

THE LONE STAR LITERARY LIFE

M A G A Z I N E



FEBRUARY 2026

ISSUE 17

LETTER FROM *The Editor*



Dear Reader,

Back in August, my team and I chose the magazine themes for the next three years. (I talk more about that in my video; you can check it out on the next page.) For the February 2026 theme, we landed on EXTEND.

We felt it was Valentine's Day-adjacent, and we wanted to emphasize EXTENDING friendship. In the intervening time, I've pondered all the meanings of "extend" in our Texas literary community.

Yes, we can extend friendship. And also, we can extend:

an invitation, grace, hope,
a kind word,
understanding,
praise, borders,
limits,
knowledge,
resources,



a helping hand, gratitude, a welcome...the list is endless.

However, none of this can be accomplished without *reaching out*.

Extend, by its very nature, implies movement. Going towards, stretching, bestowing, exerting. It calls us to a vulnerable place of offering something, with no guarantee that it will be accepted.

Which sounds exactly like the job of an author. Moving words from imagination to the page. Vulnerably sharing. Opening oneself to the reality of rejection.

Lone Star Literary Life exists to be a safe place for authors to extend themselves. To this connected community—the readers, bookstore owners, publishers, librarians, teachers, book cover designers, editors, and many other literary professionals—know that

what you extend to authors in return is invaluable.

It is so much more than reading their stories. Every time you write a review, attend an author event, comment on a social media post, recommend a favorite, or like and follow a newfound writer, you extend acceptance. Encouragement. The belief that what they're doing matters.

This month, let the conversation hearts and boxes of chocolate lingering on store shelves, and the faint smell of roses permeating your grocery store remind you to extend yourself in this literary community you've chosen.

Let the sight of every glittery card and heart-holding teddy bear prompt you to reach out to someone who is also doing the vulnerable work of sharing their words.

Not sure who that should be? Page through this issue and find a name. Look them up on your favorite social media platform, or even search for

their website, then send them a quick message:

"I saw you in *The Lone Star Literary Life Magazine* and...

- ♥ I love the work you're doing!"
- ♥ I'm enjoying your book/work so much."
- ♥ Your book/words/work made such a difference in my life."
- ♥ I see what you're putting out into the world and it's amazing."
- ♥ I appreciate the books you recommended."

Whatever you send, know that you are building our community into a literary hub known for EXTENDING kindness and encouragement. What could be better?

Warmly,



AMY KELLY

Editor-in-Chief, Lone Star Literary Life



VIDEO FROM THE EDITOR

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Texas Writes





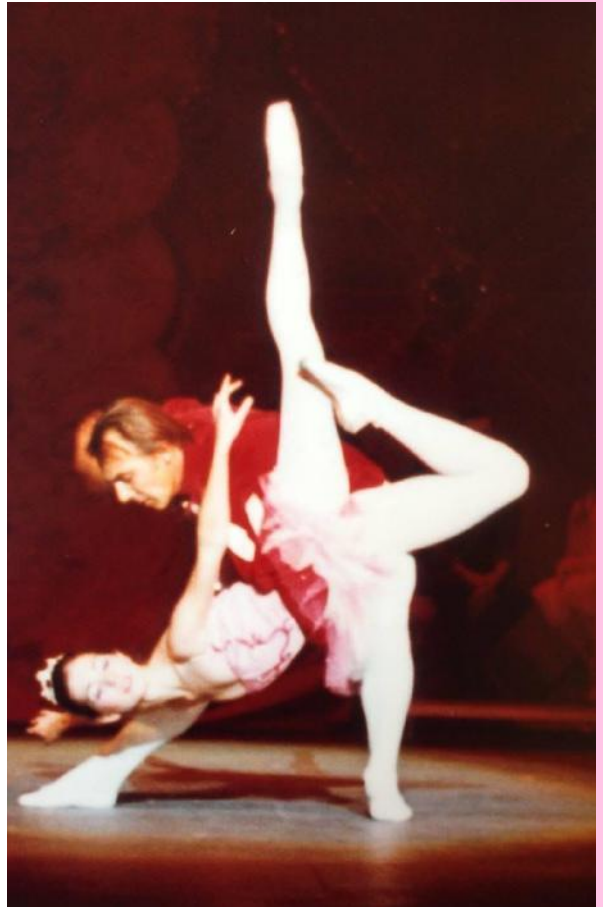
Dancing Through the Fire

Emily Sayre Smith on ballet, resilience, and telling the truth in *Smartass*

By Melissa A. Bartell

S *martass: Memoir of a Mouthy Girl* is not a trauma memoir—though trauma is present. It is not a ballet tell-all—though dance pulses through every page. Instead, it is something rarer: a fiercely honest coming-of-age story told with humor, defiance, and an embodied intelligence that never loses sight of the woman doing the remembering.

Smith grew up in Texas and Arizona in the 1950s, '60s,



and '70s, in a household that was anything but conventional. Her father was an Episcopal priest. Her mother—a brilliant, volatile woman who later

developed multiple sclerosis—was a magician in every sense of the word. Love and instability coexisted uneasily, and from an early age, Smith learned how quickly the ground beneath her feet could shift.

She also learned how to move.

“Ballet saved my life,” Smith says simply. As a child, dance gave her a place to put anxiety, anger, and excess energy. It offered structure and fantasy in equal measure. While her home life felt unpredictable, the studio made sense: barre, repetition, discipline, sweat.

Driven by a dream of becoming a professional ballerina, Smith earned scholarships, danced lead roles, and eventually studied in London for two formative years. The cultural shock was immediate and profound. “I had to learn everything,” she recalls—how to speak, how to shop, how to navigate a country still economically scarred by World War II. She developed a British

accent out of self-defense, just to avoid explaining herself to every stranger she met.

Yet London also opened her eyes. It taught her how vast the world was, how different lived experience could be depending on where—and when—you were born. It gave her perspective, humility, and gratitude, lessons that echo throughout her memoir.

A TITLE THAT TOLD THE TRUTH

The book’s title, *Smartass*, began as a joke between Smith and her editor. But it stuck for a reason.

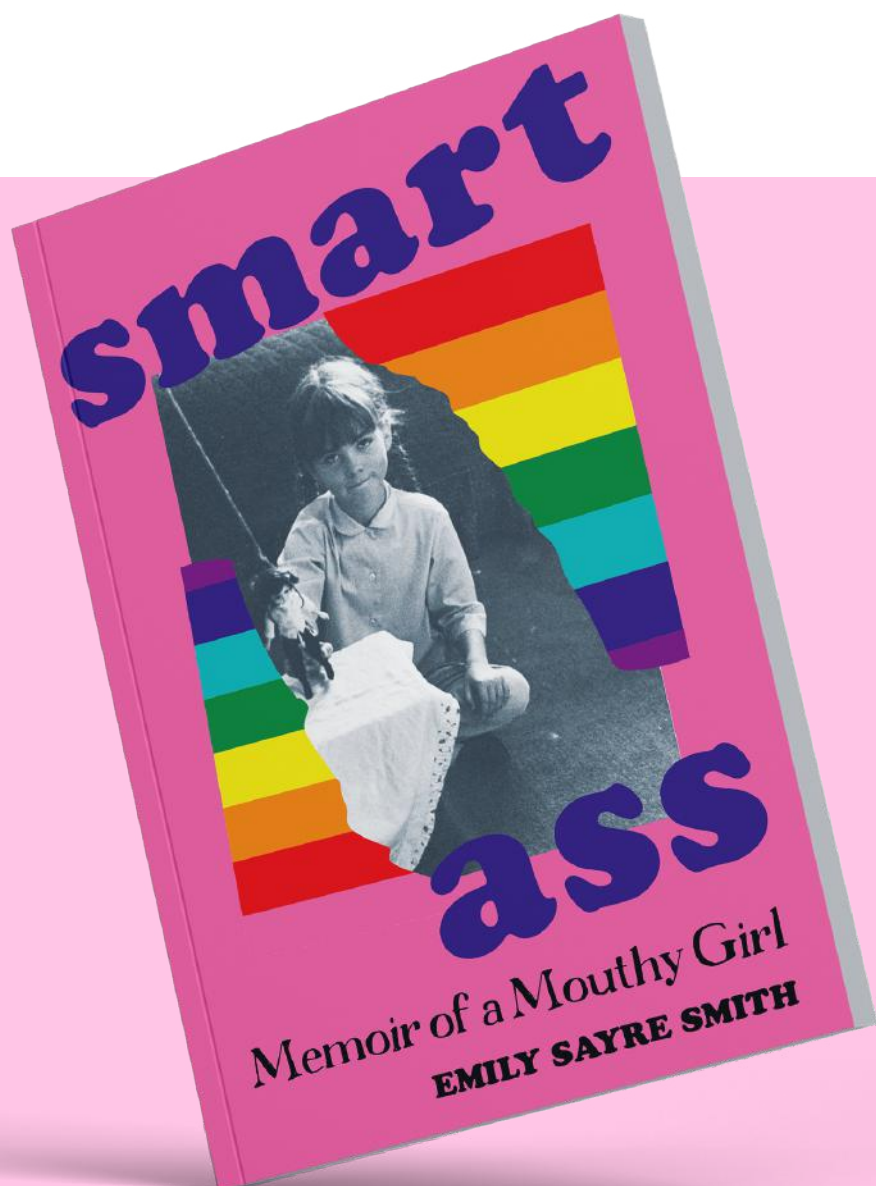
“I am a smartass,” Smith says, laughing. “That came from my dad—he was a jokester.” Over time, though, she began to see how humor functioned not just as personality, but as armor. Sarcasm could deflect pain as easily as it could entertain.

