

Texas Institute of Letters Winter/Spring 2024 Newsletter



Compiled by Kathryn Jones, TIL Secretary

thetil.org

Greetings from the President

Dear TIL Members:

We have many exciting announcements for the new year!

First, our annual banquet will be May 3-4 in The Woodlands. Our host hotel is the Crowne Plaza Shenandoah. Click here for the [link](#) to reserve your room, which can be found under the heading "2024 Conference." The cutoff date for reserving your room is April 22, 2024. Also, don't forget to buy your banquet [tickets](#). The event is open to the public, so bring your friends and family. We will be celebrating winners of our literary contests and honoring Carmen Tafolla, recipient of this year's Lifetime Achievement Award.

We are looking forward to introducing TIL to The Woodlands community. We have a tentative community event scheduled for May 4 in the morning. I will provide more details soon. For those who would like to arrive a day early, Lone Star College-Montgomery will be hosting a Walt Whitman Celebration on May 2. Around twenty local authors and a Whitman scholar will be presenting, and the event is open to the public.

At our annual banquet, TIL awards more than \$27,000 to recognize outstanding literary works. This year's contest submission period has closed, and our judges are working hard to determine the winners. Look for an announcement the second week of March.

Soon, we will be recognizing works in *fifteen* categories. Last year, the council voted to approve the establishment of the Giron/Valdez Bilingual Poetry Award in the amount of \$1,000 to be given biennially starting in 2025. This will be for a book of at least 45 pages written in English with a Spanish translation or written in Spanish with an English translation. Books published in 2023 and 2024 are eligible. If you have published a bilingual poetry book, we invite you to enter the contest.

We are also excited to announce the new Frederick Luis Aldama Award for Best Graphic Narrative. This biennial award is in the amount of \$1,500 for a fiction or non-fiction graphic narrative written for ages 16+. To be eligible, either the writer or artist must have a Texas connection. The first award will be given in 2026. Graphic narratives published in 2024-2025 are eligible. Aldama is the Jacob & Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair in the Humanities at the University of Texas at Austin, where he is also founder and director of the Latinx Pop Lab and the annual BIPOC POP and Comics, Gaming & Animation Arts Expo & Symposium. He is an award-winning author, co-author, editor, and coeditor of over 40 books and editor of numerous book series, including Latinographix and Brown Ink that publish Latinx graphic fiction and nonfiction. His recent and forthcoming publications include *Pyroclast*, *The Absolutely (Almost) True Adventures of Max Rodriguez*, *Labyrinths Borne*, and *The Steampunkera Chronicles*. We are deeply grateful for his support of Texas literature.

Please help us spread the news about our new awards, the Giron/Valdez Bilingual Poetry Award and the Frederick Luis Aldama Award for Best Graphic Narrative.

Thank you to everyone who submitted nominations for new members. The votes are in, and as soon as I am able to confirm acceptance from all the nominees, I will be sending a press release.

Thanks to all who have paid your dues, and if you haven't had a chance, it's not too late to be an active member. With your continued support, we have been able to increase the Lifetime Achievement Award to \$7,000, our highest prize for our most distinguished award.

There is much to celebrate this year, but most importantly and with great anticipation, we celebrate the company of talented writers and good friends. Can't wait to see everyone in The Woodlands!

All best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Lopez', written in a cursive style.

Diana Lòpez
President, Texas Institute of Letters



TIL Winter/Spring 2024 Newsletter

(in order received)

Carolyn Banks writes: My new novel, *THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERICA* is out. I am crazy about this book, which features Oscar Wilde as a prominent character and Bram Stoker and Stoker's wife Flo in supporting roles. My agent didn't like it because it doesn't use two of my favorite plot elements: sex and murder. But hey, at age 82, I think I'm entitled to tiptoe instead of stomp.

Preston Lewis: Three of Lewis's works were honored with Will Rogers Medallion Awards during the organization's October honors banquet in Fort Worth. *Rio Hondo*, the final book in his *Three Rivers Trilogy* on the Lincoln County War, received the gold medallion for traditional western. *Rio Hondo* was published by Five Star in 2022.

Outlaw West of the Pecos, the seventh book in his *Memoirs of H.H. Lomax* comic western series released by Wolfpack Publishing, also earned a gold medallion, this one for written western humor. The medallion was his fifth in the category since 2018.

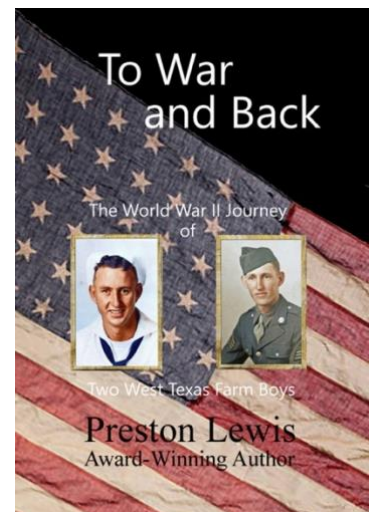
His article on frontier felines "There'll Be a Caterwauling in the Old Town Tonight" published in the winter 2023 issue of *Wild West* magazine received a silver medallion for short nonfiction. The award represented his ninth Will Rogers Medallion overall.

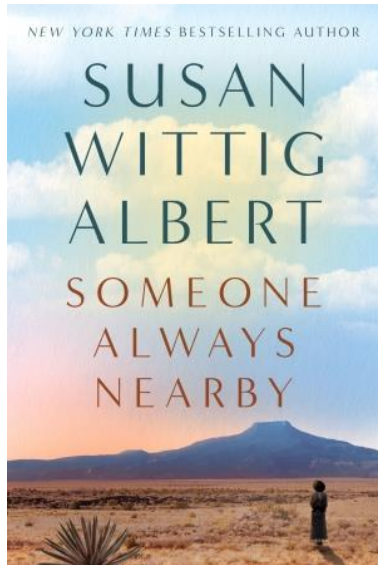
After a spring trip to Normandy, France, to conclude research on the D-Day experience of his uncle, Lewis in September completed *To War and Back: The World War II Journey of Two West Texas Farm Boys*. Published by Bariso Press, the book traces the World War II memoirs of his uncle Ray Lewis in the 552nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion and his father John Lewis in the U.S. Merchant Marine.

Then Lewis with his wife Harriet Kocher Lewis ventured into artificial intelligence, jointly publishing two books exploring ChatGPT's take on religion and humor. Bariso Press released their books *Devotionals from a Soulless Machine: A Journey of Faith through Artificial Intelligence* in October and *Jokes from a Humorless Machine: A Comedic Romp through Artificial Intelligence* in December.

Lewis is currently working on two historical novels on the Civil War battles of Franklin and Nashville in November and December of 1864. He is also a scheduled speaker at the Tucson Book Festival March 9-10.

José E. Limón, The Mody C. Boatright Regents Professor of American Literature Emeritus at the University of Texas at Austin, was invited back to his alma mater, UT- Austin (BA, 1966; MA, 1969, PhD, 1978), on March 30, 2023, to present the lecture: "Américo Paredes, Mexican American Studies, and the University within Modernity" for the university's Center for Mexican American Studies.

