

THE LONE STAR LITERARY LIFE

M A G A Z I N E



OCTOBER 2025

ISSUE 13



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This year, as I enjoy the fleeting fall season (I hold these handful of days dear!) I've been thinking a lot about harvest—not just in terms of a new door wreath from the craft store or the basket of honeycrisp apples on my counter, but the wonder of enjoying something that began long before today.

In my husband's garden, I've seen how much toil, care, and patience it takes before he can begin canning his famous "Phil's Dills" pickles. The trial-and-error of when and where to plant; creating an irrigation system to thwart the blistering summer heat; protecting the crop from rabbits, birds, and bugs.

Publishing this magazine feels so similar. I recognize how each issue has been the result of seeds planted months—or even years—ago: experiences that prepared me, ideas that took root, partnerships that grew strong, and countless small efforts that now bear fruit.

As we celebrate this month's HARVEST theme, I invite you to pause and reflect: what are you harvesting right now because of work you've already done?

As we turn the pages of this issue, I hope you'll find inspiration to recognize your own harvest—whether it's a project finally coming together, a new friendship blossoming, or simply the chance to rest and enjoy the season.

Here at Lone Star Literary Life, our harvest has included the joy of launching our newly redesigned magazine, updating our website, welcoming fresh voices and perspectives, and deepening our connections with the Texas literary community. Just like the garden teaches us, the work we've done along the way matters, and the results are worth celebrating.

We would love to hear about what you're gathering in this season of abundance—your stories, your joys, and even the hard-earned lessons. After all, the harvest is sweetest when it's shared.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy".

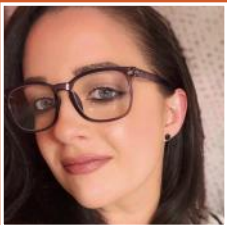
AMY KELLY

Editor-in-Chief, Lone Star Literary Life



VIDEO FROM THE EDITOR

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**Marketing
Moment**



CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF



Roxanne "Rox" Burkey

We are deeply saddened to share the passing of our dear colleague and friend, Roxanne "Rox" Burkey. Rox had been a treasured member of the Lone Star Literary Life review team since 2022, and her enthusiasm for uplifting Texas authors and her steadfast support of the

writing community touched us all. Born on December 2, 1952, Rox passed away on August 22, 2025. Her generous spirit, thoughtful insights, and unwavering encouragement made a lasting impact on everyone who had the privilege of working with her. She will be profoundly missed, but her

legacy of championing stories and storytellers will continue to inspire us.

In her honor, we wanted to share Rox in her own words. We are reprinting a feature on her that first appeared in the February 2025 issue of *The Lone Star Literary Life Magazine*.

What's your Texas connection?

My native Texas friends say I can consider myself a naturalized Texan, as I moved here over 20 years ago.

Favorite childhood book?

My favorite childhood books included *The Hardy Boys* mysteries.

Book that changed your life?

The Call of the Wild by Jack London aligned with my belief that dogs and people can have binding relationships. At the time, my dog, who had grown up with me, had saved my life as an infant. That's a story for another time.

Book you're reading right now?

I'm reading Kimberly Fish's *Home to Comfort* and *Texas Summers Are Murder* by Jinx Schwartz.

Five books in your to-be-read stack?

Death by Moonlight by C. W. Hawes; *Home to Comfort (Comfort and Joy)* by Kimberly Fish; *Revenge Waits No Longer: Callum Earley Thrillers, Book 1* by Mark Dickerman; *Dreamers of the Sea* by Louis Williams; and *Shared Madness* by Rick Moskovitz.

Favorite Texas-connected author?

I would be remiss if I failed to mention my co-author, Charles Breakfield. Over and above that, there are so many fine Texas authors who write across multiple genres. If I had to choose one, I would select Jan Sikes, as I like how her writing has evolved.

Top three books you've reviewed for LSL in the past 12 months?

The Desk from Hoboken by M. L. Condike, *The Nine Lives of Tito d'Amelia* by Ettore Farrattini Pojani, and *Pint-sized Pioneers* by Harriet and Preston Lewis.

What's your story? How and why did you begin reviewing books?

Like many authors, I have loved reading since I was small. I don't care to read horror, erotica,

or most self-help books for pleasure. My professional career has some technical reading. I enjoy mystery, fantasy, romance, historical fiction, memoirs, and thrillers.

Initially, I began reviewing books to track how many I read per year. I have reviewed books for several magazines—some under a pseudonym at the publication's request—and I also review audiobooks. Authors need constructive reviews that highlight both strengths and areas for improvement, and I felt I could provide this type of feedback.

I receive many requests to review books, which has created an incredible network of people. I have only refused to post a review for one book because it had too many editing issues. I spent hours with Post-it Notes, marking the issues and recommending that a strong editor was essential to tell that story properly. I have a goal of reading 100 books this year—we'll see if I can reach it.

What makes a book five-star-worthy for you?

