

# THE LONE STAR LITERARY LIFE

M A G A Z I N E



SEPTEMBER 2025

ISSUE 12



# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I consider myself a lifelong learner—it's a mindset and identity. From reading books to watching documentaries to traveling, I soak up new knowledge like a sponge.

That's why I love that our theme for September is Learning. It's most fitting, as steering Lone Star Literary

Life these past sixteen months has been one of the most intense learning experiences of my life.

From leadership to relationships to managing my emotions, it's been a roller coaster ride—exhilarating, heart-stopping, and more fun than I ever could have imagined.

**Here is a list of the Top Ten lessons I've internalized:**

## **1. I am no longer a solopreneur.**

I've had to unlearn some habits from when I was a one-woman band and brush off my leadership skills that were last cultivated in my middle-school teaching years.

## **2. Mistakes are inevitable—and that's okay.**

No, really. It's okay. (I'm reassuring myself here, too.) I said this so many times to my own children throughout the years that it's been a little shocking how hard it's been to navigate the (many!) moments when I've made mistakes. Which leads me to the next thing I've learned.

## **3. Curiosity is king.**

When I discover mistakes, I practice replacing shame with curiosity. Once the sting of shame is removed, it leaves room to brainstorm solutions and figure out the lessons learned.

## **4. Progress over perfection.**

Letting go of perfection has been essential. Taking baby steps, consistently moving forward, and having grace when I miss the mark—these are the takeaways that have sustained me.

## **5. Action brings clarity.**

I live in my head a lot of the time, so this has been a big lesson. Even if I don't have all the answers or know the path to my destination, it's better to take that first baby step than to stay paralyzed by fear. Whether it's a step in the right direction or not, sometimes you can't know until you've taken it.

## **6. I love my people - and not everyone wants to be "my people."**

As with any significant change, the transfer of ownership here at Lone Star Literary has meant that some of our audience has faded, while others

have doubled down on their loyalty, and still others are new to the party.

It's all part of the growth cycle, and I'm wholeheartedly embracing the Lone Star Literary community that's here.

### **7. I love Texans.**

Deep in the heart of our state, there is a considerable cohort of people who are standing up against censorship. From librarians and teachers to bookstore owners, authors, and publishers, I've had the privilege of connecting with Texans who are ready to lay it all on the line in defense of the right to read. I couldn't love them more.

### **8. I'm not good at that—but I know someone who is.**

One of my most surprising lessons has been that delegating isn't just necessary; it's preferable. Figuring out where I excel (and where I don't!) has helped shape my daily tasks. Plus, working with my team to find *their* strengths and gifts has been a joy.

### **9. I love my team.**

I worked with my husband and his business partner for over five years to launch their business. Believe me when I say that *the people on your team make ALL the difference.*



**AMY KELLY**

Editor-in-Chief  
Lone Star Literary Life

When it comes to the team I inherited when I took the reins at Lone Star Lit, I won the lottery. Not only are they skilled at what they do but they are also extraordinary human beings. The fact that they are also book lovers is the icing on the cake. I can't imagine doing this without them.

### **10. Stories save lives.**

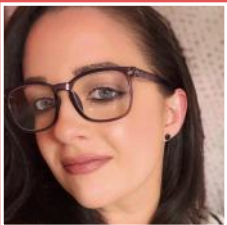
Actually, this one I knew—and it's been reinforced over and over as I've heard from readers. Books make a difference, full stop.

How about you? How do you stay in a learning mindset? What are the significant lessons you've learned? We'd love to hear!



# VIDEO FROM THE EDITOR

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## CONTRIBUTORS

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# Curiously September

by Amy J. Schultz



**A**h, September. As full of possibilities as January. As manic as May and November. As rich in nostalgia as December.

To me, September will always be the month of reengagement. Time to get back to business. As adults, we have so much to do by the end of December, and September is just the kick in the ass we need. As kids, we're keenly aware that by September, we're in a higher grade level than ever before.

"I'm in third grade now!"

It's a contradictory time, September. It's the one month out of the year when we're just as

likely to crave an icy watermelon soda as a hot pumpkin spice latte. That's because the seasons in Texas are so confused. The month might begin with temperatures over 100 degrees and end with frost on the ground. Perhaps this is why we can feel a little angsty in September. The paradoxes are tangible, but we simply have to charge ahead.

There's one interesting paradox buried deep inside September that isn't so obvious. It's the complicated relationship we human beings have with curiosity, that enigmatic mix of thoughts and feelings that motivates us to explore the un-

known, whether we're starting a new school year or figuring out how to make it to a zillion different finish lines.

Honestly, I wasn't even sure how to categorize *curiosity* until I looked it up. It seems curiosity is an emotion with an asterisk. Some experts consider curiosity a "hybrid emotion" that bridges the gap between cognitive processes and emotional responses. Others consider it a "gateway emotion" that triggers other feelings.

As a writer, curiosity is my power tool. I bet it's yours, too. There's nothing like the feeling of getting lost and found inside a character by asking and answering questions as you write.

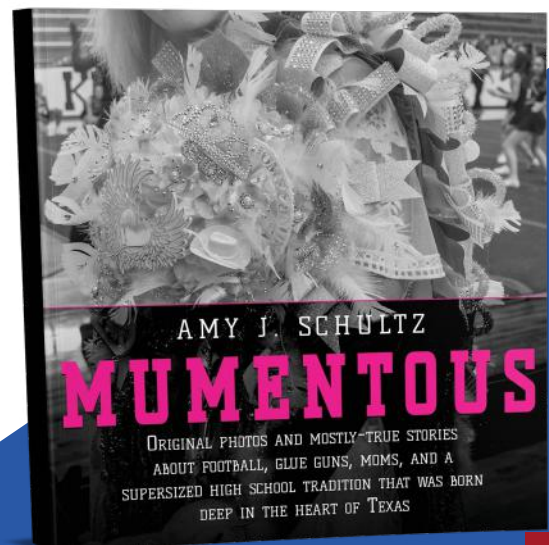
That feeling isn't just in our imaginations. Research shows that we get a little hit of dopamine every time we encounter something that intrigues us. That little rush inspires us to want to investigate, adapt, learn, and create again and again so we can keep experiencing more little rushes.

Research also shows that curiosity is with us from Day One. It drives an infant to reach for a toy and a toddler to ask, "Whywhywhywhywhy?"

But funny thing, curiosity. It can get us into trouble with ourselves and with others.

"Wait!" yells the toddler's mom. "That's not a toy! That's a pair of scissors. No, sweetie, you can't touch those scissors. Why? Because you will get hurt."

Yes, curiosity is a powerful motivator for exploration that can lead to emotions like enthusiasm, excitement, and optimism. It can also trigger other emotions like confusion, anxiety, or fear if the object of curiosity is seen as unpleasant or dangerous.



Thus is the tug of war between curiosity and safety. And in September, these opposing forces are at full tilt. Will things turn out the way we hope or the way we fear?

For better or for worse, our oral and written histories predispose us to build safety nets around curiosity instead of springboards. This storytelling ilk is as old as humankind, evolving from complicated evolutionary, religious, and cultural constructs that emphasized survival through obedience and conformity. The stories of Adam and Eve, Pandora's box, and Icarus flying too close to the sun are just three examples. Warning! Do not step out of bounds or you might get hurt. Or cast out. Or die.

The abundance of cautionary tales throughout history made me curious (of course) about idioms related to the act of being curious. ChatGPT helped me come up with a list in which, not surprisingly, cautionary tales outnumbered

others nearly 3 to 1. Here are some classics:

Curiosity killed the cat.  
 Let sleeping dogs lie.  
 Don't poke your nose into things that don't concern you.  
 None of your beeswax.  
 Ask a silly question and you'll get a silly answer.  
 Better safe than sorry.  
 You can't unsee that.  
 Look before you leap.  
 Stay in your lane.

Research shows that the pursuit of knowledge vs. the urge to stay safe actually manifest as two types of curiosity: perceptual curiosity and epistemic curiosity.

Perceptual curiosity is caused by unexpected or contradictory information. It's a disquieting feeling that can lead to anxiety. Doom scrolling is an all-too-familiar example of how curiosity can lead us into darkness.

Remember the child whose mother warned her against scissors? Imagine one day

at school, the child's teacher shows the class how to do an art project with scissors. She wants to participate, but she remembers her mother's direction. She becomes nervous. That's perceptual curiosity.

*Mom said I can't touch scissors because I'll get hurt. But my teacher says it's OK and everyone else is doing it. I don't know what to do. I'm sad. I don't like art.*

Now imagine the child's teacher notices she isn't doing the art project. When prompted, the child asks her teacher why it's OK to touch scissors when her mother said it wasn't. That's epistemic curiosity, the classic thirst for knowledge. Receiving an answer to a question is a satisfying reward in and of itself. It's also a confidence builder.