That self-awareness infuses the memoir. Smith doesn’t

sanitize her past, but she doesn't mythologize it either. She writes about being a "hero child," bringing home awards and accolades, even as she was simultaneously punished, controlled, and—at one point—taken to juvenile hall. The contradictions are left intact because real childhoods are rarely tidy.

Smith doesn't romanticize survival—and that refusal may be the book's quiet power.

"I just wrote the truth as I knew it," she says. "My mother was beautiful and brilliant and creative. She was also angry and frightening. Both things were true."



WRITING FROM THE BODY

One of the most striking qualities of *Smartass* is its physicality. The prose moves like a trained body: intentional, rhythmic, aware of space. Smith insists she never set out to write a book at all. She was avoiding housework when she sat down to sketch an outline—and instead, the first thirty-seven pages poured out of her.

“It felt like I just went back there,” she says. “I was five. I was seven. I was in that body again.”

That embodied memory is the book’s engine. Smith doesn’t write about her younger self from a distance; she inhabits her. The result is immediacy without sentimentality, insight without condescension.

Her lack of formal writing education may have helped. “I’m untrained,” she says cheerfully. “Maybe that’s a good thing.” She writes the way she talks—direct, funny, unpretentious—and trusts the reader to keep up.

REINVENTION, AGAIN AND AGAIN

Smith’s life after dance followed no predictable arc. When performing ended, she moved into the fitness industry, then later into construction management—a male-dominated, high-stress field where she spent two decades running complex projects without a college degree.

What connects ballet, gyms, and construction?

THE LIGHT IN THE BARN
BY SUSAN P. BAKER

DOMESTIC THRILLER

ENDING YOU WON'T SEE COMING

200 PAGES LONG

RELEASED NOVEMBER 20TH

ORDER NOW!

“Dance presents the impossible,” Smith says. “Can you jump higher? Can you add a turn? You learn to see space differently.” That spatial intelligence, combined with deep listening, became her superpower. On job sites, she learned quickly that authority didn’t come from shouting, but from collaboration. Ask for help. Hear what people are really saying. Reflect it back in a way that leads toward resolution.

It worked.

SOBRIETY, FAITH, AND SURVIVAL

Smith is candid about addiction, depression, and the moment when her life nearly ended. Sobriety, she says, taught her how to live—not just how to work or achieve. It also reshaped her understanding of faith.

Raised in the Episcopal Church, Smith loved its beauty and music, but says faith itself arrived later, through connection. “It’s the same in church as it is in an AA meeting,” she explains. “It’s communion. It’s people.”

That sense of connection underpins *Smartass*. For all its specificity—ballet studios, British corner shops, construction trailers—the book speaks to something universal: how we survive what we’re given, how we forgive imperfect parents, how we keep going even when the map disappears.

TRUST THE RIVER

Asked what advice she would give to young women—especially queer women—entering demanding, male-dominated fields, Smith doesn’t hesitate.

“Don’t be afraid. Be brave. Trust yourself,” she says. Acknowledge the misogyny. Don’t internalize it. Be kind—to yourself first. Do the work, but don’t fight the river.

“I didn’t plan to be a ballerina, a gym owner, a construction manager, and an author,” she says. “These things just came along. If you do the work, it tends to work out.”



Smith is already writing a follow-up memoir, exploring her years in New York and Los Angeles, her curtailed dance career, and the cost of addiction. But *Smartass* stands firmly on its own: a story of resilience without self-congratulation, of survival without bitterness, and of a woman who learned—again and again—how to land on her feet.

Smartass: Memoir of a Mouthy Girl

Emily Sayre Smith

Emily Sayre Smith Instagram

About Melissa:

Melissa A. Bartell writes at MissMeliss.com, curates book reviews at Bibliotica.com, and hosts Tales from the Tub as The Bathtub Mermaid at BathtubMermaid.com. Her work spans fiction, essays, and audio storytelling that celebrates creativity, compassion, and the art of everyday wonder.

MissMeliss.com

Bibliotica.com

BathtubMermaid.com



February

BOOKISH EVENTS

Extend your support to the Texas literary community and stop by one of these exciting major events. Click here for links to the February events below or visit the Lone Star Lit Bookish Events calendar for information on all upcoming author signings and indie bookstore events across Texas in February.

FEB
1-28

FESTIBA

FEB
14

**Romance
Readers Social**

FEB
19

**Highland Park
Literary Festival**

FEB
20-21

FenConXXI

FEB
28

**San Antonio
African American
Book Festival**

FEB
28

**Central Texas Teen
& Kids ComicCon**

FEB
28

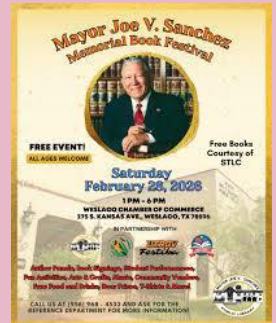
LibraryPalooza

FEB
28

**CenTex Teen Book
Fest on the Brazos**

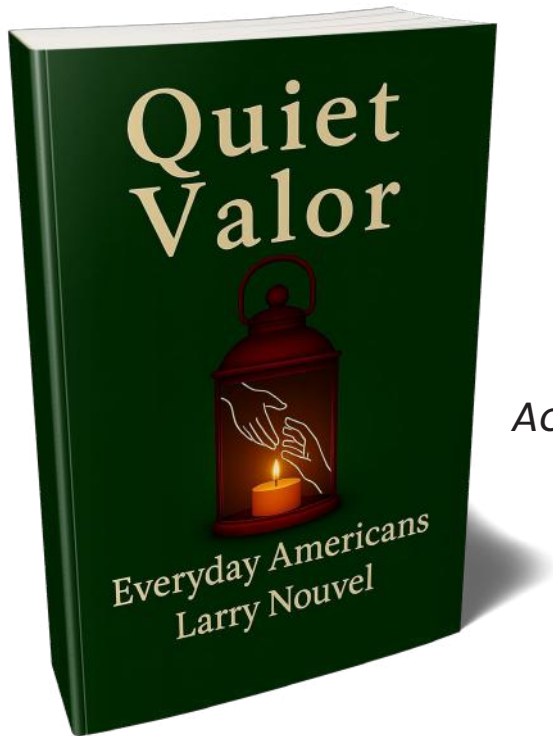
FEB
28

**The Mayor Joe V.
Sanchez Memorial
Book Festival**



The top half of the page features a vibrant pink background. On the right side, there are several hot air balloons of varying sizes, all in shades of pink. One of the larger balloons is positioned above a gift box with a yellow ribbon and a gold bow. The gift box is also pink with a yellow ribbon. The text 'HOW TO USE THE EVENTS CALENDAR' is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters on the left side of the pink area.

