

# THE LONE STAR LITERARY LIFE

## MAGAZINE



DECEMBER 2025

ISSUE 15

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Recently, my husband and I attended an opening reception at the Arlington Museum of Art. The event celebrated an exhibit featuring the work of photographer and author [Amy J. Schultz](#). (Full disclosure: Amy is a friend, and we've bonded over our shared, ubiquitous name.)

*The Nativity Project* showcases nine years' worth of photographs taken across all 50 states. Paired with her Field Notes, deftly woven throughout the display, the exhibit stands as a testament to both her visual and literary gifts.

What struck me most was how these images—many of them depicting kitschy, plastic yard art—evoked such a profound and, truthfully, unexpected response in me. Amy took something so commonplace, something many of us overlook entirely, and transformed it into a statement about our shared humanity.

In a moment when our country feels so fractured, she offers a touchpoint of unity. It was a powerful experience.

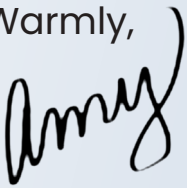
So why am I sharing this here? No, it's not a shameless plug for my friend (although

if you're in the DFW area, I'd definitely visit!). I'm sharing it because the experience beautifully illustrates this month's theme: gifting.

My team and I chose "gifting" because it carries a dual meaning. As a verb, it calls us to give. As a noun, it points to the talents we each possess—our unique gifts.

*The Nativity Project* embodies

Warmly,



**AMY KELLY**

*Editor-in-Chief, Lone Star Literary Life*

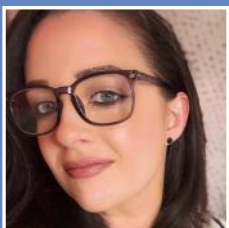
both: it is a gift from Amy, and it reflects her gifting. In sharing both, she offered a new way of seeing.

As you move through the holiday season, we hope this issue invites you to reflect on your own gifting and all the meaningful ways you share it with the world.



# VIDEO FROM THE EDITOR

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## CONTRIBUTORS



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# HOLIDAY TO-DO LIST: *Read, Review, Repeat*

by Kimberly McMillan

**J**ulie Andrews was right. Everyone loves a brown paper package tied up with string, especially when it comes in the shape of a book. But how do you know what gift to give the reader in your life? And how does a reader find their next epic story? Simple. Reviews.

*Reviews? No one cares what I think?*

Don't sell yourself short. Readers in every genre care.

*But I already tell my closest book friends?*

So what? You're going to leave the rest of us in the dark, utterly clueless? Be careful, you're edging towards the Naughty list.

*But reviews just benefit authors?*

No. Reviews are for the reader. Not only do they guide you to find exactly what you're in the mood to read, but they

can also point you away from genres and themes you strongly dislike. Remember, authors want to target readers in their genre or new readers open to a new experience. They do not want you to pick up a book expecting one thing and walk away disappointed when their story fails to meet your expectations.

### *What does a review look like?*

You've just closed that book, hugged it to your chest, and absorbed every drop of emotion. Now what's next? Don't worry, I already know the answer. Excitement bubbles as the need to share your experience is as palpable as popping the cork on your holiday champagne. You can't help yourself; your friends must know about that book.

Since you're already on Team Share, let's make your process a little more efficient and effective. Instead of calling or texting or waiting to bump into that friend at the gym, post it on Goodreads, Amazon, Barnes

and Noble, and/or your socials. Share with the whole class!

### *But, how?*

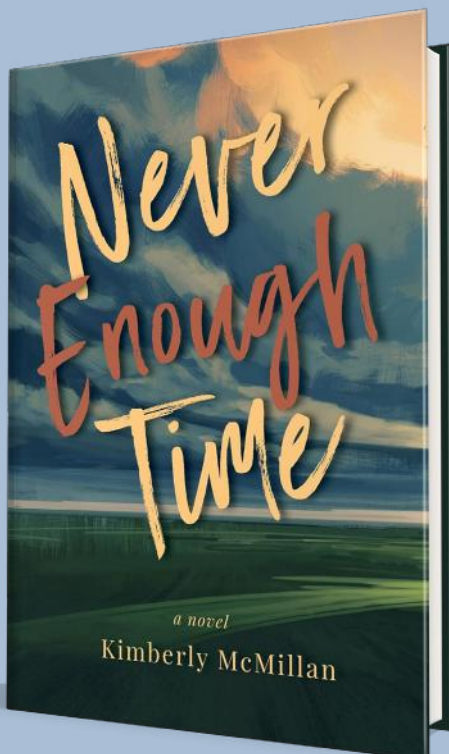
Hold on to your eggnog, this will be fast. First, rate the book (1–5 stars). Then, tell us what you loved or hated about the story. It's literally that easy! Leave the story paraphrasing to the book jacket. Instead, tell us: was the book a page-turner? Did you cry or laugh? Was the ending surprising? Will the story and characters live on in your heart? Your review can be as short as ten words. Don't sweat it. No one is asking you to write a book about a book.

Reviews are Rudolph's red nose, guiding you to your next perfect read. Will the next story whisk you to faraway places, drop you in the heat of action, heat up your love life, or heal your heart through tears and laughter? Whatever you choose, I can almost promise you that the next book in your hand is a result of someone else's excitement, persuasion,

and timely review. Now is the time for you to give back. Shine a bright light on the books you read, whether you loved them or didn't finish them. Give people a reason to pick up a book, try a new author, experience a new genre, or move to the next title on their

list. Help booklovers expand their reading horizons with your unbiased reviews. Rest assured, I will always share my reviews and book experiences with you. Don't deny me or our fabulous book community the gift of your book reviews.

**Kimberly McMillan**, author of *Never Enough Time*, is a Texas author crafting complex stories that highlight the relationships women create and endure in the midst of love, life, hardships, and drama.



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# STORMS, SECRETS, AND THE SOUL OF GALVESTON:

*A Conversation with Maria Elena Sandovici*

*By Melissa A. Bartell*

**F**or Houston-based novelist and painter **Maria Elena Sandovici**—known to friends and readers simply as **Elena**—inspiration often comes on the wind, sometimes heavy with salt spray, sometimes whispering through the live oaks of Galveston Island. Her novels explore the tension between beauty and danger, between what endures and what is washed away. Best known for *Storms of Malhado*, Elena’s work braids history, myth, and the resilience of women who face the storm and rebuild. Her latest book, *Breakaway Bridesmaid*—a contemporary mystery set amid a coastal wedding gone awry—arrived in paperback in October.

