, 1942 in Jamaica, New York, son of Lorenzo and Francesca (Nasso) Bonazzi, and died Oct. 15, 2020 in Round Rock, Texas after long illness. His family moved to Texas when he was 4. A graduate of the University of Houston in 1966, Roberto had a twin, Lawrence, who died in 2014, and a sister, Mary Frances, who survives him, along with her husband Paul Urie, and a niece and three nephews, including the actor, Michael Urie. His sister's care for Roberto was crucial during his last very difficult year. He is also survived by his beloved black and white cat, Lorenzo.



Roberto was a distinguished poet, editor, and critic and founder of Latitudes Press, which published 60 titles. Executor of the John Howard Griffin (d. 1980) literary estate, and biographer of Griffin, some of his last books included *Reluctant Activist – The Spiritual Life and Art of John Howard Griffin* (TCU Press, 2018), and his own *Maestro of Solitude: Poems & Poetics* (a finalist for the Texas Institute of Letters Poetry Award), and *The Scribbling Cure: Poems & Prose Poems*. He edited at least ten other editions of Griffin work as well as creating his own books. He married Griffin's widow, Elizabeth, in 1983, his third marriage, and was devoted to her until her death in July, 2000. They worked together on many books and artistic projects. He was also an adjunct professor at Tarrant County College after 1997. Later he wrote a column "Poetic Diversity" for the San Antonio Express-News and reviewed books for *World Literature Today*, among other journals. During his many years in Texas he would live in Austin, Mansfield and San Antonio, after his Houston childhood, ending up in Georgetown and Round Rock.

A dear and trusted friend of many Texas writers, Roberto loved solitude, neatness, strong coffee, Italian food, and jazz. He was committed to issues of racial and social justice. He disliked telephones and went years without even having one. He drove an old red BMW and took many long walks. For years after moving to San Antonio, he worked with Wings Press manuscripts, encouraging and assisting many authors. His joyous flair, sleek style, sardonic wit, keen instincts, energetic originality, and the pleasures he took in a simply arranged, but widely expansive literary life, marked everyone who knew him. He is already profoundly missed.

---Naomi Shihab Nye

(Photography by Michael Nye.)

At the loss of a beloved fellow-writer,
que puede uno decir?
The words of condolence will never be
as poetic as was his life and his friendship.
Yes, his work was incisive and significant,
his editorial eye was sharp and empowering,
but it was the human being attached to it
that most impressed us - that chispa in his smile

that laughing fire in his heart.
Yes, his memory will go on...

---Dr. Carmen Tafolla

Uno de los grandes of Texas Letters! A fearless pioneer and tireless promulgator. How many lives did he live? He lives on.
Roberto, presente!

---John Phillip Santos

I don't know anyone else who cared so much and so early about the writers of Mexico, encouraging translation and cross-pollination. He built Latitudes journal and press to foment that kind of exchange. This was one of his most unusual aspects.

---Rosemary Catacalos

He was a friend, generous with his gifts: unforgettable, his fighter's arms, eyes flashing with his leaning smile, his laugh, his painstaking honesty, the stories—and what a life! A purveyor of legacies!

---Ignacio Magaloni

BO-NAZZ-iiiiiiii!

His name ringing like a bell
Metric and rhythmic – like his energy,
accents falling on vowels

ROBERTO BONAZZI

A poem, in and of itself...

---Marian Haddad

To me he projected a caring interest and an openness in sharing his experience, interest and approach. Roberto always stood tall in dignity.

---Bill Nye, New Zealand

I will miss his care over the lines, his intolerance of crap, his naughty humor, his total dedication, his openness to the simple and the well-arranged poem, his irreverence, his gentle humorous brilliant self.

---Natalia Trevino

Jan Reid
1945-2020

(This article originally appeared in *Texas Monthly* and is used by permission from the author.)

<https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-culture/remembering-jan-reid-a-defining-magazine-journalist-and-voice-in-texas-literature/>

I felt stunned when I learned that Jan Reid had died in the early morning of September 19—not so much by his death, but by how he died. Jan was 75, and his health had been rickety since that horrible night in 1998 when he was shot in Mexico City during a robbery. On several occasions after that, I feared he might not live much longer. But I never thought his cause of death would be a myocardial infarction followed by heart failure. Jan was my close friend for 33 years. And he had more heart than anyone I’ve ever known.



Jan was a magazine journalist and the author of more than a dozen books, both fiction and nonfiction. In later years, he focused on novels, winning awards for *Comanche Sundown* and *Sins of the Younger Sons*, which many of his readers think was his finest book. He’d just finished a boxing novel, *The Song Leader*, when he suffered a major heart attack in early September. It’s expected to be published next year by TCU Press.

Texas Monthly was where Jan first came to prominence as a writer. In the magazine’s early days, founding editor William Broyles published work both by established names like Gary Cartwright and Larry L. King and by young unknowns like Al Reinert and Stephen Harrigan (both of whom eventually became very well-known writers). Jan entered Texas Monthly’s pages as one of the unknowns. He was in his twenties and working as sports editor of the *New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung* when his byline first appeared in Texas Monthly in 1973, the year the magazine began publication. Jan’s name remained on its masthead until his death.