HOW TO USE THE EVENTS CALENDAR



A measured, uplifting portrait
of quiet American bravery.

Quiet Valor

*(Everyday Americans):
Acts of Character That Change a Life,
a Street, a Community*

Larry Nouvel

November 4, 2025; 240 pages

Quiet Valor (*Everyday Americans*): *Acts of Character That Change a Life, a Street, a Community* is a carefully assembled collection that examines courage not as spectacle but as sustained commitment. Larry Nouvel turns his attention to everyday Americans whose actions steady families, neighborhoods, and civic systems through consistency, conscience, and care. Rather than centering

dramatic heroics, the book focuses on individuals who act because responsibility requires it, not because recognition is expected.

Structured as a series of concise vignettes, the book reads with the clarity and restraint of well-crafted reportage. Each account is grounded in verifiable records and reliable documentation, lending credibility and weight to stories that might otherwise

No Metal No Magic

Element 89

Actinium, Presented By Acamus
From The Magical Elements of the
Periodic Table Book Series



themselves. Nouvel resists dramatization, instead trusting readers to recognize the significance of ordinary persistence. Moments involving disaster response, caregiving, education, labor, advocacy, and cultural preservation are presented with restraint, creating a cumulative effect that underscores how communities endure through steady presence rather than singular triumphs. The pacing is deliberate, and the brevity of each vignette mirrors the humility of the actions described.

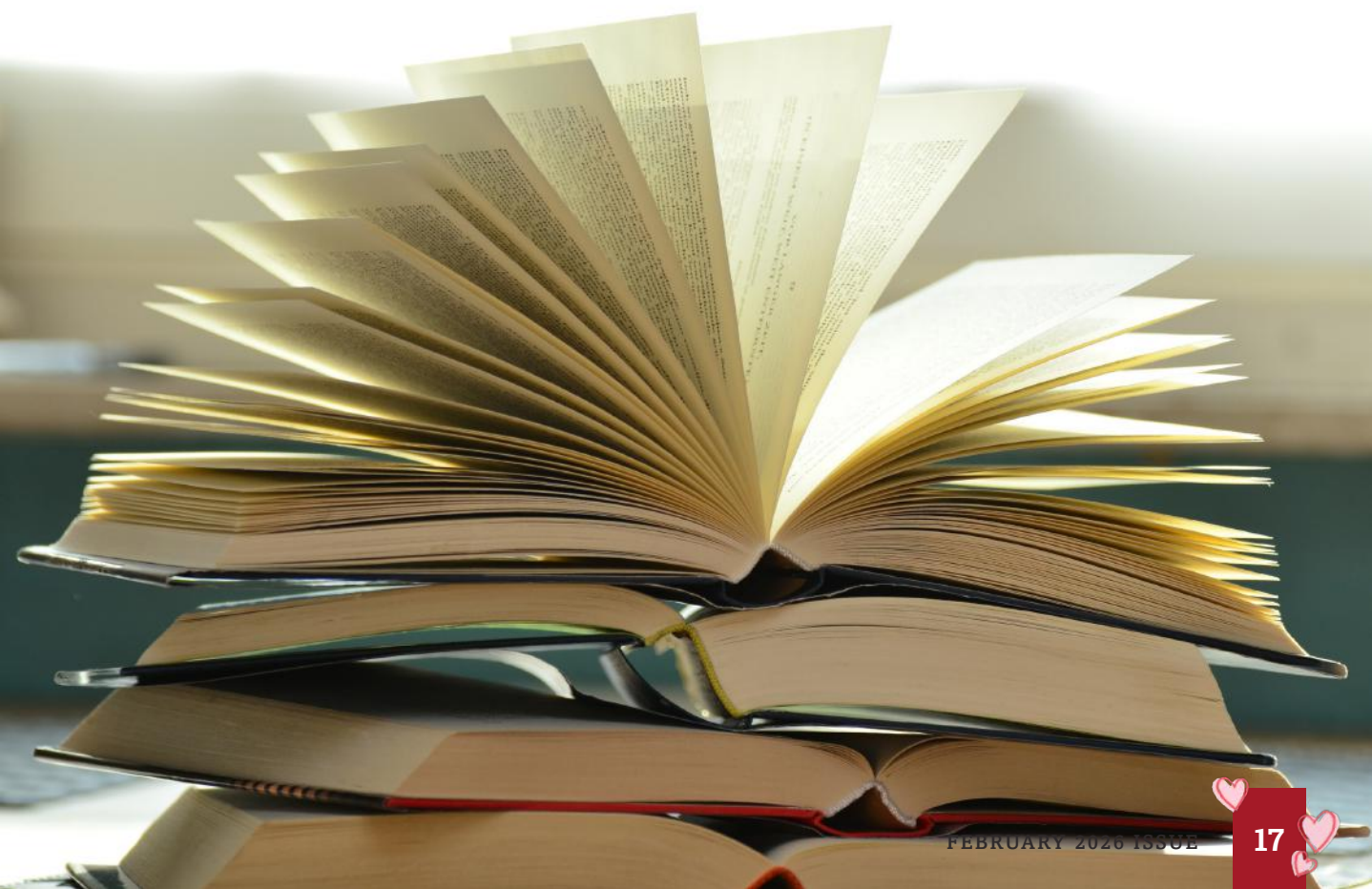
be overlooked. Nouvel establishes clear inclusion criteria that emphasize real people, demonstrable acts of quiet courage, and service rooted in moral conviction. This methodological transparency strengthens the work's authority and reinforces its commitment to honoring truth over embellishment.

The prose is measured and respectful, allowing events and decisions to speak for

One of the book's notable strengths lies in its thematic cohesion. Short reflective elements at the close of each account reinforce the concept of quiet valor and keep the reader anchored in the author's purpose. These closing reflections provide continuity without redundancy and help shape the collection into a unified whole rather than a loose anthology.

Nouvel's approach also broadens the definition of courage. Teachers guiding children through storms, workers restoring essential services, advocates standing firm despite institutional resistance, and culture bearers preserving memory all receive equal consideration. Valor is framed as presence, integrity, and endurance rather than outcome or reward. The emphasis remains firmly on action itself, even when recognition never arrives or results fall short of justice.

Quiet Valor will resonate with readers who value civic responsibility, ethical leadership, and community resilience. It is particularly well-suited for general nonfiction readers, educators, book clubs, libraries, and those seeking narratives that counter polarization with grounded examples of shared humanity. Thoughtful, steady, and affirming, this book serves as a reminder that the strength of a society often rests in the hands of those who simply keep showing up.



An imaginative, book-soaked fantasy
with emotional depth.

ON THE ORIGINS OF MAGIC

J. Lynn Carr

Page Thirteen Press,

August 26, 2025

189 pages



J Lynn Carr's *On the Origins of Magic* is a romance fantasy steeped in the hush and holiness of libraries, the kind of story that understands something book lovers rarely say out loud: for many of us, reading was never just entertainment. It was refuge. It was survival. And in Carr's imagined world, that truth becomes literal.

Set in Elden, the novel introduces an unforgettable premise, one both eerie and exquisite: after death, the human mind can be preserved, planted, and grown into books. Knowledge becomes botanical. Memory becomes harvest. Pages unfurl like petals. It is creative worldbuilding at its most original, and Carr clearly delights in the sensory wonder of it all, especially inside Wymore College of Magical Studies, where the library is not only a building but an ecosystem. From enchanted greenhouses to inventory lists that track a plant's maturity like a sacred calendar, the setting feels alive in a way that

will make readers want to step inside and stay awhile.

At the story's center is Artemis Fairchild, a thirty-eight-year-old witch arriving at Wymore at a personal crossroads. Divorced and carrying the burden of a mysterious curse, Artemis steps into the role of Head Librarian with a quiet determination that reads as hard-earned. She is not written as an impulsive heroine swept away by fate, but as a woman forced to make her next decisions from a place of constraint, with doors closing behind her and only a few opening ahead. Even so, she meets what remains with self-awareness and resolve, finding refuge in stillness and meaning in routine. Carr portrays her as an engaging blend of introvert and optimist; someone whose steadiness is not naive but brave.

