



# LETTER FROM *The Editor*



Dear Reader,

As Texas wakes and unfurls into spring, the emerging growth reminds me of the creative life. It moves in a rhythm similar to the seasons, from the fallow wintertime when ideas are germinating, to the emerging spring when a project begins to reveal itself, to the full bloom of summer when creativity flourishes and the work flows, to autumn, when it's time to harvest the creation and share it with the world.

It's a fanciful way to look at the creator's cadence, but it has always resonated with me. It's been a touchstone when I hit those places in my process where I'm flooded with self-doubt, staring at a blank page,

convinced I'll never have another good idea, or ready to tear up my manuscript and toss the whole thing out.

Often, it's only when I've hit a wall of despair that I remember the pattern and recognize where I am in the process. Always a comfort, it whispers, "You're not failing. This is a part of it. Let go of resistance and lean into the flow."

The snarky voice in my head laughs and points out the Jedi flavor of the message, but when I quiet it—and all the other naysayers living



rent-free in my mind—I always find something new.

I've been in a fallow period, holding steady and believing the growth is happening. Now, I'm poised to push out of the soil. Something is gently urging me to come out of hiding, reminding me that while it's cozy and safe in the dark, I cannot grow without reaching toward the sun.

I've discovered that these transition points, moving from one phase to the next, are where I most often get snagged—the messy and sometimes painful places I tend to resist.

Holding on to my seasons metaphor helps me endure the discomfort and carry on, so my projects can come to fruition.



My other strategy for cultivating growth is community. Spending time with others on the same journey renews me and reminds me that the creative rhythm is universal—I'm not alone in it.

Neither are you.

Whether you're a reader, an author, a literary professional, a librarian, a bookstore owner, or wherever you fit into this literary community, we are with you and for you. We hope our April issue encourages you to reflect on where you are in the growth process and inspires you to keep going.

Warmly,

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

CLICK TO LISTEN



**AMY KELLY**

*Editor-in-Chief, Lone Star Literary Life  
and the Lone Star Literary Life Team*



# VIDEO FROM THE EDITOR

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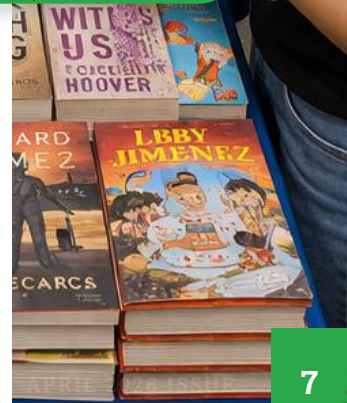
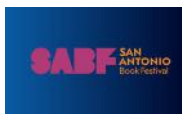


# APRIL BOOKISH EVENTS

Hope you can join the Texas literary community for some of the exciting events on tap this March. Click here for [links to the April events below](#) or visit the [Lone Star Lit Bookish Events calendar](#) for information on all upcoming author signings and indie bookstore events across Texas.



- |                     |                           |                       |                               |                       |  |
|---------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| <b>APRIL</b><br>4-5 | Austin Texas Book Trail   | <b>APRIL</b><br>10-12 | Books on the Green            | <b>APRIL</b><br>11    | Books and Bees Festival                              |
| <b>APRIL</b><br>11  | Teen Book Con             | <b>APRIL</b><br>11    | San Antonio Book Festival     | <b>APRIL</b><br>11-12 | Copperfield's Books Annual Local & Indie Author Fair |
| <b>APRIL</b><br>11  | Chautauqua Festival       | <b>APRIL</b><br>18    | Teen Bookfest by the Bay      | <b>APRIL</b><br>23-26 | Rio Grande Valley International Poetry Festival      |
| <b>APRIL</b><br>25  | Independent Bookstore Day | <b>APRIL</b><br>25-26 | Rockport Fulton Book Festival | <b>APRIL</b><br>26    | River City Rumble Poetry Slam                        |



# NOW YOU CAN LISTEN TO LONE STAR LITERARY LIFE!



**W**e are excited to introduce a brand new way to experience *The Lone Star Literary Life Magazine*. Many of our articles are now available in audio format, so you can listen to the stories, interviews, and insights you love wherever your day takes you. Whether you are commuting, walking the dog, or simply prefer listening, you can now enjoy Lone Star Literary Life on the go.

