

Bobby Byrd, in memoriam (1942-2022)
Son, Brother, Husband, Father, Grandfather, Friend
Poet, Publisher



A colleague in publishing once told me he wished he had the guts to carry a purse.

“Bobby Byrd carries a purse,” I said.

“I know,” the colleague said. “But he’s *Bobby Byrd*. He can do whatever he wants.”

For as long as I knew him, over two decades, Bobby Byrd carried a purse—thick woven cloth, bright Mexican colors, and, sometimes, tassels.

The purse has nothing to do with literature and this memoriam is for the Texas Institute of Letters, so it’s supposed to say something about Bobby and how important he was for Texas and for books. But the purse is more than just the purse, it represents Bobby’s attitude toward life: an unconscious, unaffected flaunting of convention; a pure and simple and holy ability to just be himself, damn everybody else. And this attitude has everything to do with the books he wrote and the books he ended up publishing, which were, indeed, transformative for El Paso, for Texas, and for the United States.

The facts of Bobby Byrd’s life: He was born and raised in Memphis; he met Lee Merrill in the summer of 1966 at the Aspen Writers Workshop; they told everybody they got married in 1967 but actually got married in 1972; they had three children, Susie, John, and Andy; he was a poet and published 7 collections of poetry over the decades; Lee and Bobby founded Cinco Puntos Press, an independent publishing company that operated out of El Paso, Texas for almost four decades, and published over 150 multicultural books for children, young adults, and adults—books that celebrated the culture and exposed the socioeconomic political reality of the U.S.-Mexico Border, the Southwest, and beyond; and he died on July 11, 2022, in El Paso, Texas.

But these facts of Bobby’s life tell us very little of the charismatic, loving, and beloved man I secretly called “the angry Buddhist.”

While working on the book that became *Puro Border: Dispatches, Snapshots, and Graffiti from the US/Mexico Border*, Bobby, Lee, and I walked across the bridge from El Paso to Juárez to meet with Esther Chávez Cano, an activist who had collected a list of the names of all the women who went missing in Juárez, a list which would later be included in the book. Bobby had a shambling, meandering walk, but he was on a mission: Even with his shuffling, almost lopsided gait, he kept pace ahead of us by about twenty feet. Lee and I struggled to keep up. This, too, reminds me of the man he was. By all suggestive evidence, he was unhurried and patient, but he headed straight, and rapid-fast, and true toward his goal.

In all areas of his life, Bobby had an unfiltered regard for what he knew and believed to be true. Though he practiced acceptance through meditation and Buddhist philosophy, he was unafraid to speak up angrily for the babies, the women, the poor, the needy, those male and female alike who had less no matter how hard they worked. His rage was palpable in his many rants against those he held responsible for the misfortunes and poverty of others.

And this is the heart of what we find in Bobby's literary legacy—both the books he published and the poetry he wrote: he sought a sustainable justice for all, and he recognized the untenable contradiction between lived realities and the dream of justice.

Consider, for example, this excerpt from “How to Eat Stuffed Fish in Juarez,” which juxtaposes the relative wealth of an American who can come to Mexico to eat fish on a Friday during Lent and tip the waiter an extravagant-feeling tip with the Indian babies outside on the street begging for just 50 cents. The pent-up feelings of helplessness and desire and anger emerge on the page from his pen:

Jesus died for the sins of us all.
So I walked across the bridge to Mexico
with my friend Rus the basketball coach,
and we ate fish at the Villa del Mar
which seemed like
the natural thing to do—
it was Lent in a Catholic country.
The waiter was a pro, thank God.
Two Bohemias apiece,
chips and fresh pico de gallo,
bolillos (on the soft side)
a good and simple caldo,
the pescado was relleno
con tiny shrimp and crabmeat.
The bill was 16 bucks and we added a four dollar tip,
becoming heroes because we had money in our pockets.
...

We turned back into the clutter of human beings,
the clanging traffic,
and a little Tarahumara brother and sister who found us
like lost pieces of a puzzle, blessed us
with their sad hunger, their black watery eyes
blinking with the memory of

the Sierra Madre,
hunger,
narcotraficantes,
dead babies,

lost Gods.

All that we had to give was money.
50 cents for each of them.
Enough so that they fled back to their mother,
a tiny woman who sat on the curb with another baby
wrapped in a rebozo that was becoming the color of night.

But as much as Bobby was a truth-teller and a seeker of justice, finally, in the end, he was about family.

“A Short History of Our Marriage For Our Grandchildren” by Bobby Byrd

Forgive us. We didn't have a plan.
We had instead a blue Ford window van,
1960, six-cylinder. Sometimes we took out the backseat
And put in a mattress or a raggedy couch.
Once we put in everything we owned,
Even that black R-60 BMW motorcycle.

We headed off to God-knows-where.
Colorado, it turned out, and three kids
Who became your mother or fathers,
Your aunt, your uncles. Somewhere we
Have an old suitcase where we put
All of our secrets. But don't go looking for it.

The suitcase doesn't exist. It's only words.
Like these words are my words.
Your grandmother has her own words.
Her words tell the same story, but her story
Is different. That's the way we all are.
I hope someday you understand.

