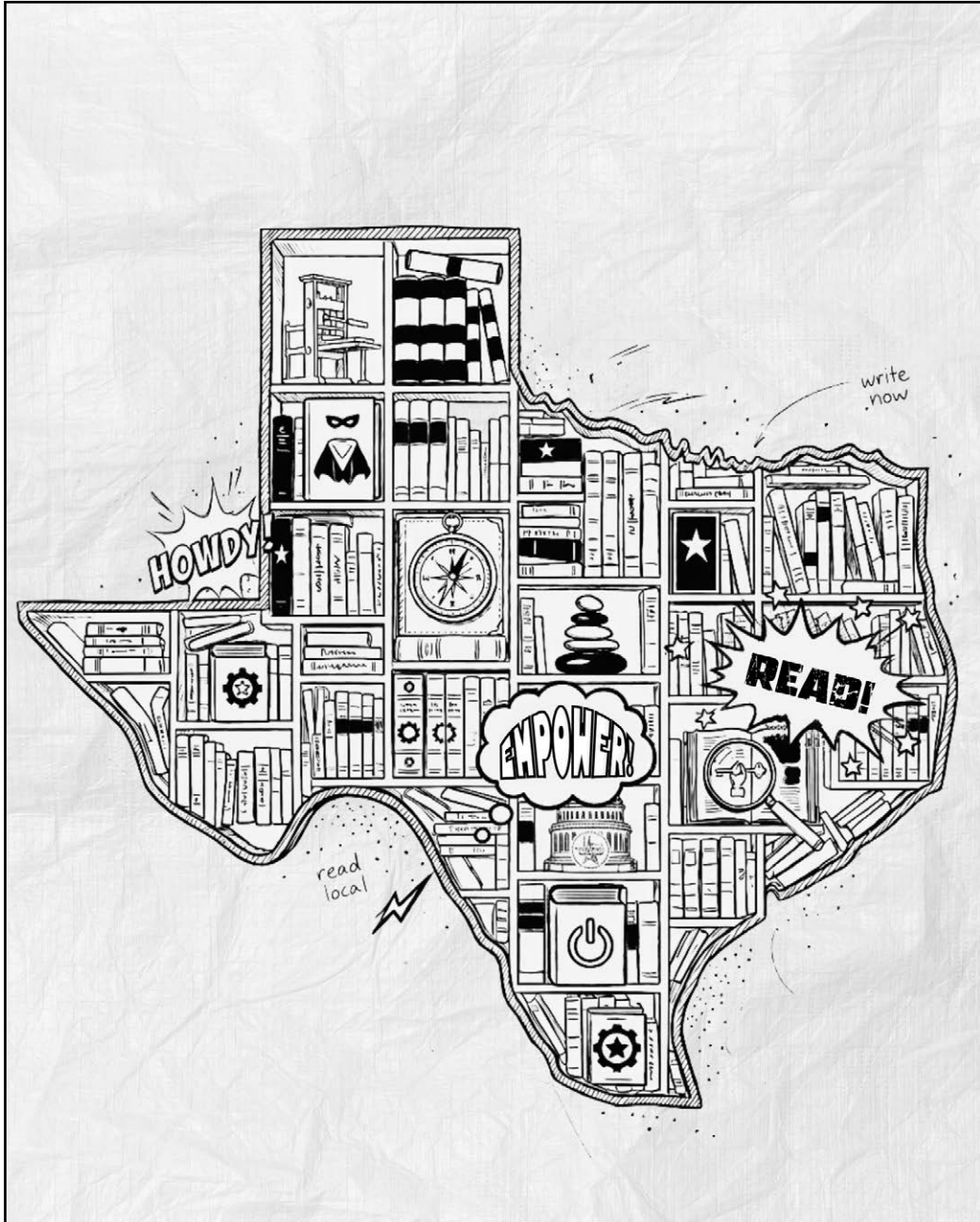


THE LONE STAR LITERARY LIFE

MAGAZINE



JUNE 2026

ISSUE 21

Letter
from the



Editor



Dear Reader,

“Empower” is declarative. It holds assumptions: we are capable; we have the knowledge, skills, and resources to empower others. All of which, if you’re reading this, is true of you, too.

When we feel empowered, we embody confidence and courage. There is a tenacity to what we do because success is

inevitable. We have the power to make things happen.

So many things around us can make us feel disempowered. Incapable of making an impact on the world around us. Stuck in an impotency that leaves us vulnerable to forces larger than ourselves.

This month, I want to gently remind all of us (myself



As we let our
own light shine,
we unconsciously
give other people
permission to
do the same.
- Marianne Williamson



included) that while feelings are always valid, they are not always truthful.

While our nervous systems may feel unsafe (read: disempowered), that is not the truth*. As Marianne Williamson said, "...*we are powerful beyond measure.*" And with that power, we have a great responsibility.

Empowered people empower.

We are called to share our empowerment with the people around us. Our families, friends, neighbors. The person in the line behind us at H-E-B. The young as well as the seasoned people in our lives.

You might be saying, "Yes, but how?"

I'm so glad you asked.

Here are some practical ways to empower others.

When we model what being empowered looks like, we give permission to those around us to do the same. Our actions speak—and teach—much more loudly than our words. When we show what is possible, we pave the way for others to accomplish the same and more.



Show up

Sometimes, empowerment is bravely saying the thing everyone is thinking, albeit with kindness. Expressing dissent with respect and compassion. I have a friend who does this beautifully, using a phrase I've memorized so I can use it, too. *"I disagree and come from a different place on this matter. I also recognize that your experiences are different than mine."*



Speak up

Recounting the times your empowerment enabled you to accomplish something difficult can inspire and empower others. I still remember the long-term substitute who filled in for my 3rd-grade teacher when she had a baby. Mrs. Davis told us about how she was the valedictorian of her high school class - a term I had never heard before. I decided in that moment that I would be the valedictorian, too.*



Share your stories

Empowerment begins with acknowledging that our lives are not lived in isolation. The way we carry ourselves, encourage others, and move through the world has an impact. When we choose courage over fear and generosity over silence, we create space for others to do the same. Drawing again from Marianne Williamson's wisdom, *"...as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same."*

So shine brightly. Someone nearby may be waiting for permission. ★

Warmly,



Amy Kelly

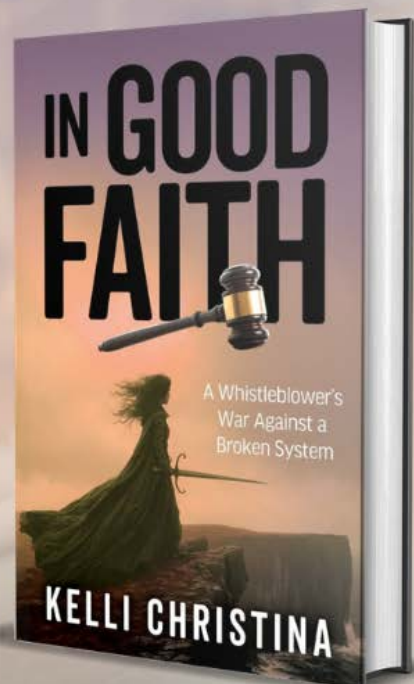
Editor-in-Chief, Lone Star Literary Life

*More on this in my Video from the Editor.

A WHISTLEBLOWER'S WAR AGAINST A BROKEN SYSTEM

**A GRIPPING LEGAL THRILLER
BASED ON TRUE EVENTS**

**What happens when
playing by the rules
becomes the most
dangerous game of all?**



BY KELLI CHRISTINA

Video from the EDITOR

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NOW YOU CAN LISTEN TO

Lone Star Literary Life!

We are excited to introduce a brand new way to experience *The Lone Star Literary Life Magazine*. Many of our articles are now available in audio format, so you can listen to the stories,

interviews, and insights you love wherever your day takes you. Whether you are commuting, walking the dog, or simply prefer listening, you can now enjoy Lone Star Literary Life on the go.

On each article page, you will find a link to listen to the audio version of that piece. We have also created this dedicated page where you can easily find all the month's articles with audio and listen to them in one convenient spot.

As you explore the recordings, you may notice that some links include an asterisk (*). This

simply means the article is read by an AI voice rather than a human narrator. Our goal is to make the magazine more accessible and enjoyable in multiple formats, and we are thrilled to offer another way for readers and listeners to connect with the vibrant Texas literary community. ★



Letter from the Editor



Now You Can Listen to Lone Star Literary Life!*



Want to Get Better at Story? Write a Few Screenplays...
Josh Weiss-Roessler*



The Power to Be Ourselves
by Kalyani Adsumilli*



Book Campaigns*



Texas Literary Podcast Highlight*



Texas Books Preview*



Marketing Moment*



Awards Roundup*



Texas Reads*



What to Read Next in Young Adult*



Texas Writes*

SECRET Shelf

Remember searching for hidden pictures in magazines when you were younger?

We've brought that spirit to this issue.

Five previously published books are hiding throughout these pages. Your mission is simple:

find each cover hidden somewhere in the magazine.