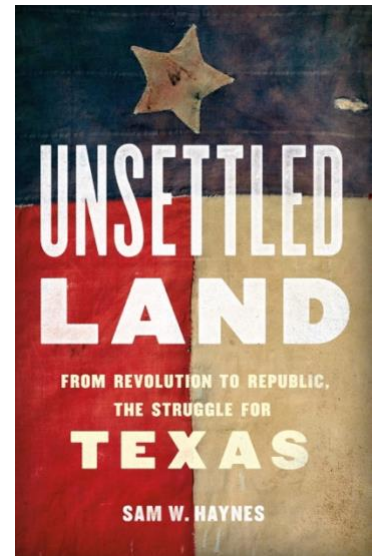




Susan Wittig Albert's novel, *Someone Always Nearby: A Novel of Georgia O'Keeffe and Maria Chabot*, was recently published in hardcover, paperback, eBook, and audio. The fourth in her "Hidden Women" series, the novel appears under her imprint, Persevero Press, and is distributed by Greenleaf Book Group. Her next print project: *Forget Me Never*, #29 in the China Bayles mystery series. Susan is currently publishing serialized short fiction and other work at

Substack: www.susanwittigalbert.substack.com.

Sam W. Haynes has won three more book prizes for *Unsettled Land: From Revolution to Republic, the Struggle for Texas*. In October he received the Tejano Book Award from the Austin Tejano Genealogical Society and the Otis Locke Award from the East Texas Historical Association. In January 2024 he received the Best Nonfiction Book Award from the Philosophical Society of Texas. In addition, he was a finalist for the David J. Weber Prize, awarded by the Western Historical Association for the best book in the American Southwest, and a finalist for best nonfiction book by the Writers' League of Texas. *Unsettled Land* was also named as one of Foreign Affairs' Best Books of 2022.



Larry D. Thomas has a new poetry chapbook, *Flaunting Their Little Crimes: the secret lives of flowers*, accessible online free of charge at [Right Hand Pointing](https://www.issues.righthandpointing.net/larry-d-thomas-flaunting): <https://www.issues.righthandpointing.net/larry-d-thomas-flaunting> Additionally, Thomas has poems in current or forthcoming issues of *Amethyst Review*, *Deep South Magazine-Southern Culture and Literature*, *Delta Poetry Review*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Petrichor: A Journal of Text & Image*, and the *San Pedro River Review*.

Reginald Gibbons has a new book, *THREE POEMS*, coming out in 2024 from Finishing Line Press, and another book of poems, *YOUNG WOMAN WITH A CANE*, coming out in 2025 from Louisiana State University Press. A third book of poems is still in a working stage, not yet completed.

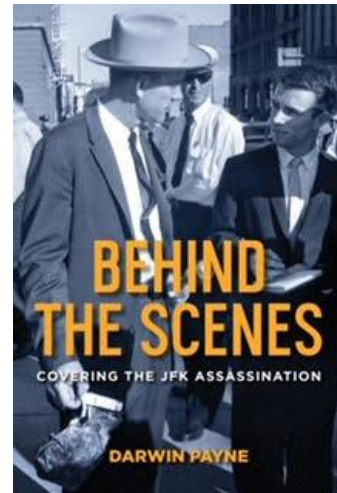
A short article on translating Russian poems with Russian poet Ilya Kutik, and including the translations themselves—of Marina Tsvetaeva, Boris Pasternak, and Kutik himself—was just published online at <https://iwp.uiowa.edu/91st/index.html>

Also, Reg's novel SWEETBITTER, originally published in 1995 by a small press, recently came out in a fourth edition, after paperback editions from Penguin and then LSU Press. The new edition was released last August by JackLeg Press. (This book won the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award when it was first published, and also the TIL award for best novel of that year.)



John Blair's new poetry book, *The Shape of Things to Come*, was released in October 2023.

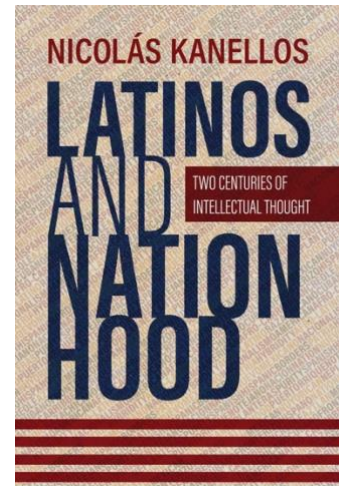
From **Darwin Payne**: With the 60th anniversary hoopla over JFK's assassination in Dallas in 1963 ending, the expected mini surge of sales for my new book, *Behind the Scenes: Covering the JFK Assassination*, is about finished. But it sure was fun while it lasted. As one of the few remaining reporters who covered those unforgettable days, I found myself in high demand for TV media interviews, including international teams from the UK, France, Italy, Australia, and Russia – yes, even Russia, where their two-man team (here for the first time in their lives) assured me of the high interest there.



An Italian film crew interviews Darwin Payne at Dealey Plaza.
Photo by Allison V. Smith

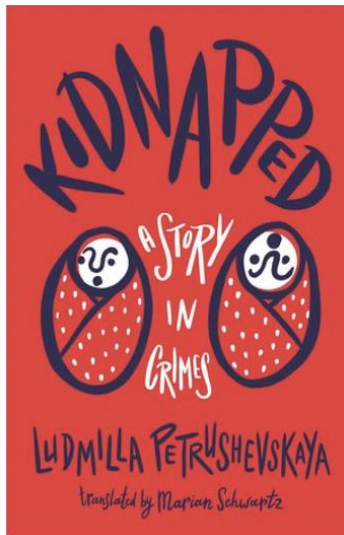
Nicolás Kanellos has a new book, *Latinos and Nationhood: Two Centuries of Intellectual Thought*, published by The University of Arizona Press. Brief description: Spanning from the early nineteenth century to today, this intellectual history examines the work of Latino writers who explored the major philosophic and political themes of their day, including the meaning and implementation of democracy, their democratic and cultural rights under U.S. dominion, their growing sense of nationhood, and the challenges of slavery and disenfranchisement of women in a democratic republic that had yet to realize its ideals.

Link: <https://uapress.arizona.edu/book/latinos-and-nationhood>



José Skinner's campus comedy-cum-narconovela *The Search Committee* will be published in the fall by Arte Público.