Bobby's enormous and enduring and bighearted love for his family, friends, and community are what everybody will remember about the man. It represents the best of us: hope and joy curling up with loved ones as a bulwark against the darkness “out there”, the darkness outside their warm house on Louisville Street, the lights spilling out the windows and providing a beacon of grace amidst it all.

That was Bobby.

Jessica Powers

Poet's voice will live on in the world she loved By Cary Clack
San Antonio Express News, June 24, 2022

On Christmas Day 2019, shortly after I'd returned to the Express-News, I received a text from Rosemary Catacalos.

"Beloved hermanito," she wrote. "I write with the greatest good wishes for you and yours in celebration of the Christmas season. Apologies for going silent a while, but I have been bound and determined not to distract you even slightly from your first week and column. I have been ill since Dec. 11. A new cancer treatment and I do not get along."



She concluded, "PLEASE don't allow this news to get in the way of your work!"

She'd sketched the character of a great friend, mentor and poet, one so selfless that she felt the need to apologize for being silent because she was being treated for cancer.

Rose, the first Latina to be named Texas poet laureate, died June 17 after living with cancer for more than seven years. She was 78.

Death never silences a poet's voice, not after it's been spoken and heard, never after it's been written and read, and few voices resonated like that of Rosemary Catacalos, one of the best poets this city and state has produced.

"I cannot bear the thought that her indelible voice won't be coming over the telephone anymore," poet Naomi Shihab Nye, her friend of 51 years, said. "She made so many melodic sounds or intonations as parts of regular conversations — the 'huh' and 'meh' and 'uh-huh' type."

Little more than a week before her death, two of Rose's close friends, Betsy Schultz and Bett Butler, set up a page for friends to receive updates and send messages. Butler, a magnificent jazz singer, wrote of Rose's "use of tempo, space, and breath; the judicious seasoning of Texas drawl or a Spanish phrase beautifully rendered."

It was a magnificent voice, one that initially confused me as I tried to dissect it.

I first met Rose in 2003 shortly after she became executive director of Gemini Ink, the literary arts center. I knew she was of Greek and Mexican heritage and grew up speaking Spanish, Greek and English, and I heard in her voice what Naomi and Bett heard. But I also heard the voice of a Black woman.

It all made sense when I learned Rose grew up on the East Side and had imbibed the idiom of the Black community in which she lived as deeply as she'd absorbed the rhythms and nuances of the languages spoken in her household.

Her poem "Swallow Wings" begins with the lines, "I been to church, folks. I'm an East Side Meskin Greek and I been to church." The poem is dedicated to Maya Angelou, who encouraged her to speak in all her languages.

Through the years, Rose and I would talk about our experiences of growing up on the East Side, and the blessings of being the oldest grandchild and living with or near grandparents.

"She was elegant," Nye said. "Her voice in every language was gorgeously resonant. She was always wise. Beyond all of us somehow."

On Mother's Day, Rose called to tell me the cancer had spread. "I'm going to begin ..., " there was a slight pause, "transitioning."

She apologized for making my day heavy — again with the apology — but I told her I was fine because I could feel she was at peace.

Then, she said, "I love this world. I love this world so much, despite all of its problems."

In 2013, at the memorial service of her former father-in-law, Bill Sinkin, the visionary businessman and advocate for social justice, Rose read her poem "Mr. Chairman Takes His Leave." It's a tribute to Sinkin, his faith in democracy and devotion to making its promise true for all:

"You have left it to us, messy and imperfect
as we are and will be, to keep to the work side by side
and as long as it takes, all the while singing of miracles
just as Whitman and you taught us to do."

It's a song of hope.

Rose, you've taken leave of this world you loved, despite Ukraine, Uvalde and the unrest of insurrection. We must find the miracles we can sing. We must keep to the work, side by side.

Wendy Barker Memorial by Sheila Black

The last time I saw Wendy was about three weeks before she died. She had come to ASU where I'd just started a new job at the Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing as part of our Distinguished Visiting Writers Series along with our mutual friend Cynthia Hogue. I could see she was ill and frail but still the same old Wendy. Over dinner we talked about her students – how wonderful they were. I should retire she said, but I just haven't gotten around to it yet. On the way back from the restaurant, she stumbled and almost fainted. Cynthia and I wondered if she was up to reading. She seemed hardly able to eat. She had grown so thin, but she was determined, and whenever we got in a conversation, we, and she, seemed to forget her illness in a gush of words and enthusiasms.



Wendy was a poet – a born investigator-explorer poet – who shared what she deeply studied about the things she adored, whose curiosity about the science of pigments and color, of trees, of weather patterns, of clouds, biology, and birds, of the inter-weavings of human history and myth so that her poems were multi-faceted, layered by odd nuggets and gleams of her scholarship and how this deep study resonated with her loved experiences. Wendy was also a fearless poet. Wendy was not born in Texas, but when I think of her particular brand of loving fearlessness, I think of those great Texas women like Moly Ivins or Ann Richards, though Wendy was not quite like them either – mostly, she was the kind of poet who can't help being a life educator, encourager, and advocate.