It's a fun way to explore the issue—and you might just discover a great book that deserves another moment in the spotlight.

Here are the books on this month's **SECRET SHELF**



Happy searching!



Share your finds with us on Instagram and tag [@LoneStarLit](https://www.instagram.com/LoneStarLit).



CREATIVITY FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Art House Dallas is a local non-profit that exists to create community and empower local artists. Each year we host over 100 events and programs for writers, musicians, visual artists, and performing artists. There's something for everyone!

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You can apply to be in a monthly writing group, attend a feedback for writers, and meet writers and creatives at one of our upcoming virtual or in-person events.

Find out information, group applications, and registration at arthousedallas.com

Want to Get Better at Story?

Write a Few Screenplays

by Josh Weiss-Roessler

For a long time, the simple act of crafting a beginning, middle, and end was a struggle for me. My stories zigged and zagged. Often, they beautifully meandered. But only rarely did they actually get anywhere.

Then I moved to Los Angeles. And for nearly a decade, I wrote television scripts – and at least one feature – with my wife. Along the way, we were fortunate enough to place in some contests, get mentored by several produced writers, and eventually be selected for NBC’s prestigious Writers on the Verge program.

At the time, I thought I was simply learning how to write for the screen. But it turned out to be an intense education in storytelling that was surprisingly empowering for my writing.

How so?



Los Angeles

“
*The most
empowering lesson
screenwriting
teaches is that
every word
must matter.*

HOLLYWOOD

SCENE 12	Close on his face
SCENE 15	Close on her face

WRITE
SHOOT
EDIT
REPEAT

YOUR TELLING IS SHOWING

We're constantly told to "show, don't tell." Well, scripts literalize this because everything *must* be visible on screen.

The audience can't read a character's thoughts or hear paragraphs of explanation. If someone is afraid, the viewer has to see it through behavior. If a relationship is strained, the tension must emerge through dialogue – or through what characters *avoid* saying.

Learning to think this way can be liberating. Instead of explaining emotions, focus on actions and

interactions that allow readers to draw their own conclusions.

Ask yourself one simple question: Could readers understand this moment if I removed the explanation?

If not, look for ways to reveal the emotion through action, dialogue, or small physical details. A pause, a glance, or a character choosing not to respond can be far more powerful than several sentences of explanation.

Speaking of which...

EXPOSITION GETS EXPOSED

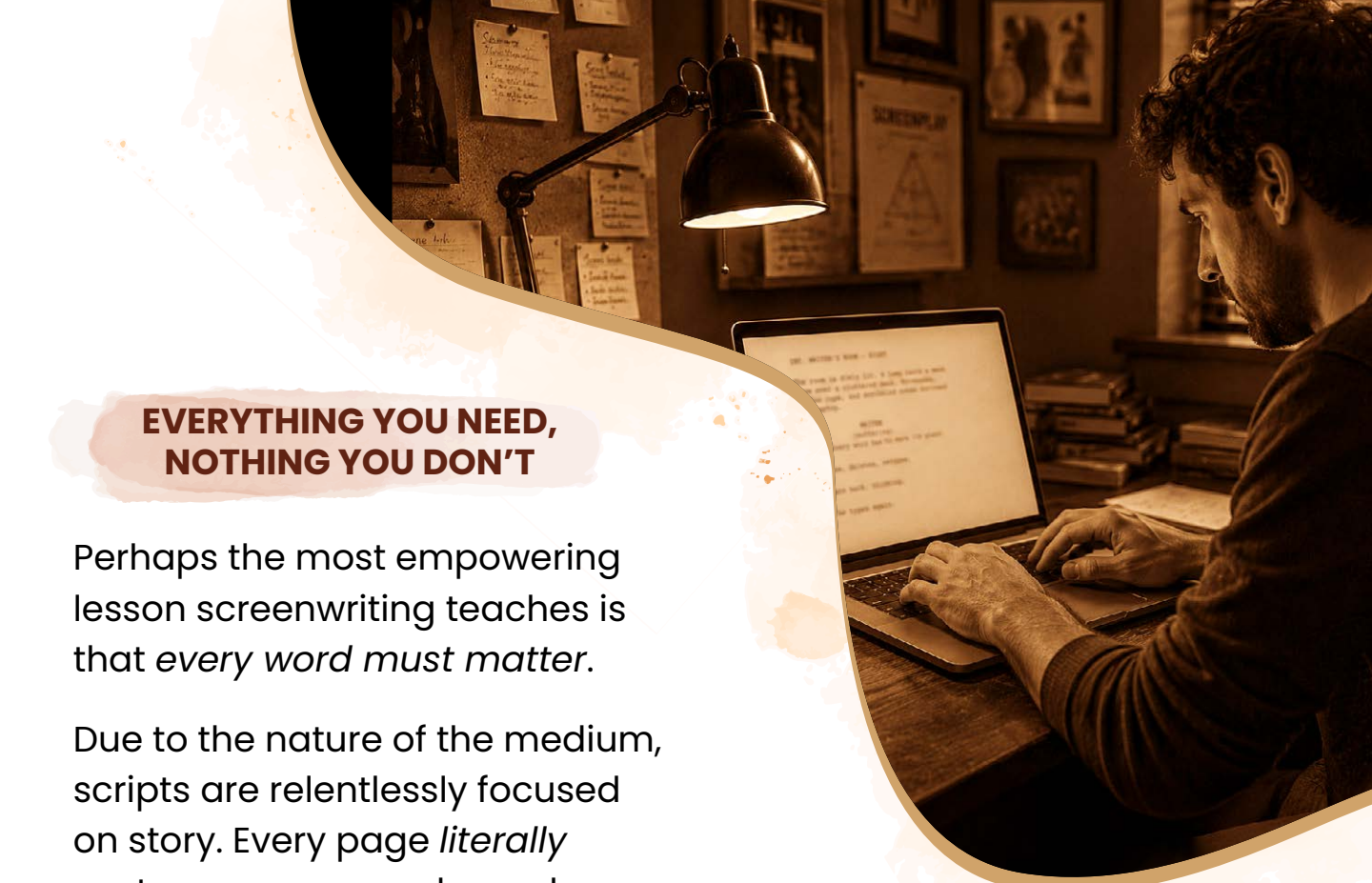
People rarely narrate their feelings or summarize events to one another in real life. You can sometimes get away with this in prose, but it's a bad habit to fall into.

Why? The problem with exposition becomes painfully obvious when listening to an actor recite it on screen: it's

dense and boring and can feel like a lecture.

So read *your* dialogue aloud. If it sounds like the characters are explaining things *to readers*, the scene may need revision. Cut obvious explanations. Lean on subtext.

Trusting readers to interpret what's on the page can make scenes feel far more alive.



EVERYTHING YOU NEED, NOTHING YOU DON'T

Perhaps the most empowering lesson screenwriting teaches is that *every word must matter*.

Due to the nature of the medium, scripts are relentlessly focused on story. Every page *literally* costs money, so each word you use has to move the narrative forward. Scenes, lines, and descriptions that don't serve the story – even your favorites – have to go.

In fact, every scene must do multiple things at once: reveal character, advance the plot, and hint at theme. If a moment doesn't *at least* pull double duty, it gets cut.

For prose writers, this can feel like putting on a straitjacket. We want the freedom to follow our characters and go where the words take us.

And after all, prose isn't the same. Part of the power of novels and short stories is that they *can* offer interiority, gorgeous description, and the ability to linger inside a character's perspective.

But if you give it a bit of time and effort, you'll quickly discover that adopting even a little screenwriting discipline in your writing is empowering. It provides a clear lens through which to evaluate every scene, every line of dialogue, every paragraph.

Because when you make each moment work a little harder, it's almost guaranteed to strengthen your work. ★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Josh Weiss-Roessler

Lives in the Austin area and has written screenplays, way too much marketing copy, and the first in a series of middle-grade sci-fi novels, which he plans to release this fall.

[Find Josh's middle-grade sci-fi series on Goodreads](#) →

SPINE CHILLING

INDIE AUTHORS

Horror
Sci-fi
Fantasy
Dark Fiction



EVENT ACTIVITIES

Author Signings
Panels
Workshops
Scavenger Hunt
Tattoos
Door Prizes
& More

TEXAS HORROR LIT FEST

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75039
3rd Floor



ADMISSION

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Admission
\$15 Parking

DATE | TIME

June 27th-28th,
2o26
10am - 6pm

WE'LL BE WAITING FOR YOU!



AUTHORS, LET'S GET THE WORD OUT—FOR FREE!

At Lone Star Literary Life, we love helping Texas authors shine—and that starts with two totally free tools just for you:

✦ **Texas Books Preview**

Have a new release? Submit it for a complimentary listing in our monthly Texas Books Preview—a go-to feature for book lovers, librarians, reviewers, and bookstore buyers across the state.

Texas Bookish Events Calendar

Hosting a launch party, book signing, or workshop? Add your event to our statewide calendar and connect with readers who are ready to show up and support.

LET'S TELL TEXAS ABOUT YOUR BOOK!