*My teacher said I can use scissors as long as they have round edges because they won't hurt me. I asked Mom, and she said it's OK, too. I know what to do! I'm happy! I love art!*

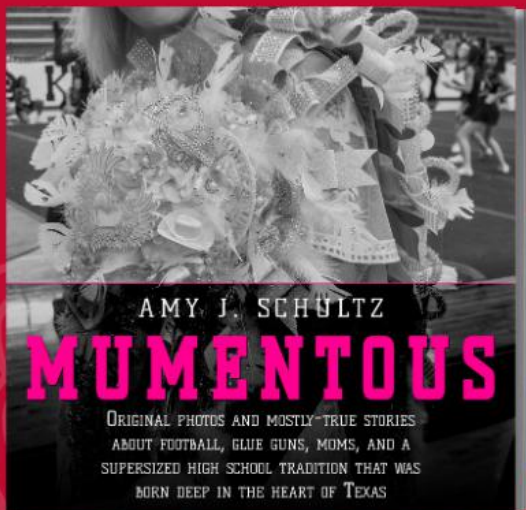
Learning inspires more learning.

Finally, there's another aspect to curiosity that is made for September. Experts tell us that the experience of being curious is more likely to be positive when we expect our curiosity to be satisfied sooner rather than later. Because September is the month of reengagement, we're anticipating less and doing more. The kids are back in school. We're full speed ahead.



**WANT TO KNOW  
MORE ABOUT HOW  
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Real-time learning, creative adapting, and forward momentum is the stuff of September as well as curiosity fulfilled.

In addition to those rounded scissors, I hope a hearty dose of curiosity is at the top of your school supply list. Even if you're not literally going back to school, September is the perfect time to restock the tools that serve you best. Here are four ideas I particularly like:

**Keep a journal of questions.** I keep a journal, but some days I struggle with inspiration. When that happens, I think of Leonardo da Vinci, who kept extensive notebooks of observations and questions. I always have observations and questions! Historians cite da Vinci's notebooks as prime examples of how curiosity fuels invention. "To become an artist," da Vinci said, "you have to be curious."

**Break a routine.** “I’m curious about everything, even things that don’t interest me.” When I’m in a rut, I remember this quote attributed to long-time Jeopardy host Alex Trebek. Then I go find something that doesn’t interest me and *start asking questions*. When I’m not invested in the subject, my questions tend to be blunter and yield more thought-provoking answers. Suddenly, I’m interested and curious to learn more.

**Follow the slow hunch.** In his book, *Where Good Ideas Come From*, Steven Johnson compares one-off ideas with truly innovative ones. He says the latter develop by curiously pursuing them from all angles, al-

lowing them to fully incubate. “The trick to having good ideas is not to sit around in glorious isolation and try to think big thoughts. The trick is to get more parts on the table.”

**Reward curiosity.** Thanks to the dopamine, there’s already a reward built into epistemic curiosity. But I think it’s also important to acknowledge and celebrate curiosity in yourself and those around you. Huzzah to the child who asks questions in class! Huzzah to the parent who encourages exploration! Huzzah to the coworker who looks for the second right answer!

Huzzah to you for being curious about curiosity!

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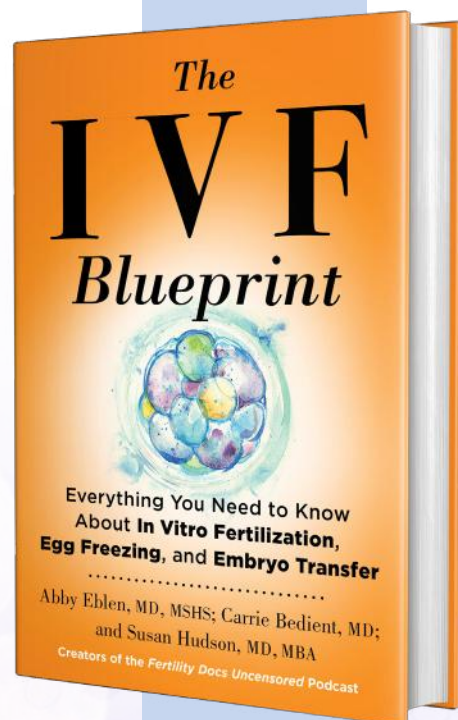
<https://youtu.be/uY1-eXclp3w?feature=shared>

## THE JOURNEY FROM PHYSICIANS TO PODCASTERS TO AUTHORS...

# *A Path of Discovery*

**I**n the late fall of 2019, no one could imagine what was about to happen (the disruption of global pandemic.) At a medical conference dinner, a marketing executive suggested some of us physicians should consider starting a podcast. Podcasts were transitioning from a niche interest to a mainstream medium. By the end of dinner, and after a couple of glasses of wine, the physician next to me—a complete stranger until that evening—and I had already decided this was a great idea. The marketing executive then mentioned another female physician who might be interested, and soon the three of us were connected. Over a couple of phone calls and emails, we decided to give this a go.

Just a few months later, we flew to Las Vegas for Valentine's Day weekend to record our first five or six episodes of *Fertility Docs Uncensored*. Recording in person was not only fun, but it also allowed us to begin building a genuine connection. We left knowing this was something





we wanted to continue. However, we weren't sure how we were going to be able to do that since we were spread across the U.S.—I'm at the Texas Fertility Center in New Braunfels and Corpus Christi; they live and work in Nevada and Tennessee.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and the world of Zoom and other virtual platforms became the cornerstone of communication and connection. We jumped on that bandwagon and found our rhythm. As a team, with accountability and

support built in, we've successfully released a weekly podcast on all things infertility for more than five years accounting for nearly 1.5 million downloads.

From the beginning, we talked about writing a book. By the time we approached a million downloads, we knew the timing was ideal. We had an established audience, a collective voice, and a strong relationship that would support such an endeavor. We chose IVF as our focus, recognizing that our audience responded best when we dug deeply

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into a specific topic. From the hundreds of questions listeners sent us, it was clear that digestible, trustworthy information about IVF was needed for the one in eight people affected by infertility.

Fortunately, we had friends and relatives that had previously published books; one had published multiple educational books, one a personal memoir about her fertility journey, and one a series of novels. Their guidance helped us see how

different and complex book publishing is compared to journal publishing, which we had all done previously in our careers. Given our busy medical practices, personal commitments, and the podcast, we quickly realized that self-publishing wasn't the right path for us.

Being the compulsive physicians we are, we drafted a table of contents and sample chapters, then sought representation. We were fortunate to connect with literary agent Regina Ryan, who immediately understood our vision and helped us secure a contract with Little, Brown Spark, an imprint of Hachette.

Then the real work ensued... writing what would become *The IVF Blueprint*. We divided chapters among ourselves and created deadlines to keep each other accountable. The most challenging chapter, on supplements, we split between us to share the load. Most of the writing came very naturally because it is what we share

with our patients and listeners every day. After years of podcasting together, we could almost anticipate each other's voices, ensuring balance in perspectives. Once the draft was complete, we edited each other's chapters for clarity, accuracy and consistency. In the end, the book reflects the collective voice of *Fertility Docs Uncensored*.

What did we learn along the way? Whether producing a

podcast or writing a book, collaboration makes the journey not only easier, but richer. It provides built-in accountability and integrated support. Our diverse strengths elevated the final product beyond what any one of us could have created alone. And most importantly, when you choose a subject you're passionate about, the process becomes more than just work...it becomes a deeply rewarding path of discovery.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Susan Hudson, MD**, is board-certified in reproductive endocrinology and infertility and obstetrics and gynecology. Dr. Hudson practices at Texas Fertility Center in New Braunfels and Corpus Christi, Texas. She currently serves as medical director for an Ovation-network andrology lab within her clinic. She served as

Chair for the Texas Medical Association Council on Practice Management Services in 2019-2021 and is an active member of the American Society of Reproductive Medicine and the Comal County Medical Society.



## CREATIVITY FOR THE COMMON GOOD

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## JUST FOR WRITERS

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](http://arthousedallas.com)

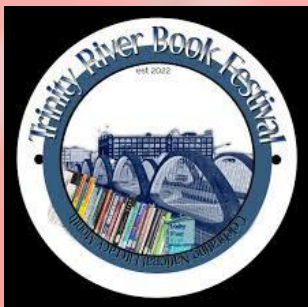
# BOOKISH EVENTS

## SEPTEMBER Major Events

*The Texas literary community has you covered with bookish events to fill your every need.*

Make sure to check the Lone Star Lit Bookish Events calendar for details on these major events as well as a plethora of author signings, poetry readings, and more.