At the reading in Arizona, five minutes before we were due to go on, Wendy still looked to be dangerously frail, and I was scared it would be hard for her to hold the room. I had worked very hard, because Wendy was my friend, to fill the space. I had promoted the reading for weeks, and the room was packed—students, teachers, people from the Phoenix community, which was still so brand new to me, even some of her old high school friends because for Wendy, coming to Arizona was a form of coming home, and in her husband's words, "coming full circle." Wendy said she would like to read second, and when I introduced her and called her to the podium, it was like watching a miracle unfold before your very eyes: Her first poem was about the police stopping cars and how she drives too fast but when she is stopped, the police are always nice to her, because everyone thinks she is just a nice old white lady. (It is called, "Driving While White.") Her second poem was about a wild love affair that totally altered her perspective on the world. Her third poem, "Remedial Reading," was about a high school student she had once with whom she had been practicing vowels, and when the word *dove* for the o sound came up, he ran out of the room, and came back to release a flock of his beloved pet pigeons concealed under his coat and tell her the names of each one. Wendy owned that room. Wendy's reading brought the house down. There are so many heartbreaks about losing Wendy Barker, but one personal one for me is that in the month or so since Wendy died, walking around ASU's campus, I invariably run into a student who was there at Wendy's last reading – and that student, not knowing she is gone – invariably says to me: "What's the name of a book by that women Wendy you had at the Piper house? I have to read her. I have to get one of her books. That reading changed my life."

Her once student and lifelong dear friend Natalia Trevino said this about Wendy Barker at a recent reading in San Antonio, the last one Wendy organized herself:

“With Wendy, my world changed and so did the worlds of so many others....

As I prepared to read here today, I thought of the term *mother tree*, not knowing exactly what it was, only that those two words came together as an obvious metaphor to describe what Wendy has done for our community of poets who studied with her in San Antonio and who had relationships with her from across time and across the nation. Then, I did some research to find out if they are in fact a thing, and of course they are. The term is found in the work of a researcher Wendy had read. She had told me to read Peter Wohlleben’s 2016 nonfiction bestseller *The Hidden Life of Trees* several years ago. She had become very attached to a leaf, a maple leaf, and we talked for hours about trees as she relayed what she learned, so I am sure she mentioned “mother tree” to me. I never got the book, but I found out the researcher included in that book, ecologist Suzanne Simard, said this. “Mother Trees’ Are Intelligent: They Learn and Remember. . . [They] are the biggest, oldest trees in the forest. They are the glue that holds the forest together. They have the genes from previous climates; they are homes to so many creatures, so much biodiversity. Through their huge photosynthetic capacity, they provide food for the whole soil web of life. They keep carbon in the soil and aboveground, and they keep the water flowing. These ancient trees help forests recover from disturbances. We can’t afford to lose them.”

Now that I’ve heard Natalia’s use of “mother tree” to describe Wendy, I can’t shake it. Wendy was a nurturer, a person who wanted you to love poetry as she did, a person who wanted—as she did in that room at ASU at her very last reading at a time when she was ill and struggling with immense pain – to fill the people around her with a will to pay attention, to discover the glory all around us, as well as to look head-on at the pain. Wendy shone by her example – never afraid to go there, and also always willing to make time for a friend.

During the time I shared space with her in San Antonio, Wendy was in several poetry groups – many with poets I know; she taught at UTSA; she wrote poetry books; she did scholarly work; she nurtured and ran UTSA’s creative writing program for over thirty years, curating a star-studded yearly reading series, traveled the world intensively, and worked with the Jewish Film Festival with her husband, critic and professor Steven G. Kellman. Yet somehow, she also found time to meet with me to look at poems at our local Whole Foods in the Quarry Mall.

We would meet Saturdays mid-afternoon--Wendy always tousled and elegant, often in a long soft sweater of grey or blue, jeans, sneakers, that somehow despite being outrageously scruffy managed also to convey a kind of elegance. I can summon Wendy’s gestures: the way her eyes would light up, the way she’d drawl “You’re not going to believe this, but...” as she gifted you with some new fact about clouds or birds, or people, or, as so often with mother tree Wendy, trees. She was politically fierce – a feminist who did groundbreaking work on Emily Dickinson, a person who has experienced what happens when life doesn’t give you what you need or deserve. She had first gone to college at ASU at twenty-six. Older students were not so common

then, but once she made it to college Wendy never looked back. She credited her ASU experience with saving her life and went on to do the same for so many others. Her early experiences of difficulty, disappointment, poverty, feeling left behind, informed her teaching ever after. Her friend Natalia Trevino has written: "I think of Wendy as my curandera. She cured me. She made me whole by introducing me to my own voice...Wendy taught me about the necessity of feminism, the crime of erasure, and the courage to edit your work."