TEXAS BOOK LOVERS CON

JULY 2026

10 am
to
6 pm

18TH



19TH

10 am
to
4 pm

DENTON CIVIC CENTER

*Over 60 Authors & Vendors
Q&A + Panel Discussions
Free Admission*





INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

The room is quiet.
She sits alone,
staring at the page.
A story begins
with a question
he doesn't know
how to answer.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAWN

People move.
Lives collide.
Every face
holds a story.
Every story
holds a choice.

CUT TO:



ACT II
Transformation

What if
all along
the story
was
really
about
becoming
me?

The Power to Be Ourselves

by Kalyani Adusumilli



Stories empower us not by telling us who to become but by reminding us that we are allowed to be ourselves.

Many people move through life performing versions of themselves that feel acceptable to family, career, culture, and society in general. Over time, those expectations can become so deeply internalized that it becomes difficult to distinguish between who we truly are and who we have learned to be. For many readers, literature becomes empowering when they encounter emotionally honest characters struggling with the same questions they carry quietly within themselves. The books that stay with us are often the ones that reflect those hidden struggles back to us with truth and humanity.

When I began writing, I found myself drawn not to what was openly spoken



about but to the pauses, contradictions, and tensions that exist beneath the surface of everyday life. I was interested in the emotional undercurrents people often carry silently, especially within families and communities where endurance, stability, and responsibility are deeply valued. Writing became less about arriving at simple answers and more about staying with difficult questions long enough to better understand them.

The *Invisible Canvas* grew out of that space.

At its center is Jansi, a woman who has spent much of her life holding everything together—her family, her responsibilities, the expectations placed upon her—without ever fully acknowledging what it has cost her. When the life she has so carefully maintained begins to fracture, she is forced to confront not only her present circumstances but also the layers of silence, memory, and inheritance that have shaped her sense of self.



Through her journey, I found a way to explore the distance between who we are taught to be and who we quietly recognize ourselves as—and what it takes to bridge that divide.

What makes stories powerful is not perfection but emotional truth. Readers connect most deeply to characters who feel human: conflicted, vulnerable, uncertain, and resilient. Fiction allows us to recognize parts of ourselves we may not always articulate openly. Sometimes, a reader does not need a character to have all the answers. They simply need to see someone grappling honestly with the same fears, pressures, grief, or longing they themselves carry. That recognition can be transformative.

Stories empower us not by telling us who to become but by reminding us that we are allowed to be ourselves. In a world that often rewards performance over authenticity, literature creates a space for vulnerability, complexity, and self-reflection. It reveals that there is strength not only in perseverance but also in honesty.

For me, that is one of the most meaningful aspects of storytelling. It allows people to feel seen, perhaps for the first time. And in that recognition, there can be comfort, connection, and the courage to move through the world more authentically. ★



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kalyani Adusumilli

A Houston-based attorney and the author of the literary novel, *The Invisible Canvas*.

www.kalyaniadusumilli.com →

June

BOOKISH EVENTS

June in Texas has a host of events for book lovers of all sorts. Whether you're a horror fan or a connoisseur of Shakespeare, you'll find an event for you. Click here for [links to the June events below](#), or visit the [Lone Star Lit Bookish Events calendar](#) for information on all upcoming author signings and indie bookstore events across Texas. ★



**Wilson
County Mini
Author Book
Festival**

JUNE
5-7

**Keys & Quills
Book Expo**

JUNE
5

NETWO

JUNE
6

CALF

JUNE
11-14

**Book Dragon
Festival**

JUNE
13

A Lit World

JUNE
13

**Juneteenth:
Voices of
Freedom**

JUNE
18

**Texas Horror
Lit Fest**

JUNE
27-28

**Austin African
American Book
Festival**

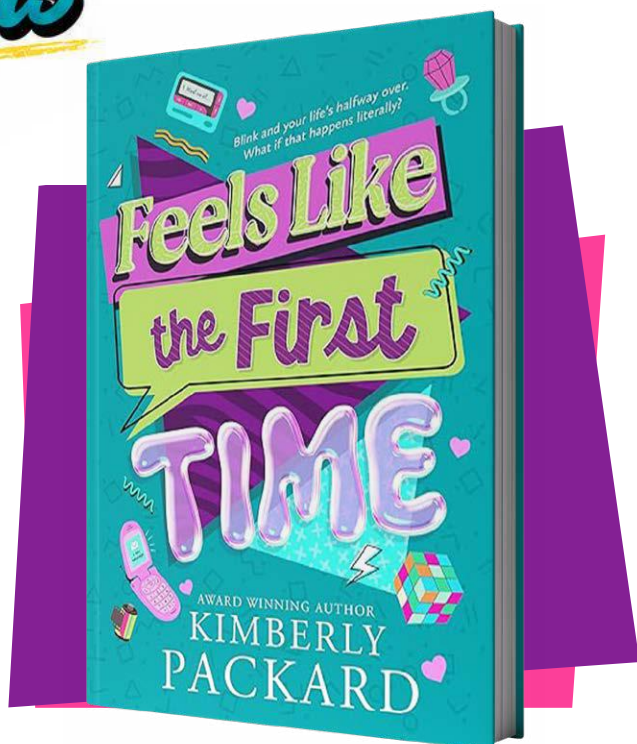
JUNE
27

June BOOK Campaigns



One Star Literary Life Book Campaigns is thrilled to share *Feels Like the First Time*, the follow up to *This Time Around* by Kimberly Packard. Our team adored *This Time Around*, and we can't wait to help you fall equally in love with Packard's newest arrival. [Bookmark the campaign page](#) to visit each stop when it launches.

Don't miss out! Empower yourself to connect with the author, follow along with our team's posts, and discover a book that will have you feeling all the feels. Stay engaged on social media to join the conversation and enter to win a copy for yourself. ★



ROMANCE / WOMEN'S FICTION /
TIME SLIP

*Feels Like the
First Time*

By Kimberly Packard

June 9 – July 6

You can find us on:





YEARS OF “MAYBE NEXT YEAR.”

The book you've been dreaming of is not finished because you lack *time*. You lack *a plan*.

You are the thought leader, the coach, the expert. You have the ideas. Stop letting analysis paralysis and the myth of “finding time” stall your author dream.

A FINISHED MANUSCRIPT IS SIX MONTHS AWAY.

My Book in Six is the 183-day roadmap for nonfiction authors who need structure, not more hours.

- **20 Minutes a Day** (*Write during the cracks in your schedule.*)
- **Idea to Done** (*Month One is dedicated to finding your best idea.*)
- **Real Community** (*Find your author people. No one succeeds alone.*)

WRITE YOUR BOOK TODAY

Texas Literary Podcasts



At a time when so much of our media consumption feels rushed and disconnected, *The Dock Live Podcast* reminds listeners of the power of conversation, community, and culture. Created by the owners of The Dock Bookshop, the podcast extends the mission of one of Texas's most beloved independent bookstores beyond its walls and into the homes, cars, and earbuds of listeners everywhere. Since opening in 2008, The Dock has become a vibrant literary and cultural hub in North Texas, dedicated to inspiring and informing readers through books, dialogue, and meaningful events.

The podcast captures that same spirit of empowerment. Through thoughtful interviews, engaging discussions, and conversations centered on literature, culture,

creativity, and community, *The Dock Live Podcast* gives space to voices and stories that deserve to be heard. What makes the show especially powerful is its sense of purpose: it isn't simply about promoting books, but about creating connection and encouraging listeners to think deeply, grow boldly, and engage fully with the world around them. Much like the bookstore itself, the podcast feels welcoming, intentional, and deeply rooted in community.

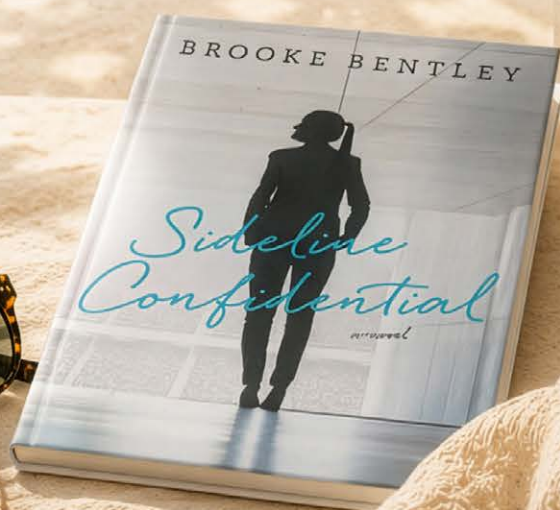
For readers, writers, and lifelong learners looking for conversations that uplift and inspire, *The Dock Live Podcast* is well worth adding to your listening rotation this summer. You can explore episodes here: [The Dock Live Podcast](#). Learn more about [The Dock Bookshop](#) and its mission to celebrate books, culture, and community in Fort Worth. ★

Discover even more Texas literary podcasts waiting for you on our website, where you can find an expanded list.