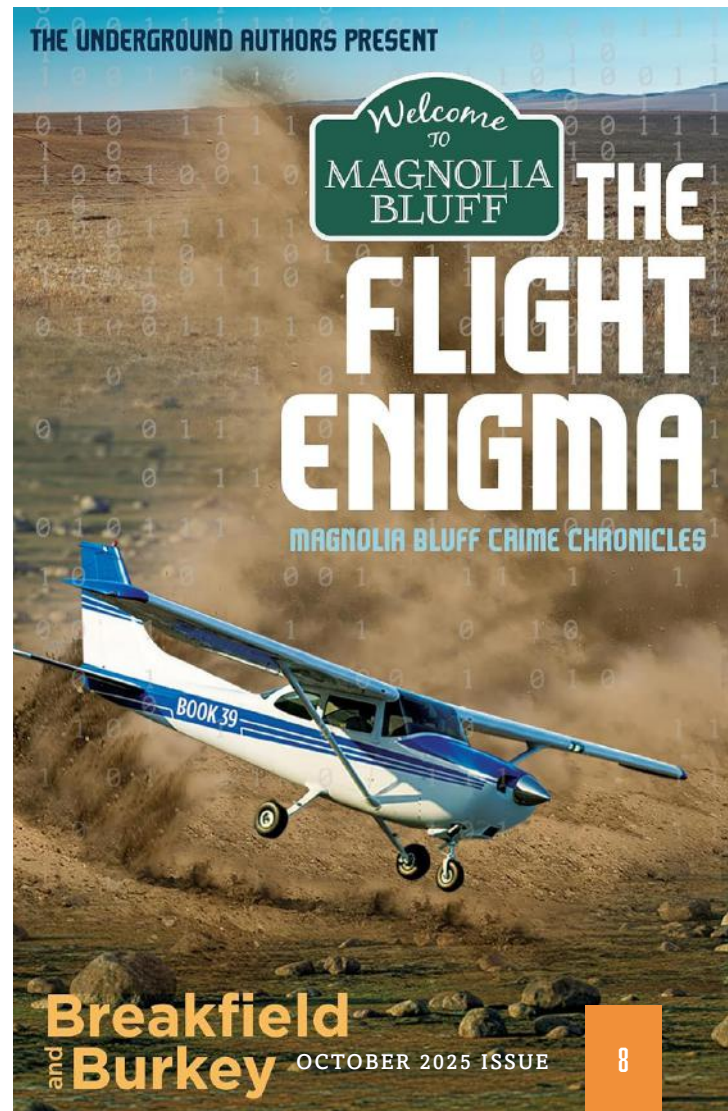
A book must captivate my imagination within the first few pages. World-building is a key element in many fictional stories, determining whether the setting and characters take shape in my mind. Do I want to walk alongside the hero or heroine? Is the dialogue believable? Am I able to figure out the ending long before I get there?

I enjoy surprises, aha moments, gripping suspense, laugh-out-loud humor, tearjerkers, and stories that stay with me for weeks. I am not a fan of excessive spelling errors that distract from reading, but finding one or two reassures me that a human rather than a machine created the book. Lastly, when I finish a book, I either pass it along to someone else or store it for future rereading. For example, the great romance speesy-spicy novels are saved—some are getting worn pages.

The family has asked that memorial donations be made in Roxanne’s name to the Arbor Day Foundation, one of her favorite charitable organizations.

Links:

<https://www.arborday.org/>



INTERVIEW WITH NATALIE DOSSETT

by **Melissa A. Bartell**



When I sat down with Natalie Dossett for a conversation about her debut novel *Sarita*, I was immediately struck by how deeply her Texas roots inform not only her storytelling but also her sense of self. A seventh-generation Texan with a history degree, she has the kind of family background that practically insists on narrative: ranchland, border towns, and the persistent voices of her ancestors.

"I grew up in San Antonio," she told me. "My family has been in Texas forever. I spent a lot of time on our ranch in deep South Texas — my dad loved it down there. If my mother had let him,

he would have moved down there and been a cowboy."

That blend of lived experience and inherited story is what eventually found its way into *Sarita*. The seed came during a creative writing course at SMU. What started as an exercise quickly grew into a manuscript rooted in a true event: in 1923, on her family's ranch, the foreman's son was killed by a tequila smuggler.

"I'd always heard that story growing up," Dossett explained. "And the more research I did, the more I realized how many women had shaped ranching life and Texas history — wom-

en whose contributions were almost invisible. That's when I knew my protagonist had to be a woman."

In her retelling, it's Sarita's little brother who is killed, and Sarita herself who must seek justice.

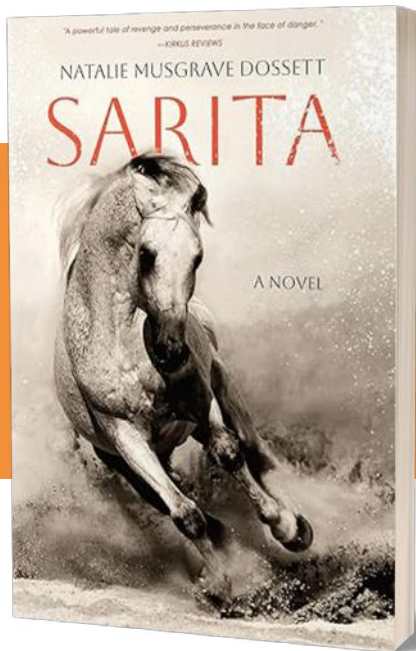
As a reader, what fascinated me was not just the plot but how authentic the history felt. Dossett attributes this to her love of research. "I'd go down these rabbit holes — spend days chasing one detail that might become a single sentence in the book. But knowing the texture of the time mattered to me. I think writers have an obligation to be true when we're working with real history."

That obligation meant exploring uncomfortable truths, including violence, corruption, and the fraught relationship between Texas and Mexico during Prohibition. Smuggling, she reminded me, wasn't limited to whiskey and gin in northern cities. On the border, it was tequila — and with it came guns, drugs,

and danger. "In some parts of Mexico, smuggling tequila was almost honorable. There were even ballads written about it. But it was also violent, and that violence shaped South Texas."

Some of the book's grittier scenes — particularly deaths of beloved characters — were hard for her to write. "I didn't plan them," she admitted. "They just happened. Griselda's death especially... I struggled. But for Sarita, it was a turning point. She couldn't look away anymore."

That unflinching approach to storytelling connects Dossett with the pioneering women she admires, both in her own family and in history. She name-checks Henrietta King, who turned the King Ranch into a profitable empire after her husband's death, as one of many women whose stories are overlooked. "There were so many women like that," she said. "I wanted readers to remember them, or at least to wonder about them."



The conversation turned, as it often does with writers, to balance. Dossett's career was in nonprofit development — grant writing, fundraising, the kind of practical prose that pays the bills but doesn't always feed the soul. At home, she and her husband raised a blended family of six children. Serious writing had to wait. "For years, I couldn't give myself permission to sit down and write. It looked like I was doing nothing, just staring at a screen. But eventually, the kids grew, and I had space. That's when I could finally finish the book."

She did more than finish it. She dedicated *Sarita* to her father, and under the dedication she placed three words: Never Give Up.

Her father had once given her a coin with those words engraved, and she still carries it. "There were so many times I thought, I can't do this, it's taking too long. But then I'd hear that phrase in my head. Don't give up."

It's as much a message to readers as it is to herself.

Of course, writers are readers, too, and when I asked about her influences, she rattled off a list: Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*, Ken Follett's *Pillars of the Earth*, James Marion Wilkinson's sweeping *Not Between Brothers*, and Elizabeth Crook's Texas novels. She also confessed a fondness for Stephen King. "His style is more like Garrison Keillor's than people realize," I told her. "Same folksy voice — only in King's stories there's a clown in the sewer instead of Powder-milk Biscuits." She laughed and agreed.