When we spoke, Elena was splitting time between her Houston studio and the 125-year-old cottage she recently restored on the island that fuels her fiction.

## Galveston as Muse

“The Great Storm of 1900 simply had to be included,” she says of the hurricane that anchors one of *Storms of Malhado*’s three timelines. “It’s such a major part of island history. And I felt compelled to include Ike too, because that one impacted my own life.” The novel also revisits Hurricane Carla in 1961—an era Elena finds “so appealing on the surface, yet filled with racial and gender inequalities lurking underneath.”

Her affection for Galveston is evident, though she’s quick to admit that love isn’t blind. “Shouldn’t a powerful love letter contain a warning?” she muses. Asked to describe the island in three words, she doesn’t hesitate: *moody, haunted, hopeful*.

The writer’s historic cottage, she says, is more than a refuge. “When I decided I wanted it, I knew it would be a perfect place to invite readers and host events. We celebrated the five-year anniversary of *Storms of Malhado* there last spring.”



## Friendship and Disappearance

In *Breakaway Bridesmaid*, Elena trades century-old storms for the emotional turbulence of friendship. The spark came on a chilly Galveston night, when she noticed “a young woman in a blue bridesmaid’s dress slip out of a restaurant and walk alone down the Strand.” The moment begged for a story.

“The novel examines how friendship breakups can cut as deeply as romantic ones,” she says. “As one starts to unravel certain bonds, it

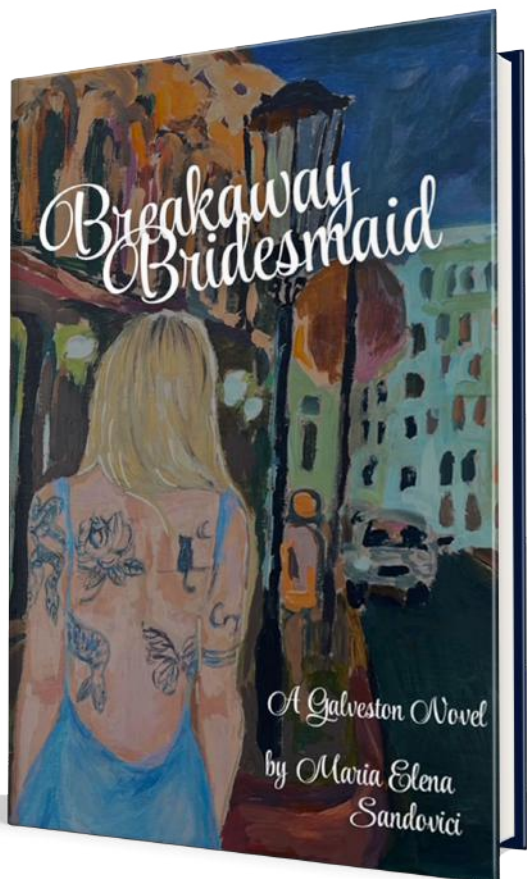
leads to a redefining and reclaiming of identity that can be powerful and positive.”

While the book begins as a mystery, she admits that “female friendships are what’s most compelling to me.” Imperfect women drive her fiction: “To be sympathetic, a character needs flaws. Our society still struggles to celebrate female protagonists who mess up—but we’re making progress.”

## Storms, Research, and the Blurred Line of History

*Storms of Malhado* demanded extensive research. “When my historical expert first reviewed the manuscript, she pointed out so many things I’d gotten wrong I feared I’d have to abandon it,” Elena recalls, laughing. Yet revisions deepened the story. “Inventing a mother’s illness to keep my heroine in Galveston actually made the plot stronger.”

Even with real backdrops like the League-Kempner mansion, she’s untroubled by historical liberties. “You should see the



stories some of the ghost tours concoct! I like that sometimes it's hard to tell what's real and what's myth."

### **Miss Vulpe and Other Wild Women**

Before the hurricanes came Ana Petrescu—better known as Miss Vulpe—a rebellious anti-heroine whose adventures stretch from Bucharest to Louisiana swamps. "I dreamed her up when I was a teenager," Elena confides. "That book was really for my own entertainment."

Her fondness for the outrageous shows in the series' noir humor and shocking turns. "A friend once told me readers would 'clutch their pearls.' Some find the stories distasteful, others love them. I wrote them for myself."

The influence of *Bonjour Tristesse* still lingers. "Reading Françoise Sagan in school was a revelation. It made me feel there needed to be more bold, complicated young women in literature."

### **Between Canvas and Page**

Elena is as much painter as novelist, though she laughs at the notion that her books begin as visual compositions. "My imagination isn't very visual—I focus on sensations and moods." Still, she sometimes paints scenes tied to her novels, painstakingly searching for reference images: "I can't paint from imagination at all."

A typical creative day? "Chaotic," she admits. "An ideal one would include a thousand words and a finished painting. But some days include neither. I try not to be hard on myself—our brains need breaks."

### **Looking Ahead**

When asked which book was most joyful to write, she names *The Glory Days of Aimee Bonnard*, drafted during the lockdown of 2020. "Since the world seemed to be ending, I figured, why not finally write about a high-end sex worker? It was so much fun."



The most challenging? Her debut, *Dogs with Bagels*. “It took endless rewrites to make it flow—and now I find it embarrassing!”

As for what’s next, she’s content to wait for lightning to strike. “I’m waiting for some kind of unexpected source of inspiration to present itself.”

And knowing **Elena Sandovici**, when that storm arrives, it will be worth the watch.

### Connect with Elena:

Blog: [Have Colors Will Travel | Website](#) | [Goodreads](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Pinterest](#) | [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.