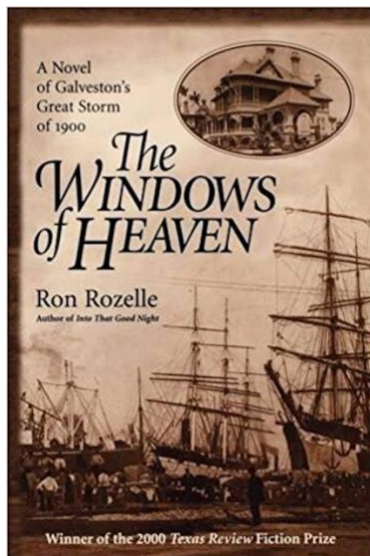
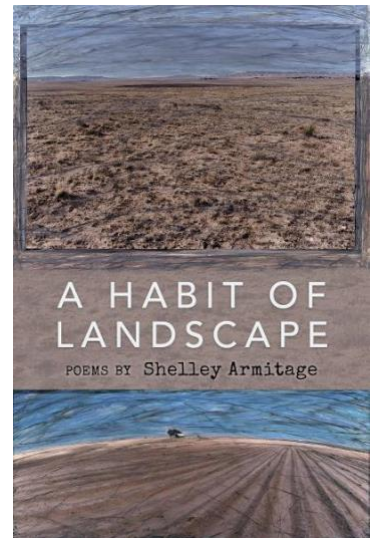
And last October, he and Melynda Nuss threw the grand opening of Alienated Majesty, the new Austin bookstore specializing in translations and small presses.



From **Marian Schwartz**: In March 2023, Deep Vellum published my translation of *Kidnapped: A Story in Crimes*, by Ludmilla Petrushevskaya, perhaps Russia's greatest living absurdist writer. Then, in the fall, my translation of *The White Factory* by Dmitry Glukhovsky (famous for his *Metro* novel series and now living in Europe, a "foreign agent" tried and sentenced in absentia) was staged at London's Marylebone Theatre. And at year's end, *The Montreal Review* published my translation of "Oppenheimer," a chapter from Irina Vinokurova's recent and seminal biography of Nina Berberova on Berberova's relationship with the scientist in Princeton toward the end of his life.

Steven Schneider's poem "Off the Beaten Path" is featured in the film *Poetry in Motion* produced by Taos Poet Laureate Joshua Concha. Steven's poem "Chanukah Lights Tonight" was published on the national educational literacy site CommonLit.org and will be used as a tool to promote literacy and cultural understanding. Also, his poem "What They Carry Across the Bridge" was published in the anthology *Border Beats*.

Shelley Armitage published a full-length poetry collection, *A Habit of Landscape*, in October 2023. She's given readings at the Branigan Library and the Ungrounded Cafe in Las Cruces, NM, and will read in Georgetown in the spring. Her essay "Place Matters" will appear in an anthology of women writing about landscape (Wittliff Collection, Texas State University). In March she will be a guest speaker at the conference "Stewarding Our Water Future" in Amarillo, Texas. Her topic: "Stewarding Wonder: Our Lives Are Like Rivers, Aquifers Too."



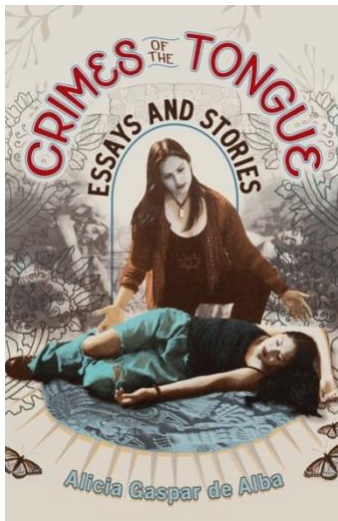
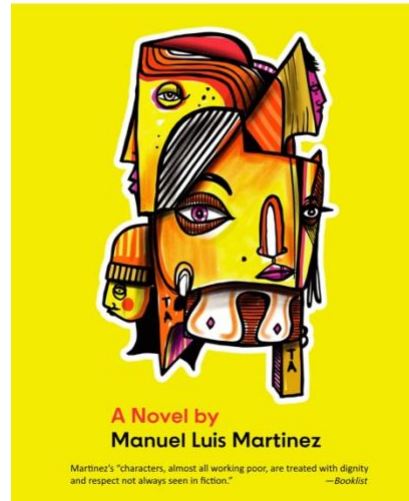
From **Ron Rozelle**: My 2000 novel *The Windows of Heaven: A Novel of Galveston's Great Storm of 1900* will be republished in a 25th anniversary commemorative hardback edition in 2025 by Texas Review Press.

Emma Pérez's new book, *Testimony of a Shifter*, was published November 30, 2023, and *Booklist* called it a "scathing look at where society could be headed in the midst of woke wars with the criminalization of trans- and gender-nonconforming bodies and the desire to suppress the Other. For fans of Ursula K. Le Guin and Margaret Atwood, *Testimony of a Shifter* is the queer, feminist dystopian novel readers have been searching for."



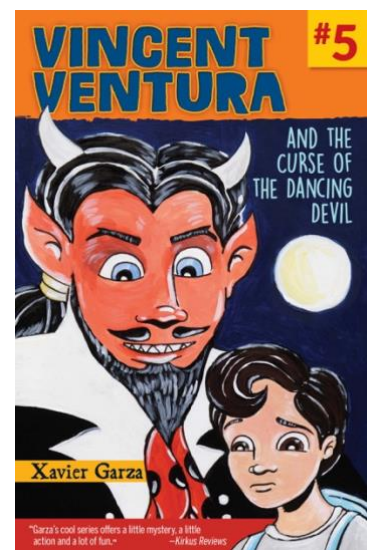
In his new book, *Fortunate Monsters*, which was published September 30, 2023, **Manuel Luis Martinez** explores the lives of Latinos living on the outskirts of society and crafts compelling scenes of war, grief, and loss.

FORTUNATE MONSTERS



Alicia Gaspar de Alba examines identity, place, and language in a stellar collection of short fiction and essays, *Crimes of the Tongue*.

The fifth installment in **Xavier Garza**'s bilingual series for intermediate readers, *Vincent Ventura and the Curse of the Dancing Devil*/*Vincent Ventura y la maldición del diablo bailarín*, is out, and the sixth installment, *Vincent Ventura and the Curse of the Donkey Lady*/*Vincent Ventura y la maldición de la Mujer Burro*, is due out May 31.



From **Janice Shefelman**: My current work in progress, *Aspasia's Choice*, is a novel set in Athens during the golden age of Pericles. My main character, Aspasia of Miletus, is a historical person, who came to Athens from Miletus as a young girl and rebelled against the Athenian idea that women must stay in the home and not receive an education. Here we see a sculpture of her.



Such an ambitious project means research, research, and more research, which I find fascinating, especially visual research. The images give me the power to make images in my head that turn into words on paper. Whenever I can't write, it is because I can't visualize the scene, which means more research to get in touch with that moment in time and place. As David McCullough, author of the Pulitzer Prize winning biography of John Adams, said, "I've been living in the 18th Century for seven years, and I'm not coming back." Well, I'm living in the 5th Century BC, but I *will* be back so I don't catch the plague that came to Athens in 430 BC.