Enter River Starling, a sigil professor tasked with helping Artemis unravel her curse. River has the aura of a man who has made solitude into a discipline, and Carr gives him the kind of

emotional weight that deepens the romance rather than just decorating it. His trauma is not presented as a tragic accessory, but as something lived-in, carried in scars and sensory memory. As River moves through the story, his internal musings reveal a character haunted not only by past violence but by the quiet terror of inheriting darkness. The result is a romantic pairing that feels charged by more than chemistry. It is charged by identity, fear, and the longing to be known without being consumed.

Carr's magic system is one of the book's most distinctive achievements. Rather than relying on vague enchantments, it leans into structure: equations, affinities, weighted variables, and rules that resemble mystical physics. Readers who love competence, research, and magical theory will find satisfaction in this grounded approach, particularly as the curse plotline begins to feel like an emotional mystery and a scientific problem all at once.

A few elements soften the novel's momentum. The present tense can feel slightly discombobulating at first, and some of the world-building occasionally leans toward telling rather than showing, repeating certain foundational concepts rather than letting them unfold organically. Still, the book's strengths are significant: immersive setting, thoughtful magical architecture, and characters shaped by hard truths rather than easy tropes.

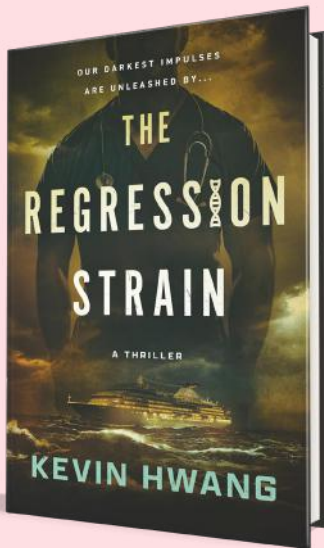
Ultimately, *On the Origins of Magic* is a story for readers who have ever sought shelter in a library, who believe knowledge is sacred, and who love romance that grows slowly, rooted in trust and quiet recognition. Carr has crafted an unusual, book-soaked universe that feels both tender and haunting, and the novel's devotion to the written word makes it linger like the scent of old pages long after the final chapter.

February

BOOK CAMPAIGNS

Join Lone Star Literary Life Book Campaigns as we dive into two fast-paced thrillers this month. We have an intense medical thriller and a tale of political intrigue, and a race against a dangerous AI. Follow along as our reviewers share their perspectives. Not typically a reader of suspense? Extend yourself out of your comfort zone and give these a try. You might just find a new genre for your 2026 reading list.

Stay engaged on social media to join the conversation. You can find us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Threads](#), and [X](#).

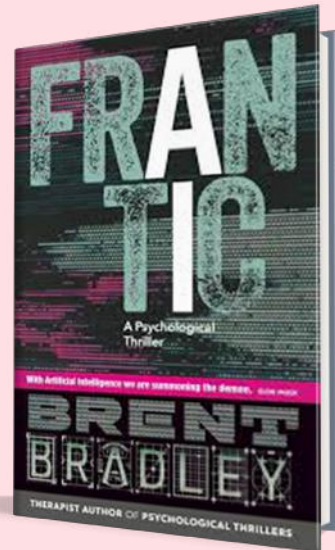


THE REGRESSION STRAIN

By Kevin Hwang

Thriller / Medical Thriller

February 3–March 2



FRANTIC

By Brent Bradley

Psychological Thriller / Technology Thriller

February 20



TEXAS LITERARY PODCASTS

This month, we're leaning into our theme, **Extend**, by highlighting podcasts that help readers and writers stretch beyond their current shelves, routines, and circles. Whether you're looking to expand your TBR, strengthen your craft, build a longer-lasting author career, or widen access to books and storytelling, these Texas-connected literary podcasts are a meaningful place to start.



Book Public

Featured Episode:

Book Public: "To Absent Friends: Eudora Welty's Correspondence with Frank Lyell"

This episode is a beautiful reminder that books extend beyond the page, offering us a deeper look into literary friendships, creative lives, and what writers leave behind.

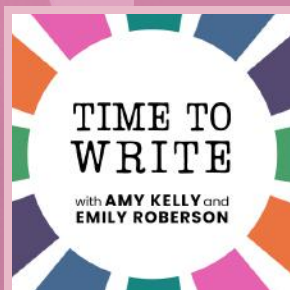


Authors Over 50

Featured Episode:

A Publisher for Women Over 40 with Lynne Golodner

This conversation is a celebration of longevity, reinvention, and purpose, showing that the writing life can expand and extend in powerful ways at every stage.



Time to Write

Featured Episode: *Small Changes, Big Results: 7 Ways to Boost Your Author Visibility*

A smart, practical episode that helps authors extend their reach, build momentum, and grow visibility without spiraling into overwhelm.



Texas Talking Book Voices Podcast

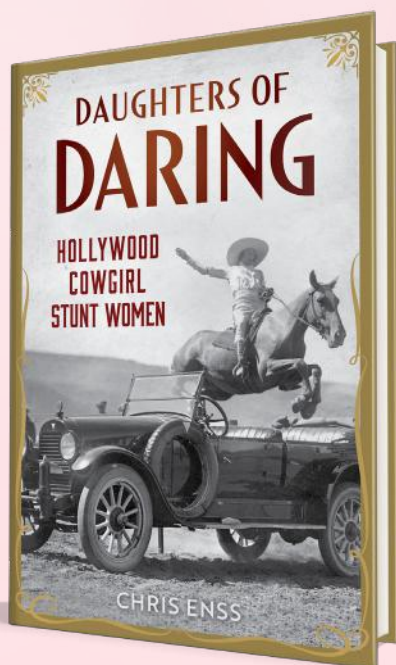
Featured Episode:

Season 3, Episode 1: People of TBP, Braille Assistant Inez

This behind-the-scenes spotlight shows how reading is being extended to more Texans through accessible formats, dedication, and community-centered service.

Extend your reading life in 2026

Up for a challenge? Need a refresh in your reading life? Consider extending your preferences outside your typical go-to genre. The February LSLT TBP feature holds treasures across the reading spectrum just waiting for you to discover your next favorite book. We have a plethora of daring nonfiction, compelling mysteries, engaging romance, and mesmerizing fantasy, all with that Texas-connected extra that puts the cherry on top. Read on to explore these highlights. [Click here to experience the entire collection on our website.](#)



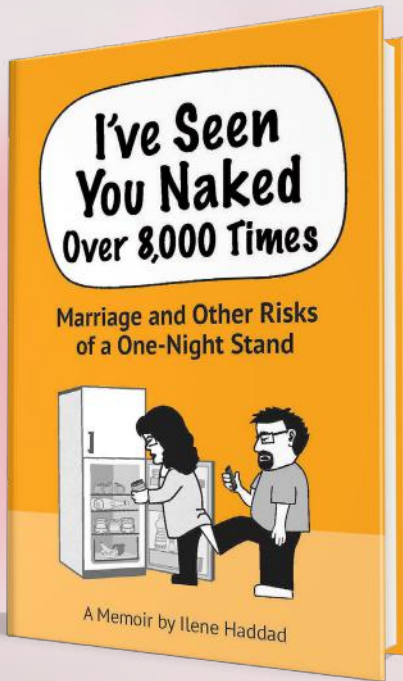
Daughters of Daring: Hollywood Cowgirl Stunt Women

By Chris Enss

Nonfiction

Lyons Press

February 3, 2026



*I've Seen You Naked Over 8,000 Times:
Marriage and Other Risks of a One-Night Stand*