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# EVENTS CALENDAR HOW-TO VIDEO

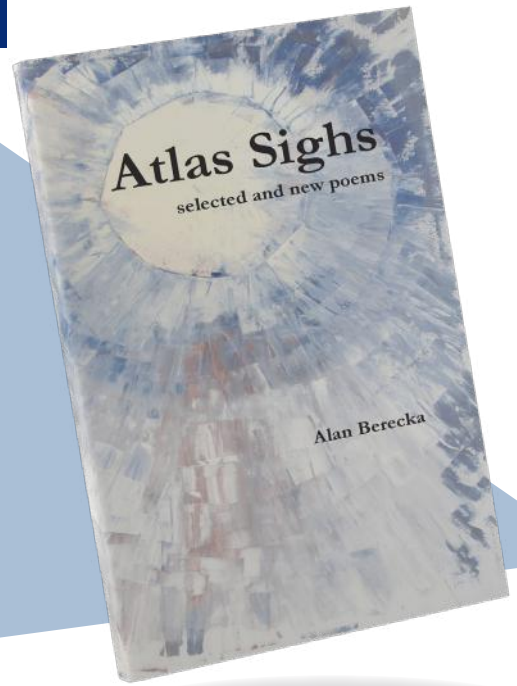


**Alan Berecka**

**Turning Plow Press**

**February 9, 2024; 120 pages**

*Reviewed by Janet McCann*



**A**lan Berecka's poems are devastatingly funny. I have always been a fan of humor in poetry, but so often comic poems are *only* funny, and thus easily forgotten. But these poems are funny and serious too. Berecka's narratives chronicle an ethnic culture that is disappearing, a way of teaching Catholicism to children that rivals *Angela's Ashes* (but isn't so cruel,) and awareness of the fragility of life and relationships. And yet there is humor. I think of Berecka's work as a space where the spiritual meets the physical with a bumpy crash, and parts fall off each.

Former Corpus Christi Poet Laureate, Alan Berecka has six books of poetry and a growing international reputation; he has performed and published poetry abroad. A retired librarian at Delmar College, he lives in Sinton, Texas with his family.

These poems are all kinds of comic, and provoke everything from a wry smile to a shout of laughter. The titles are marvelous. "McDemption," "Why Theology and Economics Don't Mix," "Wings not Feathers, Emily," and many others which invite a smile.

In the "just plain funny" category there is "Divine Error." Jesus as



a small boy kills a friend, then  
resurrects him:

Mother Mary saw it all. "Jesus  
H. Christ! What have you done?"  
Jesus didn't have to be omniscient  
to know he had stepped into it deep.  
Every child understands what it  
means  
when a parent screams a middle  
name.

By her command and his power,  
the playmate was restored. Risen  
the confused boy wept, then ran  
home, where he waited for his chance  
to holler and chant, *Crucify him!*  
one Good Friday in Jerusalem. (42)

Many of the poems are serious,  
too. They show the speaker as  
son and father, as a devoted  
family man and as someone  
experiencing grief, as teacher  
and as learner. It is hard to give  
samples of these more serious  
poems because they are all  
narratives, and tend to require  
the details at the beginning  
which build up to the profound  
conclusion. And there is often  
some slight comic twist. "Leveling"  
begins with the son and his father  
"leveling my mother's fresh grave."

The grown son tries to act like  
his father, wanting "him to think  
that I/ had become a man." But  
afterward, in their shared silent  
grief, the old man spoke

...what I have come  
to believe was his  
greatest compliment:

"Hey, kid, don't forget  
how to do this." (20)

Part of the pleasure of this book  
is at the voice seems constant  
from the first collection through  
to the new poems. Of course  
the scene changes as the poet  
grows older and has different  
experiences. In the later poems,  
there is more of the Wiseman  
and less of the Wisecracker,  
but nevertheless, there is a  
consistent tone. I remember  
my first writing teacher asking  
the class aggressively, "Is there  
anybody home in this poem?"  
These poems are definitely  
inhabited, and we feel we know  
the writer and would like to  
have coffee with him. This book  
reminds us that life is beautiful  
and sad and funny.



Midlife confusion meets curiosity and hope.

# HOW THE HELL DID I NOT KNOW THAT?

**Lucie Frost**  
**Trinity University Press**  
**August 26, 2025; 252 pages**



**I**n her sharp and often uproarious memoir, *How the Hell Did I Not Know That?*, Lucie Frost transforms the uncertainty of early retirement into an engaging exploration of what it means to rebuild a life after the structures that once defined it fall away. Having stepped abruptly out of a long legal career, Frost finds herself without routine, purpose, or even a reliable sense of direction. Instead of manufacturing a polished reinvention arc,

she offers something more honest: a candid portrait of midlife disorientation and the unexpected power of curiosity to guide one forward.

A casual binge of *90 Day Fiancé* becomes the unlikely spark for what Frost dubs her “Couch to Curiosity” project. From that point, she commits to investigating every question that crosses her mind—scientific, historical, trivial, or philosophical—as a way of reconnecting with the world and with herself. What



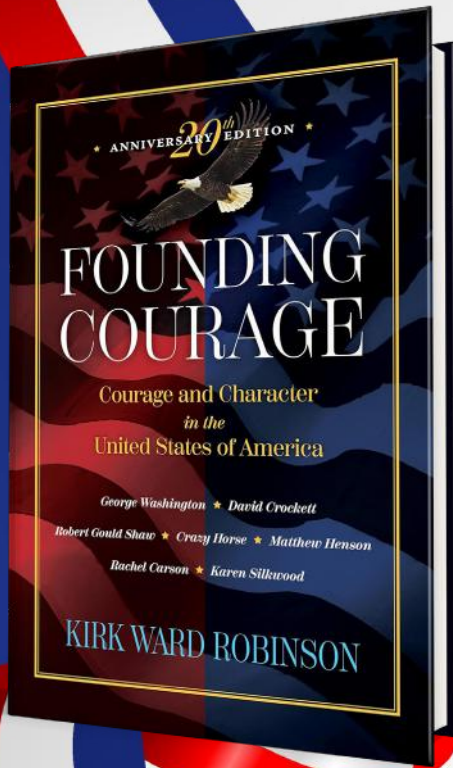
follows is a narrative with a deliberately loose, journal-like structure, in which each inquiry leads organically to the next. Whether she is investigating the history of an everyday object, uncovering the story behind a famous photograph, or revisiting long-forgotten science lessons, Frost writes with an infectious blend of wonder, skepticism, and wit.

The humor—irreverent, self-aware, and frequently laugh-out-loud—is one of the book’s great strengths. Yet Frost never uses it to avoid deeper truths. Interwoven with the comic observations are stark reflections on emotional fatigue, the weight of civic and humanitarian concerns, and the guilt she feels when volunteer work at a detention center overwhelms her. Her openness about therapy, trauma responses, and the slow, uneven path toward emotional steadiness adds a thoughtful counterbalance to the memoir’s lighter moments.