As we wrapped up, I asked what she's working on now. A sequel to *Sarita* is already underway, along with a YA novel and even a screenplay draft. She's not done telling stories.

Talking with Natalie Dossett felt a little like listening to one of those South Texas *corridos* she

mentioned — a ballad spun out of hardship, family, and grit. Her novel *Sarita* brings that history to life, but her own story is just as compelling.

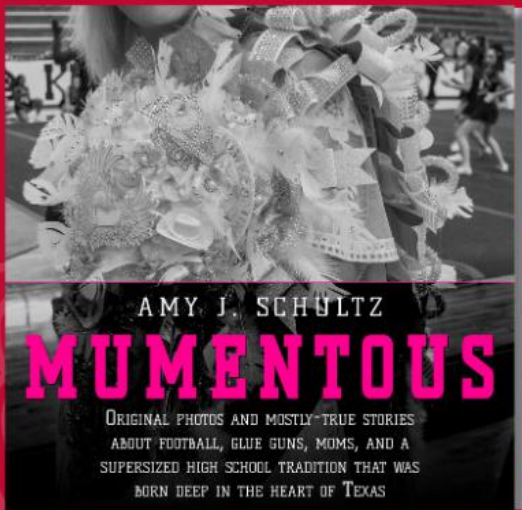
And the lesson she carries from her father, one she passes on to her readers, is simple but vital: never give up.

Connect with Melissa:

[Website](#) • [Facebook](#) • [Instagram](#) • [YouTube](#)

Connect with Natalie:

[Website](#) • [Facebook](#) • [Instagram](#) • [Buy *Sarita* on Amazon](#)



"I grew up in Texas, where homecoming mum-mania seems normal, so I wondered if the book would tell me anything I didn't already know...

but I couldn't put MUMENTOUS down!"

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BOOKISH EVENTS

OCTOBER Events

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

Visit the [Lone Star Lit Bookish Events calendar](#) for all the information to fill your days with books, authors, and literary fun.

OCT
4-5



DFW Con

OCT
4



Boerne Book Festival

OCT
5

Get Lit Book Fair

OCT
11



Tex-Indie Author Book Fair

OCT
18

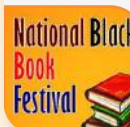
Spooktacular Book Fair

OCT
18-19



Beaumont Comic Con

OCT
23-25



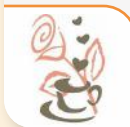
National Black Book Festival

OCT
25



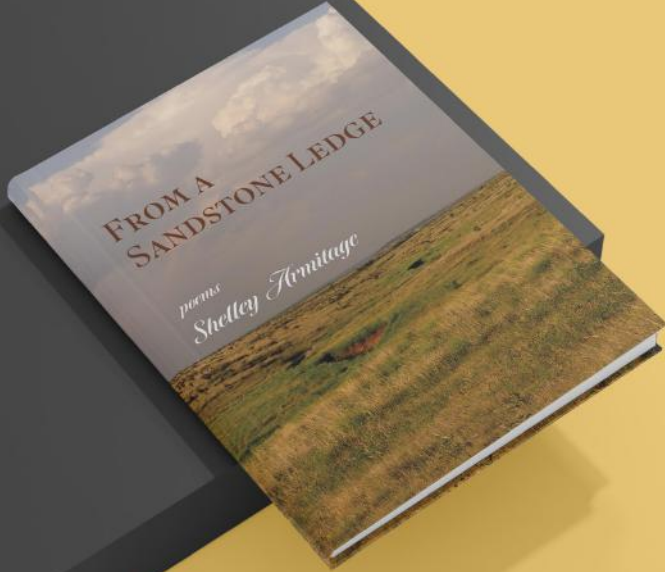
South Texas Book Festival

OCT
26



Buns & Roses Romance Tea for Literacy

SPONSORED EDITORIAL REVIEWS



Tagline: Untamed, undeveloped, undisguised—a place where past and present merge.

FROM A SANDSTONE LEDGE, POEMS.

Shelley Armitage.

Georgetown, Kentucky:

Finishing Line Press, 2025. 30 pages. ISBN 979-8- 89990-048-8. \$17.

Reviewed by Janet McCann

This collection gives us a Texas that is still untamed, undeveloped, undisguised. This is a place where past and present merge and being alive there makes the poet permanently a part of it.

Shelley Armitage grew up in the farming community of Vega, Texas. She still owns the family farm and has made it one of her environmental

projects. As a child, she helped the family with farm chores; she still walks the farm roads and collects new insights. She is now Professor Emerita at the University of Texas at El Paso. Over her lifetime, she has published in many areas and won numerous awards, including the Southwest Book Award and the Emily Toth Award. Her love for the natural world and desire to preserve it

animates much of her work—
—and her efforts on behalf of
the land are both in words and
in actions.

These poems explore the soul
of her East Texas landscape.
The opening poem, “Llano
Estacado,” gives the lie to
the negative impressions
of the first commentators:
“featureless” (p. 1) and “the
Great American Desert, a sea
of grass” (p. 1). She replaces
them with a pile-up of living
images, which are intensified
by the precision of her
language.

*Featureless? Creosote cholla gramma mesquite prickly pear
juniper and trust the pronghorn, themselves v*

er

*tical, to sniff out forbs bladderwort Mexican
buckeye acacia ironweed vervain daisies verbena crown
beard purslane panhandle grape vetch deer pea violet... (p. 2)
You can see and smell this “desert” and feel its life.*

Unfamiliar with botany, I had to look up the terms in the poem title ‘Xylem and Phloem.’ They are vascular tissues that facilitate the transportation of water, minerals, and food throughout a plant. Of course, they are metaphoric in the poem, which is actually centered on four different-era rocking chairs created of the “maple walnut cedar ash” (p. 8) of the woods. Sitting in them makes a living current flow through the speaker’s life, bringing back her childhood, adolescence, and other past experiences--connecting the woods, her family, and her individual sentience.