SEP 12-14	Armadillo Con	SEP 15	Hispanic Heritage Month Begins
SEP 13	Trinity River Book Festival	SEP 21	Fall in Love with Reading Festival
SEP 13-14	Eastern Rim Funny Book & Vintage Con	SEP 26-27	Texas Word Wrangler Book Festival
SEP 13-14	Fort Worth Book & Paper Show	SEP 28	Rhythm of Poets

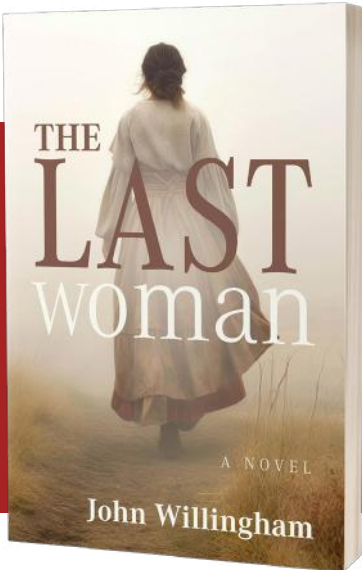




# EVENTS HOW-TOS VIDEOS

# SPONSORED

## EDITORIAL REVIEWS



Tagline: An Odyssey of the Old West

HISTORICAL FICTION

## **The Last Woman**

**John Willingham**

TCU Press

August 15, 2025; 272 pages

978-0-8756593-4-3

John Willingham's latest book, *The Last Woman*, is an enticing novel inspired by true events and rich imagination. At its heart, the Georgetown, Texas, writer's new work is an expansive retelling of a famous romance between a saloon girl from Louisiana, nicknamed "Frenchy," and an Irish gambler named Mick, who took a big chance and moved to Tascosa, Texas, in the late nineteenth century. That Panhandle hamlet briefly grew into a serious economic rival of a more famous cattle town, Dodge City, Kansas, in the 1880s. But later, heavily dam-

aged by a storm and bypassed by a railroad, Tascosa gradually dwindled until it finally became a ghost town populated only by the gambler's widow. After Mick died in 1912, Frenchy continued living there alone nearly until her death in 1941. She watched over her husband's grave and hoped the town's empty buildings and houses someday might return to life. On a wider scale, Willingham's novel also spotlights some of the key struggles and dangers young women faced as they came of age after the Civil War and tried to start their adult lives on their own terms. No matter

how smart, talented, or ambitious they were, their parents frequently expected them to marry someone “suitable,” have children quickly, and stay close to home without a job or career. Not surprisingly, young women sometimes rebelled against that stifling future and left home any way they could, on foot, horseback, wagon, passenger train, or—as in this colorful story—on a Mississippi River steamboat slowly surging upstream from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to St. Louis, Missouri. Unfortunately, as this book illuminates, many young female runaways ran out of money and ended up working in saloons, bordellos, or burlesque shows, or as street prostitutes. City life was expensive, and there were few jobs open to women beyond schoolteacher, housekeeper, nanny, or sales clerk in new-fangled “department” stores. In *The Last Woman*, Catherine McCain flees home after telling her mother: “I’ve been hearing you for almost eighteen years ... I stopped listening when I was

ten. I figured I’d heard plenty about never being good enough, or pretty enough, or smart enough, so I decided to listen to myself for a change.” She heads upriver toward St. Louis, but is soon sexually assaulted. During the struggle, she manages to grab a hatchet and kill her attacker, yet she is jailed and charged with murder. A Helena friend, Mamie Jackson, cleverly helps Catherine escape from the jail. And a third friend, Louise Pennette, whom Catherine had known in Baton Rouge, meets them in St. Louis. She shows them how to hide in plain sight in burlesque acts and in saloons around faro card games. Some time later, still not letting anyone else know she is wanted for murder, Catherine heads off to wild-and-woolly Dodge City with Mamie. There, they work in the saloon business, and Catherine uses her nickname “Frenchy” because of her Louisiana Cajun background. Soon, she finds love with Mick McGinnis, the self-as-

sured, successful gambler. The author also brings a tension-building revenge motive to *The Last Woman*. The brother of the man Frenchy killed in self-defense in Arkansas begins trying to track her down, hoping to exact revenge. When Frenchy learns she is in new danger, she finally reveals to Mick how and why she killed a man. He responds by letting her know that he, too, has some bad events in his past. With Frenchy's safety now in mind, Mick tells her that new opportunities might be found down in Texas. He moves her to Tascosa with the promise that he will build a house for them

quickly and start a livery stable. He does this, and Willingham writes: "It did not take Frenchy long to share Mick's vision of making a home in the town. She liked the fact that hypocrisy did not hover over most of Tascosa's human relations. People saw what they saw, knew it for what it was, accepted it, and went on about their business." Tascosa proves a good place for them both to continue their long-term romance. But changes inevitably are coming, and dangers are always out there, just beyond the front porch they now lovingly share as man and wife.

— Si Dunn

John Willingham's fiction, essays, and op-eds have appeared in *Southwest Review*, *San Antonio Review*, *Texas Observer*, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, *Religion Dispatches*, *History News Network*, Texas newspapers, and other publications. He has a BA in history with honors and an MA in American history from the University of Texas at Austin. He is a former election official in Texas.



# Let Birds Fly

A Story Collection by Rhea Thomas

Review by Maryann Miller

**A**s a fan of short stories and story collections, it was so lovely to receive an advanced reader's copy of this new book, *Let Birds Fly*. Just from the title, it seemed like this was going to have stories that encourage freedom, and that's true. Not in a literal sense. No actual birds are set free, but each of the characters finds a new direction in their life—whether that involves a new job in a field that they have always wanted to work in, a new place to live, or finding the courage to pursue a lifelong dream.

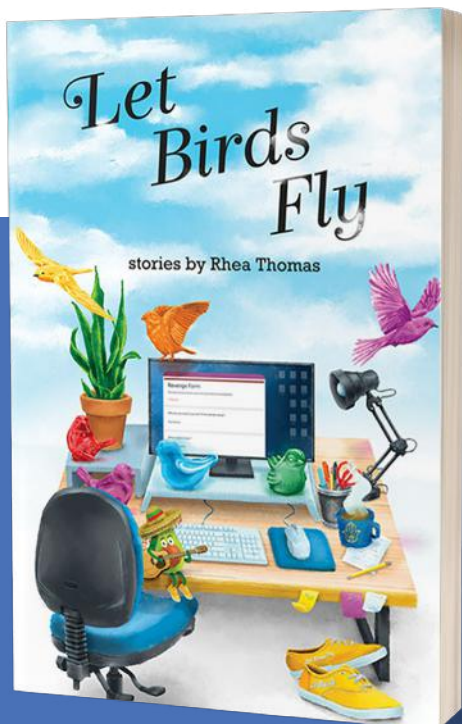
That daring to do what's in one's heart is a theme present in each story, and by the time I was halfway through the book, I was pleased to see my initial theory play out in such varied stories with such interesting people.

In some ways, this collection is presented in a writing style often used for sharing anecdotes rather than short stories; it lacks those fictional elements that explore character development deeply. Think of works like those of Alice Munro, who creates characters so textured and moments so precise that the reader feels like they know them on many levels.

The characters in *Let Birds Fly* are all interesting, mainly due to some quiriness in each one that makes them endearing, and there is a bit of character arc in that they all face a moment when they must decide to change their life. And they are happier for making that choice. But that arc lacks some of the deep contemplation and emotional reactions that are often found in other works of fiction.

To counter that is this wonderful sense of fun and magic contained in all the stories. There are talking avocados, smiling statues, images that dance on mugs, a talking tea kettle, and magical paintbrushes. At first glance, that whimsical magic could come across as too silly, making it unbelievable, but Rhea Thomas makes it work within the context of the stories, primarily because the reader is eager to see if each new character we meet is going to take that leap into “flying.”

Because of that sense of fun and enchantment, each story is a joy



to read, and one of my favorites is *Casa Dos Luna*. Matilda, a photographer, goes to a small adobe house in the mountains of Santa Fe to recover after an emotional and mental breakdown. During the visit, she recalls the times she was there with her twin sister, Melinda. How those memories are woven into the story is sweet and touching: “When they were in high school, Mellie and Matilda always talked about their compasses pointing true north, that it was their creativity and imagination that kept them going...”

*Casa Dos Luna* also has nice descriptions of the beauty of the area and the house: “Muted red and gold carpets covered and softened the tile floors. Wooden beams lined the ceiling and all the door frames.” That is a room that can easily be seen through the reader’s eyes.

As the book progresses through the stories, the connections the characters have to each other—from family to friendships to the place where they work—are

revealed, which is another nice element of the storytelling.