Stylistically, Frost’s conversational tone and stream-of-consciousness approach produce the feeling of an intimate, ongoing dialogue. Readers witness her gradually recognize that curiosity—attentive, sustained, and sincere—can offer a sense of meaning that grand ambitions sometimes cannot. The memoir’s thematic center rests here: that rediscovery in midlife does not require dramatic transformation, only a willingness to pay close attention to what sparks the mind and stirs the spirit.

*How the Hell Did I Not Know That?* will especially resonate with women navigating midlife transitions, though its reflections on identity, purpose, and the search for meaning have broader appeal. Readers who enjoy memoirs that interweave humor, cultural observation, and personal growth will find Frost an insightful, engaging, and refreshingly candid guide.





A sweeping, resonant examination of courage as both personal virtue and national legacy

## FOUNDING COURAGE: *Courage and Character in the United States of America*

**Kirk Ward Robinson**  
**HighlandHome Publishing**  
**August 29, 2025; 377 pages**

**K**irk Ward Robinson's *Founding Courage* returns in a twentieth-anniversary edition with a renewed sense of urgency, inviting readers to consider what courage has meant across American history—and what it might still mean today. Robinson approaches the subject with an unmistakable seriousness, blending scientific inquiry, historical portraiture, and philosophical reflection into a narrative that aims to illuminate not only the nature of courage but also its place in shaping national character.

The book opens with a careful examination of the biology and psychology underlying courageous behavior. Robinson walks readers through the hormonal cascades and neurological processes that prepare the body



for decisive action, then pivots toward the higher-order forces—experience, moral identity, altruism—that transform physical response into character. These early chapters are dense but purposeful, laying the groundwork for the larger argument that courage is both universal and deeply individual, accessible to everyone yet fully realized only when rooted in personal conviction.

From this foundation, Robinson widens the lens to consider the American story itself. His narrative here is often lyrical, even cinematic, especially when describing the dangers and uncertainties that have tested successive generations. He does not shy away from pointed observations about modern American life; his critique of contemporary fear, political posturing, and eroded public trust is frank and, at times, bracing. Some readers will welcome this directness, while others

may wish for a more nuanced treatment. Still, Robinson’s intent is clear: to propose that courage has not disappeared but has been overshadowed by noise, and that reclaiming it requires remembering where we came from.

The core of the book—its portraits of George Washington, David Crockett, Robert Gould Shaw, Crazy Horse, Matthew Henson, Rachel Carson, and Karen Silkwood—is where Robinson’s

**THE LIGHT IN THE BARN**  
BY SUSAN P. BAKER

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strengths are most evident. His research is meticulous, his pacing deliberate, and his prose attentive to the interior lives of his subjects. He avoids idealizing them, instead tracing how ordinary limitations, private doubts, and lived experiences shape extraordinary acts. Particularly compelling is his treatment of underrepresented histories: the layered context he offers in the chapters on Crazy Horse and Matthew Henson broadens the reader's understanding of whose courage has been celebrated—and whose has long been overlooked.

At its heart, *Founding Courage* is less about elevating heroes than about examining the conditions that make heroism possible. Robinson writes with clear admiration but also with an insistence on accuracy, noting where myth has overtaken fact and where history deserves to be reexamined. The result is a work that feels both reflective and restorative.

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Readers interested in American history, moral psychology, or character education will find much to engage with here. Robinson's arguments may spark debate, but the book's thoughtful structure and genuine reverence for its subjects make it a resonant exploration of what courage has meant—and what it still can mean.



# DECEMBER BOOK CAMPAIGN

**L**one Star Literary Life Book Campaigns has a special story to share for December.

This month, we're spotlighting a compelling work of historical nonfiction for young adults—an engaging, true-to-history account from the pioneer days that invites readers to step into a world of grit, resilience, and discovery.

Follow along on social media throughout the month for exclusive insights, behind-the-scenes content, and engaging updates as our reviewers explore this unforgettable journey into America's past.

As our gift to the hardworking reviewers who bring these campaigns to life, we pause all reviews from mid-December to mid-January—giving everyone space to rest, reflect, and return refreshed for the new year's stories.

Don't miss out! Step into history, connect with the author, and discover a book that just might become a new favorite. Stay engaged on social media to join the conversation and the fun.

You can find us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Threads](#), and [X](#).

## ***Pint-sized Pioneers at Play:***

*Homemade Frontier Fun and Danger*

**By Preston Lewis and Harriet  
Kocher Lewis**

**Bariso Press**

**Young Adult / Nonfiction / History**

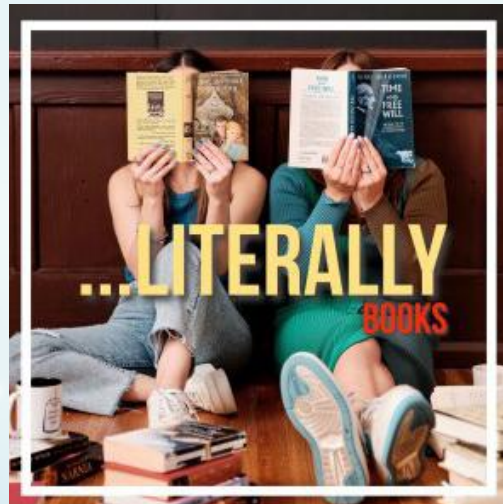
**December 2-15**





# TEXAS LITERARY PODCASTS

In the spirit of Gifting, we're excited to share **Literally, Books**, a podcast that gives back to the Texas literary community through candid, compelling conversations. With insightful interviews and a passion for storytelling, it's a true gift to our literary community.