“To Make a Prairie” nods to the Emily Dickinson poem that begins with the same line. Emily did not require much to make her prairie--just a clover, a bee, and reverie--but Armitage does. This poem, like the others, reflects the selfhood of the place, but here the speaker is saddened by the incursions into this sacred

space by what has gone, what “disappeared before knowing”... (p. 21)

What was

*purple prairie clover,
amaranth, yarrow,*

...side oats gramma, blue stem,

*buffalo gramma, purple
ground cherry (p. 21)*

yielding to

*First, the over-grazing then
habitat*

*loss, no neighbors notice,
opting for*

*widened, improved roads,
electrical*

*towers, the steel will of
development... (p.21)*

This slim book invites multiple rereadings. I am only an adopted Texan, arriving in 1967 to be one of the few women

instructors in the newly co-ed Texas A&M. The poems evoked some of my first memories of this place, coming down to live here from the North--passing through the Llano Estacado and experiencing Texas sights and sounds for the first time. This collection makes me want to pass through it again, more slowly, taking time to sit on a sandstone ledge. Despite Armitage's "To Make a Prairie," I bet it hasn't changed all that much in the last 50 years.



Hey Writers!

HOW'S YOUR BOOK COMING ALONG?

Are you stuck in the "messy middle"?

Struggling with finding time to write?

Feeling overwhelmed by the publishing process?

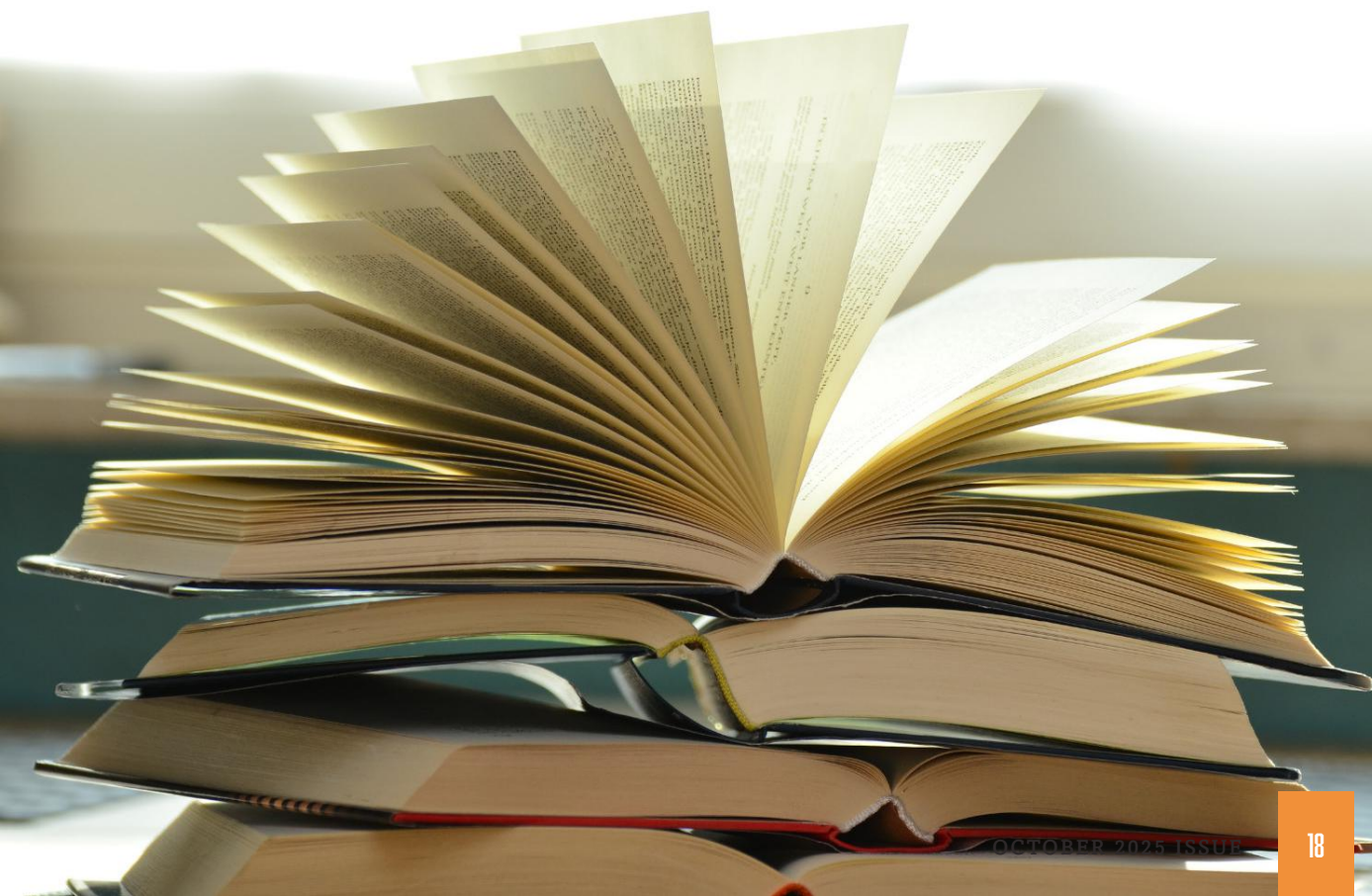
Swinging from hyper-productivity to gasping for accountability?

We Can Help.

NONE OF YOUR FAVORITE AUTHORS DID IT ALONE.

We help authors get their story out of their heads and publish gorgeous, high-quality books.

Find out more. Let's chat.



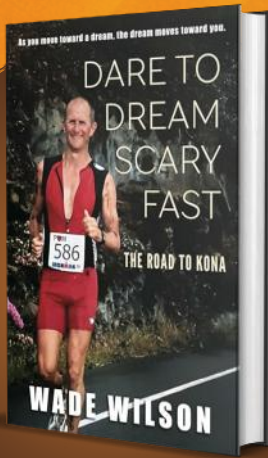
October Magazine Book Campaign Info

Lone Star Literary Life Book Campaigns has three exciting books to share for October.

This month we are sharing a compelling sports memoir, a poignant coming-of-age tale, and a taut historical mystery.

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](#).