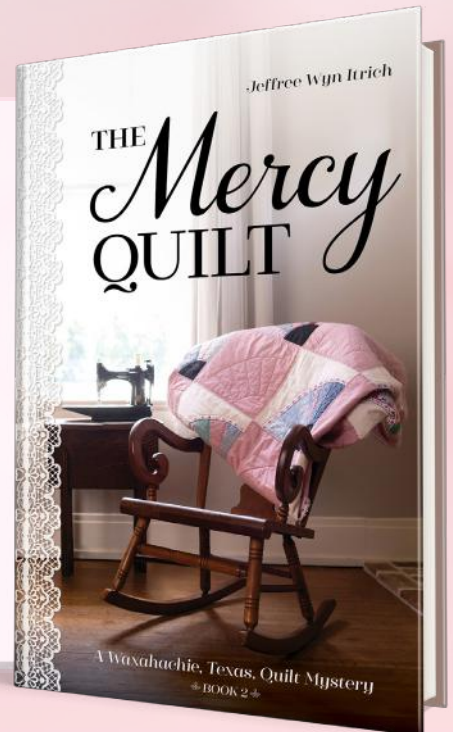
By Ilene Haddad

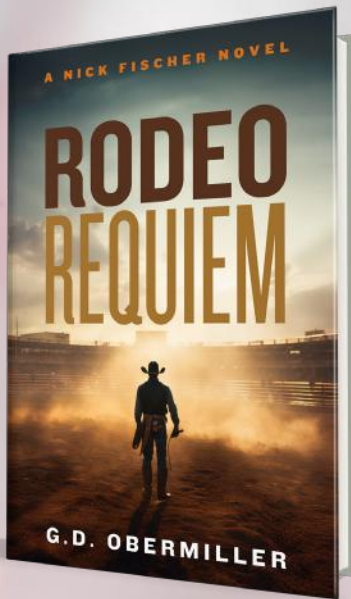
Memoir / Humor / Illustrated
November 1, 2025

The Mercy Quilt

By Jeffrey Wyn Itrich

Mystery / Amateur Sleuths / Cozy
C & T Publishing
February 24, 2026





Rodeo Requiem:
A Nick Fischer Novel

By G.D. Obermiller

Mystery / Crime / Thriller

Frio Press

February 12, 2026

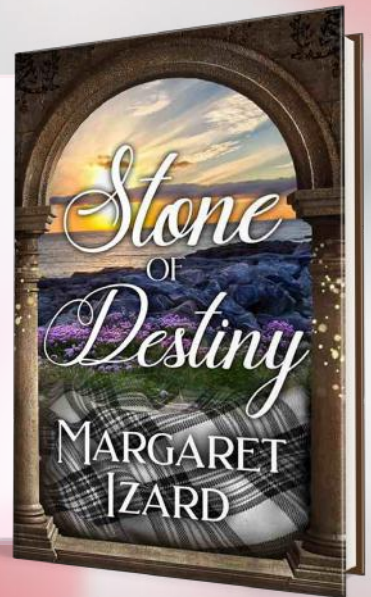
Stone of Destiny

By Margaret Izard

Romance / Paranormal Romance

The Wild Rose Press

February 9, 2026



Texas Reclaimed

By Sherry Shindelar

Historical Romance

Wild Heart Books

February 3, 2026

EXTEND YOUR MARKETING, ONE LEVEL AT A TIME

If author marketing feels overwhelming, it's usually for one reason: you're trying to do everything at once. Or worse, you're trying to do the *top* of the ladder without building the bottom first.

That's why I love this simple framework:
The Author Marketing Ladder.



THE AUTHOR MARKETING LADDER

Stop doing random promo. Build in order.

5

SALES ENGINE



- Launch plan
- Ads + promo
- Bundles + backlist

4

COMMUNITY



- Email list
- Reader connection
- Repeat Engagement

3

TRUST



- Reviews
- Awards, features
- Social proof assets

2

VISIBILITY



- Keywords
- SEO basics
- Discoverability

1

FOUNDATION



- Bio clarity
- Brand basics
- Links that work

TIP: Don't skip levels. Save this. Share it.

@LONESTARLIT

It gives you something every busy author needs: **order**. And for our February theme, **EXTEND**, it offers something even better: a way to extend your reach, your confidence, and your results, without running yourself into the ground.

Because the goal is not short bursts of promotion.

The goal is sustainable visibility that keeps working long after you post.

THE BIG MINDSET SHIFT

Before we break down each step, here's the truth:

Marketing works best when it is built, not chased.

When you build in order, you extend:

- how long your content stays useful
- how often new readers find you
- how much trust you earn with less effort
- how far your book can travel beyond release week



MARCH 14, 2026



101 S. FANNIN AVENUE
CAMERON, TX 76520



11 AM - 7 PM

Discover new reads, meet your next favorite author, and support independent voices.

EXTEND YOUR IMPACT WITH A STRONGER FOUNDATION.

In our **5-Day Email Course: Create Your Author Brand**, you'll build a clear, confident author brand you can use everywhere, from your website to social media.

You do not need to do everything. You just need to do the next right step.

LEVEL 1: FOUNDATION

This is your credibility. Your clarity. Your “reader-ready” setup.

This is how you extend your impact without creating more content. You make what already exists work better.

What to build:

- A clear author bio (who you are, what you write)
- A consistent author name and photo across platforms
- A working link in bio (with clean destinations)
- A simple “Start Here” page on your website
- A pinned post that introduces you to new readers

Quick practical tip:

- Ask yourself: *If a stranger found me today, would they know what I write in 5 seconds?*

LEVEL 2: VISIBILITY

This is discoverability. Your job is to be findable.

Visibility is not about shouting louder. It's about extending your reach by using the words readers already search for.

What to build:

- Keywords in your bio (genre, themes, tropes, audience)
- Search-friendly captions (not just vibes)
- Consistent hashtags (20–30 you reuse strategically)
- A repeatable content rhythm
- Titles and hooks that make the right readers stop scrolling

Quick practical tip:

- Your bio should include at least one of these:
 - Genre (mystery, romance, historical fiction)
 - Reader identity (for fans of...)
 - Theme or mood (cozy, gritty, faith-filled, humorous)

***EXTEND YOUR
DISCOVERABILITY.***

In our **5-Day Email Course: Turn Facebook into a Reader Discovery Tool**, we'll walk you through the exact setup that helps readers find you and trust you.



LEVEL 3: TRUST

This is proof. This is what makes someone believe you are worth their time and money.

Trust extends the life of your marketing. It turns “interesting” into “I’m buying this.”

What to build:

- Reviews (even 5–10 is a strong start)
- A “Praise” highlights section
- A media kit or simple press page
- Quote graphics you can reuse
- Photos of the book in real life

Quick practical tip:

- Screenshot reviews and save them in a folder now.
 - Title it: **Marketing Proof**
 - Every time you get a review, drop it in

LEVEL 4: COMMUNITY

This is connection. This is where readers turn into fans.

Community is one of the best ways to extend momentum beyond launch week. It gives your books staying power.

What to build:

- An email list (even if it’s small)
- A welcome freebie (reader magnet)
- A monthly newsletter rhythm
- Consistent engagement prompts
- Reader-facing conversation posts

Quick practical tip:

- Add one simple line to your bio:
 - “Get my free chapter here.”
 - “Join my reader list.”
 - “Get book updates.”

LEVEL 5: SALES ENGINE

This is where marketing becomes measurable.

A sales engine extends the life of a book. Instead of relying on a release spike, you build consistent pathways for readers to discover your work all year long.

What to build:

- A launch plan (timeline + assets checklist)
- Backlist promotions (not just new releases)
- Bundles, discounted stacks, reader pathways
- Ads (optional, only after trust is built)
- A repeatable sales cycle every quarter

Quick practical tip:

- One of the simplest sales engines is:
 - Freebie → email list → Book 1 offer → Book 2 follow-up

THE MOST COMMON LADDER MISTAKE

Here's what I see all the time:

Authors try to build **Level 5** when they are missing **Level 1**.

They run ads before their bio is clear.

They post "buy my book" before readers trust them. They launch without a list.

And then they assume marketing doesn't work.

It works. It just works in order.

A SIMPLE 5-WEEK "EXTEND" PLAN

If you want a clear place to start, do this:

Week 1: Extend your FOUNDATION

- Update bio, links, pinned intro

Week 2: Extend your VISIBILITY

- Add keywords, hashtags, hooks

Week 3: Extend your TRUST

- Collect proof, create 5 quote graphics

Week 4: Extend your COMMUNITY

- Start list, write 1 welcome email

Week 5: Extend your SALES ENGINE

- Build launch checklist, map reader pathway

FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT

This month, don't try to do more.