## *Texas Authors Close Out 2025 with Gifts for Everyone on Your List*

**O**ur December Texas Books Preview has offerings for the trickiest people on your holiday list. You'll find mysteries for the thrill seekers, holiday romance for the Hallmark fans, nonfiction for the studious set, and adorable tales for the littles in your life. Peruse these top favorites, and [click here to experience the entire collection on our website.](#)

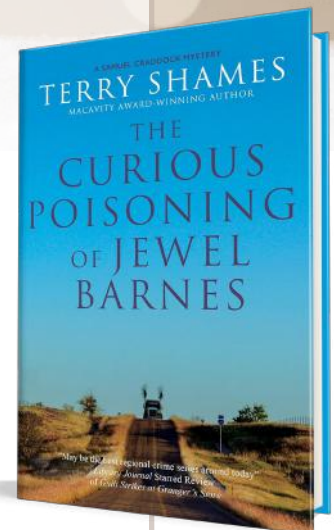
### *The Curious Poisoning of Jewel Barnes*

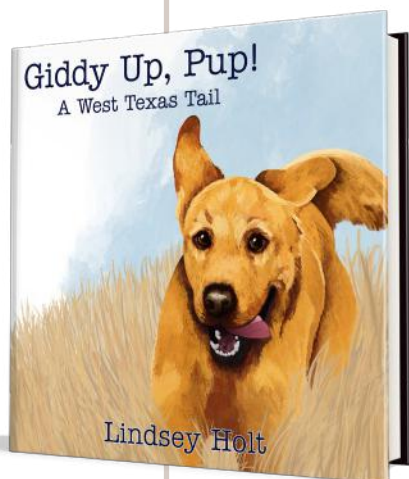
*by Terry Shames*

Mystery / Police Procedural / Small-town crime

Severn House

December 12





## Giddy Up, Pup! A West Texas Tail

by Lindsey Holt

Children's Book / Animals

Kindle Direct Publishing

December 1



## Highlander's Holly & Ivy

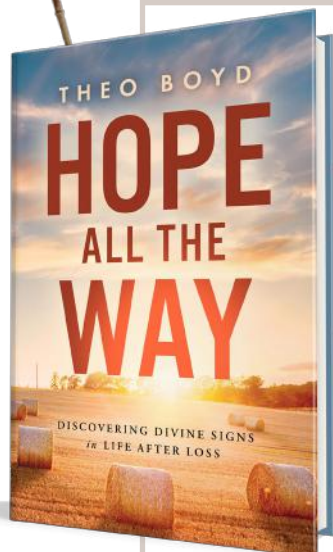
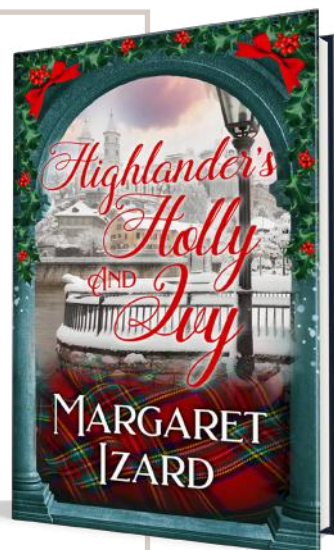
CHRISTMAS COMPANION BOOK STONES OF IONA SERIES

by Margaret Izard

Paranormal Romance / Romantasy

The Wild Rose Press

December 1st



## Hope All The Way

DISCOVERING DIVINE SIGNS IN LIFE AFTER LOSS

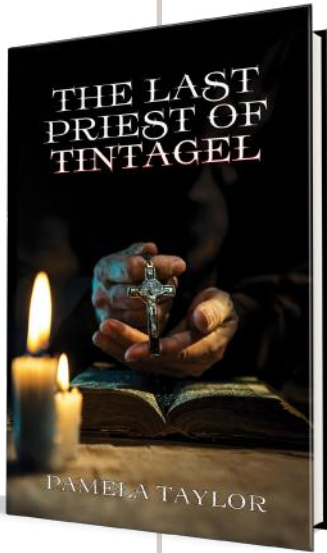
by Theo Boyd

Nonfiction / Inspirational / Memoir

Forefront Books

December 2





## The Last Priest of Tintagel

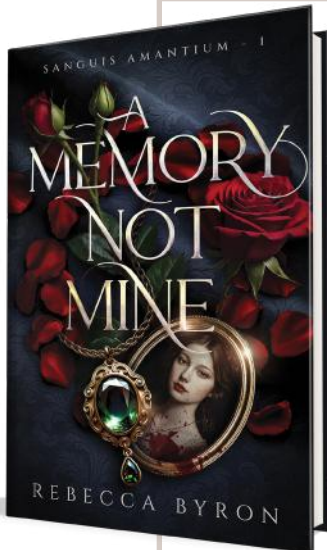
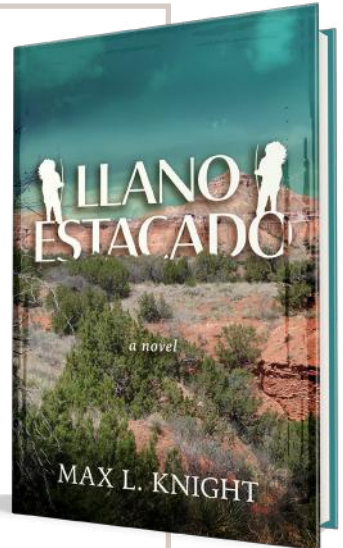
by Pamela Taylor

Historical Fiction  
Black Rose Writing  
December 11

## Llano Estacado

by Max Knight

Historical Fiction  
Stoney Creek Publishing  
October 10

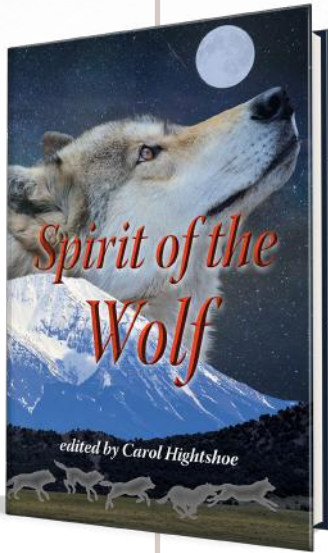


## A Memory Not Mine

By Rebecca Byron

Paranormal Romance / Vampire Romance  
September 2





## Spirit of the Wolf

*Edited by Carol Hightshoe*

Anthology / Science Fiction / Fantasy

WolfSinger Publications

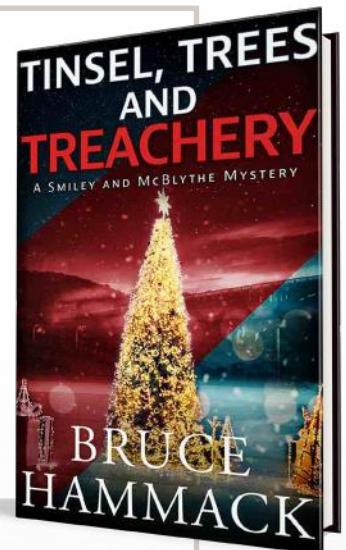
November 18

## Tinsel, Trees And Treachery

*by Bruce Hammack*

Mystery/Private Investigator/ Clean Read

December 11





“I believe we’ve discovered the first hieroglyphic photo bomb.”