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

CLICK TO LISTEN



As you explore the recordings, you may notice that some links include an asterisk (\*). This simply means the article is read by an AI voice rather than a human narrator. Our goal is to make the magazine

more accessible and enjoyable in multiple formats, and we are thrilled to offer another way for readers and listeners to connect with the vibrant Texas literary community.

-  Letter from The Editor
-  Now You Can Listen to Lone Star Literary Life!\*
-  *What Watching My Son Grow as a Reader Taught Me* by Josh Weiss-Roessle\*
-  *The Enduring Power of Poetry* by Leslie Storey\*
-  *The Bone Nest* by Shanessa Gluhm\*
-  *Unicorn Leadership* by Ann Witherspoon\*
-  Book Campaigns\*
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-  Love, Jill
-  Texas Reads
-  What to Read Next in Young Adult\*
-  Texas Writes\*
-  DiAnn Mills' Bio\*



# THE LONE STAR LITERARY SECRET SHELF




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

We've brought that spirit to this issue.

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

**find each cover hidden somewhere in the magazine.**

Write down the **page number** where you spot each one. Or you can click the  icon in the upper-right corner to add a note to the magazine page where you find each one.

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

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

Here are the books on April's Secret Shelf.

## Happy searching!





## CREATIVITY FOR THE COMMON GOOD

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

[www.arthousedallas.com](http://www.arthousedallas.com)



## JUST FOR WRITERS

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

Find out information, group applications, and registration at [arthousedallas.com](http://arthousedallas.com)



# WHAT WATCHING MY SON GROW AS A READER TAUGHT ME

CLICK TO LISTEN



**L**ike many young readers, for most of elementary school, my son's bookshelves were filled with fantasy stories. He devoured *Harry Potter* and tore through *Wings of Fire*. Worlds full of magic, mythical creatures, and rules



that ultimately worked because the story said they did.

Then, somewhere around age ten, something changed.

He picked up Neal Shusterman's *Scythe* series (yes, he was a bit young; he's always been a precocious reader) and could not put it down. The world of those books was still imaginative and speculative, but the foundation felt different. Instead of magic, the story began with an idea rooted in technology: a future shaped by artificial intelligence, advanced medicine, and a society that had solved death.

The motor animating the world was no longer "what if magic existed?"

It was "what might happen if technology advanced far enough to change everything?"

Watching that shift unfold made me realize something interesting about readers: the questions that excite us can change over time.

Why?

## Readers Don't Always Stay in One Place

Curiosity evolves. As it does, so do the kinds of stories that resonate with us. The books that once felt magical give way to stories shaped by new experiences and knowledge.

That evolution isn't just personal, either. It's cultural.

When the world around us changes, the stories that feel most alive often grow from that landscape. New technologies appear. Social systems shift. Entire ways of communicating and interacting transform within a generation.

Because of this, the questions people bring to stories change, too.

How can writers adapt to this?

## Paying Attention Without Chasing Trends

Writers often hear advice about "keeping up with the market" or "following trends." But good storytelling has never really worked that way. Trends are



fleeting. By the time a writer catches up to one, readers are already looking for something else.

What does matter is *attention*.

Writers must pay attention to:

- ◆ how people live,
- ◆ what questions they're asking, and
- ◆ what parts of the world spark their curiosity.

Because the stories that resonate most deeply tend to grow from those observations.

A familiar place becomes strange. A common technology behaves in an unexpected way. A system people take for granted begins to reveal new possibilities.

These moments of recognition and transformation are where wonder often begins.

## Writing Stories That Feel Alive

Watching readers grow is a reminder that curiosity is never static. It expands and changes along with the world around us.

The stories that endure are rarely the ones that simply repeat what came before. They listen carefully to the questions readers are starting to ask and explore what might lie beyond them.

Sometimes that exploration leads to entirely new worlds. Sometimes it begins with the one we already know, shifted just slightly, until it suddenly feels full of possibility again.

**Josh Weiss-Roessler** lives in the Austin area and has written screenplays, way too much marketing copy, and the first in a series of middle-grade sci-fi novels, which he plans to release this fall. Sign up for his newsletter to learn more and read stories set in his novel's world.