Try to **extend what works**.

Build the ladder one level at a time. And let your marketing start supporting your writing life instead of draining it.

Tip: Save the graphic. Pick one level. Extend it this month.



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](#).



AUTHOR AWARDS ROUNDUP

Texas authors extend their brilliance across the literary world in our latest roundup.

[Click here to view the complete list of winners and finalists](#), including Texans in the running for the Joyce Carol Oates Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Awards. If you're an author with a new award you'd like to share, [please submit the information here](#).



AWARDS AND ACCOLADES:



2026 Spirit of Texas Reading List

The Ambassador of Nowhere Texas
by Kimberly Willis Holt (MG)

The Art Thieves by Andrea Rogers (YA)

Even If It Breaks Your Heart
by Erin Hahn (YA)

The Hills of Estrella Rojas
by Ashley Robin Franklin (YA)

Los Monstruos: Felice and the Wailing Woman by Diana López (MG)

The No Brainer's Guide to Decomposition
by Adrianna Cuevas (MG)

The Pecan Sheller
by Lupe Ruiz-Flore (MG)

When We Ride by Rex Ogle (YA)

Best Horror Books of 2025 from The Lineup

The Pink Agave Motel & Other Stories
by V. Castro

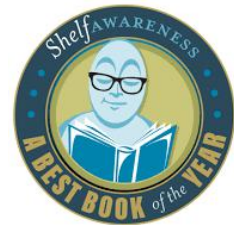
Another Fine Mess by Lindy Ryan



2026 Best STEM Books

The Spider Lady: Nan Songer and Her Arachnid World War II Army
by Penny Parker Klostermann

Who Owns the Moon? by Cynthia Levinson and Jennifer Swanson



2025 Best Books of the Year from Shelf Awareness

Picture Book

Island Storm by Brian Floca

Adult Fiction

The Buffalo Hunter Hunter
by Stephen Graham Jones

Nonfiction

Actress of a Certain Age: My Twenty Year Trial to Overnight Success
by Jeff Hiller

Esquire

Best Books of 2025 from Esquire

The Imagined Life
by Andrew Porter

Death Takes Me
by Cristina Rivera Garza

The Buffalo Hunter Hunter
by Stephen Graham Jones



Independent Press Award 2026 Distinguished Favorites

Action/Adventure – *The Fatal Saving Grace* by Jim Nesbitt

Crime Fiction – *A Change in Destiny: Dark Suspicions*
by Janet K. Shawgo

Cross Genre – *Born in the Aftermath*
by Ian Griffin

OTHER AWARD WINNERS:

Nattie Bright won The Academy of Western Artists award for Western Short Nonfiction for her article “Trying to Save the Texas Panhandle” about the Windy Deuce and Smokehouse Creek wildfires.



Rebecca Byron won a Gold Medal in the Vampire Novel category of the 2025 Global Book Awards for her work *A Memory Not Mine*.



The book also earned a Gold Medal in the Paranormal Romance category of the Independent Press Awards.

Adriene Caldwell won the Book of the Year and BREW Readers Choice Award from the Chrysalis BREW Project for her work *Unbroken: Life Outside the Lines*. Additionally, the book has won the Bookish Readers' Choice Award, a Literary Titan Book Award, two Firebird Book Awards (Memoir + Most Likely to Make You Cry).



Darlene Deluca earned a spot on the Yarde Top Reads of 2025 list with her novel *Painted Dreams*.



FINALLY. A Community for Authors in the Mind, Body, and Spirit Healing Space Looking to Self-Publish.

Introducing **Conscious Heart-Centered Publishing**, a new, private, free Facebook community specifically for non-fiction authors seeking to bring hope and healing to the world.

- A warm, welcoming space for authors at all stages of their self-publishing journey
- A place of respect, inspiration, and shared values
- Guidance, support, and resources writing, editing, and publishing experts
- No hidden agenda or pushy sales posts

LAUNCHING ON 2/22!
Request to join the community now

R&R

Kevin Hwang earned a second-place award in the Thriller category of the 2025 Book Awards from [Bestsellersworld.com](https://www.Bestsellersworld.com) for his novel *The Regression Strain*. The novel also won the 2025 [Independent Author Network Book of the Year](#) in the Thriller category; a Gold Medal in the [2025 Readers' Favorite International Book Award](#) contest (General Thriller category); Medical Thriller of the Year, 2025 [BestThrillers.com](#); Best Adventure, 2025 [Bookshelfie Awards](#); First Place Thriller, 2025 [Digital Book Today Literary Awards](#); Second Place, 2025 [BookFest Awards](#) (Medical Thriller category); Second Place, 2025 [BookFest Awards](#) (Dystopian - Viruses, Plagues & Zombies category).

María Murillo garnered two wins in [The Bookfest Awards for 2026](#). Her work *dog + girl* won First Place in both the Children's–Animals and Children's Picture Books categories. She also won Distinguished Favorite at the [2026 Independent Press Awards](#) in the Animals/Pets–Children's category.



TEXAS READS



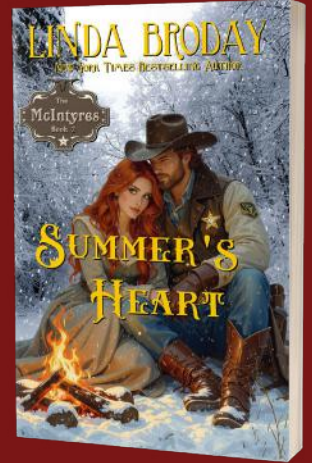
Historical Western Romance

by **Linda Broday**

I was thrilled to be asked to write the Texas Reads column this month. Such an honor. Books have filled my life since I was just a child, and I've read a LOT over the years. I have to say, we really have a great list of outstanding writers with high-quality books here in Texas. I'm going to tell you who's at the top of my list of historical western romance.

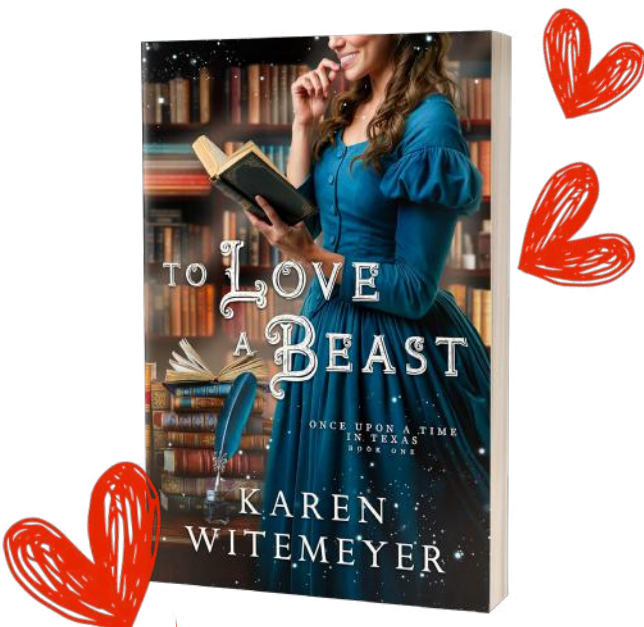
A huge favorite is Texas author Karen Witemeyer. Each book she puts out is amazing and heartfelt. I read her first book, *A Tailor-Made Bride*, way back in 2010 and became a devoted fan from that moment on. Every release becomes a keeper. Karen is just one of those go-to authors when I need a good story. She's just finished up her Texas Ever After

LINDA BRODAY is a New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of historical western romance novels. Watching TV westerns during her youth fed her love of cowboys and the old West, and they still do. She resides in the Texas Panhandle on land the American Indian and Comancheros once roamed, with ghosts lurking around every corner. She loves researching Texas' rich history and looking for little-known tidbits to add realism to her stories, and quite often makes a nuisance of herself at museums and libraries. Besides writing, she loves to travel and explore out-of-the-way spots. Just don't ask her to work in the garden. She kills everything she plants.



series with all three set around a fairy tale. Currently, the first book of her new Once Upon a Time in Texas series released in June 2025, and I loved it. [TO LOVE A BEAST](#) is a cowboy take on Beauty and the Beast, and it's set in 1891 in the wilds of Texas.