**C**hris 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*.

YOUR  
WORDS  
ARE A  
GIFT —  
TIME TO  
SHARE  
THEM



**T**his December, as the world shifts into a season of giving, it's natural to think not only about the gifts we buy and wrap, but also about the gifts we offer with our hearts, our time—and yes, our words. For writers, this is especially meaningful. Words carry stories, ideas, hope, and connection. They can illuminate a truth, comfort a stranger, spark curiosity, or inspire courage. They create bridges between lived experiences, and they linger long after the page is closed.

Your words are not just pages in a book; they are one of the most personal gifts you can give.

Yet it's easy to forget this in the quiet moments of creating. During drafting sessions, revisions, and the inevitable periods of doubt, questions like *Does anyone need this?* *Will anyone find it?* surface for nearly every writer. These doubts are human—but they shouldn't be the final word.

Because the truth remains—yes, someone needs your words. And yes, someone is waiting. Somewhere, there is a reader who will feel more understood, more grounded, more inspired because of what you've created. To get your words to them, writers must think not only as creators, but also as givers and as marketers.

## **MARKETING AS AN ACT OF GENEROSITY**

Marketing is often misunderstood as self-promotion or noise. But in reality, it is an act of generosity. It is the process by which you help your gift reach the hands of the people it was meant for.

Marketing says:

- *Here is something I made with intention and care.*
- *Here is something I believe might matter to you.*
- *Here is a story, an idea, a moment—offered openly.*

Good marketing is not about convincing people to care. It is about helping the **right** people discover that what you offer is exactly what they've been looking for.

## **YOUR READER CAN'T RECEIVE WHAT YOU DON'T SHARE**

Many talented writers remain unseen not because their work isn't meaningful, but because they hesitate to share it. Sometimes it's fear. Sometimes it's overwhelm. Sometimes it's simply not knowing where to begin. But just as a wrapped gift cannot be appreciated until it is opened, an unwitnessed story cannot make the impact it was meant to make.

This is why showing up for your work—and for your readers—matters.

## **A FEW GUIDING REMINDERS**

As you consider how to share your gift more generously, keep these in mind:

- **Your author brand is your invitation.** It helps readers understand who you are, what you write, and why your work might matter to them.
- **Consistency builds trust and recognition.** Even small, simple touchpoints—a monthly note, a weekly post, a seasonal update—create familiarity.
- **Your message is the gift; marketing is the wrapping.** Wrapping doesn't diminish the gift; it prepares it for presentation.
- **Beginning is better than perfect.** Small steps open more doors than waiting for an ideal moment that may never arrive.



- **Readers want connection.** They choose books not just for the story, but for the voice behind it. Let them know who you are.

## **GIVE YOURSELF—AND YOUR READERS—THE GIFT OF VISIBILITY**

This season invites reflection, gratitude, and generosity. It's also an opportunity to recommit to your work and its purpose. Sharing your writing is not an act of ego; it is an act of service. It says: *I believe these words can help someone, delight someone, or simply make someone feel less alone.*

That is worth sharing.

That is worth celebrating.

That is worth marketing.

## **IF YOU NEED HELP STARTING, WE'VE GOT YOU**

If building your author brand feels overwhelming or abstract,

our **5-Day Email Course: Creating Your Author Brand** is designed specifically to help. Over five days, you'll receive:

- Practical, bite-sized lessons
- Clear, achievable action steps
- Guidance to help you define your message, your audience, and your presence
- Encouragement woven throughout

By the end, you'll walk away with the foundation of an author brand that reflects your heart and helps your gift reach the readers who need it most.

Your words are a gift.

Your readers are waiting.

Let this be the season you share them boldly, confidently, and generously.

# AUTHOR AWARDS ROUNDUP



**T**exas authors shine in this roundup of awards and accolades from across the literary world. We're continually amazed at the depth of talent in the Texas literary community. [Click here to view the complete list of winners and finalists](#), including Texans in the running for the Booker Prize, the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction, and the National Book Awards.

## 2025 Texas Writer Award Recipient



**Peniel Joseph** won the prestigious Texas Writer Award for 2025. Formerly known as the Bookend Award, the Texas Book Festival honors one recipient each year for their originality, literary achievement, and the impact of their body of work.



**Robert Jackson Bennett** won the 2025 World Fantasy Award for best novel with his work *The Tainted Cup*.

**Jane Little Botkin** won the 2025 Downing Journalism Award from Women Writing the West for her article "How to Write an Honest Biography."



**KB Brookins** won the 2025 Lammy Award for Transgender Nonfiction for their memoir *Pretty*.



**Robin Bruce** is one of two winners of the inaugural Susan Kamil Emerging Writers Prize. Each

recipient wins \$12,500. The prize is to provide aspiring writer-booksellers with the financial support to focus on a full-length manuscript.

**Robin Dobbins** won a Literary Titan Award for her book *Midnight Justice*.



**Angela Dominguez** earned a spot on the prestigious Texas Bluebonnet Award list with her book *Gabby Torres Gets a Million Followers*.

**Cristina Garcia** won Honorable Mention with the 2025 Purple Dragonfly Awards with *The Pesky Problem*.

**Ian Griffin** won first place in both the Mystery-Spies & Espionage and Fiction-Thriller-Espionage categories awards in the 2025 BookFest Awards for *Ascend from the Ashes*.

**Lyndsey Lewellen** won the Young Adult category of the 2025 Christy Awards for her novel *The Chaos Grid*.



**Margaret Izard** won the Silver Award in the Fiction-Romance-Fantasy category of the Bookfest Awards for *Stone of Hope* and First Place for Book Series with the Iona series and First place in the Fiction-Romance-Fantasy category for *Stone of Doubt*.

**Andrew Porter's** short story "Angelo" was selected by Celeste Ng for inclusion in this year's Best American Short Stories.