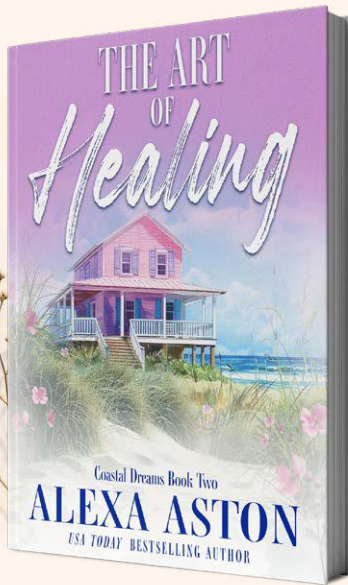


Elevate *Your* Summer Reading

Uplift the Texas literary community by exploring one of the new releases we've rounded up for June. Let a Texas author empower you to explore a new genre, relax with a guilty pleasure (minus the guilt), or find the perfect book to kickstart your summer. Lone Star Lit is here to help you elevate your summer reading, Texas-style. Read on to explore these highlights. ★



[Click here to experience the entire collection on our website.](#)



ROMANCE

The Art of Healing

By Alexa Aston

Oliver-Heber Books

June 23, 2026

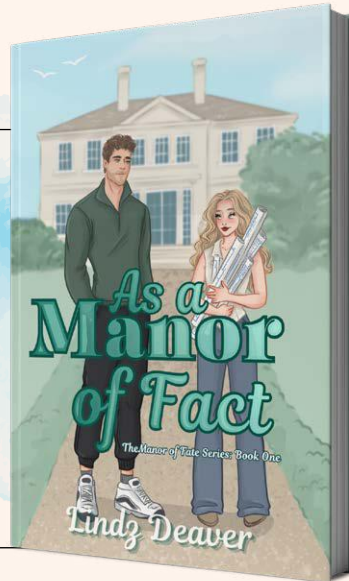


ROMANTIC COMEDY

As a Manor of Fact

By Lindz Deaver

June 8, 2026



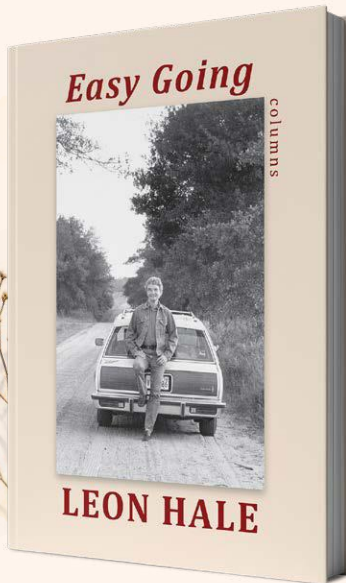
LEGAL THRILLER

The Bone Nest

By Shanessa Gluhm

Lost Meridian Press

June 30, 2026



NONFICTION

Easy Going

By Leon Hale

Winedale Publishing

June 24, 2026

ROMANCE / TIME SLIP / WOMEN'S FICTION

Feels Like the First Time

By Kimberly Packard

Abalos Publishing

June 16, 2026



WESTERN & FRONTIER ROMANCE / CHRISTIAN ROMANCE / HISTORICAL ROMANCE

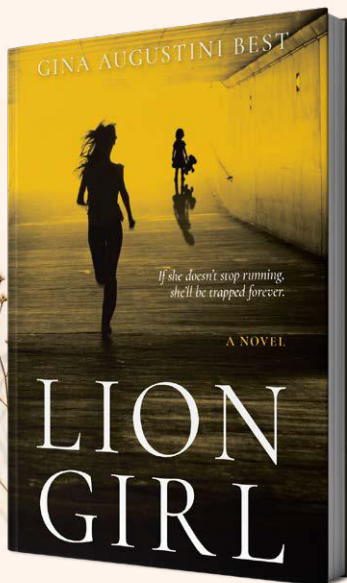
Freed by the Frontier

By Denise Farnsworth,
Sherry Shindelar,
Susan F. Craft

Wild Heart Books

June 30, 2026





YA FICTION / COMING OF AGE /
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Lion Girl

By Gina Augustini Best

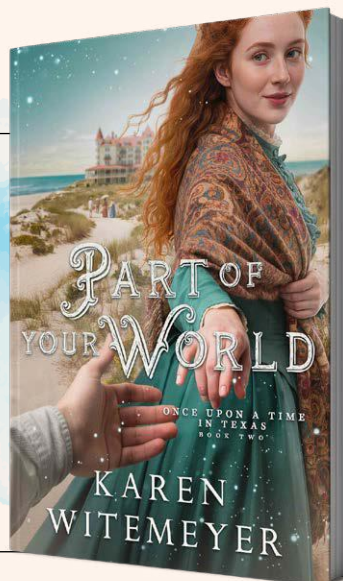
June 28, 2026

CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL ROMANCE /
SWEET WESTERN ROMANCE

Part of Your World

By Karen Witemeyer

Hope & Light Publishing
June 16, 2026

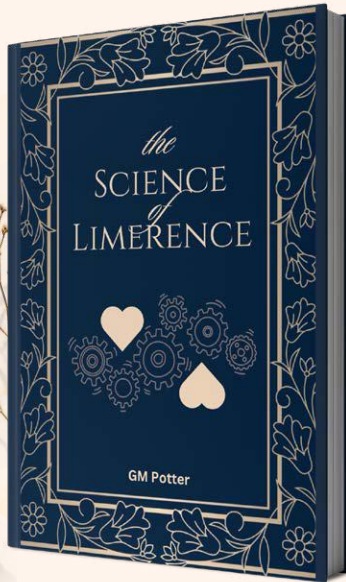


HISTORICAL FICTION / MEDIEVAL FICTION

The Queen Among Kings

By Brian Martin

Lost Meridian Press
June 30, 2026



ROMANCE / STEAMPUNK /
URBAN FANTASY

The Science of Limerence

By GM Potter, narrated by
Cameron Lisney

May 22, 2026

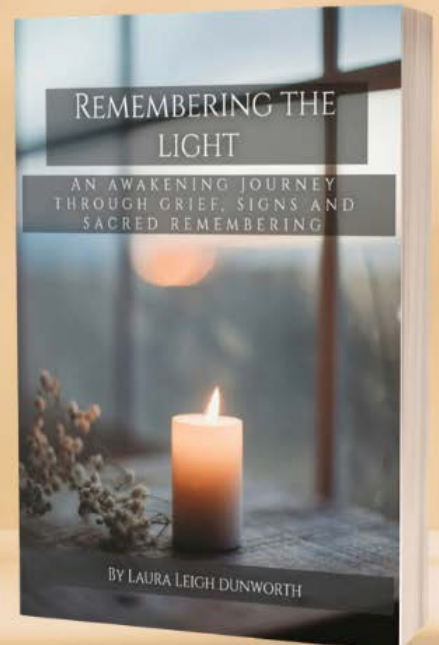
REMEMBERING THE LIGHT

AN AWAKENING JOURNEY THROUGH GRIEF, SIGNS AND SACRED REMEMBERING

BY LAURA LEIGH DUNWORTH

A profound journey through grief, exploring the connections that transcend physical existence. Through heartfelt reflections and the signs that guide us, Laura Leigh Dunworth reveals the sacred process of awakening to our true selves and the light we carry within.

READ NOW





WRITERS' LEAGUE
of TEXAS

AGENTS
& EDITORS
CONFERENCE



2026

JUNE 26-28 AUSTIN, TX

The Most *Empowering* Thing a Writer Can Do

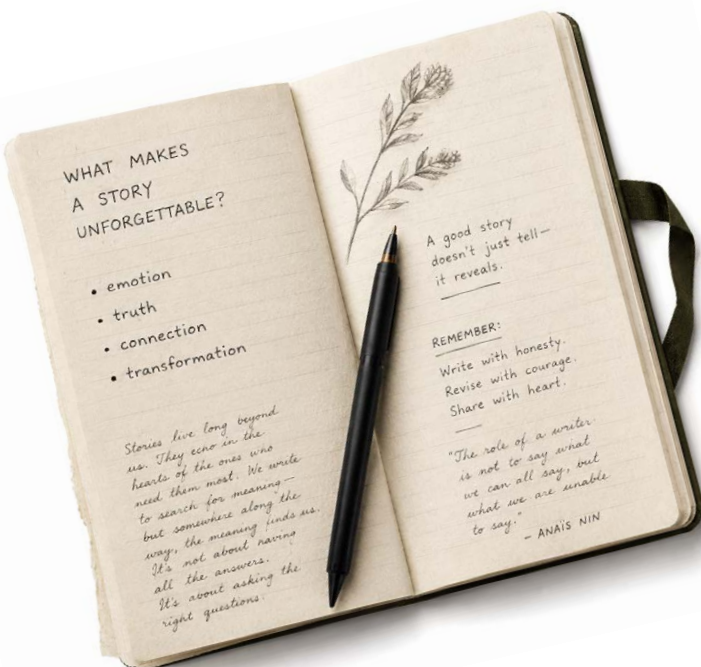
*Not compete.
Not compare.
Collaborate.*



One thing authors often misunderstand about writing is this: success is not built in isolation.