Dare to Dream Scary Fast: The Road to Kona

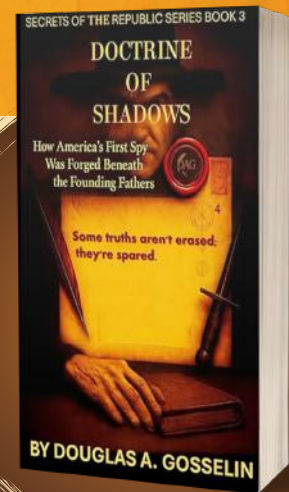
By Wade Wilson

Dare to Dream Publishing
Extreme Sports / Triathlons
October 7-20

Doctrine of Shadows

By Douglas Gosselin

Historical Fiction / Mystery / Thriller
October 14 – November 10



Pillars of Creation

By Carlos Nicolás Flores

Atmosphere Press
Literary Fiction / Coming-of-Age
October 21 – November 17





LITERARY PODCASTS FEATURE



In this season of Harvest, we're featuring the Hill Country Authors Podcast, which gathers a rich crop of conversations with Texas storytellers. Each episode shines a light on fresh voices and seasoned authors alike, offering listeners a bounty of insight, laughter, and inspiration. You can find even more Texas literary podcasts to explore on our website—tune in and enjoy the harvest of stories that grow deep in the heart of Texas.



Exploring Texas Tales: Cynthia Leal Massey's Journey, Writing Process, and Historic Inspirations



Aviation Therapy: From the Air Force to Southwest Airlines with David Dale



From Nursing to Novel Writing: The Journey of Teddy Jones



Exploring the Challenges of a Green Transition with Tom Ortiz



The Great Ice Cream War: A Conversation with Author John Brock



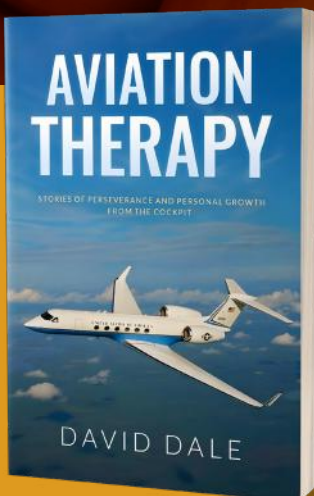
Exploring Mental Health and Community-Based Practices with Claudette Fette

TEXAS BOOKS PREVIEW

October Texas Books Preview Information for Magazine

*A bountiful harvest of
enticing new reads*

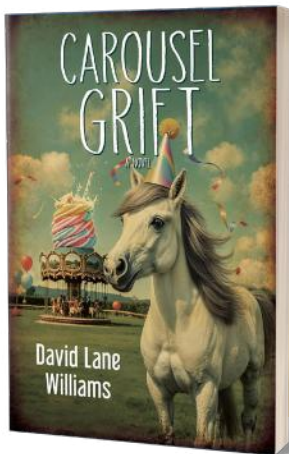
Fall is on its way, bringing a plethora of new Texas-connected titles. Grab your favorite sweater (even if you have to crank up the A/C to bear it) and get cozy with a fresh new read. We've picked a bumper crop of taut mysteries, compelling nonfiction, lush romance, and gorgeous picture books for the littles in your life. Peruse these top favorites and [click here to experience the entire collection on our website.](#)



AVIATION THERAPY: STORIES OF PERSEVERANCE AND PERSONAL GROWTH FROM THE COCKPIT

by David Dale

Aviation Memoir
Stoney Creek Publishing
10/21/25



CAROUSEL GRIFT

By David Lane Williams

Romantic Comedy / Women's Fiction

Black Rose Writing

10/23/25

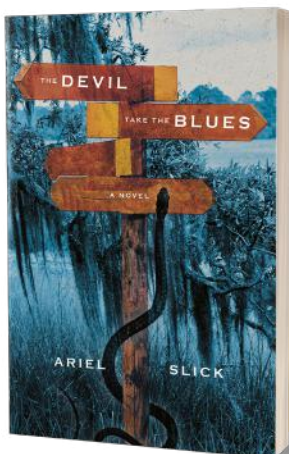
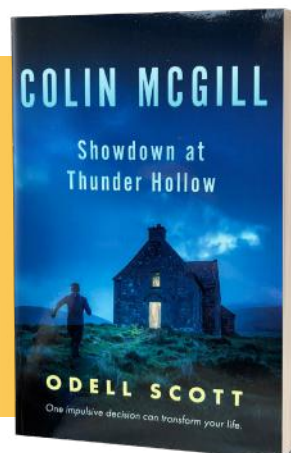


COLIN MCGILL SHOWDOWN AT THUNDER HOLLOW

By Odell Scott

YA / Adventure / Coming of Age

10/16/25



THE DEVIL TAKE THE BLUES

by Ariel Slick

Horror / Southern Gothic

Hell or Highwater Books

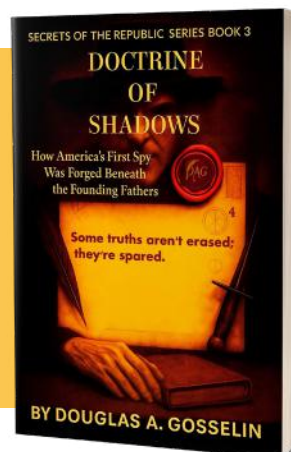
10/13/25

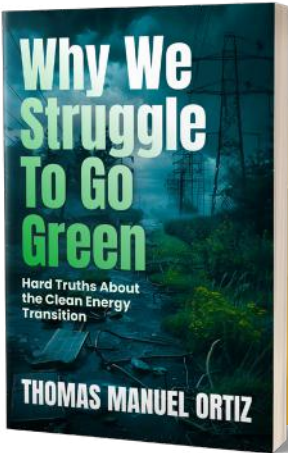
DOCTRINE OF SHADOWS

by Douglas A. Gosselin

Historical Fiction / Thriller / Suspense

8/28/2025





WHY WE STRUGGLE TO GO GREEN: HARD TRUTHS ABOUT THE CLEAN ENERGY TRANSITION

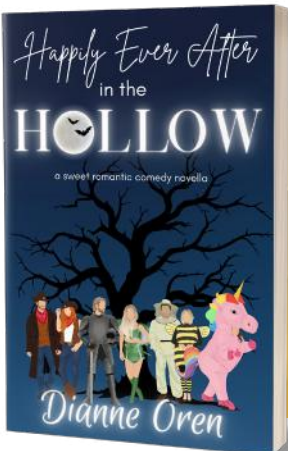
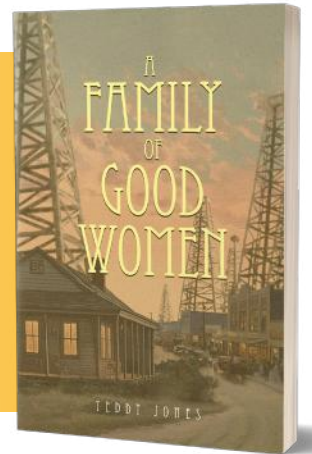
by Thomas Manuel Ortiz