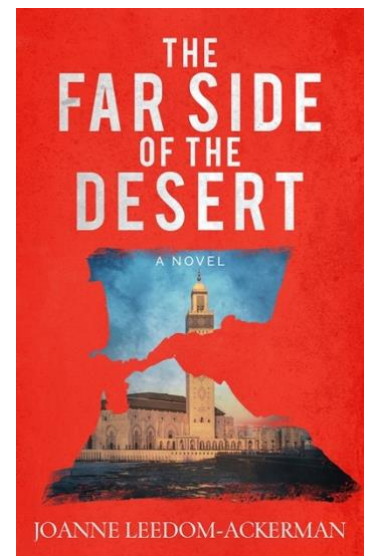
From **Joanne Leedom-Ackerman**: My new novel *The Far Side of the Desert* hits the shelves and online stores March 5 from Oceanview Publishing, and the paperback of my novel *Burning Distance* comes out two weeks before on February 20. I'm in Dallas March 16 at Interabang Books and hopefully in Austin after. You can check <https://joanneleedom-ackerman.com/speaking/> for other dates and events. Hope you'll follow my Substack for monthly news and updates. It's free! <https://joanneleedomackerman.substack.com/>

"*The Far Side of the Desert* is that rare story—a literary work and a first-rate thriller."—Jennifer Clement, former President of PEN International and award-winning novelist of *Prayers for the Stolen*

"*The Far Side of the Desert* is a riveting thriller with richly nuanced characters and fast-paced action...I binged until the end."—Robin Wright, award-winning journalist and author of *Rock the Casbah*

"Leedom-Ackerman delivers a thriller that transcends genre and has stayed with me long after I read it in one breathless sitting. *The Far Side of the Desert* is one of my top reads this year!"—Deborah Goodrich Royce, nationally bestselling author of *Reef Road*

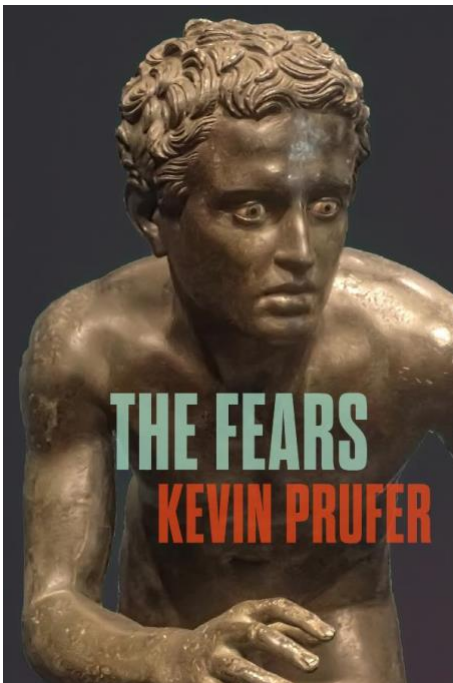
"A thoroughly enjoyable read...with characters that will stay with you long after you finish."—James Grippando, best-selling author of *Code 6*



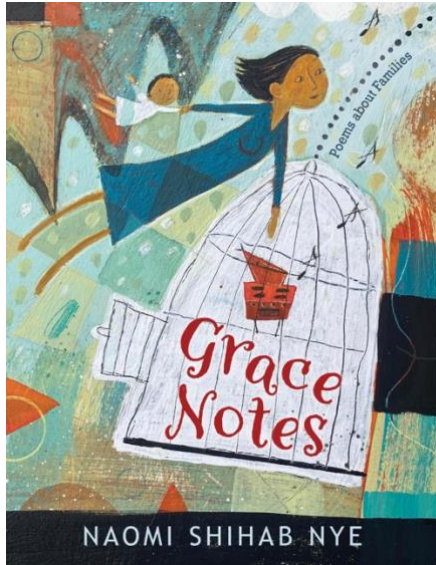
Steve Davis announces with regret that he's fired his dog, Ralfred, as Director of Publicity. Ralfred did have his moments (see photo) and Steve emphasizes that Ralfred is a good dog in so many ways — he's an excellent companion who will catch a tossed frisbee and keeps the cats from becoming too complacent.

But the truth is Ralfred hasn't posted a damn thing under Steve's name on social media for two years now. He's even neglected to send in glowing updates about Steve for the TIL newsletter.

Steve himself is of course far too busy to be running around tooting his own horn. That's why he got the damn dog in the first place. While Ralfred was slacking off, Steve has completed a new nonfiction book manuscript. Once he finds a new publicist y'all will be hearing no end of news about THAT.



From **Kevin Prufer**: My book *The Fears* is just out from Copper Canyon Press and my novel, *Sleepaway*, will be out in April from Acre Books.



Naomi Shihab Nye's forthcoming book of poems, *Grace Notes* (Greenwillow, HarperCollins, 2024), contains Poems About Families.

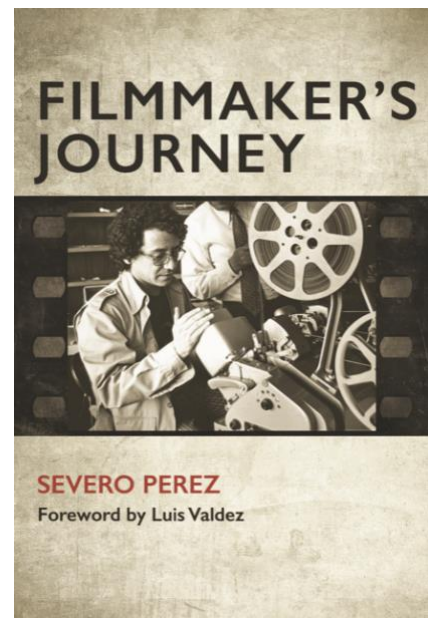
Her book co-edited with **Marion Winik**, forthcoming from Texas A&M University Press as a Wittliff Series Book, is *I Know About a Thousand Things, The Writings of Ann Alejandro of Uvalde, Texas*.

Carol Flake Chapman's new book of poems, *An Altar Without Limits*, will be published in May.

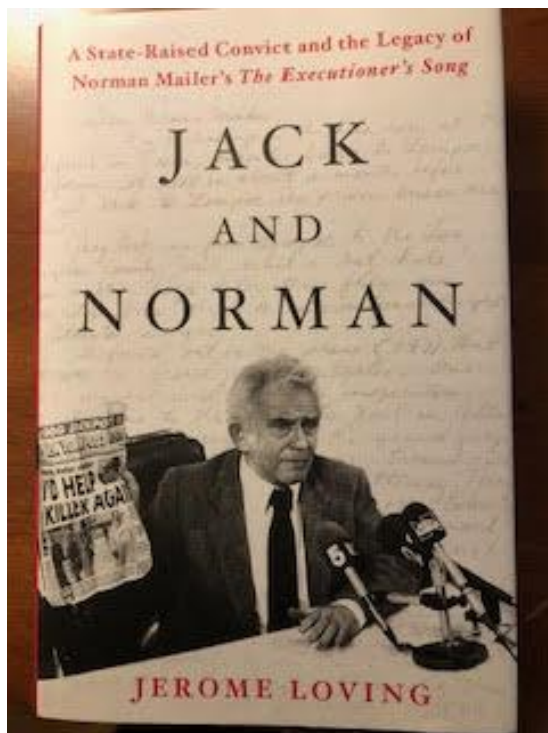
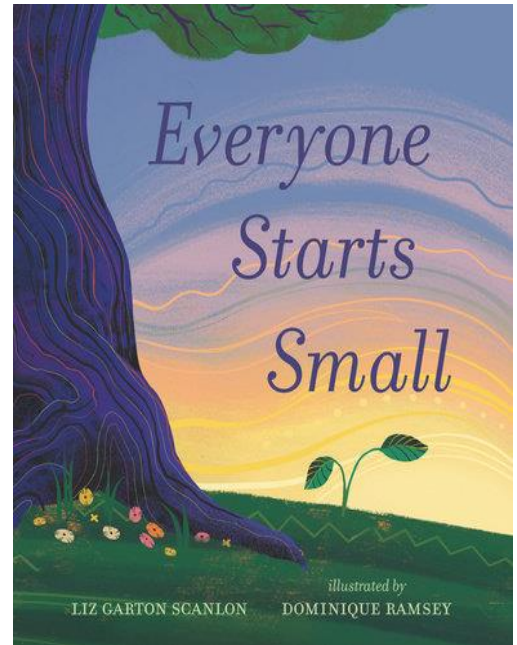
From **Severo Perez**: Coming in April 2024 in the Wittliff Collections Book Series published by Texas A&M University Press.