Yes, writing itself requires solitude. You need quiet. Focus. Time alone with your thoughts and your characters and your drafts. But building a sustainable writing life and reaching readers? That almost always happens in community.

This month's theme in The Lone Star Literary Life Magazine is EMPOWER, and there may be no better word to describe what healthy collaboration does for writers. It strengthens your work. It expands your perspective. It helps you grow faster. And perhaps most importantly, it



Empowerment rarely comes from carrying the entire burden alone. More often, it comes from finding the right people to grow alongside.

reminds you that you are not carrying this journey alone.

Too many authors try to do everything themselves. They write alone. Edit alone. Market alone. Struggle alone. Then they wonder why the process feels exhausting and discouraging.

The truth is that some of the strongest, most resilient writers are the ones who have learned how to collaborate well.

Not compete.
Not compare.
Collaborate.

That shift changes everything.

Collaboration Makes the Writing Better

Every writer has blind spots.

You know the scene in your head so clearly that you cannot see where the reader is confused. You love a character so much that you miss where they need development. You become so familiar with your pacing that you stop noticing where the story drags.

That is why critique partners and writing communities matter.

Strong collaborators do not simply praise your work. They help sharpen it.

In several recent podcast conversations about publishing, marketing, and the writing life, one theme surfaced again and again: growth accelerates when writers invite trusted voices into the process. The authors and industry professionals interviewed repeatedly emphasized that feedback,

honest conversation, and shared experiences helped them improve both creatively and professionally.



Good critique partners help you:

- ★ Identify weaknesses you cannot see yourself
- ★ Push past “good enough”
- ★ Stay accountable
- ★ Gain confidence through constructive feedback
- ★ Learn how readers actually experience your work

That last point matters more than most authors realize.

You are not writing your book for yourself anymore once you publish it. You are writing for readers. Collaboration helps bridge the gap between what you intended and what readers actually receive.

And no, collaboration does not weaken your voice.

It strengthens it.

Collaboration Makes Marketing Easier

Marketing feels overwhelming for many authors because they approach it like a solo performance instead of a shared conversation.

But some of the most effective marketing in the literary world happens through partnerships and relationships.

Think about the authors you see thriving online. Many of them are:

- ★ Interviewing each other on podcasts
- ★ Sharing newsletter swaps
- ★ Hosting joint events
- ★ Supporting launches
- ★ Cross-promoting books
- ★ Appearing together at festivals
- ★ Recommending each other to readers



They are building ecosystems, not silos.

When authors collaborate, everybody benefits:

- ★ Readers discover new books
- ★ Algorithms see increased engagement
- ★ Audiences expand naturally
- ★ Events become more dynamic
- ★ Marketing feels more human and less transactional

Most importantly, collaboration helps authors stop feeling like they are constantly shouting into the void.

Readers can sense authentic community. They are drawn to it.

Collaboration Builds Emotional Resilience

Writing can be emotionally brutal.

Rejection happens. Reviews sting. Sales fluctuate. Motivation disappears. Imposter syndrome creeps in at the worst possible moments.

This is where collaboration becomes more than strategy. It becomes support.

One of the recurring ideas discussed in these podcast episodes was the importance of relationships inside the literary world. Not networking for status. Genuine connection. The kind where people understand what this process feels like because they are living it too.





But Collaboration Requires Skill

Here is the important part many people skip:

Collaboration only works when writers know how to critique well and receive critique well.

That is a learned skill.

A strong writing community can:

- ★ Encourage you when momentum slows
- ★ Celebrate milestones with you
- ★ Offer perspective during setbacks
- ★ Remind you why you started
- ★ Help you keep going when quitting feels easier

That kind of support is empowering in the truest sense of the word.

Writers who stay connected tend to stay in the game longer.

Helpful collaboration is not:

- ★ Tearing someone's work apart
- ★ Giving vague praise
- ★ Trying to rewrite someone else's voice
- ★ Defending every creative decision
- ★ Competing for superiority

Healthy collaboration requires:

- ★ Curiosity
- ★ Respect
- ★ Clear communication
- ★ Emotional maturity
- ★ Trust
- ★ A willingness to listen

The best critique partners are not people who simply tell you what you want to hear. They are people who help you see more clearly while still honoring your vision.

Likewise, the best collaborators are not defensive when receiving feedback. They stay open. They ask questions. They evaluate suggestions thoughtfully.

That balance is where real growth happens.

You Do Not Need a Huge Platform. You Need Real Relationships.

Many authors believe they need massive audiences before collaboration becomes valuable.

Not true.

Some of the most meaningful collaborations begin very small:

- ★ Two writers exchanging chapters
- ★ A shared Instagram Live
- ★ A local coffee shop writing meetup
- ★ A newsletter recommendation
- ★ A bookstore panel discussion
- ★ A group text of author friends checking in weekly



Those connections compound over time.

Careers are often built through relationships long before they are built through visibility.

If you are feeling stuck in your writing or your marketing right now, ask yourself this question:

Who are you trying to do this with?

Because empowerment rarely comes from carrying the entire burden alone. More often, it comes from finding the right people to grow alongside.

And that may be one of the most important investments you can make in your writing life. ★

BOOKISH HUMOR



CHRIS MANNO

Chris Manno's award-winning cartoons appear in periodicals worldwide. Several of his cartoon collections are available in paperback and Kindle format. He is also the author of the award-winning Texas novels *East Jesus* and *Blood and Remembrance*. Manno earned a doctorate in English from Texas Christian University, where he teaches writing. ★



Enjoy more of Manno's cartoons in
Song of Many and Much

WHY CAN'T I SELL MY BOOK?

You wrote it. You launched it. You're posting about it.

*So why does marketing
still feel confusing...
and exhausting?*



*You're not failing.
You're just in a stage.*

INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR JOURNEY ASSESSMENT

*A free quiz designed to show you exactly where you are
– and what to focus on next.*

*Stop guessing.
Start building strategically.*

TAKE THE FREE AUTHOR JOURNEY ASSESSMENT

Most authors are applying the wrong strategy for their stage.

START THE QUIZ





AUTHOR AWARDS

★ R O U N D U P ★

Texas authors empowered to reach for new heights find themselves shining like the stars they are this month. Across the Lone Star State authors are earning accolades and making us proud. Send congratulations to your favorite authors today. ★



Click here to view the complete list of winners as well as finalists for the Spur Awards, Reading the West Book Awards shortlist, Nebula Awards, and much more.

2026 Texas Great Read for Youth and Young Adults

Youth

**Hank the Cowdog #83:
The Case of the Poison Toad**
by John R. Erickson

Young Adult

Small Town
by John R. Erickson

Texas State Historical Association Awards

Kate Broocks Bates Award
Saltgrass Prairie Saga
by Jim Burnett

Ron Tyler Award for Best Illustrated
Book on Texas History and Culture

Texas Takes Shape
by James Harkins, Mark Lambert,
Dr. Brian Stauffer, Patrick Walsh

Coral Horton Tullis Memorial Prize for
Best Book on Texas History

**One National Family:
Texas, Mexico and the Making of the
Modern United States, 1820-1867**
by Sarah K. M. Rodríguez

Liz Carpenter Award for Best Book on
the History of Women

**She Changed the Nation: Barbara
Jordan's Life and Legacy in Black
Politics**
by Mary Ellen Curtin

Randolph B. "Mike" Campbell Award
**1st Place: Paul M. Lucko –
Capital Punishment in Texas**
**2nd Place: Frank Jackson –
The Alamo (1960)**

H. Bailey Carroll Award
The German Lives of Black Texans
by David Huenlich

Al Lowman Memorial Prize
**The Conservative Frontier: Texas
and the Origins of the New Right**
by Jeff Roche

Kay Bailey Hutchison Award for
Women's Achievements in Texas
History
Linda Sioux Henley

Emily Awards from League of Romance Writers

Contemporary Romance

2nd Place, The Cadence Crush

by Christine Ashdown

Novel with Romantic Elements

Winner, Christmas in Honeybee Harbor

by Amy Woods

Other Award Winners:



Char Adams won the Debut Adult category of the [Indies Choice Awards](#) from the American Booksellers Association for her book

Black-Owned: The Revolutionary Life of the Black Bookstore



Michael Baldwin won the Best Literary Fiction Award from the [Texas Authors Institute](#) for his novel

Roll Back the Sun



Libba Bray won the Best Young Adult category of the [Edgar Allan Poe Awards](#) from the Mystery Writers of America for her novel

Under the Same Stars



Laura Dunworth won the Children's Education/ Parenting category of the [International Impact Book Awards](#) with her book

Breath Easy: A Kid's Guide to Feeling Calm



Desiree Groft's **Girl, Unemployed** was a Staff Pick by [Yellow Bird Editors](#).