Nonfiction / Environment / Energy
Stoney Creek Publishing
9/23/25

A FAMILY OF GOOD WOMEN

by Teddy Jones

Women's Historical Fiction
Stoney Creek Publishing
9/23/25



HAPPILY EVER AFTER IN THE HOLLOW

By Dianne Oren

Romance / Romantic Comedy / Sweet & Clean
10/01/25

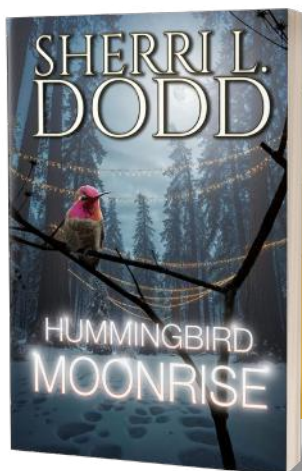


HOOPS AND HEARTS (BOOK 5 HEARTS IN HAWTHORNE)

by Alexa Aston

Small-Town Contemporary Romance
Oliver-Heber Books
10/14/25





HUMMINGBIRD MOONRISE

By Sherri L. Dodd

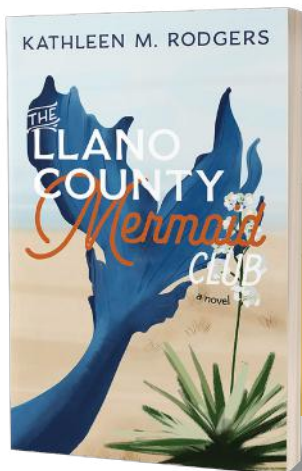
Paranormal Fantasy
Black Rose Writing
10/9/25



LEVI

by Amber Allee

Romantic Suspense / Second Chances
9/25/25



THE LLANO COUNTY MERMAID CLUB

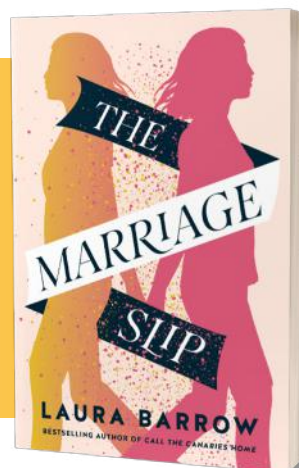
a novel by Kathleen M. Rodgers

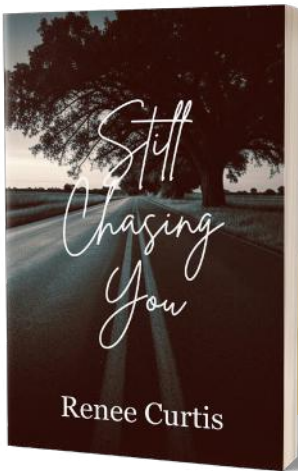
Literary Fiction / Coming of Age
University of New Mexico Press
10/7/25

THE MARRIAGE SLIP

by Laura Barrow

General / Bookclub
Lake Union
10/7/25





STILL CHASING YOU

by Renee Curtis

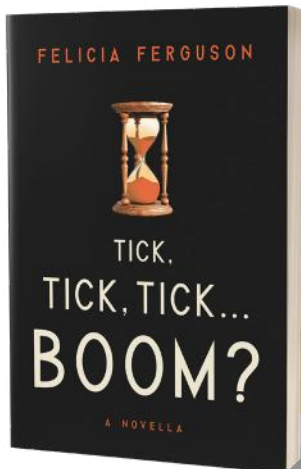
Romance / Cowboy Romance /
Second-Chance Romance
10/21/25



THREE BLUE HEARTS

by Lynne Kelly

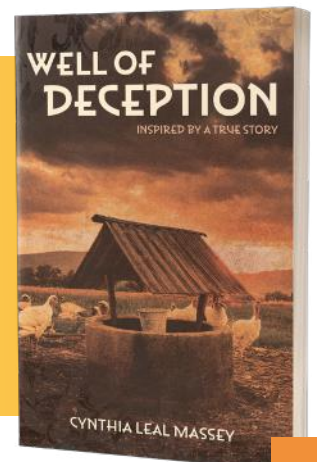
Contemporary middle grade
Random House/Delacorte
10/7/2025



TICK, TICK, TICK ... BOOM?

A Novella by Felicia Ferguson

Suspense / Thriller
Salt & Light Publishing
10/1/25



WELL OF DECEPTION

by Cynthia Leal Massey

Historical Murder Mystery
Stoney Creek Publishing
10/7/25



THE REAL PURPOSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR AUTHORS



You've heard it a million times: as an author, you *need* to be active on social media and build your following.

But why?

Sure, it's a strategy for selling more books. But here's the truth: there isn't always a direct line between your number of followers and your sales numbers. You can have thousands of followers and still see only a trickle of book sales.

Some say, "Connection creates relationships, which creates sales." And that's true—relationships matter. But what happens when the algorithm changes, and suddenly fewer of your followers see your posts? You don't control how Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook decide who gets to see your content.

That brings us to the *real* reason authors should leverage social media: **to move readers from social platforms onto your newsletter subscription list.**

When someone joins your email list, they've said "yes"

JOIN
MYSTERY
AUTHOR

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BOOK SIGNING EVENT

Sunday Oct 19th
1pm-3pm
Half Price Books
5803 E. Northwest Hwy
Dallas, TX 75231

Enter a raffle for your chance to win a
FREE mystery box, HPB gift card and more!

50% of all proceeds from the event
will go to the Tri-City Animal shelter

DEAD
GIRLS
DON'T
TALK
ASHLEY BRANDT

to giving you something incredibly valuable: direct access to their inbox. Unlike social platforms, you control that connection.