I include these long segments of memories of Wendy here because I don't know how else to convey the most important information – that Wendy was a gifted and extraordinary poet, who also made it her mission to live and spread the life-altering and immense importance of poetry – that poetry could be a pathway to living a more alert, more honest, more fearless, and most of all kinder, more generous life. And this is reflected in her poetry. Take, for example, Wendy's poem "Praise of Stumps," from her most recent book, *Weave: New and Selected Poems*. It begins humorously – a slight rant about suburban homeowners endlessly warring with the stumps in their yards, which – those stubborn stumps! – refuse to be removed easily. But little by little Wendy illustrates all the richness having a stump in your yard might possibly provide— "nesting sites for titmice, chickadees, owls..." and, moreover, that the stump is still a part of the living forest: "the roots of trees feed/each other, pump sugar into a stump to keep it from dying."

The poem ends as follows:

...right now, I'll go out,
 speak to my dead trees, tell them I know
their roots are alive, connected to all
 the leafy trees nearby, and I know they're
signaling each other through an
 arboreal internet, their intricate fungal,
mycelial network, maybe warning
 about our thick, dumb-as-a-ditch skulls."

It breaks my heart a little to read that and think about how large and urgent Wendy Barker's poetry tends to get while still being – that ineffable and vital thing – human, funny, real. Mother tree indeed. She was the author of eight full-length collections and six chapbooks, a noted scholar and translator, whose volume of Nobel prizewinning poet Rabindranath Tagore's late poems received the Sourette Dihel Fraser Award from our own Texas Institute of Letters, a book of poems that she kept by her bed in the hospital and in rehab at different times during this very cruel and difficult year for her as she finished her full new and selected collection, *Weave* and wrote a new chapbook that will be published posthumously by Alabrava Press. Listed above is only a fraction of her many achievements – an NEA fellowship, a Rockefeller Fellowship in Bellagio, and more prizes than I can count, but what holds Wendy in our minds and hearts is equally her countless kindnesses and inspirations, which she offered to all of us without fail.

In our meetings at Whole Foods, Wendy patiently taught me what to value about myself, my writing, but also, without ever uttering a critical word, where I could be sharper, finer, more truthful. I'm forever grateful – like Natalia – to that Wendy, the one who is so loved by her husband, her son David Barker, her two sisters, Liza Piatt and author, Patricia O'Connel, her students of many generations, and her multiple gangs of friends across many generations – including the Crones, a group of San Antonio women, who spoke up at her San Antonio memorial about the wild Wendy they remember: skinny-dipping, reciting poems to strangers, celebrating trees, and working so hard every single day to wake up everyone around her to the wonders of this world.

Loretta Diane Walker, in Memoriam (1958-2022)

By Katherine Hoerth

I believe that old cliché: to live a good life is to leave the world a better place than you found it. As I think about my dear friend Loretta Diane Walker, I find solace in this. Loretta's presence made our dark world a better place. If you've ever read Loretta's poetry, or even better, had the pleasure of hearing her read her poetry live, you know what a deep, authentic, and talented person she was. In her short sixty-three years on this earth, she wrote profoundly and profusely. Loretta could dance on the line of sentimentality with the grace of a ballerina; her poetry took direct aim at the heart, and never, never missed its mark.



I could give you some stats about Loretta's many accomplishments as a writer: she wrote five books of poetry, won the Phillis Wheatley award for her book, *Word Ghetto*, was inducted into the Texas Institute of Letters in 2020, and presented at conferences around the country to great acclaim. Her work was published in numerous literary journals such as *San Pedro River Review*, *Texas Observer*, and the Academy of American Poets' *Poem a Day* (selected by none other than Naomi Shihab Nye!). But that doesn't really get to the heart of her impact. Her poetry soothed, provided solace, and pointed to the goodness in the world, even and especially in moments of darkness. She wrote about family, dealing with death, battling breast cancer, and witnessing the raw beauty of her beloved west Texas. She wrote, with utter grace, about racism, poverty, and the difficulties of growing up Black, poor, and female, about overcoming challenges, and always about finding love and light in the bleakest of moments. I have no doubt in my mind that, had Loretta lived to write a few more years, she would have made an amazing Texas Poet Laureate and would have risen to national fame. She was already well on her way! Loretta's voice, pure and sweet, was exactly what our nation needed in these difficult times.

Did you know Loretta was also a talented musician? She played the saxophone with the same glory she brought to her poetry. She taught elementary school music for Ector ISD for thirty-nine years. Thirty nine years! And all at the same school, too. She brought music and beauty to the lives of generations of west Texans. She was an advocate for breast cancer awareness, a caregiver to her mother, a beloved sister to five siblings, and an upstanding citizen of Odessa. In fact, her community cherished and respected her so that the city of Odessa has declared February 22nd Loretta Diane Walker Day. That's how special she was to those around her.

I loved Loretta. As her editor, I knew her mainly through her poetry, though she was the kind of person whom it was impossible not to let into your heart. She was quick to call or text a congratulations, ask how I was doing in my own life, and check in on me when she knew I was going through a difficult time. And she gave the very best hugs—the kind that warmed and strengthened both the body and the soul. Loretta deeply cared about those around her, truly. She had such a heart. Such a *good* heart. I can't decide if Loretta had an old wise soul that

understood something more profound about life than the rest of us, or a young soul that burned brightly with the purity of a child.