# WHY CAN'T I SELL MY BOOK?

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

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



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

## INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR JOURNEY ASSESSMENT

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

*Stop guessing.  
Start building strategically.*

**TAKE THE FREE AUTHOR JOURNEY ASSESSMENT**

*Most authors are applying the wrong strategy for their stage.*

**START THE QUIZ**



# The Enduring Power of Poetry

by Leslie Storey

Poetry has always been one of humanity's most enduring creative expressions, a form that blends language, rhythm, and emotion into something both intimate and universal. Its history stretches back thousands of years, long before written records, when early communities used verse to preserve memory, ritual, and identity. The earliest poetry was recited or sung, serving as a vessel for oral history, genealogy, and law, and often intertwined with musical traditions. Surviving ancient poems include hymns, prayers, love songs, and even practical instructions, revealing how deeply poetry was woven into daily life.

Poetry's power lies in its ability to distill experience. A poem can capture a fleeting moment, a complex emotion, or a profound truth in just a few lines. Its condensed form invites readers to slow down, interpret, and feel. Because poetry often relies on imagery, rhythm, and metaphor, it creates space for personal reflection—each reader brings their own memories and meaning to the text.

Poetry also thrives on its flexibility. It can be spoken, sung, performed, or read silently. It can be traditional or experimental, structured or free. This adaptability allows poetry to reflect the changing world while still honoring its ancient roots.

From prehistoric chants to contemporary spoken-word performances, poetry remains a vibrant, evolving art. It adapts to new media, new voices, and new cultural landscapes, yet its essence remains the same: a celebration of language and the human experience. Whether encountered in a classroom, a coffee shop, a digital feed, or a quiet moment alone, poetry continues to offer insight, comfort, and connection.

As part of my research into this genre, I asked several poets across Texas to provide one of their works and the inspiration for it. Mental health is very important, and an outlet that many use to express their feelings about life, their situation, and the world around them. I am honored to share some of their work with you.

**Leslie Storey** has worn many hats in her life, from the financial world to the book world. But she has found her niche at Lone Star Literary Life, helping to promote all things bookish in Texas. She grew up reading everything she could, has a To Be Read shelf that she will never finish, and still has a special place in her heart for Nancy Drew and Laura Ingalls Wilder. She somehow manages to find time to review books as well (hence the never-ending TBR), and you can follow her reviews at [storeybookreviews.com](https://storeybookreviews.com), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X/Twitter](#), [Threads](#), and [BlueSky](#).

CLICK TO LISTEN



The first piece is from the 2010 Texas State Poet Laureate, karla k. morton. She shared this with me about her inspiration for her poem: *In between Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico, lies the road N.M. 76. It is one of the most beautiful drives you can imagine, taking you through the villages of Talpa and Chimayo and ending at the San Francisco de Assisi Mission Church in Taos (which was made famous by the artwork of Georgia O'Keefe and Ansel Adams). Whenever I drive this route, I always stop and renew my soul at El Santuario de Chimayo, its beginnings traced back to about 1810. It is this church which gave me the inspiration for this poem.*

[CLICK TO LISTEN](#)



## High Road to Taos

Took the long High Road to Taos,  
the low road to Santa Fe.

Took my dog,  
Took some pictures,  
Took my time along the way.

Took those  
"I hate you" letters  
I always meant to send,  
then tore them up like dandelions  
and gave them to the wind.

Something out there happened  
in that dirt in Chimayo.  
On my knees,  
I begged God please,  
heal my heart to let you go.

It's been a long while coming,  
it's been an unforgiving climb.  
I've been wandering these badlands,  
forgetting to be kind.

Please forgive the hatred  
unleashed from my mouth.

May each word now I eat be sweet -  
I'm on the High Road back to Taos.

God I've missed the Rocky Mountains  
their wide, enchanted arms.  
They lift me from my sorrows,  
mend the wounds where they come from.

They fill me with a beauty,  
there's nothing now that I lack.  
Once you give yourself to the mountains,  
you never can go back.

It's hard to break a loving heart,  
I finally understand.  
Sometimes you can't walk that old same  
road,  
Sometimes you can't hold that hand.

Go find the life you're meant to live,  
May joy be your north and south.  
I'm headed to my destiny...  
on the High Road back to Taos.