Think of it this way: social media is where you plant the seeds—every post, comment, and video is a seed that could grow into a relationship. But the real *harvest* happens when those seeds bear fruit in the form of readers who join your list, stay connected, and become raving fans of your work.

Why Social Media Matters for Authors (Beyond Sales)

- **Visibility:** Social platforms are the fertile ground where readers, bloggers, and industry professionals gather.
- **Connection:** Seeds of trust grow when you share your journey, personality, and values.
- **Community:** Strong roots develop as you interact with readers and fellow authors.
- **Pathway:** The harvest comes when those connections move to your newsletter—your own garden, not one rented from social platforms.



Actionable Ways to Use Social Media as an Author

1. Plant seeds of engagement, not just sales.

- Ask thoughtful questions about books, writing, or everyday life.
- Share behind-the-scenes glimpses of your writing process.
- Highlight favorite authors or literary influences.

2. Water the seeds with clear calls-to-action.

- Offer a freebie (sample chapter, short story, or reading guide) to encourage sign-ups.
- Regularly point readers toward your newsletter.

3. Repurpose content across the rows of your field.

- A blog post can become an Instagram carousel.
- A snippet of dialogue can be a tweet (or X post).
- A quick video about your writing process can flourish on TikTok or YouTube Shorts.

4. Tend your field with consistency.

- You don't have to post every day—choose a rhythm (2–3 times a week is plenty).
- Think steady growth, not overnight abundance.

5. Engage more than you broadcast.

- Comment, reply, and celebrate your readers.
- Just like in a garden, attention and care help things grow.

6. Measure the harvest.

- Don't obsess over follower counts. Instead, track how many people are clicking through to your site or signing up for your newsletter—the real fruit of your labor.



Bringing It All Together

Social media is the soil where you plant. Your posts are the seeds. Your consistency and care are the watering. And your newsletter? That's the harvest—the place where the fruit of your work is gathered and enjoyed.

The goal isn't to collect followers; it's to cultivate lasting relationships that grow into a community of readers who want to hear from you again and again.

So as you think about your own harvest this season, ask: *Am I planting seeds on social media that will grow into connections I can nurture for the long haul?*

ARTFUL PAGES
East Texas Book Fest

OCT. 25
9:30-4:30

200 W. Blair St.
Mineola

Mineola League of the Arts

25+ author signings

RAFFLE

FREE ENTRY

book merch vendors

author readings and Q&A



Marketing Moment

Tip Box

- Social media is **the seedbed**—your posts start the relationship.
- Your newsletter is **the harvest**—where raving fans gather.
- Don't measure by follower count—measure by sign-ups and engagement.
- Be consistent, not constant—steady care leads to growth.
- Invite readers from the porch (social media) into the living room (your inbox).



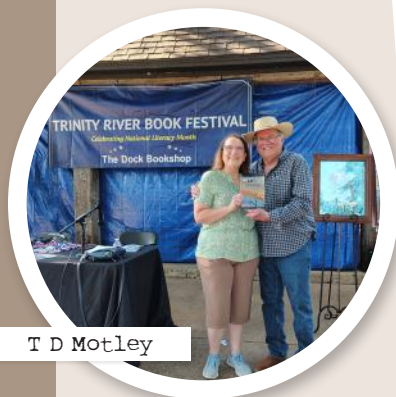
Out & about

With

Lone Star Literary Life

Trinity River Book Festival

Our own Leslie Storey has been out and about, gathering the fruits of this season's literary harvest. From inspiring conversations at [Inclusion Coffee](#) hosted by [Pretty Little Things Market](#) to the lively [Trinity River Book Festival](#), hosted by [The Dock Bookshop](#), she's bringing back snapshots of the connections, stories, and celebrations that make Texas's literary landscape so vibrant.



TD Motley



The Craddock Sisters moderating Dock Panel w authors Tony Leblanc, TD Motley, Nathan Nipper & ER Bills, 9.13.2025



J R Lightfoot



Jacquelyn Childs

- <https://inclusioncoffee.com/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/prettylittethingsmarketntx>
- <https://www.instagram.com/trinityriverbookfest/>
- <https://thedockbookshop.com/>



Christene Chadwick Moss



Cindy Vanous

Inclusion Coffee Event



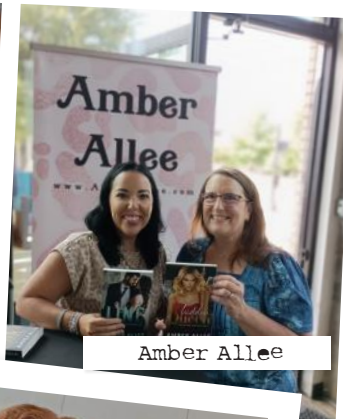
Angie Barton



Dianne Oren



Brittany Wilson



Amber Allee



Mase Evans



Heather Bennett

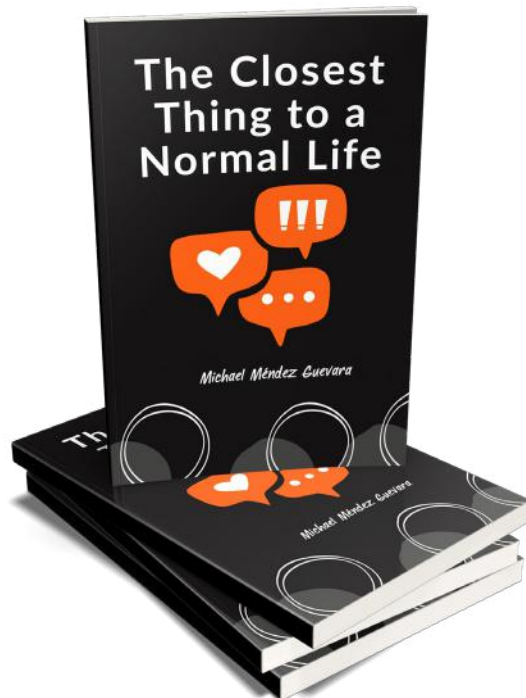


Kimberly Page

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.

These novels both tell the story of two teenage boys finding each other against all odds and through some of the toughest times. They learn about themselves while discovering what it means to live life to the fullest.