Loretta, what are we to do without you? We have your legacy of poetry with which to remember you, and you give us some insightful thoughts on death. You told us “Death is a quiet river,” and I imagine you “drifting across its tender currents” your “mouth opened in gratitude” for its releasing you from your pain and for a life well-lived. But me and all the rest of us who mourn you, who miss you so very much, who now must come to terms with a world without you are “fish, caught-released to swim / through this day with a gaping hole in our hearts / torn open by sorrow’s hook.” (from “Bartering with Death,” *Ode to My Mother’s Voice*).

I will miss Loretta—her friendship, her words, her warm presence. But she leaves us with her poetry, her music, her voice, and a legacy of love. If you haven’t read one of her books of poetry, I urge you to pick up *Word Ghetto* (Blue Light Press), *In This House* (Blue Light Press), *Desert Light* (Lamar University Literary Press), *Ode to My Mother’s Voice* (Lamar University Literary Press), and *Daylight Begins with Darkness is in Full Bloom* (Blue Light Press) to get to know this remarkable woman. This world is a better place for her having been in it, and I can think of greater measure for a life well-lived.

I will leave you with one of Loretta’s last poems.

From “On the Other Side, Almost”

I am drenched in anticipation as I wait
for lemon-colored canna lilies to open.
Childlike, I peek out the backdoor twice a day,
survey a corner of the yard congested with clusters
of my shrub roses’ pink bountiful blooms.
Such assumption I have for their beauty.
Like the supposition I once had about this earth.
How it would rotate on its axis without glitches.
How air would remain chaste as truth.
Tomorrow is a string of pearls.
The past two weeks a sealed path of yesterdays.
Today I cup detached canna lily petals in my grateful hand.
Their yellow softness an answered prayer.
I track dried dirt through the kitchen
as the mourning doves coo-oo-oo song echoes
between new strands of hair creeping across
my chemoed bald head. I am on the other side,
almost.

MICHAEL WAYNE ADAMS PhD
February 13, 1946 - November 28, 2022
by Sarah Bird

“You were the kindest soul I’ve ever encountered.”

That is how a former student of Michael Adams’ addressed him in a letter she wrote her teacher after his death.

Michael Adams was a cultivator of budding writers who was himself an award-winning author of novels, essays, short stories, and a college textbook on writing.

He was a protector of the artistic spirit who was also a celebrated painter, his work sought after by both private and public collectors and commissioned for the 1979 Governor’s Inaugural Ball.

English professor, Associate Director of the Michener Center for Writers at UT-Austin, director of the Dobie Paisano Fellowship Program, winner of a Fulbright Award, and member of the esteemed Academy of Distinguished Teachers, Michael was a soft-spoken champion who spoke loudly on behalf of all those lucky enough to be taken under his wing.

But to have attended his memorial and heard a student who had flown in from Tokyo to be at the service sob openly as he told how Michael had changed his life was to know what—after his beloved Dorothea--mattered most to Michael. His students.

Whether they were those he taught in a classroom, or the lucky ones like myself whom he encouraged and supported with wild generosity, or even his charmed four-footed friends that he trained to win the rare Master Hunter title, Michael cared most for those under his stewardship. As he wrote during his final months, it was looking after those he stewarded that “keeps me magnetized towards what I love.”

Michael Adams entered my life when he encouraged me to do something I never would have considered otherwise: apply for a Dobie Paisano Fellowship. In my months at the ranch, Michael lavished me with such kindness I told him he was the St. Francis of writers and that he made me feel safe as a bird nestling on the shoulder of the saint’s brown hooded robe.

It wasn’t until Michael left us that I came to understand how large the flock I belonged to was. Friends, colleagues, but, most of all, students from forty, fifty years ago right up to the present, spoke at a celebration of his life and sent tributes. There is no finer way to understand and appreciate the essence of the man than to read their words.

A “shy, introverted Latino from the south side of San Antonio” recalled how Michael had made him feel welcome in the “foreign land of the University.”



A “frightened 23-year old fresh off the plane from the Philippines remembered how “you were at the door to greet me with your wide, reassuring smile. I'll never forget our first meeting in which you made me feel, with the gentleness of your presence, that this house far away from my homeland could be my home too. . . I learned from you that kindness alone was what would pry ourselves open to the wonders of this world. And that this, more than anything, is necessary for our art.”

Many foreign students recounted spending holidays with Michael and Dorothea and the couple becoming godparents to their children. Some of those godchildren even expressed their love for “Uncle Michael.”

The comment that resonated most deeply with me, though, came from a grad student in Botany from Kenya who wrote, “Michael had the ability to make anyone who spent five minutes with him feel like they were part of a special inner circle here on earth.”

I count myself blessed to have been part of that special inner circle, one of Michael’s flock.

The Kenyan botanist ended with a wish that “Allah rest his soul peace.” That would be just reward for a man who gave such peace to all those he cherished.

REMEMBERING PAUL BURKA, BY WILLIAM BROYLES APRIL 17, 2023

Along with Griffin Smith, Greg Curtis and me, Paul was part of the founding core of Texas Monthly. I was 17 when I met Greg and Griffin and Paul at Rice in 1962. Greg and I were freshman, Paul and Griffin lordly world-wise seniors. They were both History majors, although Paul had entered Rice as a math major and the Texas Slide Rule champion. I came to Rice a math major too, as had Larry McMurtry before us.