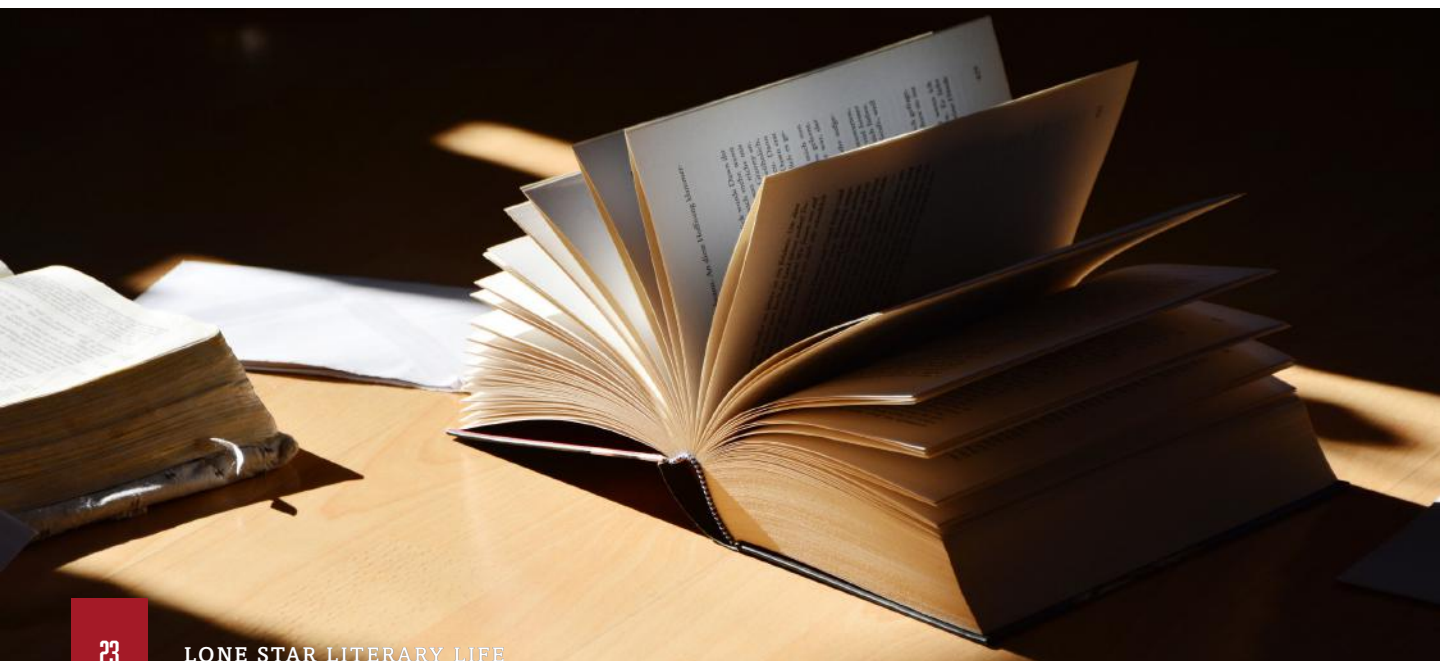
And what fun to see a side of the Greek goddesses Aphrodite, Hera, and Athena, who appear in the story *Too the Fairest* to claim ownership of a magical apple. They squabble like teenage sisters fighting over a favorite sweater, and there are scenes that make a reader laugh out loud. Such as when Aphrodite first arrives and announces, “‘I made it.’ Athena rolls her eyes. Hera sniffs loudly and looks away.” So much more fun than how they are portrayed in *The Odyssey*.

There’s a nice wrap-up at the end, where the magical ele-

ments and the characters from all the stories play a part in a delightfully surprising grand finale. I’ll admit, I didn’t see some of it coming.

Even though there’s a bit too much telling, not showing, throughout—such as, “Lucy looked impressed”—the stories are engaging enough that there never was a point where I wanted to abandon the read.

*Let Birds Fly* is a good book to stash in a satchel to read while waiting to pick up kids or sitting in the waiting room at a doctor’s office. It’s fun. It’s entertaining. And the stories are short enough to get one or two read in ten or fifteen minutes.



# BOOK CAMPAIGNS

## September Magazine Book Campaign Info

**Lone Star Literary Life Book Campaigns** has five stellar books to share for September.

This month join us to explore a mysterious quest, a sports romance, a camel adventure, and two coming-of-age tales.

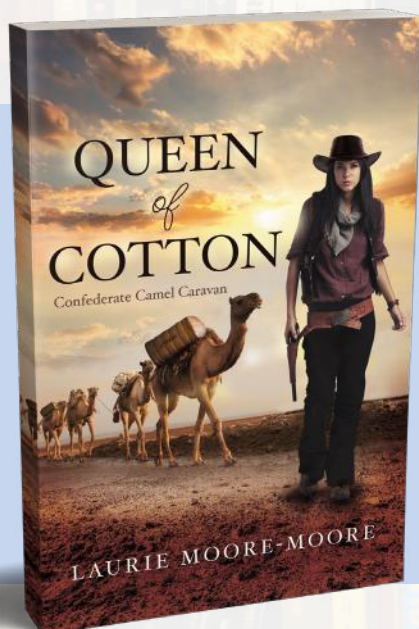
Follow along on social media throughout the month for exclusive insights, behind-the-scenes content, and exciting updates about these must-read books. Many campaigns also include fantastic giveaways—your chance to win prizes that bring these literary adventures to life!

Don't miss out! Dive into these stories, connect with the authors, and discover your next favorite read. Stay engaged on social media to join the conversation and the fun. You can find us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Threads](#), and [X](#).

## The Bulls of Bashan

By Jodi Lea Steward

Progressive Phoenix Rising Press  
Historical Fiction / Mystery Action and  
Adventure / Quest Fiction  
September 2-15



## Queen of Cotton

By Laurie Moore-Moore

Goat Mountain Press  
Historical Fiction  
September 9-22

## The End Game

By Michael Scott Clifton

Sports Fiction / Contemporary  
Romance / Sports Romance  
September 16-29





## **Narrow the Road**

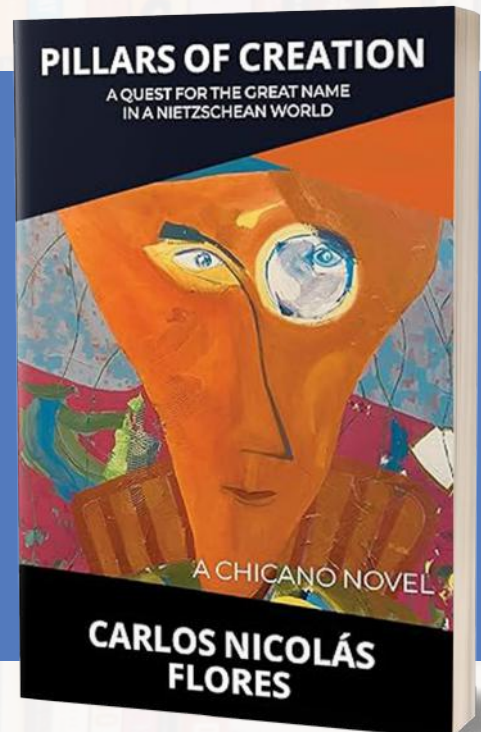
*By James Wade*

Blackstone Publishing  
 Historical Fiction / Literary Fiction /  
 Coming-of-Age  
 September 23–October 6

## **Pillars of Creation**

*By Carlos Nicolás Flores*

Atmosphere Press  
 Literary Fiction / Coming-of-Age  
 September 30–October 28





# LITERARY PODCASTS FEATURE

**Learning, Lone Star style:** our September roundup blends how-to guidance for writers with front-porch Texas storytelling. Cue them up and grow your craft while falling even harder for Texas books.

You can find even more Texas literary podcasts to explore on our website.

**SCAN OR CLICK THIS**



**Texas Standard >>  
Stories from Texas**

**Once Upon a Time  
in Texas**



**Time to Write**

**The Write Atmosphere**

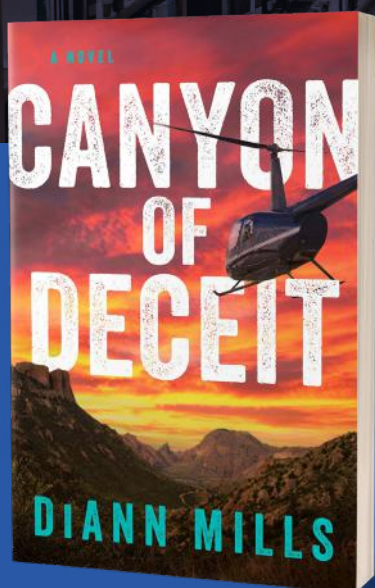


# TEXAS BOOKS PREVIEW

## September Texas Books Preview Information for Magazine

### PUT SOMETHING EXCITING ON YOUR BACK-TO-SCHOOL SHOPPING LIST

Fall schedules can get jam-packed in a hurry. Remember to schedule in a bit of 'me time' with a crisp new read from our September Texas Books Preview list. Lone Star Lit rounds up new Texas-connected titles for your fall TBR. Whether you're in need of some inspiration or education, romance or realism, fantasy or knowledge, you'll find the perfect book to keep your brain happy.