“Jan Reid spoke slowly and quietly,” Harrigan said. “I never heard him raise his voice, either in person or in prose. His works of fiction and journalism and personal reflection are marked by an exquisite steadiness of tone that had its origin in his personality, but was refined by a lifetime of undeviating devotion to his craft. His writing is part of the DNA of Texas Monthly and of the legacy of Texas literature.”

Jan’s primary interests as a writer were history, politics, crime, sports, and what I’ll call revisionist views of Texas and the larger Western landscape. But at the time that Texas Monthly was in its infancy, the Austin live music scene was beginning to coalesce in a significant way. Though Jan had no designs on becoming a music writer, he didn’t shut his eyes or close his ears to what was going on around him. Jan’s *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, which established him as an author before age thirty, dealt with Willie Nelson, Jerry Jeff Walker, Kinky Friedman, and others who were defining or redefining their musical careers in the Austin of the early seventies. It is widely acknowledged to be the first book to deal with the world of music in the state capital and it has stayed in print almost continuously since it was first published.

Jan opted to move away from music after that. He followed *Improbable Rise with Deerinwater*, a novel; *Vain Glory*, which is about Texas football; *Close Calls*, a collection of his magazine journalism; and *The Bullet Meant for Me*, a powerful memoir of fortitude and courage about Jan's recovery from the shooting in Mexico. I hate to say it, but his near death there was in many ways the defining moment of his life. How he emerged from such a dire circumstance revealed his amazing character.

Jan grew up as an athlete. He played high school football and baseball in his hometown, Wichita Falls. He was also a boxing fan—a passion I shared with him—and in his thirties, he began pounding a heavy bag he'd hung from a tree at his cabin outside San Marcos. After he moved to Austin, he trained in earnest at Richard Lord's Boxing Gym. There he befriended an up-and-coming lightweight pro, Jesus Chavez.

Chavez had been brought to the U.S. from Mexico as an infant by his parents, who were undocumented immigrants. Just as he became a contender for a world title, Chavez was forced to leave the U.S. by federal authorities. Chavez continued his boxing career in Mexico. Jan kept in touch and followed his career closely.

In April 1998, Chavez fought Moises Rodriguez. Jan and three Texas Monthly colleagues—John Spong, David Courtney, Michael Hall—flew to Mexico City to watch the fight, which Chavez won. They celebrated his victory at the Plaza Garibaldi but later were stuck up by a group of men in a Mexico City suburb. During an altercation with the robbers, Jan attempted to throw a hard punch at one of the men.

"I failed to heed my friend Jesus's advice," Jan wrote. "Step up in the pocket, he said, then throw that jab. If I were going to throw a punch at a man with a gun, I damn sure needed to land it. And by inches it fell short." Jan saw the "flash of lightning" from the gun, sensed himself being propelled backward, and then felt "the cruel gouge of a screwdriver, with the force of a train" as searing pain immediately spread through his abdomen and up his spine. The bullet that tore through his gut and lodged against his spine forever altered his life. He suffered from recurring infections, reduced mobility, and terrible pain episodes. But Jan pressed forward and overcame those obstacles.

Jan received incredible support during his rescue and recovery from all kinds of people, including the late trauma surgeon Dr. Red Duke and the infamous boxing promoter Don King. Texas Monthly founder and longtime publisher Michael Levy worked tirelessly to raise money for Jan's medical expenses and otherwise help him recover. "[Jan] was the bravest person I knew," retired Texas Monthly editor Greg Curtis told me shortly after Jan died. "To have lived for so many years after his gunshot wound without complaint or self-pity. Sometimes you would see his face contort with pain, but he would never give in to it and never look for sympathy. He was a kind and gentle soul." Curtis considers Jan's 1976 prison-break story, "Busting Out of Mexico," to be "one of the defining stories in the early days of the magazine."

One person was truly responsible for saving his life and giving him the willpower to keep fighting: his wife, Dorothy Browne. Dorothy, who died of cancer last Christmas Eve, was a familiar figure in Democratic party politics in Texas for half a century or more. She was a dedicated feminist—energetic, intelligent, feisty, and beautiful—and had once been married to novelist Billy Lee Brammer. Jan credited Brammer as being his writing mentor, though Jan didn't meet Dorothy until long after she and Billy Lee were divorced.

Jan and Dorothy had maybe the most passion-filled relationship of any couple I've known. Passion at that level doesn't always make for smooth sailing. Sometimes turbulence popped up. I saw them verbally tear into each other over something as innocuous as the Grateful Dead (Dorothy was pro; Jan, nay). But at the same time, they were dedicated to each other to the hilt. I know Jan adored Dorothy and her daughter from her second marriage, Lila Vance-Wilson. On more than one occasion, Dorothy put her arm around me and whispered, "Thank you, Kip, for taking care of Jan Reid." Jan told me that his desire to see Dorothy again is what got him through the trauma centers in Mexico City. For me, that sums up love, never mind those feuds over the Dead.