Paul Andrew Hutton won the Best [Western Historical Nonfiction category of the Western Writers of America 2026 Spur Awards](#) for his novel

The Undiscovered Country



Teddy Jones won the Historical Fiction category of the [Sarton Awards](#) from Story Circle Network for her novel

A Family of Good Women



Preston Lewis and Harriet Kocher Lewis won in both the Historical Fiction and Best Cover Design- Nonfiction categories of the [Literary Global Children's Book Awards](#) for their work

Pint-sized Pioneers at Play: Homemade Frontier Fun and Danger



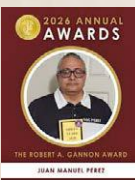
Paul McGrath won the Best Book for Fiction–Science Fiction category of the [Winter 2025 Pencraft Book Awards](#) for his novel **Left**



David H. Millar won a [Literary Titan Gold Book Award](#) for his novel **Dragons, Demons & Demigods**



Carrie R. Moore won the Fiction category of the [Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards](#) from the Cleveland Foundation for her **Make Your Way Home**

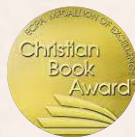


Juan Perez won the [2026 Robert A. Gannon Award for Poetry](#) from the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation for his memoir

Thirty Years Ago: Life and the First Gulf War



Maria Reva won the [Aspen Words Literary Prize](#) for her novel **Endling**



Melanie Shankle won the Biography & Memoir category of the [ECPA 2026 Christian Book Awards](#) for **Here Be Dragons**



Taryn Souders earned a spot on the [Tome Society Book Awards](#) in the Junior category for her book **Secrets of the Broken House**

Bryan Washington won the Fiction category of the [Los Angeles Times Book Prize](#) for his work **A Novel**



Anne Witherspoon won a Five Star award from the [Open Book Awards](#) for her book **Unicorn Leadership**

Additionally, the book won Third Place in the Nonfiction/Self-help & Happiness category of [The Bookfest](#) and was an [Open Book Awards](#) Five Star winner.



Texas Reads for

PRIDE

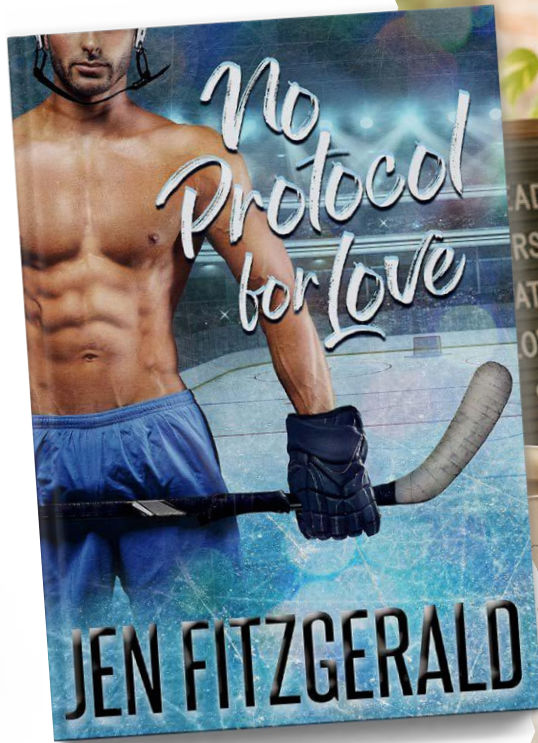
By Kimberly Packard

When the wonderful team at Lone Star Literary Life asked if I would pen the Texas Reads column for Pride month, I wondered if I would be the right person for it. While I'm not part of the LGBTQ+ community, I am a staunch ally and advocate. It's even more important now to understand someone else's life and stories, stand up and speak up when we see injustices, and to celebrate progress made.

And there is no better way to step inside someone else's life than through books. Here are some books either written by LGBTQ+ authors or with LGBTQ+ characters.

*Happy Pride
Month!*

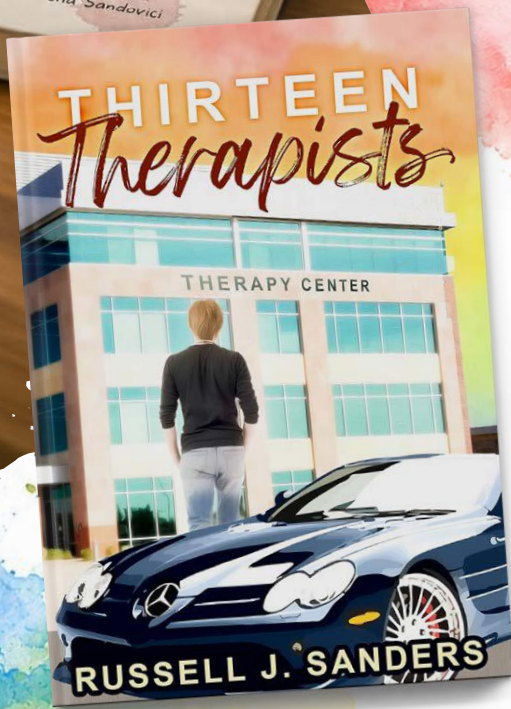
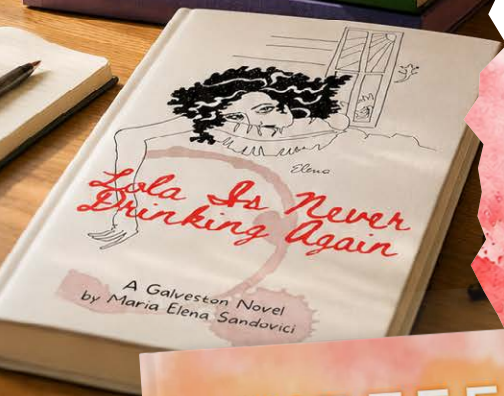




No Protocol for Love

by Jen FitzGerald

While *Heated Rivalry* put M/M hockey romance on everyone's TBR, Texas author Jen FitzGerald has been penning the genre for years. Her *Face Off for Love* series looks at the struggles of coming out under the spotlight of professional hockey, addressing the stigma gay male athletes continue to face as they must choose between a career they have worked their whole lives for, or being their authentic selves. The first book in the series, *No Protocol for Love*, goes deeper into these struggles with a closeted Russian main character, who grapples with adhering to the cultural demands of his family and home country while falling deeply in love with an American man.



Thirteen Therapists

by Russell J. Sanders

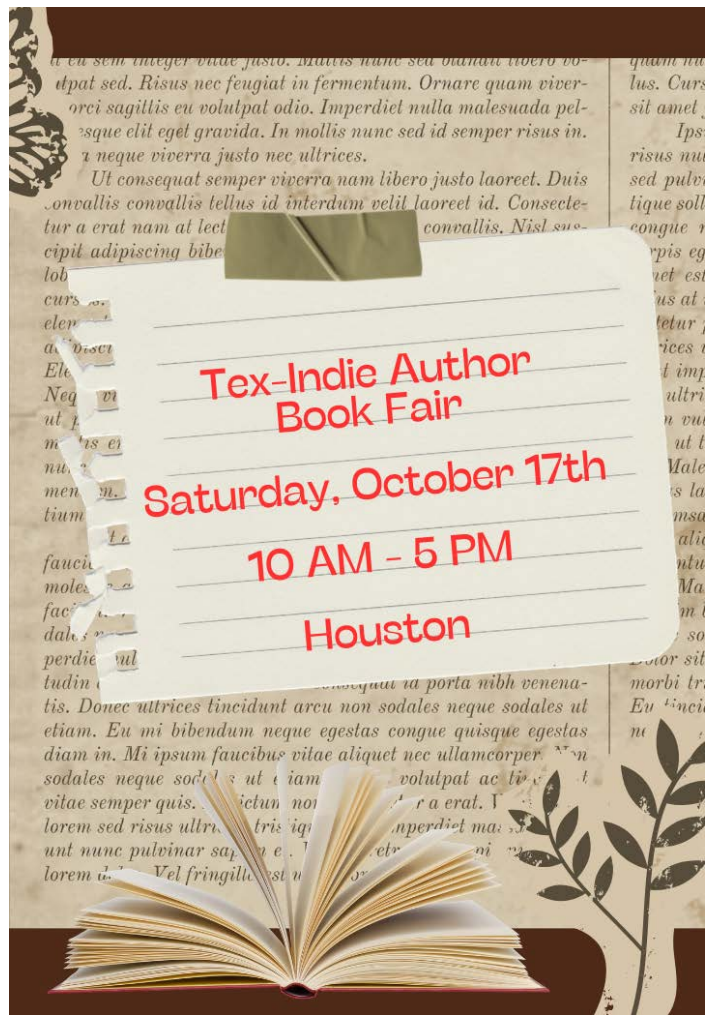
Texas native Russell J. Sanders' novel *Thirteen Therapists* combines a coming-out story and a coming-of-age story. The main character, Aaron, is a mostly-closeted teenager in Chicago's upper crust. While escorting the daughter of his mother's friend to a debutante event, he meets Derrick, another gay teenager who might just be the more dangerous type than the take-home-to-mother type. Throughout Aaron and Derrick's relationship, you feel the flush of first love all along with an undertow of impending doom. And the name? It comes from an endearing exchange with Aaron and his thirteenth therapist as he tries to scare her off. He doesn't and instead calls her Thirteen, which just made me fall in love with Aaron that much more.