If we all hadn't failed miserably at our major, McMurtry and Paul and I might have been math teachers—I like to think good ones--and well, I wouldn't be writing this today.

That wasn't all Paul and McMurtry had in common. Paul wrote like McMurtry did. With literary flair, a unique eye for the telling detail and the ability to find a great story anywhere. And like McMurtry, Paul held the mirror up to Texas his whole creative life. He showed us ourselves. Paul wrote about Politics like Larry wrote about sex, with gusto, unflinching honesty, and an insatiable curiosity about who was doing what to whom.

Griffin was Editor of The Thresher, the Rice weekly student newspaper, and Paul the Sports Editor. They encouraged me to come try it out, which is how I got into journalism. Paul also played bridge in the dining room commons every afternoon and evening. He roped me into bridge too. Which is probably why I failed math. Paul was looking out for me even then.

Others have written of Paul's legendary patience as an editor, his ability to encourage and teach, to bring out the best in us. With bridge, there was a different Paul. The competitive, demanding, all-in Paul. He was patient, yes, but only up to a point. To him, and to his mentors as well, bridge was blood sport.

One late night we were playing bridge in the commons. I, a novice, was Paul's partner. The bidding quickly swirled into the strange coded language by which one partner attempts to signal to the other what cards they have in their hand. Paul did an unexpected and dramatic bid. My mind went as black as deep space. I didn't know what to do. I passed.

Paul threw down his hand.

"Pass? PASS?" His voice shifted to an almost falsetto shriek.

"I DID A JUMP SHIFT YOU CRETIN! NOBODY 'PASSES' THAT!"

Luckily, when I later made similar unforced errors in my writing, Paul was the soul of patience and understanding.

And usually, he just could write it better himself. Let's hear his voice. Here's Paul writing about bridge in Texas Monthly.

I learned the game of bridge from my mother, a fact for which she has never forgiven herself. She has often inquired why, from all the wisdom of the world she tried to pass on, I apparently took to heart only the rudiments of a game of cards. I have tried to answer by pointing out the joys that lie in knowing you have mastered something, but she wonders why it couldn't have been, say, law or medicine.



And here is his memory of those bridge days at Rice.

You could walk through the lounge of the residence hall at any hour of the day or night and find the same group of players and kibitzers huddled around a table. They had the slightly emaciated look of serious mathematicians, with short, curly hair and horn-rimmed glasses. No one seemed to know their names, and you never saw them anywhere else. Toward the end of the year, when everyone but them was frantic over finals, their game took on the serene air of persons reconciled to martyrdom. Little did I know that within six months I would be one of them.

Of great bridge players he wrote, it "it was not that they knew how to perform miracles, but they knew how to avoid catastrophe."

Ten years later, when Mike Levy--for reasons still unclear to me--asked me to be the first editor of Texas Monthly, I turned first to Greg and Griffin and Paul. Paul's first direct contribution was to collaborate with Griffin and Richard West on the first Ten Best, Ten Worst Legislators feature we inaugurated in 1973. Paul was all about judging politicians not by their politics, but by their effectiveness and their character. Could they get things done? Could you trust them? If that was Yes, you made the Best. If no, you made the Worst. As I recall, Paul suggested a third category, Furniture, for Legislators who were indistinguishable from their desks.

Paul was from Galveston. He was BOI--Born on the Island, and that was central to who he was. Galveston was not frontier Texas. It was an immigrant Texas, a Texas with historic suffering at its very heart. I often thought that Paul's passionate lifelong belief in the value and honor of politics goes back to growing up in Galveston, where the Gulf made sure no one suffered alone. The Great Hurricane that washed over the Island in 1900 killed perhaps 10,000 people. It is still the greatest disaster in American history, and it gave mortal lessons on how we are all in this together.

But what came after the hurricane is what Paul often talked about. How they built a vast sea wall. How they raised the level of every surviving building for 500 city blocks, by up to 17 feet. Not just for the rich and powerful, but for everyone. Every building! Up to 17 feet! Just to walk the streets of Galveston, Paul said, was to be reminded of how we are all on the edge of loss and tragedy, and that we have to help each other. That was one reason Paul believed politics and politicians mattered--and he spent his career holding them to account. When he retired decades later as a Texas institution himself, he decided even some of the politicians on the Worst list those days look good in comparison to today.

If Texas politics once produced giants, our time seems more like the dark ages. There are no John Connallys or Ann Richardses or Bob Bullocks. These were people who loved Texas and, because of that love, knew how to reach across the aisle, set their egos aside, and put the best interests of the state first. I am reminded of an aphorism that former state legislator Bob Eckhardt, who held office back in the fifties, liked to say about Texas politics: "The Capitol was built for giants but is inhabited by pygmies." That remains the perfect epitaph for the Legislature today. The pygmies are in control.

Another of Paul's passions was baseball. Paul's first by-lined article was a eulogy for Clark Field, the classic UT baseball park with a cliff running across the outfield. Paul saw it as a cathedral to the charms of college baseball.