Amazingly, Jan became even more productive as a writer after the shooting. He continued to contribute to Texas Monthly and began turning out book after book. He and I edited a collection of the writing of Grover Lewis, the Texas-born influential Rolling Stone writer. Jan wrote a critically heralded biography of former governor Ann Richards. He collaborated with Lou Dubose on books about Karl Rove and Tom DeLay. He put together anthologies of essays on the Rio Grande and on the Red River. Jan revisited music again with books about Doug Sahm and about the making of Layla by Derek and the Dominos ("Bell Bottom Blues" might well have been Jan's favorite song).

So, yes, it took a lot of heart to rebound from what happened in Mexico City to live the kind of life he did afterward. Jan also revealed a big heart in the things he did for other people. I was on the receiving end of his generosity many, many times. He connected me with legendary Dallas Morning News book editor Bob Compton, which resulted in my having a freelance relationship with the paper for three decades. He introduced me to my first literary agent, which resulted in four book contracts with major New York publishers. He helped me get magazine assignments. He opened doors for me to meet and befriend people I never thought I'd know. I owe him big time.

Once Jan and I were driving somewhere together and he said, "You know, you and I are both semi-shitkickers who tried to get away from that world." It's true. We had many commonalities in our respective upbringings, his in Wichita Falls, mine in a small town just north of Oklahoma City. And we both aspired to bigger things. He was a big brother who showed me how to get there.

---W.K. (Kip) Stratton

Max Evans
1924-2020

The best that I can tell, Max Evans turned 1,000 years old in 2004. That's when a biography documenting his first millennium on earth appeared. Max hung around this rock for another sixteen years before going off to meet "the great mystery in the sky" on August 26, 2020. The newspapers listed his age as 95, but, again, people knew him understood that was just a fraction of his real age. Max had been around since the wind first began to blow. Undoubtedly, he's still around somewhere.



In the form that graced the earth almost a century, Max took his first breath in Ropes, Texas, where he was raised to be a cowboy. He learned to ride a horse at the same time he learned to walk, as the old saying goes. He was from a different time for sure. As a boy, he and other ranch hands drove a herd of horses across miles of open-range land in the Texas Panhandle to Guymon, Oklahoma, where they were sold. He worked as a ranch hand in West Texas and eastern New Mexico. One day he discovered a set of the translated novels of Honoré de Balzac in a bunkhouse and began reading. The tales of Old Goriot and Cousin Bette and the others making up *La Comédie humaine* inspired him to take up writing himself.

Max compiled great material from real life. There was ranching and rodeo, of course. He also served with distinction as an American soldier in the great campaign against Fascism known as World War II. In fact, he was one of the troopers who came ashore at Normandy during the D-Day invasion. A German shell took out all the members of Max's squad except him. The explosion blew him a considerable distance off a road and deposited him in a bombed-out building. But he survived. Others did not. Why? The question is the stuff of compelling fiction.

Max came to explore such topics in his books. Faulkner had his Yoknapatawpha County. Max had what he called the Hi-Lo Country. It comprised the western-most tier of counties in the Texas Panhandle, a big chunk of northeastern New Mexico, a couple of Oklahoma Panhandle counties, and a little bit of southeastern Colorado. Here the vistas stretched forever, the human population was sparse, rainfall was scarce, and nature was both beautiful and unforgiving. Max would come to be considered a "Western writer," but he had only scant interest in traditional historical cowboy novels. In the 1950s and 1960s, he along with such authors as Larry McMurtry, William Eastlake, and Edward Abbey forged what came to be called "contemporary Westerns" in which a cowhand was as likely to be encountered behind the wheel of a Ford pickup as in a saddle.

Max's first novel, *The Rounders*, which concerned the comical conflict between two modern cowboys (neither of whom is the proverbial sharpest knife) in conflict with a horse who is smarter than they are. The novel made its way to Hollywood, where Burt Kennedy adapted it into a screenplay and then directed it. *The Rounders*, starring Glenn Ford and Henry Fonda as the intellectually challenged cowboys, became a sleeper hit. Afterward, the moving picture business became Max's primary source of income. He and Sam Peckinpah, director of *The Wild Bunch* and *Ride the High Country* and other classic films, became close friends and collaborators. Sam was like Max, a true Westerner and more than a little bit of an outlaw, to put it politely. (Max never hid his extra-legal activities, which included smuggling contraband from Mexico for a time.) Peckinpah worked endlessly to get Max's stories into

production, but, more important, the director opened the door for Max to do off-the-financial-books script-doctoring in Hollywood.

Often payment came in cash, with no screen credits involved. Max became adept at it. There's no telling how many movies contain lines of dialogue or maybe even whole scenes penned by Max. He was also a master at horse-trading options on his own books and stories. Interest in his work continues on the Coast. My friend Ron Shelton (writer and director of *Bull Durham*, *White Men Can't Jump*, and *Tin Cup*, among others) tells me he's currently working on an adaptation of Max's novella, *My Pardner*.