**46TH ANNUAL AMERICAN BOOK AWARD**

*Malas: A Novel* by **Marcela Fuentes**

[...] *Poems* by **Fady Joudah**

**WOMEN WRITING THE WEST WILLA LITERARY AWARDS**



Historical Fiction– *Sarita* by **Natalie Musgrave Dossett**

Contemporary Fiction– *Malas: A Novel* by **Marcela Fuentes**

Scholarly Nonfiction– *A Story of Stories from a Texas Border Barrio* by **Cristina Devereaux Ramírez**



**Lucas Schaefer** won the 2025 Kirkus Prize for Fiction for his debut novel *The Slip*.



# A Year of Powerful Books.

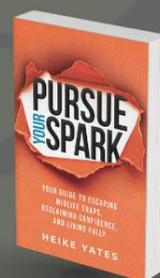
## A Year of Purpose.

At Reaching & Rooted Publishing, we help purpose-led authors bring messages of hope, healing, and clarity into a world that needs them more than ever.

This year, four extraordinary books came to life through our Process Publishing™ method.

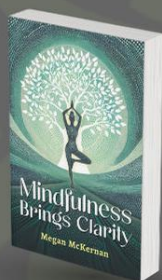
***Pursue Your Spark*** by Heike Yates

A bold midlife reset for the woman ready to reclaim her confidence and her voice.



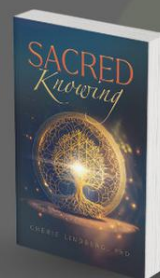
***Mindfulness Brings Clarity*** by Megan McKernan

A grounding guide to overcoming anxiety, self-doubt, and the weight of judgment.



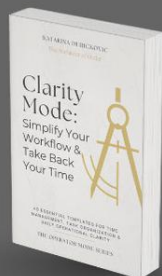
***Sacred Knowing*** by Cherie Lindberg

A transformative path to nervous system healing, trauma recovery, and personal growth.



***Clarity Mode*** by Katarina Durickovic

A systems-first playbook with 49 templates to help founders and operators take back their time.



Your Book Could Be Next.

Learn More About Publishing With Reaching & Rooted

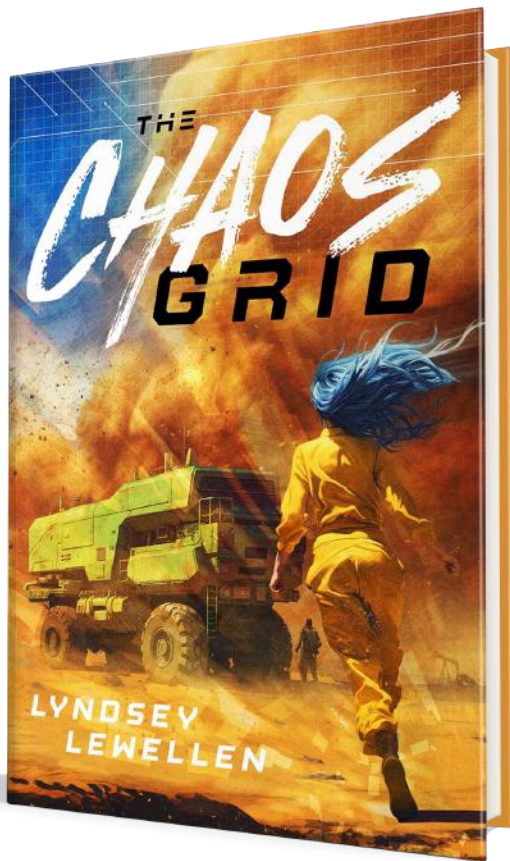
# WHAT TO READ NEXT IN YOUNG ADULT



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

These two novels tell very different stories, but with similar themes. One of them is realistic fiction and the other is scientific fiction, but they both deal with topics such as revenge, standing up against injustice, and family dynamics.





## ***The Chaos Grid***

Cross the grid. Survive the storms. Let your destiny burn.

When mankind's attempts to control nature backfire, Texas descends into a wasteland. Storms rage and ravenous beasts roam the Outer Grid. The only safe havens rest inside the tech-obsessed domed cities. But when her parents are murdered inside the Plex City dome, seventeen-year-old Juniper Conway wants revenge.

Ties to her extended family threaten to pull her back as she runs from city to city. The Plex is endangering its citizens by legalizing a deadly nano drug, and Juniper's family needs her help to deliver the counteragent. Saving the city who orphaned her goes against everything she stands for. The only way out is to brave the wasteland.

Juniper joins a shipping crew fearless enough to transport food across the Outer Grid. But when a string of bad luck turns lethal, she fears something, or someone, is dragging her back to the Plex. As her world sinks into chaos, Juniper must decide if revenge is worth the lives of the crew she has come to love.

*The Chaos Grid* is a fun, compelling, and christian based novel. It contains action and beautiful worldbuilding with an allegory expertly woven throughout that you won't expect til the end. The plot and characters will keep you reading and the unique monsters and pets will bring joy.

**Lyndsey Lewellen** grew up on a healthy dose of comic books, punk music, and sci-fi. She infuses all three loves into novels written for young adults. When she's not writing or whittling down her endless TBR, she designs novel covers and paints on shoes. She lives on a small Texas farm with her best friend/husband, five children, and what some might call a zoo of animals (especially after meeting the peacocks).

## *The Writing Room*

Immediately after high school graduation, eighteen-year-old Maya is kicked out of her wealthy dad's NYC home; he prides himself on forcing his kids to "make their own way in the world." Maya's mom lives in Guatemala, so Maya crashes with friends while working and trying to land freelance writing gigs.

Maya struggles to find her footing until she gets access to a "writing room," a shared workspace where she can focus—and get to know the intriguing neighbor, Jake, who's often there.

When she discovers her dad is bankrolling a virulently anti-immigrant candidate for

governor, Maya—the daughter of an immigrant—realizes she can't continue quietly accepting his choices. She'll have to take a stand, using the voice she's found in the writing room.