The appeal of college baseball is that the players have talent but not perfection. They are capable of astounding accomplishment and unbelievable mistakes; they are, in short, just like ourselves. It is a game all of us can understand.

Paul then began a Sports column and used the arcane corners of his many-chambered mind to create a Texas Monthly Puzzle which ran on the last page of the magazine for years. For decades he was the best political writer in Texas and arguably in America. He could also handle huge complex stories like his two-part story on the South Texas power broker Clinton Manges. That won him a well-deserved National Magazine Award.

Paul was also a great polemicist, a charming humorist, and a natural showman. The cover image of his "I Hate Chili" story was Paul turning thumbs down on a bowl of Red. Inside was a photo of him with that same bowl poured over his head.

Paul was Team Barbecue all the way. His debates with Griffin Smith on our first best Barbecue in Texas story took on epic dimensions, often veering into European history, politics, classical music, the correct usage of a wok, and other passions the two of them shared. At Rice listening to them debate with passion, intelligence, wit, and devotion was a master class; at Texas Monthly it remained one of my joys.

Here is Paul on Barbecue.

I am a member, indeed a founding member, of the Texas Barbecue Appreciation Society. Our organization was established in 1973, and its first official action was to propose a legislative program that included changing the state seal to a brisket surrounded by a sausage link and exempting barbecue entrepreneurs from air pollution regulations. Unfortunately, the six founders split soon after the society's inception--into sauce-on-the-side traditionalists and sauce-on-the-meat revisionists--and we have thereafter been unable to add any members or transact any business.

Paul also brought his brilliance to the smallest corners of the magazine. He believed that every word mattered, and spent countless hours polishing our headlines sub-headlines, captions and contents pages. His eye for humor and irony helped make Bum Steers an annual tradition. He once did an entire story on the Chevrolet Suburban, which he called The National Car of Texas.

One of my favorite Paul stories is "The Man who Wasn't There." It was about his father, who died when Paul was four--about the void that losing him left in Paul's life, and about finding out who his father had really been. It was a story of fathers and sons, Galveston, the cotton business, and above all of family myths and family secrets. Here's Paul:

Every family has its myths. Some myths are intended to reveal, and some myths are intended to conceal, and sometimes the intentions can get confused. The problem with myth is that it can overpower history, the story of what was real. That is what

happened in my family, and, I suspect, it happens in many families who become vested in their myths and use them to bury their secrets..

As a writer, Paul was rooted in the typewriter era. He wrote page by page. Until the page was perfect, he wouldn't go on to the next one. That was why his stories rarely needed editing. Paul had perfect pitch, and he held himself to the highest standards.

Paul was also a truly gifted editor. For generations of writers. Many great writers aren't so great as editors, because they fall back on telling you how they would write your story. Paul was brilliant at understanding what you wanted to say, and then devising the simplest and clearest way to achieve it. Even better, he was relentless in getting you to figure out what you DID want to say. Good writing is clear thinking, he would tell me whenever he found (and that was often) sloppy thinking in my early drafts. Each paragraph should lead inexorably to the next, he would say, the seed planted in the one flowering in the other.

For all his great gifts, Paul was not overburdened with self-discipline about deadlines or time itself. During long editorial meeting days, Paul would occasionally go out for donuts or barbecue and return hours later with crumbs and sauce stains, carrying empty take-out bags. Once he was even later than usual for an important editorial meeting. Everyone was waiting. I called him. Paul was a magician, he was skilled at making himself disappear just when his deadlines went Code Red. To my amazement, he answered.

"Paul, where are you? We're all waiting."

"I can't make it."

"Why? You're the key to the meeting."

I listened to his answer, said I understood, and put down the phone. Everyone looked at me.

"Is he coming?" Greg asked.

"No."

"What is it this time?"

"He says his pants are in the dryer."

Without a word, everyone got up and went back to their desks. That story and other similar ones became Texas Monthly legends.

Paul's lack of discipline in areas he simply couldn't think were important stood in stark contrast to the incredible discipline of his mind. His memory was prodigious, but it wasn't the memory of a parlor trick, it was memory married with wisdom. Paul never forgot a box score, a bridge hand, or a legislative session. For Paul the magazine deadline was not when you finished writing. It was when—maybe—you started.

It is still a mystery to me why Paul, who clearly did not enjoy having everyone up in arms and panicked, spent his life on deadline. From his sophomore year at Rice till he retired, he was never not on one. Never not without some editor going insane, never without being under pressure that would have long since melted a mere mortal.

But Paul was made of cosmic stuff. Like the mysteries of the universe, Paul was out in Space/Time where the ordinary laws of nature did not apply. There's no explaining it. In the end, it was simply magic.

Paul lived his entire career like Houdini chained in a tank of water, hoisted over Times Square for all to see, somehow emerging, past the point where any mere mortal would have died, with the best story in the magazine.

I long ago decided that Paul had access to some spirit world, of shamans and visionaries, of deep magic. And power beyond magic, because those stories, three thousand, two hundred and eighty-two of them in the Texas Monthly index, were beautiful.

What was all the fuss?