What I loved most about *To Love a Beast* was the warmth combined with charming, strong characters and a faith-based plot. The stubborn female lead, Callista Rosenfeld, tangles with a very scarred man hiding from life and everyone in it. Everett Griffin's gruffness and facial scars do not deter Callista one bit. Strong women always get my vote, and Callista is definitely one of the strongest with a huge heart. These kinds of female characters stand up for what's right, no matter the circumstances, and they're not afraid to voice their



opinions. That, combined with a wounded alpha hero, is a winning combination in my opinion, and it's what I always search for, hoping to find.

So, if you're looking for excellent writing, the best storytelling skill around, and a book that lingers in your mind long after you're finished, reach for *To Love a Beast*.

Hannah Lee Davis released an excellent book November 2025 called [TO LOVE A TEXAS RANCHER](#) that kept me up at night reading. She's written a few books set in Texas, but this is a new one that I recently ran across. For sure, this will not be my only book by her.

Hannah's strengths lie in strong characters, great dialogue, and twists and turns you don't see coming. She lures you into her storyworld with an amazing plot that keeps you happily there like a spider in her web, waiting for prey. This story centers around a desperate woman who answers a mail-order bride ad and runs for her life in order to escape a very powerful man who has the means and connections to hunt her down. The story has a few twists and turns that keep you interested, and the writing is stellar. Davis knows how to spin a good yarn, and that's great news for romance readers looking for stories filled with warmth and family values.

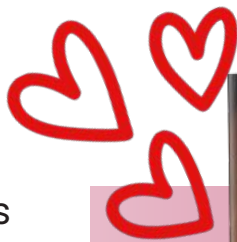
This was a standalone book and a departure from my normal thirst for series, but it was a book I'm ever thankful I took a chance on.

This next author does not live in Texas, but a lot of her books are set here. Winnie Griggs and I started our publishing



journeys about the same time, so long ago, and I've enjoyed reading her stories that are infused with warm, strong characters. I really love her three-book Inspirational romance, The Everharts of Texas series, that I missed the first time around. Winnie's stories are always such a joy to read. They have everything I require in a keeper book—strong characters I can root for, a heartfelt message, and a lasting romance with family at the center.

What I loved most about her newest, [GRIFF'S JOURNEY HOME](#) (Book 3 of the series) is that these characters have endured such deep heartache and loss and are afraid to trust again. You know, once you've been burned, you're careful around the stove sort of thing. Ruby asks Griff to escort her to Tyler, Texas, but the journey doesn't go as planned. Does it ever? That always makes it interesting. Griff and Ruby felt like family to me, and it seemed as though I'd known them forever.



Their romance builds slowly, something else I love, and they have to be convinced they're worthy of being loved. But true love cannot be denied, and pushing it away never works. The heart knows what it wants.

Winnie has a unique gift of bringing you to tears one minute, then, while you're dealing with that, she makes you laugh at something the character says. Jodi Thomas used to be an expert at this, and I always wondered how she did it.

So step into The Everharts of Texas and enjoy Griff's and Ruby's journey. You won't regret it.

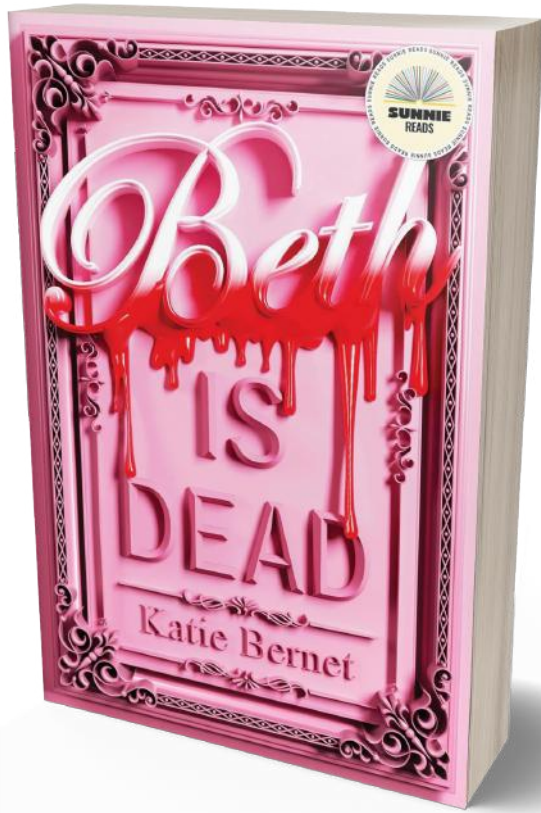


WHAT TO READ NEXT IN YOUNG ADULT

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

These books take different approaches to crime and intrigue. One through a murder that needs to be solved, and the other through spying and loyalty. They are both gripping and enthralling.





BETH IS DEAD

When Beth March is found dead in the woods on New Year's Day, her sisters vow to uncover her murderer.

Suspects abound. There's the neighbor who has feelings for not one but two of the girls. Meg's manipulative best friend. Amy's flirtatious mentor. And Beth's lionhearted first love. But it doesn't take the surviving sisters much digging to uncover motives each one of the March girls had for doing the unthinkable.



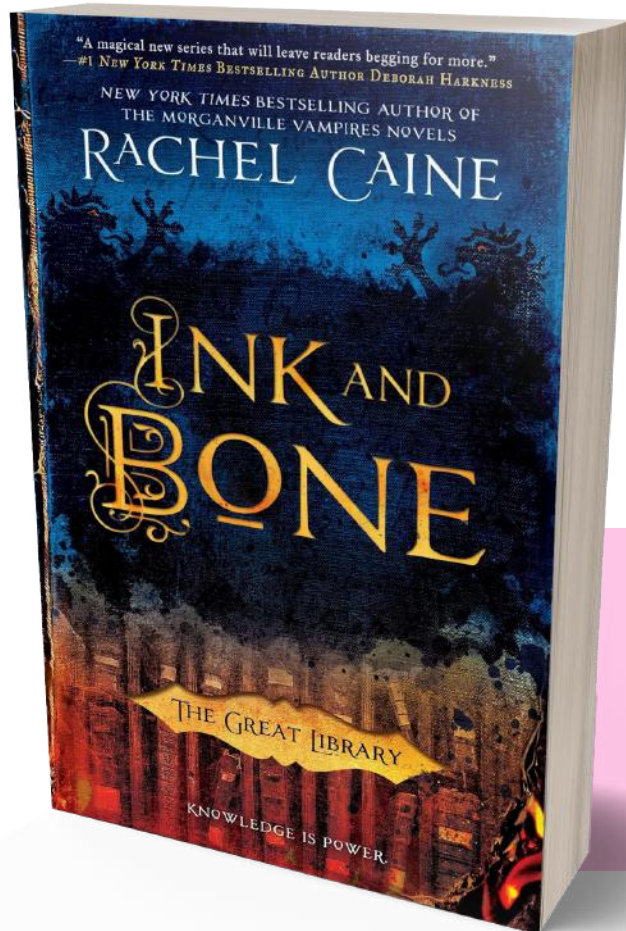
Jo, an aspiring author with a huge following on social media, would do anything to hook readers. Would she kill her sister for the story? Amy dreams of studying art in Europe, but she'll need money from her aunt—money that's always been earmarked for Beth. And Meg wouldn't dream of hurting her sister...but her boyfriend might have, and she'll protect him at all costs.

Despite the growing suspicion within the family, it's hard to know for sure if the crime was committed by someone close to home. After all, the March sisters were dragged into the spotlight months ago when their father published a controversial bestseller about his own daughters. Beth could have been killed by anyone.

Beth's perspective, told in flashback, unfolds next to Meg, Jo, and Amy's increasingly fraught investigation as the tragedy threatens to rip the Marches apart.

Beth Is Dead expands the beloved world of *Little Women* beautifully. The story is refreshing and modern, but still stays true to the characters and heart of the classic story. The novel is truly thrilling and will keep you on the edge of your seat.

Katie Bernet is an author living in Dallas, Texas. She's an award-winning creative director, a long-standing member of the DFW Writers' Workshop, and the director of the 2025 DFW Writers' Conference.