Max never came close to being a *New York Times* bestseller. He was not much loved by the New York publishing world. *The Rounders* and his novel *The Hi-Lo Country* (his best book) were both brought into print by a major New York publisher. (*The Hi-Lo Country* eventually became a Martin Scorsese-produced film starring Woody Harrelson, Billy Crudup, Sam Elliott, and Penélope Cruz.) But afterward, his books mostly were published by university presses. Part of it was that Max's independent, sometimes cantankerous spirit didn't fit in with New York; he wasn't one to suffer officious editors gladly. But mostly it was because the novella became his fiction form of choice — too long to be a short story, too short to be a standalone novel.

Now that I've written those words, I have to contradict myself. His best-known novel might well be the 800-page epic concerning Bluefeather Fellini, which was published in two volumes by the University of Colorado Press. Fellini is part Pueblo and part Italian — the latter heritage comes from the scores of Italians who immigrated into the U.S. to mine coal in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. He's a character much like Max himself in that he is attuned to Native mysticism. The epic is a work of magical realism. And Max came by it honestly.

Max's grandmother was an American Indian and she raised him to respect Native traditions and beliefs. Later, after World War II, Max studied painting in earnest, and his mentor became the acclaimed painter Woody Crumbo (Potawatomi). Crumbo schooled Max on more than just apply oils to canvas, however. Many of their discussions had to do with spiritual ways. Until his death in 1989, Crumbo remained an important friend and advisor to Max.

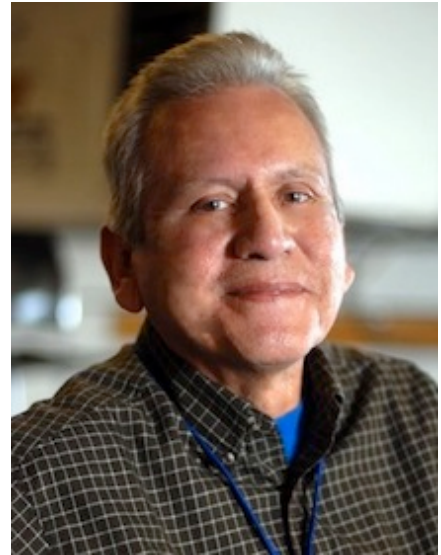
And so: In Max Evans, we had a sure-enough tough cowboy who rodeoed until he was in his 70s and who wasn't shy about applying a hard fist to a deserving mouth in a bar brawl. A mystic who communicated with the earth and dead people. A man could drink almost everyone under the table once the seal on a whiskey bottle was broken (he especially liked doing that to self-important Hollywood producers who thought they were tough guys). A hero of World War II. A lover of nature. A dedicated family man (married to his wife, Pat, for 70 years) who nonetheless could get rowdy in Hollywood with a good friend like Morgan Woodward, the actor originally from Odessa who was killed by Marshal Dillion on *Gunsmoke* more than any other actor. A man who worked tirelessly to promote the arts and helped get the New Mexico Film Office up and running. A spiritual man. And an author with a dedicated following who published 27 books of fiction and nonfiction, the last of which, *The King of Taos*, was published just three months before his death to much acclaim and has won at least one award. I'm tempted to say we'll not see his kind again. But he's still here, *someplace*, working on his second millennium. I don't know exactly where, but it is place with high country flatland offset by mesas and mountains and plenty of horses.

---W.K. (Kip) Stratton

Gregg Barrios

1940-2021

Gregg and I met with awkward handshakes across the faded gray divider of our adjacent cubicles at Hearst's San Antonio Express-News. We knew little if anything about each other's background or how we'd wound up in 2000 at what would become an interesting, if dysfunctional, stint at "the voice of South Texas." He had signed on as the new book editor. I was the new travel editor. Over the first of uncountable lunches we figured out we had considerable in common, from politics to cultural and artistic viewpoints to both being Vietnam Era veterans, a bond that became ever stronger as we grew older. We remained friends through relocations, job changes, fights with the powers, and personal karmic paths for more than twenty years.



Should have been longer. When a staffer from the Ex-News, as we called it, phoned late one morning about a rumor that Gregg had passed, I was skeptical, a journalistic trait. But when my calls and texts went unanswered, I felt my body go stoic, and as soon as I drove to Gregg's eerily vacant apartment driveway I knew it was true. He was gone. Three days earlier, Aug. 17. His nephew, Robert Barrios, told me Gregg had gone to Methodist Memorial for a check-up on shoulder pain, and was released. He returned the next morning, this time to the ER. The heart attack struck quick and merciless.