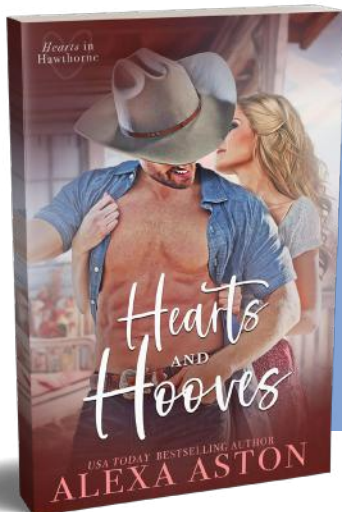
### **Canyon of Deceit**

*DiAnn Mills*

Romantic Suspense

Tyndale

9/9/25



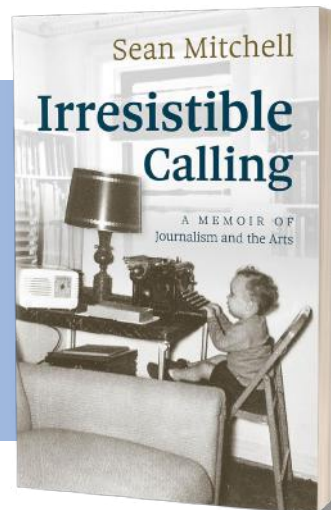
## Hearts and Hooves

By Alexa Aston

Contemporary Romance/ Small-Town Romance

Oliver-Heber Books

9/16/25



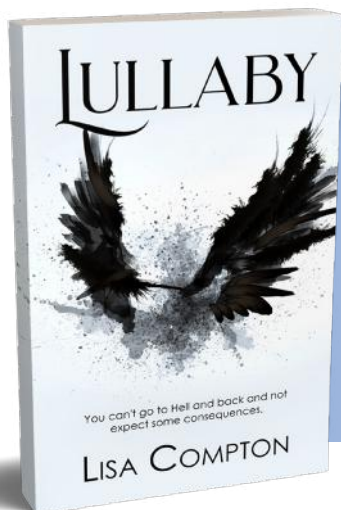
## Irresistible Calling

By Sean Mitchell

Nonfiction / Memoir

TCU Press

8/15/25



## Lullaby

By Lisa Compton

Paranormal / Mystery / Thriller

The Wild Rose Press

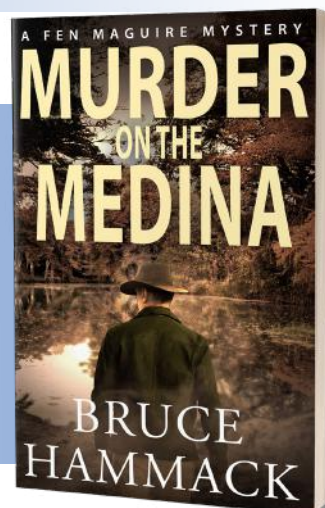
9/17/25

## Murder on the Medina

By Bruce Hammack

Mystery / Private Investigator

9/18/25



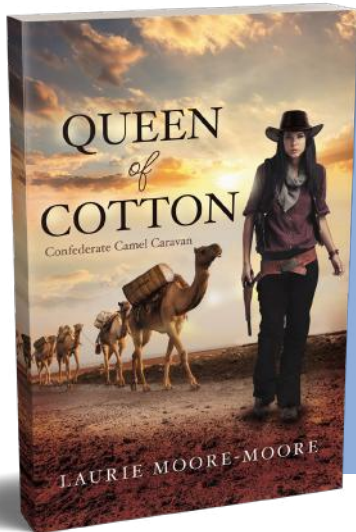
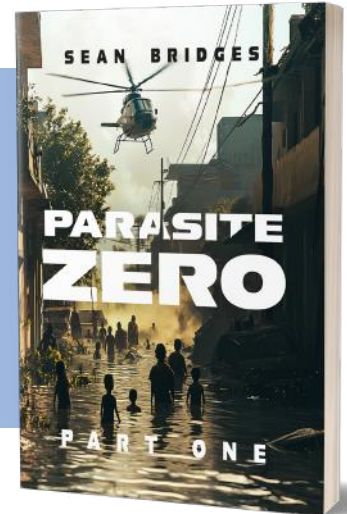
## Parasite Zero

*By Sean Bridges*

Suspense / Thriller

Audible Parade Productions

9/15/25



## Queen of Cotton: Confederate Camel Caravan

*By Laurie Moore-Moore*

Women's Fiction / Action & Adventure / Historical Fiction

Goat Mountain Press

9/9/25

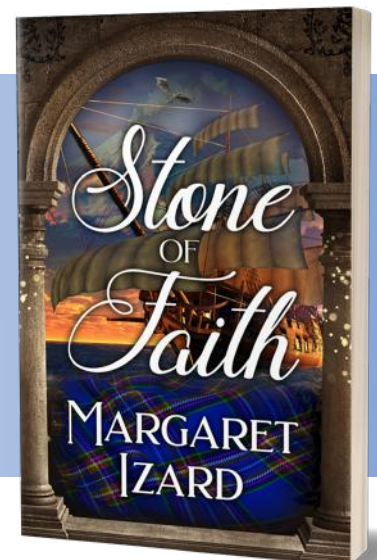
## Stone of Faith

*Margaret Izard*

Romance / Paranormal Romance

The Wild Rose Press

9/29/25





# MARKETING MOMENT

## **Get It Done—Without Doing It Alone**

If you've ever stared at your calendar, your manuscript, and your social feeds and thought, *I can't carry all of this at once*, you're in good company. Most authors we meet aren't short on ideas—they're short on time, clear next steps, and a supportive place to work the plan. That's exactly why we created **Get It Done Days**: one purposeful Saturday a month where writers gather to make measurable progress on the projects that matter most, with a warm community and gentle structure to keep things moving.

This isn't a conference with back-to-back panels you'll forget by Monday. It's a practical, sleeves-rolled-up workday designed for authors at every stage—from querying to debut to backlist revival—who want accountability, clarity, and momentum. You'll come in with a goal; you'll leave with work done, a lighter mental load, and a plan you can sustain.

## **Why a Dedicated Workday Works**

Our team hears the same refrain over and over: *I know what I should be doing—writing consistently, connecting with*

*readers, polishing my brand, planning content—but I never carve out the time to actually do it.* Meanwhile, social media shifts weekly, platforms reward consistency over perfection, and it's easy to slip into all-or-nothing thinking: post daily on every site or not at all; share your entire life online or disappear; design like a pro or avoid visuals entirely.

Our *Get It Done Days* threads the needle. We focus on the **four pillars** that help authors build a resilient, values-aligned creative practice: **Character, Content, Creativity, and Consistency**. You'll see these pillars woven through the day's mini-workshops and coworking sprints:

- **Character** helps you decide what parts of your story belong online, and what doesn't. You don't have to "bare your soul" to be authentic; you just need clarity about what you're comfortable sharing and why it serves your readers. When

authors dial this in, the result is self-awareness, purpose in what you post, and healthier boundaries.

- **Content** is your way of showing and telling: what you're writing, what you care about, and how your book fits into a reader's life. Intentional content frees you from decision fatigue; you don't need dance trends or gimmicks—just a plan that fits your voice and your goals.
- **Creativity** is the look and feel of your presence. You don't need to be a graphic designer, but you do need a simple, repeatable visual language—colors, type, and a few templates—to appear professional and memorable.
- **Consistency** is the habit layer—the systems and schedule that make it sustainable. Perfection isn't required; progress is. With the right prompts and a light-touch calendar, you can show up for your readers without sacrificing your writing time.

Underneath all four pillars is one shared belief: **your stories matter**. They matter to you, to the people you'll never meet in person, and to the one reader who needs your words at exactly the right moment. *Get It Done Days* are built to help your work meet those readers—on the page and online—in a way that honors your bandwidth and your boundaries.

### What the Day Looks Like

Each month's session runs **9:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.** in **Addison, TX**. We start with a casual welcome and goal-setting circle—no icebreakers, no spotlighting—just a quick check-in so you can articulate your one or two priorities for the day. Bring your laptop, your charger, and a light layer (meeting rooms have opinions about air-conditioning). Lunch is on your own, and we'll have a list of nearby options so you can grab a quick bite or walk with a new writer-friend.

The rhythm is simple:

1. **Mini-Workshop (Character, Content, Creativity, or Consistency)**. In 20–30 minutes, we'll introduce a single, targeted concept—say, shaping your “about the author” talking points, building a 30-day content plan, streamlining a brand board in Canva, or batching captions from prompts. The goal is **clarity, not overwhelm**.
2. **Guided Coworking Sprint**. We work in focused blocks with short breaks to keep energy high. You'll apply the mini-workshop directly to your project: drafting pages, mapping a newsletter sequence, designing three visuals you'll reuse, or scheduling a week's worth of posts.
3. **Gentle Accountability**. Short mid-day and end-of-day touchpoints help you celebrate wins, troubleshoot roadblocks,

and set your next micro-step so the momentum continues at home.

#### 4. **Community Time.**

You'll have space to ask practical questions, trade tips, and build relationships. We're big fans of the "no-ego, all-help" vibe.

### **What You'll Walk Away With**

These aren't one-and-done tasks for a single Saturday. They're cumulative milestones we'll assemble over the months



we meet, with each session moving one or two pieces forward. You'll leave every Get It Done Day with tangible wins, *and* a bigger toolkit that will take shape over time:

- **A clearer online persona** that reflects your values and your comfort level (Character). You decide the few facets of your life that belong on your public stage—and the many that don't. The result is less second-guessing and more purpose.
- **A right-sized content plan** that removes guesswork (Content). You'll identify two or three recurring "show and tell" themes, collect five story prompts that fit your voice, and sketch a light editorial calendar you can sustain.
- **A simple brand kit**—colors, type choices, and two or three templates you can tweak quickly—so your posts and newsletters look polished without hours of fussing (Creativity).

- **Systems for staying steady** (Consistency): prompts, a batching workflow, and a weekly 30-minute maintenance ritual that protects your writing time. Perfectionism can sit this one out.