As much a story about loving ourselves unconditionally as it is about finding that same love and acceptance in a partner.

Go Find Less

by Thea Claire

Go Find Less is the first novel in Texas writer Thea Claire's Recovering Good Girls series. And, while the first two books are M/F romance, Thea herself is a member of the LGBTQ+ community, which is part of the reason I'm including her books in this column, but the other reason is that her stories embody the spirit of Pride month. I think the best way to show that is in this quote that gives the first book its name: "If I'm too much, go find less." The main character, Piper, refuses to shrink herself to fit into someone else's box. **Go Find Less** is as much a story about loving ourselves unconditionally as it is about finding that same love and acceptance in a partner. ★





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kimberly Packard

An award-winning author of women’s fiction and romance. When she isn’t writing, she can be found planning her next trip, asking her dog what’s in his mouth or curled up with a book. She resides in Texas with her husband Colby, a clever cat named Oliver and a precocious black lab named Tully.

www.kimberlypackard.com →



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Ingredients:

- 1 try-hard salutatorian
- 1 annoying and (annoyingly) cute boy
- A handful of Korean recipes (measure with your heart)
- The spice of competition, to taste



What to Read Next in

Young Adult

Welcome to *Texas Reads YA!*
As a teen who loves to read YA, I sometimes have a hard time finding quality YA novels.



Eliza, from Scratch

Eliza Park's senior year will be perfect: She's going to be salutatorian, give a tear-jerking graduation speech in front of her parents, and enjoy her last year with her equally ambitious best friends. But when a scheduling mishap enrolls her in Culinary Arts, Eliza is suddenly the most clueless person in the class. Her typical title of star student belongs to the aggravatingly arrogant Wesley Ruengsomboon, a charming Thai American boy whose talent in the kitchen leaves Eliza both awed and annoyed.

With her rank on the line, Eliza's only hope is to snatch the midterm cooking contest

win from Wesley, however improbable that may be. Add in the flavor of her grandmother's Korean recipes, the heat of being class partners with Wesley, and the sweetness of unexpected feelings—and Eliza must now rebuild everything she knew about success, love, and what it means to be herself, from scratch.


Eliza, from Scratch twines success, culture, and family into a beautiful story about identity. Eliza's relationship with her mom is real and raw and very compelling. The romance aspect is truly sweet and Eliza and Wesley's romance is adorably refreshing. ★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sophia Lee

Sophia Lee, a Corpus Christi native and Texan at heart, currently lives in Washington, DC, as an OB-GYN resident with dreams of being a lifelong storyteller and empathetic health care provider.

www.instagram.com/bookishsophia →



Rodeo after rodeo, year
after year, can Josie and
Shawn keep their hearts
open through the secrets,
twists, and turns?



This Ain't Our First Rodeo

This ain't Josie's first rodeo. Her parents own several fancy restaurants in Houston, and they just opened a new one right outside the stadium. Josie is expected to stay inside the restaurant and help, and maybe take over their growing empire one day, but that isn't what Josie wants. She'd rather be at the rodeo itself than in a high-end restaurant next to it. Or eating funnel cakes and Texas-sized corn dogs at the carnival on the grounds. Or better yet, riding her horse at her grandparents' ranch, the very place her mom wants to sell.

It ain't Shawn's first rodeo either. He's been riding bulls since his mom died, doing everything he can to live up to his rodeo-champion stepfather's sky-high expectations. But as Shawn's stardom rises, so do tensions in their relationship. His stepfather's drinking and gambling problems sure don't help.



After one unforgettable night leaves Josie and Shawn wanting nothing but each other, their lives become entwined in increasingly complex ways. Can they save Josie's family land? Or will Shawn's stepfather and his shady plan be the ranch's ruin? Will one wrong move cost them everything? Rodeo after rodeo, year after year, can Josie and Shawn keep their hearts open through the secrets, twists, and turns?

This Ain't Our First Rodeo uses a sweet romance and a journey of perseverance and tradition to dive into Black cowboys and deliver a cute, YA, cowboy romance. The characters are real and rooted in the culture surrounding the Houston Rodeo leading to fun and relatable characters. ★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

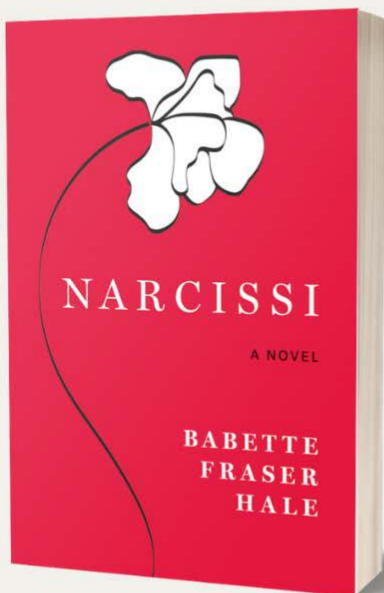
Liara Tamani

Attended Harvard Law School and worked as a marketing coordinator for the Houston Rockets and Comets and production assistant for *Girlfriends* (TV show). She lives in Houston, Texas.

www.liaratamani.com →

COMING

SOON



Hurt is never the whole story.

NARCISSI: A NOVEL
BABETTE FRASER HALE



Sydney Spell

A nursing student at UT Austin. She has enjoyed reading throughout her adolescence and is an especially big fan of YA novels.

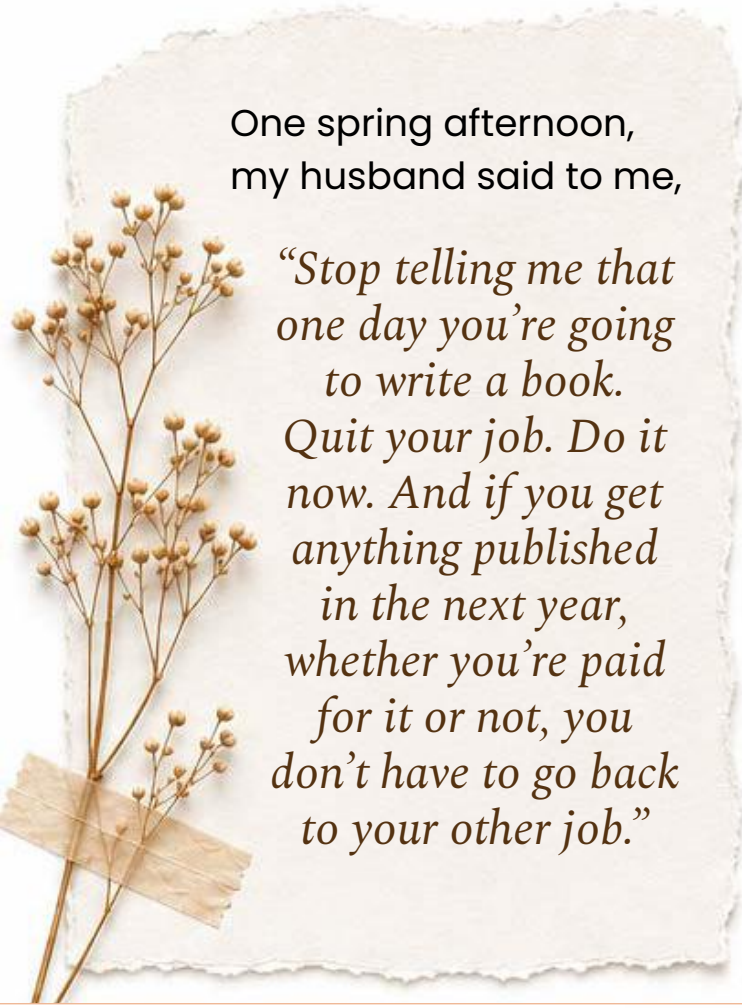
Empowering Writers

HOW TO BUILD CONFIDENCE AND FINALLY FINISH YOUR BOOK

For years, the calling to write nudged me. I dreamed about story, formed characters and plot, and allowed my imagination to carry me away on exciting adventures. But I didn't have the courage to begin

I believed my lack of resources mentally, physically, and professionally hindered me from venturing forward..