The Closest Thing to a Normal Life

by Michael Méndez Guevara

There's nothing remotely normal about seventeen-year-old Ethan-Matthew Cruz Canton's life. His parents, journalists in Spain, were killed in a terrorist attack and now he's living with his grandparents



in San Antonio, attending his father's high school for senior year. Narrated in the young man's perceptive, witty voice, the novel opens with his plan to keep his head down, make it until June and then follow his parents' footsteps to Northwestern University's journalism program. But his idea to keep a low profile is quickly blown out of the water.

As Ethan-Matthew deals with incessant questions about his hyphenated name and his grief, he looks forward to the only "normal" thing available: writing for the school newspaper. He was set to be the editor at his high school in Spain, but now his story ideas

are being ignored! With the encouragement and help of his new friends, he starts an alternative online newspaper to cover the overlooked students and staff. Things escalate, though, when he writes about a racist incident—instigated by the school's mostly white, privileged student body—that turns violent!

Amidst all the drama, Ethan-Matthew suddenly and unexpectedly finds himself romantically involved with another boy, his cross-country teammate and best friend Reid.

The Closest Thing to a Normal Life is full of everything life is full of: grief, the path to finding yourself, love, and the chaos of being a teenager. It is fast paced and keeps you wanting to turn the next page. The book is placed in the real world context and does not shy away from the political and cultural effects on teenagers today.





Michael Méndez Guevara is a Mexican American writer and former high school English teacher. He has taught at schools where students lacked for nothing and went off to college at places like Princeton, Stanford, and Columbia, and he has also taught at schools where students relied

on free breakfast and free lunch to eat, often worked to help support the family, and maybe considered community college. Regardless of who he taught, he wanted all his students to see themselves as writers who recognized the power of their individual stories.

Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe

by Benjamin Alire Sáenz

Aristotle is an angry teen with a brother in prison. Dante is a know-it-all who has an unusual way of looking at the world. When the two meet at the swimming pool, they seem to have nothing in common. But as the loners start spending time together, they discover that they share a special friendship—the kind that changes lives and lasts a lifetime. And it is through this friendship that

Ari and Dante will learn the most important truths about themselves and the kind of people they want to be.

Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe is real and painful and simply profound. The love story is beautiful and raw. The family dynamics are as close to real life as possible and they make you feel like a part of the family.

Benjamin Alire Sáenz was born in 1954 in his grandmother's house in Old Picacho, a small farming village in the outskirts of Las Cruces, New Mexico in 1954. He is an associate professor in the MFA creative writing program at the University of Texas at El Paso, the only bilingual creative writing program in the country. Benjamin Sáenz is a novelist, poet, essayist and writer of children's books.

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

HARVEST YOUR DRAFT

10 Editing Helps

*By DiAnn Mills, Lone Star Lit,
October 2025*



Professional writers understand the value of harvesting their drafts. Editing—whether fiction or nonfiction—ensures a bountiful crop that readers will savor. Preparing a manuscript for publication is like a harvest, often the most labor-intensive part of producing quality work. But in this stage, we bring clarity, polish, and hidden grains of value to the surface. The process takes time and diligence before sharing our treasured work with readers.

The process usually involves multiple passes:

- First, use text-to-voice software available in Word, Scrivener, or another tool to listen to your draft and make any necessary revisions.
- Next, print the manuscript and edit line by line.
- Finally, complete at least one more read-through to catch any lingering issues.

How do we step into the fields of our manuscripts with a positive attitude and glean an amazing crop?

Here are ten practical steps.

1. GATHER THE RIGHT TOOLS

Keep both digital and physical resources at hand:

- Calendar
- Dictionary
- Grammarly/ProWritingAid
- Scrivener
- Text-to-voice software
- The Chicago Manual of Style
- Word and phrase frequency counter

2. STORE YOUR WORK

- Back up your abundant writing frequently.
- On discouraging days (the rainy season), backups help renew our enthusiasm and protect our crop.

3. CUT DISEASED WORDS

Remove anything that weakens the manuscript:

- Filler and overused words
- Redundancies
- “Telling” instead of showing
- Unintended modifiers
- Never use two words when one will do

4. CUT UNNECESSARY WORDS

Trim excess to keep your manuscript lean:

- Adverbs: Are they needed?
- Adjectives: Do they add meaning or clutter?
- Overexplained passages
- Long lists that weigh down the reader

5. STORE SEEDS FOR THE NEXT HARVEST

- Save notes and references for future writing projects.
- Record lessons learned in grammar and punctuation.
- File research and interviews.
- Participate in writing groups and give back to other writers.

6. WINNOW

Let time act as wind, blowing clarity into the manuscript:

- Remove clichés—create fresh new metaphors and similes.
- Save deleted or revised material in a separate file.

7. REAP

The manuscript should show evidence of a healthy yield:

- Strong hooks at the beginning and end of scenes
- Consistency in content, spelling, and punctuation
- Clear chronological order
- Smooth transitions
- Varying sentence length for rhythm

8. YIELD FICTION

Ensure the story elements are ripe:

- Three-dimensional protagonists and antagonists
- Tension and conflict in every line using emotive conflict
- Tight plot with each scene containing a goal, conflict, and high stakes
- Dialogue in character that moves the story ahead
- Setting that is antagonistic in every scene
- Balanced and credible emotion
- True to genre
- Unique and powerful voice

9. YIELD NONFICTION

- Clear premise that carries throughout, providing purpose and value to the reader
 - Writer's credentials and passion
 - Table of contents that supports the topic logically
 - Facts presented with storytelling techniques
 - Documented details and supporting evidence
 - Engaging, reader-friendly language
 - Unique and compelling voice
 - Content that challenges the reader to act, improve, or explore
- View social media as a means of meeting reader needs.
 - Post regularly on social media platforms.
 - Build a professional website.
 - Prepare bios of different lengths.
 - Invest in a professional headshot.
 - Learn to create memes sized according to social media platform.
 - Present a realistic marketing and promotion campaign to agent and editor.
 - Write guest blogs while the story or nonfiction project is fresh on your mind.
 - Visit bookstores and introduce yourself—physical and online.
 - Research book clubs—physical and online.

10. MARKET THE HARVEST

Our work deserves to be widely shared:

- Organize marketing activities with spreadsheets or templates.
- Stay current with social media trends.

Are you ready to harvest your draft and make every word part of your best crop?

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

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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



THE LONE STAR LITERARY LIFE MAGAZINE

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