Most importantly, you'll leave with **evidence**: pages drafted, emails outlined, posts scheduled, a brand board built, a query polished—whatever you chose as your goal for the day. That proof tends to quiet the loudest inner critic.

## How the Four Pillars Show Up in the Room

To give you a feel for the “vibe,” here's how each pillar translates from idea to action throughout the sessions:

### Character: Share Wisely, Connect Deeply

We'll start by exploring what you want your public presence to *feel* like—for you and for your readers. Expect a short reflection on your passions, boundaries, and quirks (yes, the little things count), plus

a few prompts to shape your “author as character” talking points. You'll identify three safe, sincere themes you can revisit often—say, your love of Texas trail walks, your fascination with found family tropes, and your devotion to



Friday-night taco runs—and three off-limits areas you'll never feel pressured to share. That clarity unlocks a kinder relationship with social media.

## Content: Show and Tell, with Intention

Rather than chasing trends, we'll help you frame your content around your writing life: *show* the process (research snapshots, line-level breakthroughs, the



playlist that keeps you in the scene) and *tell* the story (why this book, why now, who it's for). With a handful of prompts, you'll generate a month of ideas in under an hour. The outcome isn't an unbreakable schedule;

it's a flexible plan that respects your bandwidth and keeps your reader in view.

## Creativity: Make It Look Like You

You'll experiment with a tiny brand board—two typefaces, a simple color pair, and a few graphic elements that whisper your genre or themes. No design degree required. With three quick templates set up in your tool of choice, you'll stop reinventing the wheel and start shipping posts that look cohesive and professional.

## Consistency: Build a System You'll Actually Use

We'll share tools for keeping rhythm—caption prompts you can pull when you're tired, a once-a-month batching session that covers your next two weeks, and a buddy system for weekly check-ins to protect your writing time. The point isn't to post everywhere every day; it's to **show up where it counts**—and then get back to the page.



## Your Story Starts *Here*

You finished your first novel—yay! But now what? Maybe you're stuck on page two, can't wrangle a villain, or don't know how to land an agent.

Wherever you are in your writing journey, the 17th annual DFW Writers Conference is here to help.

Hosted by the DFW Writers' Workshop, DFWCon packs two days with classes, agent pitches, author sessions, marketing tips, and hands-on feedback. Plus, you'll build connections and find community with fellow writers.

**300+ attendees**  
**90 classes & panels**  
**15 agents and editors**  
**1 full weekend of networking**





## Who It's For (and Who It's Not)

If you're an author, poet, essayist, or literary professional with a Texas connection—or a Texan at heart—*Get It Done Days* were designed with you in mind. You'll feel at home if you:

- Crave focused time and friendly accountability.
- Want your online presence to feel authentic, not performative.
- Prefer a clear, human-sized plan to a complicated content machine.
- Believe stories make a difference—and you're ready to make yours findable.

If you're looking for a “hack” that replaces the work, this won't be your room. We champion steady effort and kindness—to your readers and to yourself.

## When and Where to Join Us

We meet on the **second Saturday** of each month from **September through May** (we skip December for obvious reasons), **9:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.**, in **Addison, TX**. Bring your laptop and your current project; wear layers; expect a welcoming space where you can settle in and focus. Lunch

is on your own, and we'll have suggestions ready so you can make the most of your break.

Whether you join us for a single session or make it a monthly ritual, you'll find the structure adaptable to your season. Some writers use the morning sprints to hit their word count and the afternoon to plan two weeks of reader-facing content; others flip it. A few tuck in an hour for business tasks—updating a short bio, cleaning up a link-in-bio, refreshing a headshot credit. We're here to help you use the day in service of your goals.

### **A Note on Courage (and Kindness)**

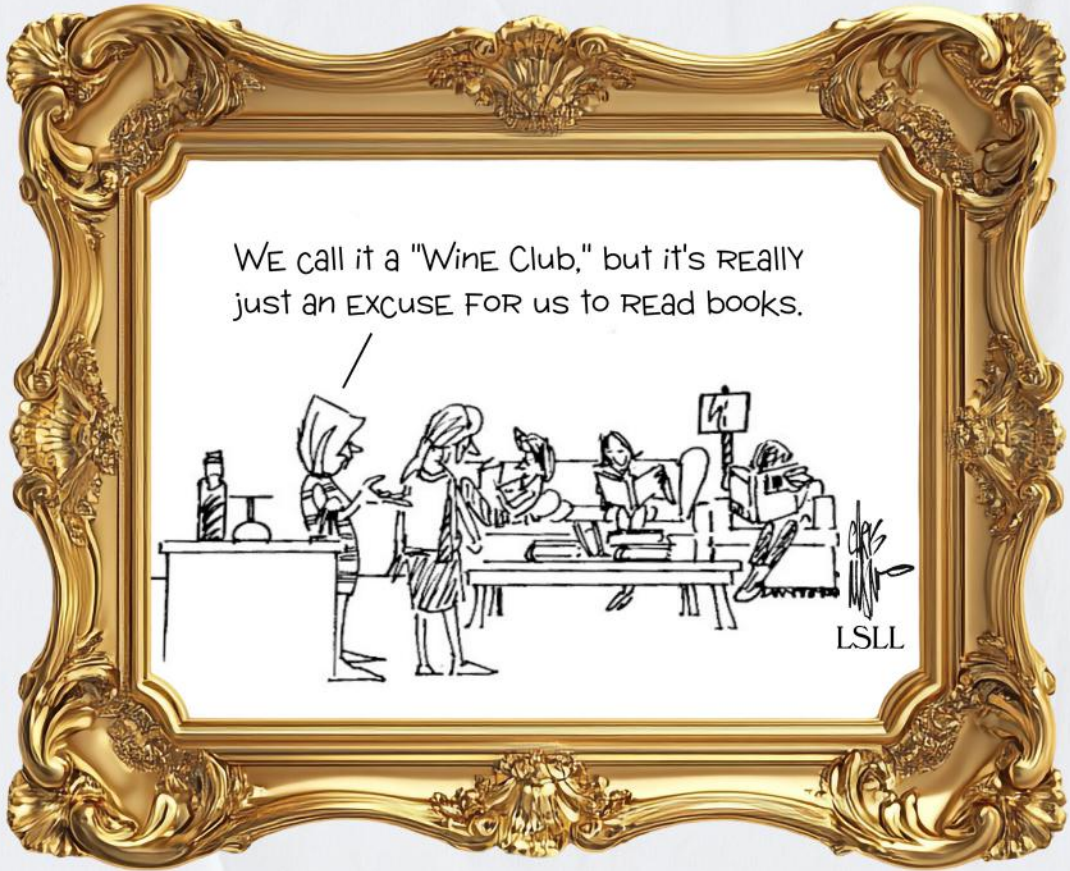
Many authors hesitate to show up in professional spaces because they fear being judged—by algorithms, by strangers on the internet, by gatekeepers, sometimes by themselves. We see you. The answer isn't to vanish or to overshare; it's to **tell the truth, thoughtfully**, about who you are and what you're making. Our hope for *Get It Done Days* is simple: that you'll discover the

steady, sustainable way you're meant to share your work—and that in doing so, you'll connect with the people your stories are meant to reach. Stories save lives; at the very least, they make hard days easier. We want your story to land in the right hands at the right time.

### **Ready When You Are**

If you're hearing the tug to protect one Saturday a month for your creative life, we'd love to welcome you. Come with a goal and your laptop. Leave with pages written, a plan you trust, and proof that you can **get it done**—without doing it alone.

We'll save you a seat.



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 [Cartoon Chronicle: Winter 2024-2025](#).



Welcome to Love, Jill, the column devoted to those of us who are enthusiasts of all things bookish. We read them, we listen to them, we lose ourselves in their pages. Many of us, like myself, know we'll never write one, but we are certainly most grateful that other people chose to weave worlds out of words for us to enjoy.