INK AND BONE

Ruthless and supremely powerful, the Great Library is now a presence in every major city, governing the flow of knowledge to the masses. Alchemy allows the Library to deliver the content of the greatest works of history instantly—but the personal ownership of books is expressly forbidden.

Jess Brightwell believes in the value of the Library, but the majority of his knowledge comes from illegal books obtained by his family. Jess has been sent to be his family's spy, but his loyalties are tested in the final months of his training to enter the Library's service.

When his friend inadvertently commits heresy by creating a device that could change the

world, Jess discovers that those who control the Great Library believe knowledge is more valuable than any human life—and soon both heretics and books will burn....

Ink and Bone is the perfect book for anyone who loves friendships, secrets, rivalries, and ever-changing morals. The novel is captivating and will keep you on your toes. The worldbuilding is complex, and the descriptions are beautifully detailed.

Rachel Caine lost her fight with a rare and aggressive cancer, soft tissue sarcoma, in November of 2020. With over 56 books in print and millions of copies sold, she was a frequent guest at conventions in the United States and around the world.

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

EXTEND YOUR REACH:

How Writers Can Attract and Keep Readers

The most authentic and effective way to attract and keep readers is to be active where they hang out. The dilemma is we must discover the readers' needs before we can discover their favorite hangouts.

Take the time to explore the status of a reader. Who are you trying to reach? What content does the reader expect? Have you asked what content they'd like to see from you?



CHOOSE THE TYPE OF READER

Influencers

Book reviewers and large, reputable bloggers

What are their specifics? This means spending time on their platforms and uncovering characteristics and needs.

Writers

More broad ways to simplify professional and personal life.

Writer Needs - the psychological side of a writer's life

Agents

Is the writer looking for agent representation?

Publishers

Is the writer looking for a publisher?

THE READERS OF OUR BOOKS – THIS TAKES THE MOST WORK

- ◆ **Age**
- ◆ **Demographics**
- ◆ **Reading preference**
- deeper than merely fiction or nonfiction, but specifics

Needs according to age, demographics, reading preference, lifestyle or culture, careers, family life, etc.



FOR ME, TARGETED POSTS WORK BEST:

- ✦ **Facebook** – personal page with a few professional posts
- ✦ **Facebook** – author page consists of relational and professional posts
- ✦ **X – (Twitter)** 90% is publishing world related
- ✦ **Instagram** – 33% is personal, and the remainder is either the publishing world or a mix of reader and writer
- ✦ **Pinterest** – the boards are a mix of the publishing world and personal. *My weekly blog is posted there.
- ✦ **BookBub** – Entirely for the reader
- ✦ **Goodreads** – Entirely for the reader *My weekly blog is posted there
- ✦ **LinkedIn** – Professional *My Weekly blog is posted there

How will the writer's subject matter affect the reader? What CTA (call to action) is the writer anticipating?

Each type of reader has a specific goal. Is the reader's aim for betterment regarding?

Ministry

Provide value in day to day living

Provide professional insights

Engage

Establish relationships

Before beginning every writing project, whether a social media post, blog post, article, or book, a writer inwardly asks:

1. Why is what I'm creating important to the reader?
2. Why would the reader care about the subject?

Write a quality book that others will want to promote. In turn, the reader will want to learn more about the writer. Before, during, and after the book process, employ a caring relationship that is honest and sincere. Follow up with quality posts and reposting of valuable information .

KNOW YOUR READER'S IDENTITY.

- ✦ **Fiction**
- ✦ **Nonfiction**
- ✦ **Genre**

HOW IS YOUR BOOK UNIQUE AND MEMORABLE?

- ✦ What topics are included?
- ✦ Is there a common theme?
- ✦ If fiction, what is the character's hobby, career, lifestyle, skills, culture, etc.
- ✦ If fiction, what is the setting?

Now that we've explored what makes your book different from others, where do you find the readers who fit into the above categories?

DISCOVER THOSE ANSWERS ON:

- ✦ **Facebook**
- ✦ **X (Twitter)**
- ✦ **Instagram**
- ✦ **Pinterest**
- ✦ **Google**

Follow those groups, businesses, blogs, even products, and special aids. Comment and interact. For example, if your character is a hair stylist, spend a little time at your salon asking

customers what they read and why. Is this a spot for a signing event? If your character is knowledgeable or works in a health-food store, find out what those customers are reading. Again, it can even be a setting for a book signing event.

Do a search on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, for those writers who write the same material. Follow them. Get involved. Comment. Read their reviews.

Jane Friedman says, "Connection is simple: find like-minded people and start conversations. Ask questions. Comment, add value, entertain, discuss your common interests, share relevant links, and just be present and authentic. Choose the social media platforms, reading sites (like Goodreads), blogs, forums, and other communities where your audience hangs out and make it about them, not you. In other words, don't treat them like your meal ticket. Get to know them. Show you care. Add to

the community. Then, when a natural opportunity arises, share that you are an author, and when it sparks an interest, share your book.”

The truth is, spending hours online is useless if the writer isn't where the reader hangs out.

Social media isn't designed to get readers; it's designed to create relationships. The best method of selling books, and I mean attracting readers, is word of mouth.

This means in addition to creating online relationships, the writer must also:

- ◆ Meet bookstore owners.
- ◆ Contact reading groups
- ◆ Visit libraries
- ◆ Develop influencers - like a Dream Team. Also called a Street Team.

Writers, we must be organized, armed with a mission statement, and work intentionally in establishing key relationships. Selling books is secondary. Plant seeds and watch the growth.

The following 7 items will help writers reach out to their audience and cultivate valuable relationships. Every item is what the writer will do for their audience . . . not the other way around.

1. Dear reader, my goal is to build a friendship with you. I care about you, and I'm constantly working to answer your questions, inform, and entertain you.
2. The passion for my writing project comes from a deep desire to provide a great book, blog post, article, and social media post for you. Your encouragement is why I work hard at my craft.

3. You can trust me to stand firm on my brand. I'm a writer who is true to my promises. My books, blogs, articles, and social media posts reflect my integrity.

4. Reader, you are important to me. My posts are about how I can meet your needs. My promise to keep in touch is reliable. Leave comments, and I will respond.

5. Your input helps me be productive. I'm listening to your suggestions, questions, and advice.

6. We're a team. No writer is ever alone. We need each other to walk this path called life.

7. What books and writers have influenced you? How can I best continue to serve you?

Our readers are priceless gems. Nurture and take care of them. Building a database takes a plan, time, and compassion for people. Are you willing to do the work?





DiAnn Mills is a bestselling author who invites her readers to step into stories where

suspense meets adventure and romance warms the heart. Known for crafting unforgettable characters tangled in unpredictable plots, DiAnn believes every breath we take unfolds a story waiting to be told—so why not make it thrilling?

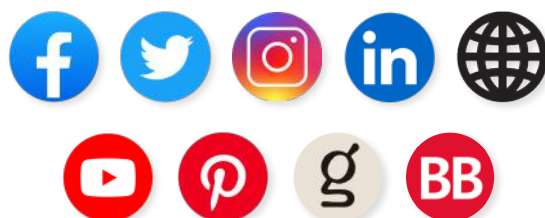
Her novels have consistently landed on bestseller lists including CBA, ECPA, and Publishers Weekly, and have won prestigious awards such as the Christy, Selah, Golden Scroll, Inspirational Readers' Choice, and Carol awards.

DiAnn is a founding board member of American Christian Fiction Writers and Conference Advisor for the Blue Ridge Mountains Christian Writers. She actively participates in Advanced Writers and

Speakers Association, Mystery Writers of America, the Jerry Jenkins Writers Guild, International Thriller Writers, Outliers Writing University, and The Christian Pen. DiAnn passionately invests in helping fellow authors succeed through mentoring, book coaching, and editing. She travels nationwide speaking and teaching engaging writing workshops.

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

Connect with DiAnn online for behind-the-scenes glimpses, writing tips, and lively discussions:



THE LONE STAR LITERARY LIFE MAGAZINE EDITORIAL CALENDAR

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

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THE LONE STAR LITERARY LIFE MAGAZINE

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