Once the news got around, the outpouring of sorrow and surprise in the city's vibrant arts community, especially among Latinx colleagues and friends, was stunning. So many people knew Gregg, from so many different directions—poetry, playwriting, criticism, academia, publishing, and nonstop, nonyielding cultural and political activism—that I immediately saw my friendship as but a flyspeck on a lush canvas of creativity and invention. It made me happy and proud to have known such a man connected to so many others. One of them, poet and professor Natalia Treviño, caught a day in his life for a farewell essay in *Latino Stories*:

Normally, he would drive himself to any and all appointments in his red Cadillac, and when we went to breakfast, he insisted I meet him at his house so he could drive, often with Sade playing in the background, him setting the scene for a drive just like an artist would, sunroof down, taking an extra turn into an extra pretty street even if it was out of the way to hear the fullness of the song and to enjoy the ride to the best breakfast taco place he loved—Mary Lou's on McCullough because "where else do you see Cantinflas, Warhol, and Diego Rivera in one place."

In a way, the array of fellowships, honors, publications, celebrity interactions that would make Zelig jealous would have seemed improbable to a gay boy born Oct. 30, 1940 in Victoria to the middle-class family steered by his father, Gregorio, a professional photographer from Monterrey, Mexico, and his mother, Eva, "a Tejana farm girl from Nursery, Texas," as he proudly described her. But he was always an avid and curious reader and at age 16, thanks to some local librarians, he was given a job reviewing books for the *Victoria Advocate*. It was the opening to everything.

In 1958, just turned 18, Gregg was drafted and joined the Air Force, where he was trained as a medic, and had temporary duty helping transport wounded from Vietnam back to the U.S. in the early years of the war, ultimately stationed at Bergstrom AFB in Austin. This was the experience he narrated in 2014 for “Telling San Antonio,” a production of the Austin-based Telling Project in which veterans told gripping stories of their service in specially written stage productions around the country. In those days I was director of a veterans support program at the Texas A&M System and had recommended Gregg to the producers. He was the only Latino and only Vietnam Era veteran and stole the show, staged at the Tobin Center for the Arts, and broadcast on KRLN, the San Antonio PBS station.

Later, Gregg tried hard to get a sequel production at the Tobin, but focused on Latino veterans and those from the Vietnam Era. It fit with his ongoing criticism that the center didn’t provide proportional venues for Latino artists or performances of any kind. The local media and establishment Anglo cultural elite all but ignored him. He answered by advocating even more for recognition of the role of the Mexican-American population in Texas’s most historic city. He was still pushing his idea when he died, and had begun drafting a multi-media performance, “Mi Vietnam Odyssey,” which he had hoped to premiere one day at the Texas Book Festival.

Gregg’s lifelong journey of activism included an astonishing level of networking through a remarkable number of channels. For years, though, many of his accomplishments remained seriously unknown and underreported, such as founding the Cinema 40 Film Society in 1965 as a UT student on the GI Bill. Cinema 40 was the first such organization on the campus, forging a path for the other better-known film societies and groups at and around the university.

From that experience and the many contacts he made in the national film community, Gregg moved on to New York, where he worked for a time with Andy Warhol at the Factory, making a short experimental film and soaking up the vibes of world-class creativity in the late ‘60s. By the ‘70s, he had returned to Texas to teach high school English, first in Austin but quickly thereafter in Crystal City, where he had helped tutor students during the 1969 school walkout. He remained in Crystal for the years during which the town became an epicenter for the Chicano movement in Texas. Among other actions, he led his students to create *Stranger in a Strange Land*, a play about the alienation and oppression of Mexican Americans, and which Gregg said was influenced by Bowie’s song “Space Oddity” as well the film in which he starred, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. The students were devoted to the play, and sent Bowie a copy of a libretto. The rock icon liked it so much he sent back autographed photos.

There was more to come in Gregg’s Crystal City years. He became an editor of *La Verdad*, the newspaper of La Raza Unida, the party founded by José Angel Gutiérrez, and noted for its historic rise to power in the city. La Raza also made headlines in the runs by Ramsey Muñiz for the governor in 1972 and 1974. During the infamous power shutout imposed on the town, Gregg wrote another play, *Dale Gas, Cristal*, that represented the successful struggle to get the power turned back on. Tom Hayden, Jane Fonda, and Angela Davis all took an interest and Hayden wrote a foreword. Many years later, one of Gregg’s students, Roberto Alonzo, became a Texas state representative and led the drive for Gregg’s Golden Gavel award for poetry during Hispanic Heritage Month in 2011 from the Texas House of Representatives.

After Crystal City, already having made contacts with the Los Angeles Times, Gregg headed to the West Coast and stayed for a number of years, where he taught English in the LA school system, and became a frequent culture reporter for the paper, meanwhile advancing his own interests in theater. He

snared a CTG-Mark Taper Fellowship, the first of many such honors that he would hold throughout his unfolding career, and which helped him pursue research for his first major play, *Dark Horse, Pale Rider*, based on the life of Texas author Katherine Anne Porter, which ultimately premiered in 2002 in San Antonio.

In the 1980s, Gregg had moved back to Texas, mostly, but traveling as needed for freelance work and landing various jobs. One was summer teaching at Loyola University in New Orleans, where he had a crucial dinner meeting with Pancho Rodriguez, also a Texan, and began the pioneering research proving Pancho's relationship with Tennessee Williams, including proof that Pancho also had been a major influence on the character Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. From a multi-year truth quest came *Rancho Pancho*, Gregg's own interpretation of the Pancho and Tennessee story. It premiered in San Antonio (2008) but steadfastly spread to theaters and festivals across the country and into Mexico. Gregg saw it as the first of a "Tenn trilogy." The second, *Tennessee, Mon Amour*, was to premiere in 2022. He was making revisions on *Seven Card Stud*.