From “outsider” to “insider” . . . the memoir of one of our most important Latino filmmakers . . .

Born in San Antonio, Texas, in 1941, award-winning filmmaker Severo Perez moved to Los Angeles in 1972 to pursue a career in the motion picture industry. Perez is also an accomplished playwright and novelist. *Filmmaker's Journey* offers valuable insights into the life and work of this influential and visionary artist.

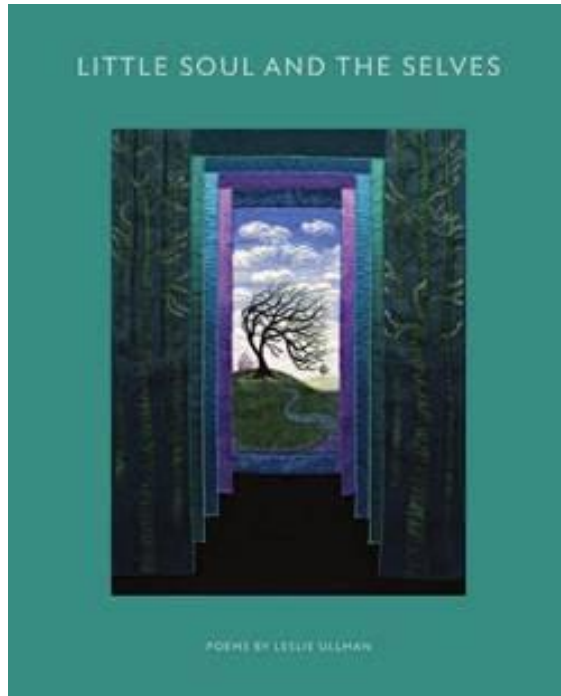


Liz Garton Scanlon looks forward to welcoming three new books into the world this year -- an eco-focused picture book called *Everyone Starts Small* (illustrated by Dominique Ramsey and published by Candlewick) in March, and the first two books in her new chapter book series, *Bibsy Cross and the Bad Apple* and *Bibsy Cross and the Bikeathon* (illustrated by Dung Ho and published by Knopf) in June. *Everyone Starts Small* has already earned a Kirkus star and both *Bibsy Cross* books have been chosen as Junior Library Guild Gold Standard selections.



From **Jerome Loving**: It was announced on January 10 that the film based on Jerome Loving's *Jack and Norman: A State-Raised Convict and the Legacy of Norman Mailer's "The Executioner's Song"* (St. Martins, 2017) will be shot this year. Directed by Andrew Haigh ("All of Us Strangers," "45 Years"), "Belly of the Beast" will star Colin Farrell as Jack Henry Abbott and Ben Stiller as Mailer. The movie script was written by Haigh and Alexis Jolly. See more at <https://geektyrant.com/news/ben-stiller-and-colin-farrell-to-co-star-in-film-belly-of-the-beast-from-director-andrew-haigh>

From **Leslie Ullman**: I have a new book to announce, and also that I have one forthcoming next fall. The new book is *Little Soul and the Selves*, out from 3:TaosPress, and it can be obtained directly from the publisher with free shipping. Their link is <https://3-a-taos-press.square.site/product/little-soul-and-the-selves-by-leslie-ullman/42?cs=true&cst=custom>. It's also on Amazon.



How does a spirit new to the world, baffled by the family domain and its customs, but above all curious, come to discover its essence? What does any child carry into the present from ancestors whose histories have been assimilated and long forgotten? These are the questions poet Leslie Ullman explores in her sixth collection. In the process, what at first appears to be a chronicle of a mid-century childhood through coming of age to maturity becomes an interrogation of the very nature of the soul—its origins, its purpose, its evolution in a given lifetime. To this end, the persona of Little Soul muses at the heart of the search. Introduced as a half-wild creature unbound by maleness or femaleness, tentative and weightless as “a lone firefly lacing the dusk,” Little Soul at first flounders alongside the untried Selves but eventually comes to instruct and fuse with them. Sometimes humorous and gently satirical in their depictions of a middle-class America whose values seemed unassailable, these poems reconstruct a personal

history as they mull over the universal burdens of self-doubt, ambition, and inevitable relinquishments, and then taste the pleasures of traveling light.

Words About *Little Soul and the Selves*

In her poetic sequence, *Little Soul and the Selves*, Leslie Ullman offers a rich and rewarding commentary on the multiplicity of roles life demands of us and the undefinable, but felt, unity of consciousness that underlies them. To browse the list of poem titles alone is delicious: “Little Soul Remembers,” “Little Soul Comes Across Lines by George Seferis,” “The Selves Channel the Day the Parents Met,” “If Little Soul and the Selves Were a Rock Band...” Playfully side-stepping the perils of direct philosophical inquiry, Ullman avoids the weighty “I” of confession and turns autobiography into a series of adventures, a profound questioning of human identity and the forces that tear at it. These are supple, athletic poems, full of the thisness of the world, touching lightly and with elegance on the larger questions.

—Jean Nordhaus, *Memos from the Broken World*

My other book, *Unruly Tree*, a book-length series of poems spun off of Brian Eno’s *Oblique Strategies*, will be out next fall from University of New Mexico Press.

Chris Barton is up to his tastebuds in the research for his next nonfiction picture book, a historical, cultural, and scientific overview of our taste for sweetness, titled (what else?) *Sweet!*

No pressure on Chris, but the Texas Library Association's 2024 Texas Topaz Nonfiction Reading List for children, teens, and adults just came out, and it includes two of his recent books: *How to Make a Book (About My Dog)* and *Glitter Everywhere! Where It Came From, Where It's Found & Where It's Going*.

Glitter Everywhere! was also included on "Best of the Year" lists from *Kirkus Reviews*, National Public Radio, and the New York Public Library.