On the surface, it might seem strange for an extroverted girl like myself to list reading as her main hobby. How can I stand to spend hours reading all alone when I could be out in the world chatting up

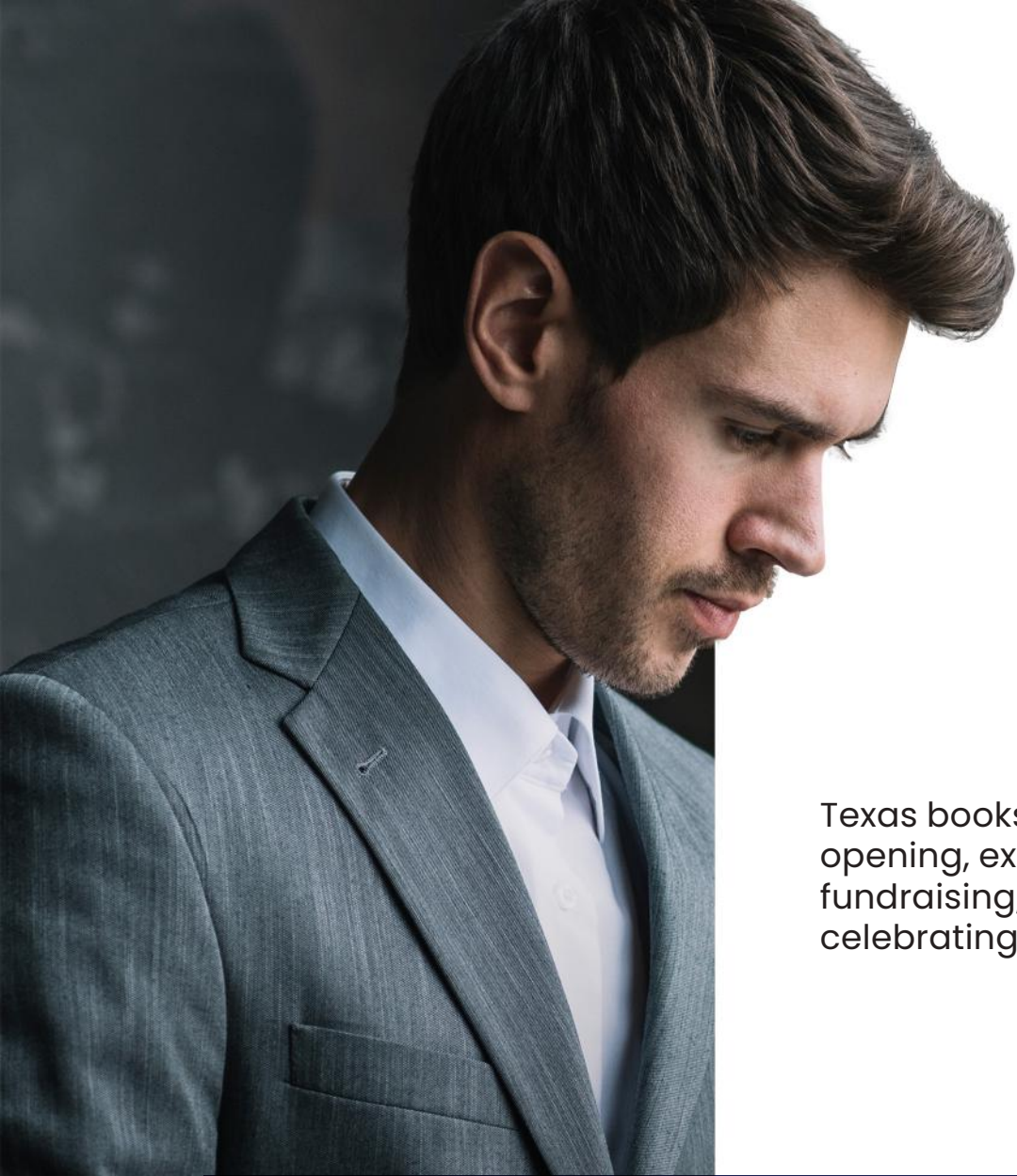
people in elevators, meeting friends for coffee, or attending a get-together? While I do love interacting with people, books allow me to meet people in ways I never could otherwise.

Reading helps me appease my curiosity about others and learn how they see the world in ways I don't or can't fathom. I might be fascinated by a woman walking past me with piercing eyes and an 'I dare you to try me' expression on her face, but I will likely never have the opportunity to talk with her to find out about her life. The level of intimacy required to discover someone's past, their motivation, and their dreams is a rare and precious thing we can't always achieve in real life.

I find people endlessly fascinating, and it's a fine line to be interested without being intrusive when getting to know someone. Not so when reading. I get to jump right inside the thoughts and feelings of characters for hours on end. I get to find out what it feels like to be a giant hockey player who can zoom across the ice, a gorgeous woman in a sparkly designer dress gathering all eyes at a gala, or a brilliant physicist searching for a breakthrough. I get to 'meet' people I will never come across in my ordinary little life and discover a bit about what their worlds are like.

Books push us out of our complacency and show us the world with new eyes. Through stories, we have the incredible opportunity to navigate feelings, ideas, struggles and identities we will never otherwise experience. The writers who bring us these characters offer us the rare opportunity to peek behind those curtains and explore a world or a perspective that's not our own. For that, I will always be most grateful.

Jill Anderson is a former teacher and academic advisor who focused her career on helping students find their voices and develop confidence in their own wonderfulness. A misplaced Texan, she currently lives in Tacoma, WA, but thinks the weather might keep her there permanently. [Jill@LoneStar-Lit.com](mailto:Jill@LoneStar-Lit.com)



Texas bookstores are opening, expanding, fundraising, and celebrating. Read on!

# BOOKSTORES AND INDUSTRY NEWS

## ABILENE

Barnes & Noble opened a new location in the Shops at Abilene on July 23, 2025. Author Monica Garner cut the ribbon and signed copies of *Summer on Cape May* to celebrate the opening.

## ARLINGTON

**Folklore Grove** opened as a dedicated space inside the restaurant Smash Toast. They offer a variety of books. They have dedicated shelf space to selling works by local authors to help increase their visibility.

## DALLAS

**Bird's Bookstore** announced that they will open in August in the Preston Royal shopping center. The store will offer a wide variety of books for all ages as well as a curated selection of magazines focused on design and fashion, European and Japanese stationery, and ceramics. Patrons will also be able to enjoy a small cafe serving coffee and baked goods.

## EL PASO

**The Nook Bookstore & Cafe** held their grand opening on July 26, 2025. A combined book store and wellness cafe, they plan to offer

products from local vendors and host weekly creative classes. They hope to be a hub for literature, creativity, community connection, and good eats.

## FATE

**Leather & Bound**, a bookstore and coffee bar, is open in Fate. They've opened the coffee shop and part of the bookstore, with plans to continue expanding the bookish offerings over time.

## GRAPEVINE

**Talking Animals Books** announced that they are expanding and opening a second location at 909 S. Main St. in November. The new location will include a coffee bar, wine tastings, a larger event space, and more. They have launched a Kickstarter to help support the business growth.

## KATY

**Mockingbird Books** opened in mid July. They offer wine and coffee in addition to a selection of new books and bookish items.

## LUBBOCK

**Lit Brews Coffee & Books** will open in late September near 50th Street and Indiana Ave.

Owner Elizabeth Roberts hopes to create a space where people can “have time for themselves.” The store will focus on new books, but will also offer some used books along with a coffee shop and bookish events.

**MIDLAND**

**The Plot Twist** bookstore held its grand opening on July 25, 2025. Run by a mother and daughter, The Plot Twist offers vinyl records and gift items along with a wide range of books. They have plans to offer book club meetings and local author signings.

**Paper & Vine Book Bar**, formerly Main Squeeze Midland, held their grand opening in August. The store now offers a wider selection of book genres as well as wine, beer, and dirty sodas.

**MINERAL WELLS**

**Glass Castle Books** announced that they will transition to a mobile bookstore in September.

**SAN ANTONIO**

**San Antone Books** announced that they were closing after less than a year in business. They needed to return to Italy to be with their family.

**Inprint  
Margarett  
Root Brown  
2025 Reading  
2026 Series**

Chimamanda Ngozi *Adichie* SEP 8

Adam *Johnson* OCT 15

Bryan *Washington* NOV 3

Kiran *Desai* NOV 17

Salman *Rushdie* JAN 12

George *Saunders* FEB 25

Álvaro *Enriquez* MAR 23

Marie *Howe* MAR 30

Yann *Martel* APR 27

brittney *ray crowell* & Nina *McConigley* MAY 4

**inprint**  
inprint.org



# 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.

One of these books contains mystery, intrigue, and complex puzzles and the other is a story of navigating identity, coming of age, and falling in love despite it all.



## **The Grandest Game**

Seven tickets. An island of dreams. The chance of a lifetime.

Welcome to the Grandest Game, an annual competition run by billionaire Avery Grambs and the four infamous Hawthorne brothers, whose family fortune she inherited. Designed to give anyone a shot at fame and fortune, this year's game requires one of seven golden tickets to enter. With millions on the line, those seven players will do whatever it takes to win.

Some of the players are in it for the money. Some for power. Some for reasons all their own. Every single one of them has secrets. Amidst it all is Grayson Hawthorne, tasked with a vital role in this year's game. But as tensions rise and the mind-bending challenges push the players to their limits—physically, mentally, and emotionally—it soon becomes clear that not everyone is playing by the rules.

Yale University, where she received her Ph.D. in 2012. Jen wrote her first published novel when she was nineteen-years-old and sold her first five books while still in college. Jen is an Associate Professor at the University of Oklahoma, where she holds a dual appointment in Psychology and Professional Writing.



The Grandest Game is a novel with mindbending puzzles, games, and mysteries. It features complex characters that feel like they could be your best friends. This novel is the first book in a new interconnected series to Inheritance Games set in Texas. But The Grandest Game contains even more layers of secrecy and motivations.

Jennifer Lynn Barnes is the author of more than a dozen critically acclaimed young adult novels. She has advanced degrees in psychology, psychiatry, and cognitive science, including graduate degrees from Cambridge University, where she was a Fulbright Scholar, and

## **The Accidental Boyfriend**

Jess is everything Gabe wants. Gabe is everything Jess doesn't know she needs. Some accidents were meant to be.

Gabe isn't a werewolf. He just plays one on TV. Jess has never been kissed. She just writes romance online.