From this came Gregg's many other involvements in theater, mostly in San Antonio, although with performances, readings, and publications elsewhere. *I-DJ* (2012), the story of a gay Latinx DJ who took the name Warren Peace and explored his identity through the LA nightclub and music scene, the impact of AIDS, and various social issues, was perhaps his next most successful. He also did considerable freelance. His work has appeared in *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *Texas Observer*, *Texas Monthly*, *Film Quarterly*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and Andy Warhol's *Interview*. He was chosen as a visiting writer at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio.

He had also developed a keen interest in boxing, and covered a number of bouts, with a special interest in San Antonio boxer Mike Ayala, brother of the ill-fated Tony Ayala, Jr., prompting an assignment from Bill Broyles, then editor at *Texas Monthly*, on Ayala's steady rise in the sport. Gregg also met the greatest boxer of all time, and stands next to Muhammad Ali in one of the many photos on his bookshelves and walls, Selena to Tennessee Williams to Sandra Cisneros to Elvis—whom, at one time, a younger Gregg uncannily resembled.

One of his major works, on the famous Texas stripper and unhappy girlfriend to Jack Ruby, Candy Barr, was in the casting stage at Gregg's passing. He had met and befriended her many years earlier. A poignant 1984 photo shows him standing with Candy in her modest kitchen. He thought her story as a victim of domestic human trafficking starting as a 15-year-old was not only powerful theater, but an important take on our society as well. Same with his unfinished play on Fred Gómez Carrasco, an early cartel drug boss killed along with others during an attempted breakout at the Texas state prison in Huntsville in 1973.

As with Candy Barr, Gregg had been intrigued by Carrasco's life for many years and finally found a storyline he thought would work. I had been a desk editor at the AP bureau in Dallas during that standoff and shooting, and Gregg and I had many a conversation over why it had been needless bloodshed pushed by an impatient warden and state law enforcement. I say that in the nicest way possible. It was this similar way of looking at things that emerged in our conversations numerous times over the years and made me often wonder why we'd never crossed journalistic or other Texas paths previously. It was hard not to see it as a result of long-term racial and ethnic structuring in Texas, even in the ranks of artists, media, and activists who should have known and done better.

A few years after clinching the role as Ex-News's first Latino book editor, Gregg left to become one of the founding editors in 2004 of Rumbo, a Spanish-language daily newspaper based in San Antonio with offices across the state. Gregg was disheartened when the risk-taking paper slowly declined and essentially folded in 2008, but again threw his energy into poetry and playwriting. A stunning succession of Yale, Harvard, and USC Annenberg Getty fellowships as well as a Ford Foundation Grant and Artist Foundation Grant gave him important prestige, and also time to research and develop more work.

His best-known of three poetry books, *La Causa* (2010), was published to strong reviews. He also collaborated a few years later with James Franco for the actor's chapbook, *Straight James/Gay James*, which, like many of Gregg's achievements, offered friends and colleagues yet another example of the many irons in his fires.

Recognition and networking continued to spread. Gregg was elected as a member of the board of directors of the National Book Critics Circle (NBCC), where he served more than ten years, helping personally fund a major honor, the Nona Balakian Citation for Excellence in Reviewing. He also was elected Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion in 2020, a key role in helping the NBCC recover from a tumultuous period that summer and expand its commitment to a more diverse membership and approach to reviewing.

By then, Gregg had also become more involved in LGBTQ issues as well as his lifelong advocacy of stronger recognition of Latinx contributions and much greater avenues of participation. He also found time to support, creatively and financially, the Overtime Theater, "San Antonio's Off-Off Broadway Theater," where controversial new plays, including his, could find a home too often denied in the more traditional venues. Although it had to close briefly, it re-opened as The Gregg Barrios Theater at the Overtime before he died.

In 2015 he was inducted into the Texas Institute of Letters, an honor that many thought was both well-deserved and long overdue. In many ways, those characteristics were replicated in his professional life, and rendered all the more notable because they were constantly countered with his relentless, courageous, and ever-confident breaking of barriers and boundaries, challenging of status quo, rebuking of repression, and vast creative imagination and energy.

All considered, he was a literary force of nature. Or perhaps the way his friend Barbara Renaud González remembered him in a column in the San Antonio Current:

Gregg Barrios missed his calling. He shoulda been in the movies, but then his life was a movie of secrets, spicy revelations, tissue-wrapped journals, photos, hidden closets and cabinets filled with famous and sometimes rubber-banded papers brimming with stories he said he wanted to write, and didn't... I was always in awe of Gregg's love of literature — an achievement and a courageous love given that we both come from Texas, a place where people like us with our overwhelming love of stories sometimes find no place to tell them, no money or time to write them. Deserving better, we are simply different angles of the Texas story with parallel, daunting, pasts barely understood in this country.