Chris has maintained [a digest of news regarding the Texas book ban](#), a.k.a. House Bill 900, a.k.a. the READER Act and was delighted in January to update it with the Fifth Circuit court of appeal's upholding of U.S. District Judge Alan Albright's injunction against the law.

Along with way, *School Library Journal* published his essay "[Is There a Looming 'Dog Man' Crisis?](#)" In it, Chris encourages librarians and other educators to use legislation such as HB 900 as an opportunity for kid-level lessons about civics and the importance of individual participation in the political system.

Chris says, "Another highlight of the past several months was that I got to do signing event for *Glitter Everywhere!* at NOLA Craft Culture, a New Orleans shop specializing in glitter for Mardi Gras and other celebrations.



Thank you so much to school librarian Soline Holmes (that's her on the left in the Krewe of Muses T-shirt) for putting me in touch with NOLA Craft

Culture co-owner Nori Pritchard (that's her in the righthand photo, showing me some of the handiwork made with the store's merchandise). And thanks to Soline also for providing these photos of the event, not to mention helping with my research for the book itself!"

From **Kip Stratton**: I've been busy writing magazine articles. In December, I published a feature in *Texas Highways* about Pancho Villa's experiences in El Paso and the key role the city played in the Mexican Revolution. TIL members Sergio Troncoso and Andrés Tijerina helped me out greatly. Here's a link: <https://texashighways.com/culture/revisiting-el-paso-texas-haunts-pancho-villa/>

I wrote my first article for *Cowboys & Indians* magazine, which concerns how a significant collection of archival material related to film director Sam Peckinpah barely escaped being hauled off to the Livingston, Montana, city dump and wound up at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City instead. Here's a link: <https://www.cowboysindians.com/2023/12/saving-sam-peckinpah/> Ah, Sam. I never knew him, but he keeps giving me gifts.

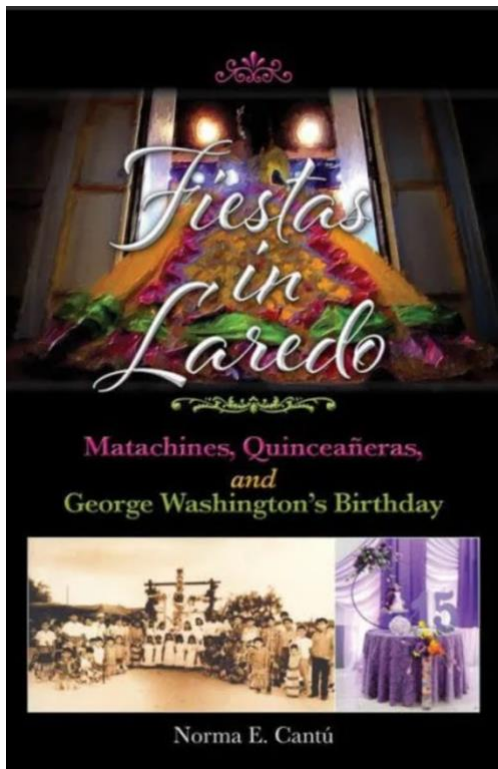
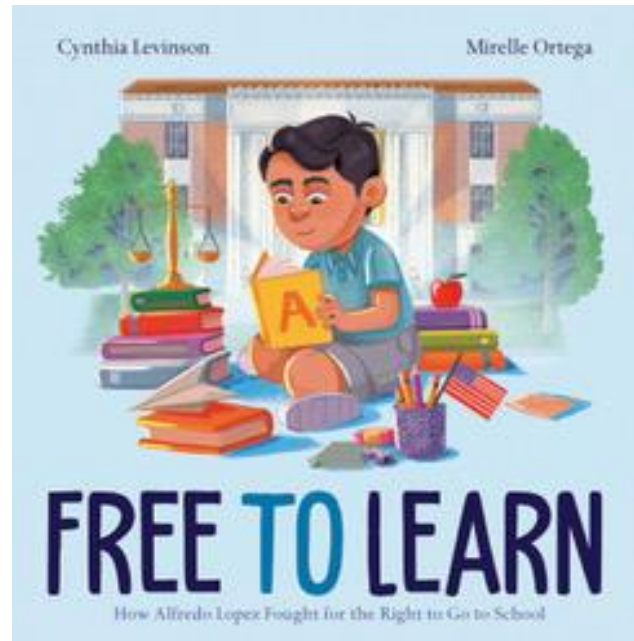
Upcoming in *Texas Highways* is a piece about "sky islands," which gave me a chance to spend time tromping around the Big Bend country late last year. Twist my arm! It should be in the March issue.

I'm putting the finishing touches on an article for *Texas Monthly* about the greatest Black cowboy you probably never heard of, Daniel Webster "80 John" Wallace. His 8,000-acre ranch outside Colorado City is still owned by his family. I was privileged to hang out there with his great granddaughter, who lives on the place. 80 John's life was a true saga. He was almost like a real-life Deets from *Lonesome Dove*, except he lived to make the transition from trail drives to modern ranching. I'm not sure when the piece will run in the magazine.

On tap: a personal essay for *Texas Highways* concerning changes in my spiritual life thanks to the wonderful people in my Comanche family and the Native American Church. It will also concern threats to the four-county "Peyote Gardens" area of South Texas. Thanks to TIL member George Getschow, I was part of a panel discussion about Larry McMurtry at the annual meeting of the Philosophical Society of Texas in Fort Worth. And, big news, thanks to a recommendation by Sergio, I've been invited to speak at the Yale University Writer's Workshop this summer. I'm completely blown away by the opportunity. Thanks again, Sergio!



From **Cynthia Levinson**: Attached is the cover of my next book, due out in April from Atheneum/Simon & Schuster. *Free to Learn: How Alfredo Lopez Fought for the Right to Go to School* is an historical fiction picture book involving one of the families that sued the Tyler Independent School District when their son, Alfredo, was barred from going to school because he was undocumented.



Norma Elia Cantú presented her work in a number of venues, including various community groups such as the San Antonio chapter of the Pan American Round Table, various women's book clubs, and classroom visits via Zoom and in person. Her upcoming book, *Fiestas in Laredo: Matachines, Quinceañeras, and George Washington's Birthday Celebration*, will be published by the Texas Folklore Society. Two anthologies are out for review: one at University of Illinois Press, *Tradition and Innovation: Folklórico in the United States*, co-edited with Dr. Olga Nájera Ramírez, and at University of Texas Press, *¡Somos Tejanas!* Forthcoming under the new imprint at Trinity University Press, *Tinta*, is the much-anticipated anthology *Weeping Women: La Llorona in Modern Latinx and Chicana Lore*, co-edited with Kathleen Alcalá.

Don Tate was a featured author at the 2023 Texas Book Festival. During the event, he presented his latest book, *Jerry Changed the Game! How Engineer Jerry Lawson Revolutionized Video Games Forever*. The book has received numerous accolades, including the 2023 EUREKA! Nonfiction Children's Book Award by the California Reading Association, and the Best STEM Book award (K-12) by the National Science Teaching Association.