TV heartthrob Gabriel Wade has never met a party he couldn't rock, a problem he couldn't

dodge, or a crowd he couldn't play. Homeschooled Jessica Thorne has never met a party she couldn't wallflower, a problem she couldn't stress over, or a crowd she couldn't escape. But they both know what it's like to lose someone ... someone who's still here.

After a hotel escalator dumps Jess into Gabe's spotlight and he unknowingly hijacks her first kiss, he decides she'll be the perfect decoy for the paparazzi. If he can convince her to play his "girlfriend of the week."

Except Jess isn't about to be anyone's fangirl and doesn't care about TV's Hottest Hairball or his Hollywood ego. And by the time she figures out Gabe isn't who she thought, it might be too late to say she needs him as much as he needs her. Even if he wants her for real.

The Accidental Boyfriend is funny, sweet, and emotional. The family dynamics are real and raw leading to characters that are relatable and that you just want to root for. It is written in dual POV and this writing choice just adds to the complexity of the emotions.

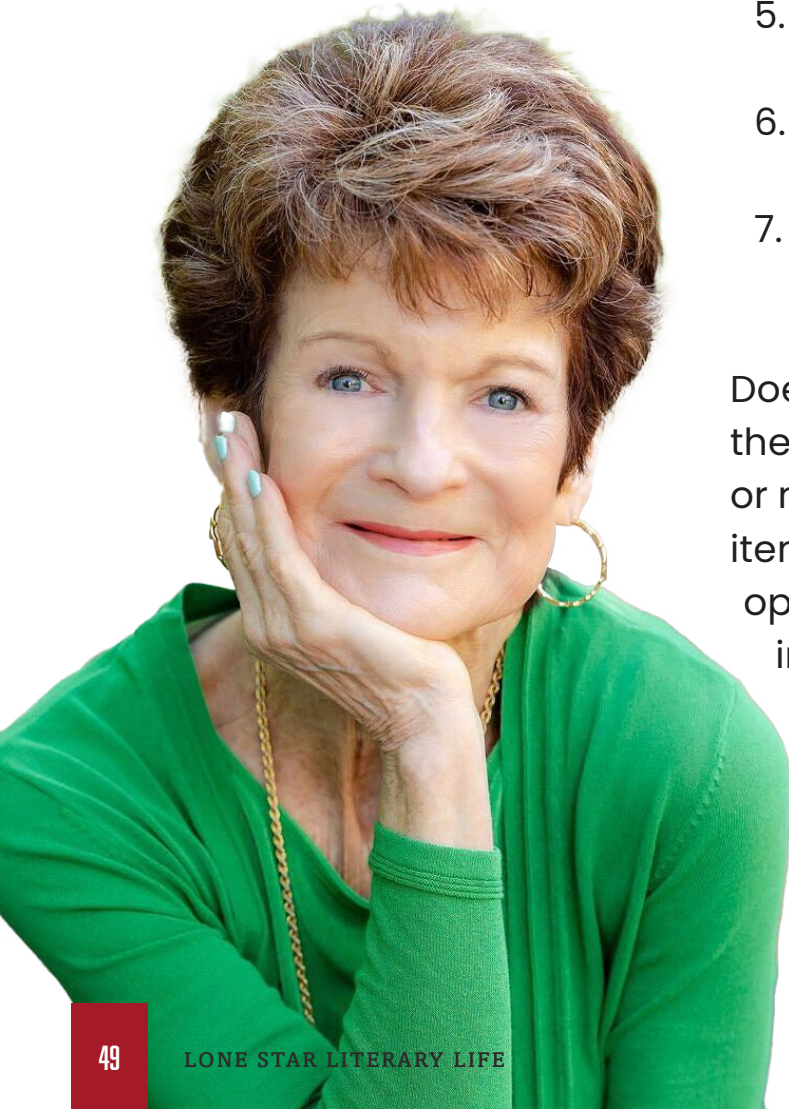
Lori Freeland wrote her first story at age five. It wasn't good, but it left her with the belief that everyone has a story to tell. An author, editor, and writing coach, she writes everything from articles to novels, has taught at conferences across the country, and helped many new writers find their voices. A mood reader, she loves happy endings, thrills and chills, unexpected twists, and anything a little weird—as long as it has a touch of romance. When she's not curled up on the couch with her husband and her dog drinking too much coffee, you can find her messing with the lives of the imaginary people living inside her head.

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

# TEXAS WRITES

Lone Star Lit  
DiAnn Mills  
September

## Commitment to Learning the Craft



What does commitment to learning the craft of writing mean to you? Do any of the traits below apply to the uniqueness of your writing life?

1. A dedication to acquiring new writing skills.
2. A continuous striving for more readers.
3. A push to master marketing and promotion.
4. Adhering to a specific word count during concentrated time.
5. Attending writing conferences.
6. Involvement in a writer's group.
7. The practice of reading bestsellers.

Does commitment to learning the craft mean selecting one or more to explore? The seven items above are all learning opportunities, a choice to incorporate those things and more according to our time, talents, and abilities. Writing isn't an easy task, and to succeed, a writer incorporates discipline and purpose.

Daily learning and applying those techniques that make sense isn't an easy task; it takes time and a plan. No matter what field or specialty a person undertakes, keeping up to date is a part of their career if they want to succeed. Writing is no exception. Is the commitment the same for everyone?

I encourage a mission statement that states the writer's goals, values, and how to proceed with hard work and integrity. Consider the inclusion of "passion." We've all heard, "I'm passionate about my book." The definition of passion includes something we would die for. A bit strong, I agree. But if faced with physical, psychological, or professional death, would we give up our writing? Something for each of us to think about. Our writing is a calling but maybe not in this season of our lives.

## What tips can we use to masterfully achieve our writing goals?

1. Examine our mission statement and set aside time to write, learn, and give back to other writers. Many of us have day jobs and family responsibilities that have priority.
2. Within the allotted time, learning how to improve our craft and staying updated about the latest trend in the publishing and marketing world are critical. This can be accomplished through blogs, how-to books, face-to-face groups, online workshops, and in-person or online writing conferences.
3. Find a comfortable platform(s) with social media and develop your following. Understand the platform and how it's different from others. Follow favorite authors, comment, and in the steady practice, we find

1. our voice. Some social media platforms draw in specific genres. Study to see if you are a good fit. Post regularly. When we provide information and resources to other writers, readers, and followers, we are giving back, enhancing their lives with useful information—even humor. Social media isn't about us but our followers. When we jump onto a platform to sell our writing, the all-about-me syndrome is revealed.
2. Discipline is key. We have a job to do, and the path there has lots of twists and turns.
3. Read. Read. Read. One of my sons learned to read at age four by sounding out words on the back of a Cheerios cereal box.
4. Determine to help a serious writer(s) who needs mentoring. This could be participation in an online or face-to-face writing group. This ensures the quality of the next generation of writers.
5. Repeat.

“Whether you’re an unpublished novelist or a sixteen-time New York Times bestselling author, you can always improve your craft. You can always become a better writer.” Robert Dugoni

Commitment to learning the craft of writing grabs onto determination, but we also need to accept what we can do according to our lifestyle. Our commitment is a striving to achieve our best.

**DiAnn Mills** is a bestselling author who believes her readers should expect an adventure. She weaves memorable characters with unpredictable plots to create action-packed, suspense-filled novels with threads of romance. DiAnn believes every breath of life is someone’s story, so why not capture those moments and create a thrilling adventure?



# GET IT DONE DAYS

Get Your Book Out There – Now!

*A one-day, in-person reset for your writing—  
right in the DFW area.*

 **You're juggling writing, marketing, and, well...life.**

We get it. That's why we created Get It Done Days—a monthly in-person event where authors come together to learn, focus, and finish what they start.

- ✓ Live workshops on marketing and craft
- ✓ Coworking time to apply what you learned
- ✓ Feedback and support from fellow authors
- ✓ Actual work DONE before the day ends

**You'll walk away with new skills, real results, and a reset that lasts all month.**

***Space is limited—only 10 spots available each month!***

**JOIN US FOR JUST \$147 PER SESSION**

Or commit to consistency:  
\$1076 for all 8 Get It Done Days  
(BONUS: templates + replay access included)

**RESERVE YOUR SPOT NOW**

# 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!**



# 2025 EDITORIAL CALENDAR

MONTH	THEMES	CONTENT DEADLINE	AD CLOSE	PUB DATE
JAN	PERCEPTION	1/6	1/6	01/08
FEB	LOVE	01/22	01/29	02/05
MAR	FATE	02/19	02/26	03/05
APR	RENEWAL	03/19	03/26	04/02
MAY	CELEBRATE	04/16	04/30	05/07
JUN	CHARACTER	05/21	05/28	06/04
JUL	FREEDOM	06/18	06/25	07/02
AUG	BEGIN	07/23	07/30	08/06
SEP	LEARNING	08/20	08/27	09/03
OCT	HARVEST	09/15	09/10	10/01
NOV	GRATITUDE	10/15	10/10	11/05
DEC	GIFTING	11/15	11/10	12/03



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