And as for miracles, while Paul was working full-time for Texas Monthly, he was also going to every U.T. baseball and football game. PLUS playing bridge at the highest levels all over the country. Playing bridge is how he met Sarah Rainey, a young woman of uncommon beauty, mastery, intelligence, and super-human patience. With Sarah he built a family and a life which all of us admired and marveled at.

After I left Texas Monthly I didn't see Paul nearly as much as I would have liked, but when we did connect he always kept me up to date on Sarah and Janet and Joel and Barrett, who he adored. One time he called me out of the blue and without a "Hi Bill how are you?"—he said: "Barrett's fast ball just hit 90!"

For four decades presidents, governors, state legislators, and Texas Monthly editors came and went, but Paul was always there. He was the one constant at the core of Texas Monthly and, I would argue, Texas history. He was The Franchise. The lode stone. The North Star. For generations of politicians and writers.

When he retired in 2014, Paul wrote these words about the first few years of Texas Monthly:

We loved Texas, and we loved what we were doing, and the entire state was our beat...I never imagined, of course, that I had found my life's calling, or that my career would extend for forty years. All I knew was that my colleagues and I were embarking on a grand adventure.

A grand adventure it was.

In the end we all lived in Paul World, and it was a marvelous place to be. Paul trumped his old bridge masters. He didn't just avoid catastrophes, he worked miracles. And where he is, may there be baseball, and bridge, and barbecue--and a spare pair of pants.

Remembering Carol Coffee Reposa by Diana López

I met Carol Coffee Reposa when I lived in San Antonio where the writing community has participated in a tradition that began more than twenty years ago, the Third Monday Group. Every third Monday of the month, someone hosts a potluck for local writers, and Carol could always be counted on to open her home.



The Third Monday organizer, Paige Ramsey-Palmer, had this to say: "Carol Reposa has been a dear friend and writing compadre with us for many years, known for hosting our January Third Monday gatherings as an inspiring kickoff for each new, wonderful year. We all knew her in different ways, from being a gifted poet, magnificent host, inspiring professor, devoted friend, church choir member, the opinionated and outspoken yet kind, funny spirit who never met a stranger. She has been an active, engaged, and valued member of the San Antonio and Texas literary communities for many years. She lived a full life and loved living every moment, and her spirit was a huge part of many of our lives and contributed memories that we can cherish."

Carol is the author of *At the Border: Winter Lights* (Pecan Grove Press), *Facts of Life* (Browder Springs Press), *Underground Musicians* (Lamar University Press), and *Carol Coffee Reposa: New and Selected Poems* (TCU Press). Her poems, reviews, and essays have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *The Atlanta Review*, *The Evansville Review*, *The Texas Observer*, *Southwestern American Literature*, *The Valparaiso Review*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Concho River Review*, and *River Sedge*. She won of the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center Poetry Contest in 1992 and the San Antonio Public Library's Arts & Letters Award in 2015. She has received three Fulbright-Hays Fellowships for study in Russia, Peru, Ecuador, and Mexico. She was named professor emerita of English at San Antonio College in 2010 and the Texas Poet Laureate in 2018.

She also served as poetry editor of *Voices de la Luna*. Her friends at the magazine, Viktoria Valenzuela and James Adair wrote a touching tribute: "Friends, it is with heavy hearts that we share the news that our dear friend, Carol, has passed on . . . She was a valuable contributor to *Voices de la Luna*, having served on the board of directors from 2011 to 2022, and as poetry editor plus copy editor for most of those years. A jovial and gracious host, she regularly opened her home to friends both old and new. She was particularly known for hosting the January meeting of the Third Monday writer's group and a Christmas celebration that featured fantastic food, drink, and the trimming of the tree (Carol herself never put up the tree—she left that to her guests!) . . . She was a dear friend and one of the most valuable members of the *Voices de la Luna* team for many years. Rest in peace, power, and poetry, Carol!"

I met Carol again the way I meet most writers, in a book—a journal, to be precise. One of my first short stories was published in *New Texas*, and there on page 55, was Carol. We shared space again in a new anthology called *A Fire to Light Our Tongues: Texas Writers on Spirituality*. In her poem, "Lighthouse, Port Isabel," she describes climbing to the top and once there, she and her companions . . .

Take in a breathless Gulf
Tranquil at the moment
Despite tempests come and gone,
Battles fought.

Ships were lost here, many drowned,
But still I think this beacon
Is perfection, sending out
Its swirling slice of light
Forever
Into dark.

The last time I saw Carol was in 2019 when she gave a reading at Del Mar College. It was the last in-person reading I attended before the pandemic, and what a treat! I went up to her to remind her that we've met before. I could tell she didn't remember me, but when I mentioned going to her house for the Third Monday Group, her whole face lit up. She took my hand and squeezed it, and though we were only acquaintances, for that night, we were dear friends. And that is the magic of Carol—everyone is welcomed.

In Paige Ramsey-Palmer's note, she also mentions that Carol died in her daughter's arms, but she lives on in our hearts, thanks to her poetry, her kindness, and her generosity. Her enduring spirit, a perfect beacon to light the darkness.