Although he frequently talked about moving back to LA, Gregg ended up staying in San Antonio. The old house he had bought in the Tobin Hills area, later to be all but swallowed by development of the raucous Pearl entertainment district, sold for a price that he finally decided to take, despite love for his

patch of the city. He didn't move far, only to an apartment in nearby Monte Vista. It was a good fit, plenty of room for him and his piles of books and boxes. He was as happy as I'd ever seen him. Usually a smile on an impish face under snow-white hair, regaling his friends regularly at breakfast or lunch, always planning a new project, raising an activist voice for whatever cause he felt needed help. And so many did. Toward the end, he was signing his emails and some of his social media posts with "Peace, Love, Protest."

Our last meeting was less than two weeks before he died, at Jim's, a restaurant on Broadway, not far from Brackenridge Park. He wanted to tell me about the progress of "Hard Candy: The Life and Times of Candy Barr," and an upcoming trip to a quarterly NBCC board meeting in New York. He had been on dialysis for about a year by then, but you'd never know it and he rarely brought it up. I advised him not to take the trip because of the latest wave of the pandemic, but he'd gotten his vaccinations—after prodding from friends. He said he already had the trip lined up and had even found a Manhattan clinic to get dialysis if needed. He looked a little thin, but vigorous as ever, and as excited with each day as a kid. An 80-year-old going on 18.

Robert, his nephew, handled the complex duties of the departure of a family member, but the disposition of Gregg's many archival works, some already with the Getty Museum in LA and some with UT-SA, were more complicated. Gregg's friends and his publisher Jon Hansen pitched in to help. Hansen planned to posthumously publish an anthology, *My Life: The Poem I Never Wrote: New & Selected Poetry 1968-2021*. The city's noted writing arts center, Gemini Ink, created a special memorial honor for Gregg with an Award for Literary Excellence at the annual Inkstravaganza gala, and announced the launch of the Gregg Barrios Teen Writer Mentorship Program.

A few months before he left the building, Gregg (née Gregorio) had visited Robert in Victoria and they had gone to a favorite record store. Gregg enjoyed returning to his hometown, especially driving his "Mac Caddy." It had been a long journey from South Texas to that other America, but his roots, his identity, his enthusiasm at all that the world and its ideas and adventures never left his mind or soul. It seems so strange now that he has left us. A man who really had fallen to earth.

---Rod Davis

Dave Hickey
1938-2021

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<https://www.texasmonthly.com/arts-entertainment/dave-hickey-great-art-critic-extraordinary-friend/>

Dave Hickey Wasn't Just a Great Art Critic. He Was an Extraordinary Friend.

By Sarah Bird

Maybe you already know that Dave Hickey was the seminal art critic of the past century. Before his death on November 12 at age 82, the Fort Worth–born writer collected most of the big prizes that the creative world can award: a Peabody Award, a MacArthur “genius grant,” and many, many other accolades “like that,” as Dave would have said about lists he trusted you could figure out on your own. Since I have zero knowledge of and even less interest in the art world, it never figured in our friendship.



This is about the Dave who was my friend. The off-duty Dave.

I met Dave 35 years ago at an Austin party hosted by a smart, glamorous group of women I thought of as the Art Babes. I wasn't sure how I'd managed to slither in, but slither I had. I was barely in the door when a friend asked how the garage sale I'd hosted that day had gone.

“Well,” I told her, “the oddest thing happened. Not once, but two different times, little old ladies in giant Buicks drove up. Neither one got out. They just rolled down the window and yelled—”

“Milk glass?!” a tobacco-roughened voice imitating a twangy, exceedingly nasal North Texas accent interrupted, taking the words right out of my mouth.

My jaw dropped, since that was precisely what the ladies had asked for. I turned and there was Dave.

He had the imposing build and manner of a one-time linebacker whose knees had gone bad many, many seasons ago, crossed with the jaunty contrariness of a renegade leprechaun. There was about Dave an air of dukes-up Irish pugnacity leavened with an irresistible bad-boy charm; he was always almost as ready to joke as to jab. I was lucky. We started out joking and never stopped.

“Did they ask if you had any milk glass, jadeite, like that?”

“How the hell did you know that?” I said, asking the question that would define our relationship.

Instead of answering, he told me we were going out to the patio to smoke. There, after nonchalantly tossing off a thumbnail history of Depression-era hobnail glass pitchers, as well as jadeite (“like that”) and its recent rise in value, he said, “I liked that thing you wrote.”

In my second “How the hell did you know that?” moment with Dave, it turned out that he’d read the novel I’d recently published, *Alamo House*. That “thing” was a scene in the book. The scene, juvenile and dopey as it is, is worth describing because it reveals so much about the Dave who was my pal.

In it, my heartbroken heroine, forced by her cheating boyfriend’s betrayal to move into a dump of a housing co-op, contemplates “the half-dozen tenderhearted cockroaches that gathered at my feet like the kind mice that had altered Cinderella’s ball gown. The little guys waved their wee antennae at me in a touching display of interspecies commiseration.