One spring afternoon,
my husband said to me,

*“Stop telling me that
one day you’re going
to write a book.
Quit your job. Do it
now. And if you get
anything published
in the next year,
whether you’re paid
for it or not, you
don’t have to go back
to your other job.”*

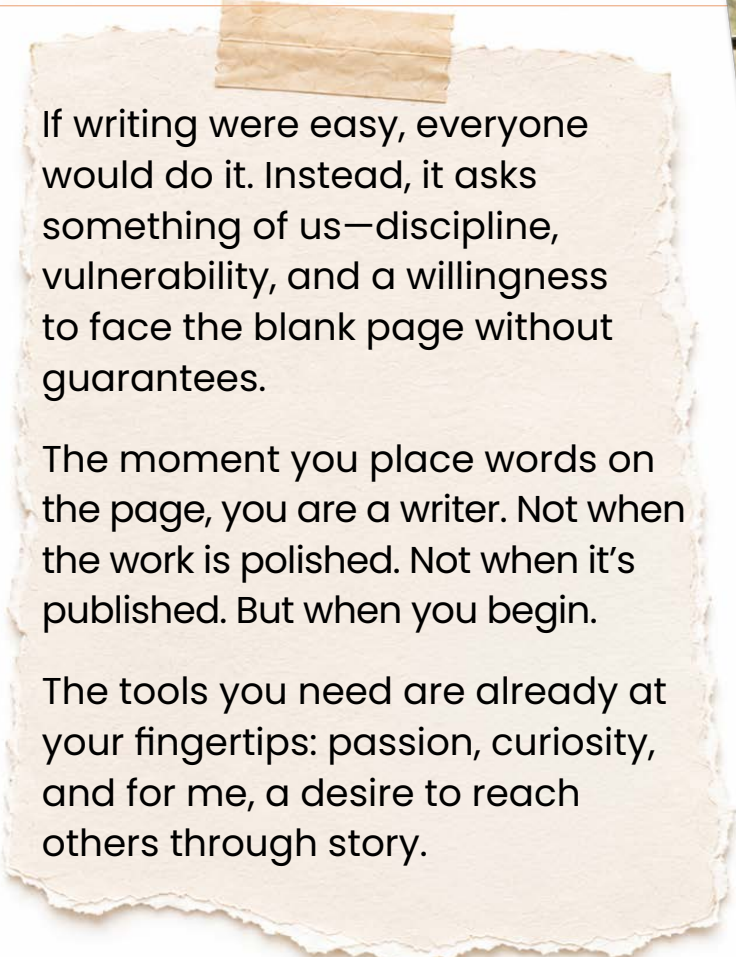
I looked at him, all 5’2” of me,
and lifted my chin. “I’ll do it.”
And I did. That was over 100
books ago.

That day, I realized a
valuable truth.

- ★ If we wait for empowerment, it won’t come knocking on our door or sail into our inbox.
- ★ My empowerment didn’t come before I began to write. My empowerment came because I chose to write.

Let’s examine some of the arguments and solutions that are empowering writers to be their best:

Writing Isn’t Comfortable—and That’s the Point



If writing were easy, everyone would do it. Instead, it asks something of us—discipline, vulnerability, and a willingness to face the blank page without guarantees.

The moment you place words on the page, you are a writer. Not when the work is polished. Not when it’s published. But when you begin.

The tools you need are already at your fingertips: passion, curiosity, and for me, a desire to reach others through story.

Naming What Holds Us Back

Most writers don't struggle with a lack of ideas. They struggle with what stands in the way.

Fear is often at the center:

- ★ Fear of failure
- ★ Fear of success
- ★ Fear of not having the discipline to follow through
- ★ Fear of disorganization
- ★ Fear that we have nothing worth saying

Left unchallenged, these quiet fears grow loud enough to keep us still. My fears shouted at me for over thirty years.



Choosing Forward Motion

Empowerment begins with responsibility—not pressure, but ownership.

We make time.

We set a rhythm.

We decide to write, even when the conditions aren't ideal.

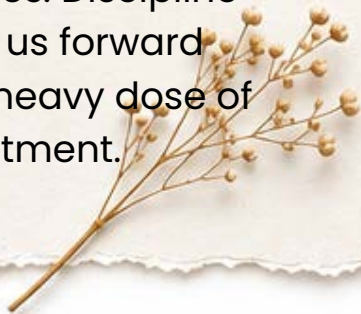
Progress usually arrives in small, consistent steps taken day after day.

The Power of Daily Practice



Writing is less about inspiration and more about habit.

A single page a day may not feel like much, but over time, it becomes a finished manuscript. Scenes written out of order still carry weight—one of my biggest practices. Discipline carries us forward with a heavy dose of commitment.



Every writer wrestles with resistance and priorities. Some days, the words flow like sweet honey. Other days, they clog up the drain. It's all part of the process.

Learn to trust your heart, mind, and body to find a balance of pushing on or resting.

A Voice Worth Hearing



The Risk That Makes Writing Matter



Safe writing rarely leaves a lasting impression. It's forgotten or deleted.

Stories that resonate ask us to take risks—to lean into stress, tension, conflict, to tell the truth, to reveal something real. Readers remember a voice that subtly says, “I care about your experience.”

Action Over Inspiration

There's a common belief that writers must feel inspired before they can begin.

Professionals know otherwise.

They show up.

They write.

They continue, even when the work feels difficult.

Discipline doesn't limit creativity—it brings the writer to a place where it can grow.

“Writing is easy. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein.”

Red Smith

A Simple Challenge

If you're waiting to feel ready, consider this:

For the next seven days:

- ★ Write 250 words each day about something that matters to you
- ★ Read something that sharpens your understanding of craft
- ★ Invite someone to hold you accountable

Evaluate your heart and mind at the end of seven days. Where are you?

Every writer faces doubt. Every writer questions whether their work is of value.

The question isn't whether you feel empowered.

The question is—will you write anyway?

DiAnn Mills

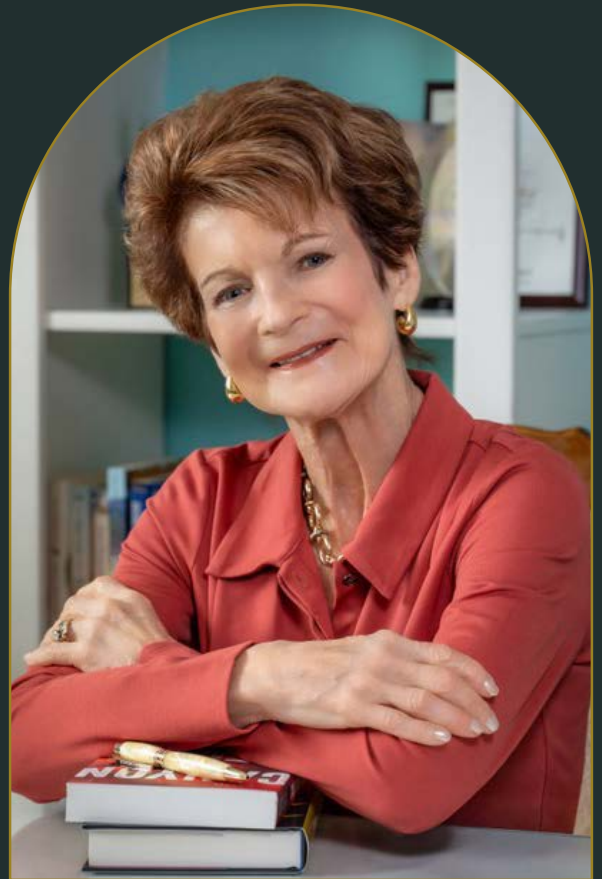
DiAnn Mills is a bestselling author who invites readers to expect an adventure—where heart-pounding suspense meets unforgettable romance and faith shines through every challenge. Known for crafting gripping plots and richly layered characters, DiAnn believes every breath we take unfolds a story waiting to be told—so why not make it thrilling?

Her novels have appeared on the CBA, ECPA, and *Publishers Weekly* bestseller lists and have earned numerous honors, including the Christy, Selah, Golden Scroll, Inspirational Readers' Choice, and Carol Awards.

DiAnn is a founding board member of American Christian Fiction Writers and

serves as Conference Advisor for the Blue Ridge Mountains Christian Writers Conference. She is also active in Advanced Writers and Speakers Association, Mystery Writers of America, International Thriller Writers, the Jerry Jenkins Writers Guild, Outliers Writing University, and The Christian Pen. Passionate about helping others succeed, she invests in writers through mentoring, book coaching, editing, and dynamic workshops she teaches across the country.

A self-proclaimed coffee snob who roasts her own beans, DiAnn enjoys diving into good books, experimenting in the kitchen, and unabashedly spoiling her grandchildren—whom she insists are the smartest kids in the universe. She makes her home under the sunny skies of Houston, Texas. ★



Connect with DiAnn for behind-the-scenes glimpses, writing tips, and lively conversations



The Lone Star Literary Life





M A G A Z I N E



The Lone Star Literary Life Magazine

Editorial Calendar

 MONTH	 THEMES	 AD CLOSE	 CONTENT DEADLINE	 PUB DATE
JAN	RESOLVE	12-15-25	12-15-25	01-07-26
FEB	EXTEND	01-14-26	01-19-26	02-04-26
MAR	HOPE	02-11-26	02-16-26	03-04-26
APR	GROW	03-11-26	03-16-26	04-01-26
MAY	HONOR	04-15-26	04-20-26	05-06-26
JUN	EMPOWER	05-13-26	05-18-26	06-03-26
JUL	SPARKLE	06-10-26	06-15-26	07-01-26
AUG	PREPARE	07-15-26	07-20-26	08-05-26
SEP	WELCOME	08-12-26	08-17-26	09-02-26
OCT	THRILL	09-16-26	09-21-26	10-07-26
NOV	GATHER	10-14-26	10-19-26	11-04-26
DEC	INSPIRE	11-11-26	11-16-26	12-02-26



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