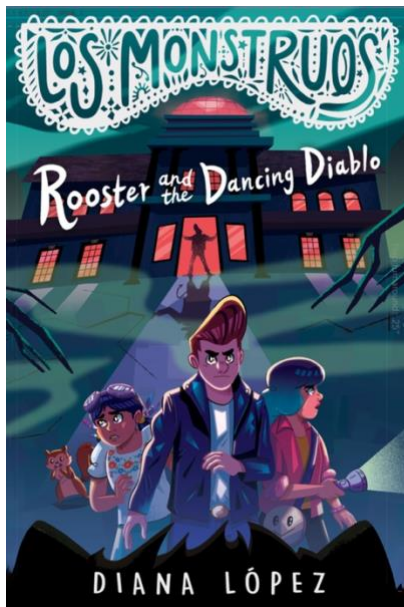
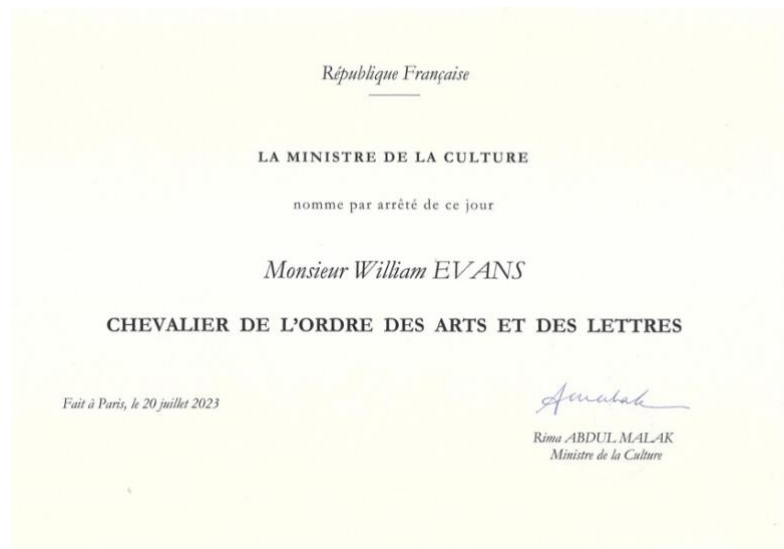
Don also had the opportunity to speak and sign copies of his book at the National Council of Teachers of English conference in Columbus, Ohio, before visiting elementary schools in Bryan ISD. He is thrilled to announce that he has authored three more books but has not yet revealed the details. Expect to hear more about these books soon!



Don Tate and Chris Barton speak at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission as part of a panel at the Texas Book Festival.

From **Will Evans**: We publish seven books by this year's Nobel Prize for Literature laureate, Jon Fosse of Norway, who writes in Nynorsk. His books have been translated by Damion Searls and May-Brit Akerholt.

I have been knighted by the French government for my contributions to French culture internationally, a Knight of the Order of Arts & Letters. We are planning a knighthood ceremony in Dallas in April with the French Ambassador, Consul and Cultural Attaché out of the French Consulate in Houston, the Book Officer of the French Embassy, and the Alliance Française in Dallas. I've attached a scan of the certificate acknowledging the honor. This will be part of Deep Vellum's 11th anniversary celebrations held throughout April 2024.



From **Diana López**: I am happy to share that my novel, *Los Monstruos: Felice and the Wailing Woman*, has been named to the 2024 Lone Star Reading list. My second book in the series will be released on May 7, 2024. It's called *Los Monstruos: Rooster and the Dancing Diablo*, and it's a retelling and extension of the dancing devil legend of South Texas. I'm busy at work on the third book for the series, *Ava and the Owl-Witch*, which will be available in 2025.

From **Patrick Cox**: I am still recovering from a severe accident last March. I had a subdural hematoma, craniotomy surgery, and have been in recovery and physical therapy that continues into this new year. I suspended my research and writing until this year and have some ideas about how to start anew.

I am working with my friend and fellow author Chick Morgan on organizing the Wimberley Area Writers group. We have more than 50 people in our community that include fiction, nonfiction, historians, poets, songwriters, and many other creative individuals. My experience as a TIL member has provided inspiration for this venture. I also completed my term as President of the Texas State Historical Association before my accident.

Octavio Solis was an artist-in-residence at The Pedro E. Guerrero Art Center in Florence, Arizona, from January 2 to 27.

His "Quixote Nuevo" production runs at the Seattle Repertory Theatre, January 19 to February 11; see <https://www.seattlerep.org/plays/202324-season/quixote-nuevo/>. The *Los Angeles Times* featured him in a story: <https://www.latimes.com/delos/story/2024-01-31/octavio-solis-quixote-nuevo-seattle-rep-el-paso>.

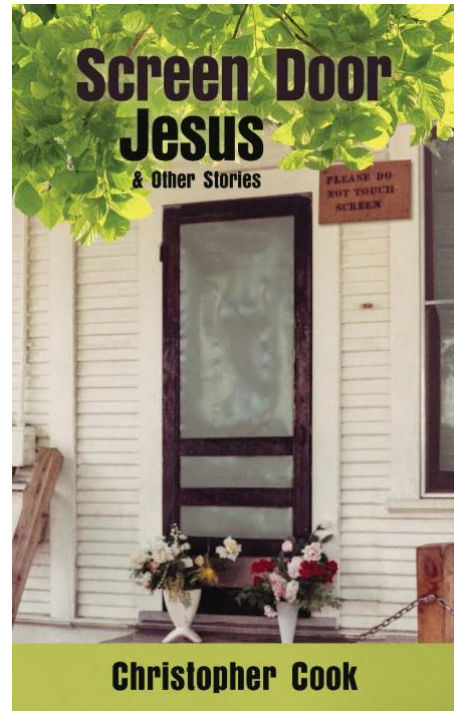


Next the production moves to the Portland Center Stage in Portland, Oregon, from March 2 to 31; see <https://www.pcs.org/quixote-nuevo>.

Finally, the "Mother Road" production lands at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre in California from June 14 to July 21; see <https://www.berkeleyrep.org/shows/mother-road/>.

Christopher Cook published two new books during the past year, *The Salvage Yard – Collected Stories* and *Tongues of Fire – Novellas & Stories*. He also published new editions of his books *Robbers* and *Screen Door Jesus*. He is currently writing an introduction to a special edition of Jim Thompson’s acclaimed noir novel *The Grifters* to be produced by the French publisher Éditions Payot & Rivages.

Also on his work agenda for 2024 is a movie script for his novel *Robbers* (the business logistics of that project are now under discussion) and a novel-in-progress. Christopher and his wife, Czech artist-poet Kateřina Piňosová, are still living in Prague, Czech Republic. He notes that the cold, snowy, and usually dreary Central European winter there has been blessed by an unusual number of days with clear skies and sunshine, which bodes well for 2024. The magpies he feeds on his terrace have been especially chipper. They like to note that all Christopher’s books are available in print and e-book at Amazon.