“I hope they knew how much it cheered me to dispatch four of their number to Valhalla with my sandal. The two survivors scurried away to spread the tale of human perfidy (a tale that would cause my toothbrush to be peppered every night thereafter with tiny black roach turds).”

For a long time, I figured that Dave’s affection for this goofy passage was simply the master, the connoisseur, the arbiter of all that was hip and cool, taking a break to indulge in a bit of childish whimsy. As the years passed, however, I came to see that his affection for whimsy dwelt in the tender spot that he’d sheltered from the tragedies of his youth, including his father’s suicide when Dave was sixteen.

Over the next three decades, I watched Dave smoke innumerable Marlboro Light 100s on innumerable patios, balconies, and in a couple of hotel rooms where smoking was strictly forbidden. “Strictly forbidden” was the red cape Dave charged at his whole life. He had the superpower of making those he allowed into his secret clubhouse of naughty kids feel as if we, too, were rebels, transgressive and dangerous.

Then I went and did the least transgressive thing a woman can do: I had a baby. That, along with a nasty case of postpartum depression, would, I was certain, zero out any particle of cool cred I might ever have had, thereby canceling my membership in the Dave Club. Instead, though I never uttered a word about my particular brand of misery, Dave threw out a psychic lifeline: He took to calling me regularly simply to ask, “How’s my princess doing?”

And then he would talk about teaching at Harvard or his latest dust-up in the world of art criticism. He’d make me laugh and then ask how my work was going, as if I were still a functioning writer instead of an insomniac feeding station.

A bit later on, after I’d made contact with the child-care system, I moaned to Dave about how, not only had I failed to befriend a single other mom in the Mother’s Morning Out cabal, but, in spite of my concerted charm offensive, they actively avoided me. Why?

“The farmers always know who the pirates are, and they always hate them,” Dave growled, his voice further graveled by a few more years of Marlboros.

Whether or not this vision of me as a swashbuckling threat to staid bougie values was accurate or not (it wasn't), it sure beat being the loneliest loser mom on the playground. Dave wasn't always kind, but he was kind to me in ways that mattered a great deal.

Many years later, he published a book of essays with that exact title, *Pirates and Farmers*. From very early on, Dave and I bonded over titles. He liked hearing about the articles I wrote for women's magazines on topics such as the infinity of ways the reader might intuit whether or not "he" was or was not "into" her. In this case, it was an essay I was writing for, yes, *Cosmopolitan* about my sad history of unwise clothing purchases and the sense of release it gave me to return said bad buys and start the cycle again.

"Binge Purge Shopping!" Dave decreed, bestowing upon this effort not just a title, but a whole guiding concept. I gave him 10 percent of what the cosmonauts paid me, writing "Title Tithe" on the memo line of the check I sent him.

Not all his ideas were bull's-eyes, of course. Dave was convinced that my fifth novel, *The Yokota Officers Club*, really should have been called *Yokohama Mama*. His marketing scheme for the novel I set in the world of flamenco dance pivoted around the title "Cast a Net," which, he promised, was guaranteed to "reel in" the fishing crowd.

He was also always eager for dispatches from my ten-year ramble through Hollywood as a screenwriter. When I once lamented that the producers on a certain project wanted me to both cut ten pages *and* "amp up" a minor character, Dave did not hesitate. "Cut out all his dialogue and have him playing a Game Boy and chewing on a toothpick," he suggested. I did both, and the satisfied producers moved on. How the hell did he know that?

I think our phone calls, daily during certain periods, must've been a break for Dave. An opportunity to power down the hydraulic turbines that kept his big brain whirring. For a few moments, he'd put aside charting a new course for the art world or doing battle with the fussbudgets and puritans of any world and indulge in goofy puns and suburban chitchat.

When I learned that Dave would never call again, I relistened to one of the last voice messages he'd left me. Senate Bill 8 had just effectively outlawed abortion, and Dave railed, "Hey, Sarah, it's Dave. I just wanted to talk to someone smart. What is going on? Texas is a vigilante state, you know what I mean?"

Anyone who ever spoke with Dave was asked, "You know what I mean?" multiple times during any conversation. Maybe even during a sentence. For Dave, so often the smartest person in any room, the question was a verbal tic he used to take the intellectual temperature and make sure that we were all following the mental gymkhana he was leading us through.

I like to think that Dave is now in his true element, where such a question won't be necessary. And I hope that that element is the Allman Brothers Band touring bus, barreling down a 2 a.m. highway. The only lights are neon and everyone is smoking, ingesting the substances of their choosing, drinking caffeinated anything, and eating chicken-fried everything. And when Dave asks for the last time, "You know what I mean?" this crew will actually understand and the greatest riffathon ever will commence.

And they will treasure the Dave I knew, the off-duty Dave. The one who was that rarest of friends, the one who made you feel significantly snazzier than you actually were. The one who could always intuit when a bit of tenderness, a call simply to ask how his princess was doing, might be needed. The one who left you wondering, “How the hell did he know that?”