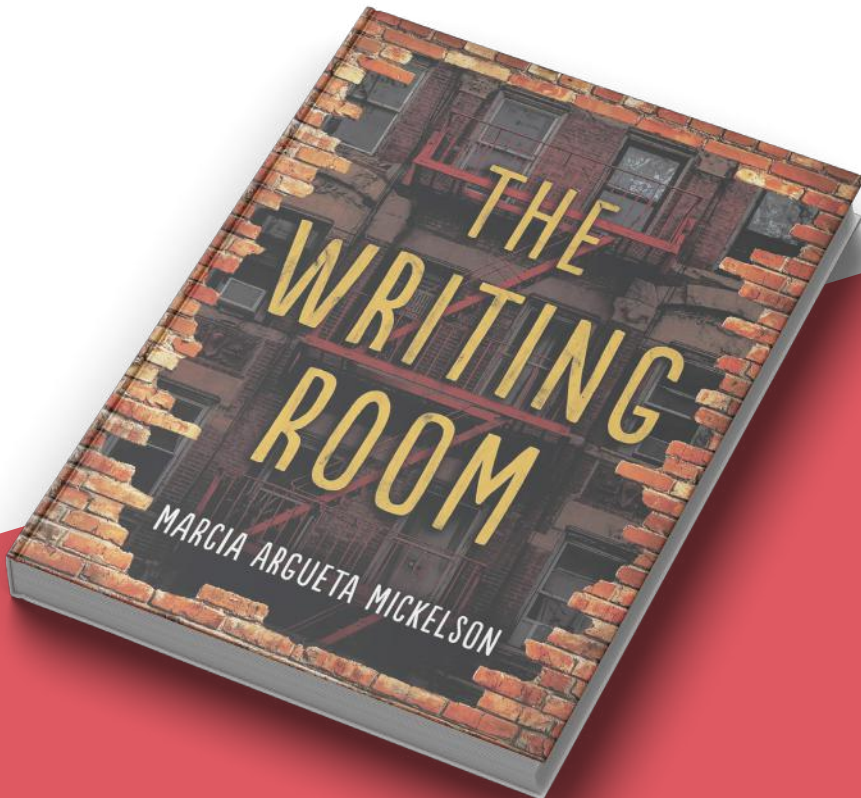
*The Writing Room* is a raw and relatable novel about the struggles of being young, broke, and still needing to stand up for what is right. This novel deals with morals and parental relationships as well as how to build your life from the ground up. It contains characters full of passion, love, and the want to truly make a difference.



## **Marcia Argueta Mickelson**

was born in Guatemala to Corina and Jose Argueta. When Marcia was an infant, her family immigrated to the United States. She attended high school in New Jersey and then graduated from Brigham Young University with a BA in American Studies. She lives in Texas with her husband, three sons, and two dogs.

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





# Christmas is for Giving

*by DiAnn Mills*

**W**riters give every time they create—whether fiction or nonfiction. Words possess healing, connective power; sincere actions represent generosity in its finest form.

Christmas reminds us that giving isn't limited to monetary gifts. The season is also a time to share what we've penned in carefully written sentences and in ways that also offer joy, hope, entertainment, inspiration, and encouragement—which doesn't come in colorful paper and enormous bows. The recipient may not be a reader, but they will remember your generosity.



We give not to climb a bestseller list, but because compassion and gratitude overflow from our hearts. How we share with others during this joyous season reflects our thankfulness for the blessings we've received throughout the year.

Here are a few ideas to inspire our Christmas giving.

1. Write a holiday short story or poem and share it online with our readers. This is my favorite. Use a royalty-free website to create a cover. Consider Pixabay or Unsplash.
2. Encourage another writer. Can you help them in a way that adds value to their life? Send them a note of appreciation or support.
3. Host a holiday brunch or gathering for writers or friends and neighbors. Give a book or other gift item.
4. Guide a budding writer for a few hours on craft, marketing, or promotion. Perhaps social media consultation.
5. Thank local bookstores by visiting their stores, buying locally, or delivering treats for their breakroom.
6. Wrap books and send them to friends, family, hospitals, or nursing homes.
7. Share our writing tips, along with the latest publishing and social media info.
8. Donate one month of royalties to a charitable cause that means much to us and our community.
9. Address those who have blessed and inspired us this year. Many times, these special people do not know they have touched our lives. Show your gratitude in unexpected ways.
10. Design and personalize a holiday greeting from a site like BookBrush or Canva. These can be sent electronically or printed and mailed to brighten someone's day.



## 11. Give beyond the page:

- ★ Volunteer to read to children.
- ★ Serve in a community or church environment to benefit the needy or otherwise forgotten.
- ★ Look for ways to show gratitude to first responders.
- ★ Sponsor a needy family or child with gifts and food.
- ★ Consider a gift and handwritten letter to military personnel.
- ★ Sing in a church or community choir. When did we last sing carols?
- ★ Offer to help a single parent during the busy time.

The best gifts don't always fit under a tree or arrive wrapped in sparkly paper but from those hearts willing to give their time, talent, and

**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?



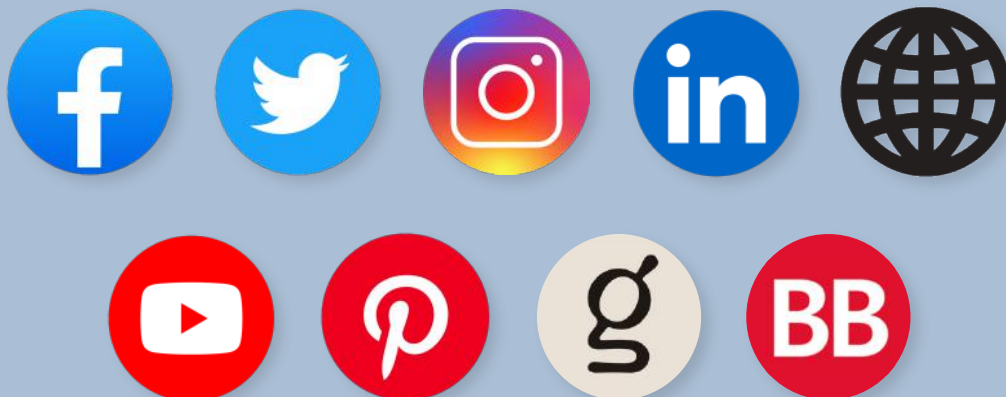
Her novels have consistently landed on bestseller lists including CBA, ECPA, and Publishers Weekly, and have won prestigious awards such as the Christy, Selah, Golden Scroll, Inspirational Readers' Choice, and Carol awards.

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:



# GIVE THE GIFT OF STORY—AND SUPPORT TEXAS CREATORS

*Discover the perfect presents for every book lover in your life! This season, celebrate the spirit of giving with our Holiday Gift Guide, featuring books, authors, and bookish businesses that make Texas shine.*

## 2025 HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE



LONE STAR  
LITERARY LIFE

# 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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