From **Christian Wallace**: On February 4, principal photography began on *Landman*, a new series Wallace co-created with Taylor Sheridan for Paramount+. Wallace is also executive-producing the show, which stars Billy Bob Thornton and is based on the podcast, *Boomtown*, which Wallace wrote and hosted. *Landman* is scheduled to shoot in West Texas and Fort Worth for several months.

From **Mike Cox**: My latest nonfiction title recently hit the market. *Boots, Badges & Bullets: Texas Ranger Lore* is my 41st book and one of several I've written over the years on the history of the Rangers. My intention was to get the book out last year—the 200th anniversary of the Rangers. But I was reminded once again that intending to is not the same as getting it done. In other news, beyond being a longtime writer, I'm a longtime collector of Texana. For years I've known it was time to start thinning the herd, hopefully by donating my books to some appreciative library. After numerous flirtations, several years back I found the right library and the right person, San Marcos Public and its able second-in-charge, Dr. Arro Smith. In April 2022 the library dedicated its Mike Cox Texas Collection and it's open to all. Of course, the books and pamphlets are non-circulating. The library has cataloged roughly 6,000 of my books and will be getting another thousand or two as soon as I screw up the courage to let them go. In cataloging my books, Dr. Smith found that 25 percent of them were rare and 2 percent were bibliographically unknown.

Speaking of letting go, I wrote a memoir-ish book on my adventures as a book collector and rare book seller called *Book Hunter: How to Collect Books, Sell Them and One Day Let Them Go*.



Currently, I'm in the process of getting my Texas and Western-related research files in order to add to my existing writing-related papers at Texas State University's Wittliff Collection. While I'm passing along my books and papers for others to use, let me be clear that I still intend to keep arranging and rearranging those 26 letters that writers have at their disposal to work with.



From **Sergio Troncoso**:

Thank you to the Philosophical Society of Texas for choosing *NOBODY'S PILGRIMS* as an Honorable Mention for their 2023 Fiction Award. I am with Bryan Garner, Book Prize Committee Chair, in the photo. I was proud to be in the company of Stephen Harrigan, winner of the award for *THE LEOPARD IS LOOSE*, and Katie Gutierrez, also an Honorable Mention for *MORE THAN YOU'LL EVER KNOW*. At the ceremonies in Fort Worth, I traded stories with other favorite writers and Texas Institute of Letters members, Kip Stratton and George Getschow. What a fun time!

From **Barbara Ras**: I spent a month in South Africa in fall 2023, beginning with a Fulbright Specialist Grant to teach creative writing (poetry) at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town. In addition to teaching energetic and enthusiastic undergraduates, master's, and Ph.D students, I gave a reading at the university and at the poetry collective The Red Wheelbarrow. I didn't expect to learn that my poem "You Can't Have It All" was translated into Afrikaans by Ilze Olckers, who had heard me read a couple of times. Afrikaans? Really!!



It was a joy to travel with my dear friend and fellow TIL Member **Nan Cuba**. In Cape Town we went to museums and galleries and attended a fantastic dance performance showcasing a stellar choreographer (not your usual tourist thing). We met a remarkable array of writers and artists in our time there. We left Cape Town to arrive in the Eastern Cape. There we took spectacular game drives at Gorah Elephant Camp, getting breathtakingly close to too many wild animals to mention. We followed the Garden Route overland back to Cape Town. Each of the towns and cities we stopped in offered up dazzling experiences, from whale watching in Hermanus to strolling through the awesome Dylan Lewis Sculpture Garden in Stellenbosch. Did I say how people everywhere went out of their way to be kind and generous? If not, let me say it now, to highlight why I long to go back to South Africa.

In other literary news, I'll be doing an event on Tuesday, February 20, at Wild Detectives in Dallas, where **Ben Fountain** will join me in a conversation punctuated by readings from my collection *The Blues of Heaven* to discover how a moral compass can guide poetry in our time. A couple of days later, on Thursday, February 22, at Trinity University in San Antonio, Andrew Porter and I will share a stage to explore what makes *The Blues of Heaven* a surprising book, revealing social, political, and familial issues.

After fifteen months as Writer-in-Residence at The Pines Ranch, high in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of Colorado, **James L. Haley** is back home in Texas. Ensnared in Galveston, luxuriating in the sea air with its abundance of oxygen, he is rolling up his sleeves to return to work in the Texas history vineyard with three books to finish and two new ones on the desk. The Third Act should always be the most exciting.

From **Celeste Bedford Walker**: I continue to work on a new play for the Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship to be finished by July 2024.

Last September I appeared on The Bookmark Interview with Christine Brown for my anthology *Sassy Mamas and Other Plays*. Appeared on “Life, Death, and Writing from the Edge” panel at Texas State University, Steve Davis moderating.

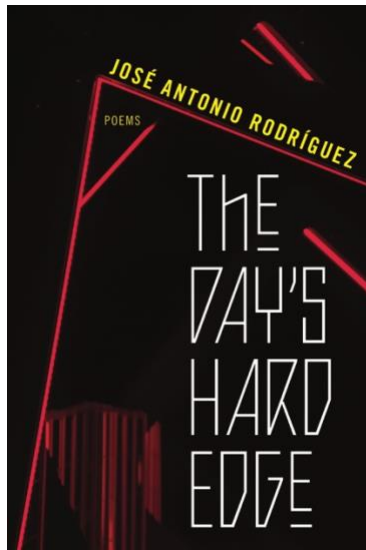
In October 2023, I was asked to write an op-ed for the *Houston Chronicle* about the overturned verdict of the soldiers in the 1917 Camp Logan mutiny. Andrew Dansby of the *Houston Chronicle* interviewed me in a profile article for my TIL Lon Tinkle Lifetime Achievement Award.

Last November I participated in the Texas Book Festival for my anthology *Sassy Mamas and Other Plays*.

In February, I'm slated for **Cliff Hudder's** Writers in Performance Series at Lone Star University

My play “Greenwood: An American Dream Destroyed” about the 1921 Tulsa massacre will have a reading in Manhattan sponsored by the Metropolitan College.

In March my revised cowboy musical “Black Spurs” will be performed in Queens, New York



José Antonio Rodríguez's new poetry collection, *The Day's Hard Edge*, is forthcoming summer 2024 from Northwestern UP. His poems "Shelter" and "Tender" will be included in the fifteenth edition of *The Norton Introduction to Literature* textbook. His poems "Shelter" and "La Migra" will be included in *Latino Poetry: The Library of America Anthology*. His work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Salamander*, *The Common*, *Huizache*, *Watershed Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Lips*, and *The New Yorker*.

Kathryn Jones' poetry chapbook *An Orchid's Guide to Life* will be published by Finishing Line Press in August and was a national semifinalist in the New Women's Voices competition. Her poems have appeared in several anthologies in fall 2023 and early 2024 and she is at work on two collections. She continues to write for *Texas Highways* and other magazines. Kathryn also is an editor for the Austin-based nonprofit, nonpartisan investigative news site Public Health Watch (publichealthwatch.org) and does freelance book editing.