# Attack of the Panic

The room is silent, can't breathe  
Cover my face from the light  
Cover my face from the world  
Tears stream down my face

The room is spinning  
Darkness falls on my mind  
Silence so deafening  
I feel so alone

Still can't breathe  
Can't break free of the pain  
Waiting for the comfort of light  
Waiting on the warmth of touch

Praying to be found  
Locked in a chamber of my secrets  
Afraid because the world has shut me out  
Dying because becoming a burden

It's too much  
When I scream no one hears my anguish  
They only see me smile

CLICK TO LISTEN



We follow that with a piece by Jillian Morris. She said, *Writing has been my primary outlet since childhood, inspired by the works of Shel Silverstein. Through my poetry, I aim to share my experiences with anxiety and mental health to ensure others know they are not alone. This piece is featured in my collection, Middle Aged & Mentally III: A Book of Poetry.*

Jamie Zenteno shares an unpublished poem, and her inspiration is personal, and many women will relate to it. She shared with me that, as a mom who, unfortunately, experienced the hardship of having several miscarriages, this poem is near and dear to her heart. She wanted to write something to not only honor the little ones she has lost but also to support others who might be on their healing journeys as well. In honor of Pregnancy & Infant Loss Remembrance Day, she penned this poem with tear-filled eyes, knowing that one day on the next side of heaven, she'll get to see them in their full healed capacity.

## One Day

I never got to hold you; your time here was too short.  
But one day when I see you, I'll know you in my heart.

The laughs we missed, the cheeks not kissed,  
Forever lost within life's midst.

One day we'll be whole again, but until then ...

I'll think of you, in pink or blue.  
With my one-day baby blues.

CLICK TO LISTEN



Poems vary in length, from just a few words to a page or longer. Tim Bryant shared four poems and let me choose one. This one spoke to me, especially the title. Sometimes we go into each day trying to just get by. He shared these thoughts about this poem: *THE HOLY ART OF NOT MAKING IT WORSE is part of a collection of poems I wrote for my poetry book, THE THIN PLACE IS THE PORCH. I have defined myself before as a Buddhist Baptist, and I think these poems all fit loosely into that envelope. I love reaching for the Spiritual in poetry writing, perhaps because it's somewhat attainable through that medium and is not so through my fiction. I'm a long-time practitioner of making things worse, both in real life and in my mind. So that*

## THE HOLY ART OF NOT MAKING THINGS WORSE

Some days my main spiritual discipline is not becoming a situation.

Because I have a talent:  
I can take one harmless sentence  
and build a full courtroom around it.  
With exhibits.

So here's the practice.

### 1) Notice the moment the comeback wakes up.

You know it.  
It stretches behind your teeth  
like it's clocking in for a shift.

### 2) Do not "just be honest."

"Just being honest" is how a lot of fires start.  
If the sentence begins with that,  
escort it gently back into your body  
and let it quietly die there.

### 3) Don't hit send while hungry.

This is basic holiness.  
Eat a banana.  
Become less prophetic.

CLICK TO LISTEN



### 4) Replace escalation with a tiny task.

Wash that spoon again.  
Fill that kettle.  
Put the dish towel in the wash before it  
becomes a personality.

### 5) Remember: pride is a dog.

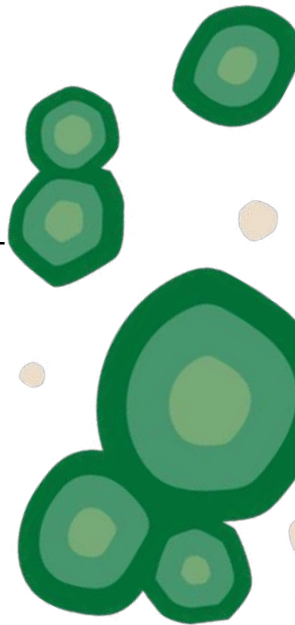
If you let it off the leash,  
it will chase whatever car passes  
and then you'll be writing apologies.  
Plural.

So I pause.  
I breathe.  
I look at a tree  
doing tree stuff  
with no opinion about me.

And sometimes—  
the best thing I do all day—  
is let the moment pass  
without making it worse.

Not saintly.  
Not heroic.

Just...  
a small, quiet yes  
to peace staying possible.



*part has had much practice. The first part, concerning the Holy Art, is something I'm still struggling to learn. I wasn't even sure this poem was doing its work until I got to the line: "Eat a banana. Become less prophetic." The heart of the poem, really, the heart of much of my poetry, can be found in those six words. Everything that comes before and after them in the poem is doing the work of propping them up and pointing. It's one of my favorite poems in the book. Some poems feel like versions of me. This one I admire only as much as I admire myself in a mirror. It's me for good and for bad. But the good is, I confess, better than most other versions.*



# Weapons Of Silence

I'm still trying to heal  
All the burns in my mind.  
So many silent shotgun  
Shells still left to find.

Weapons of silence  
Destroy a person's soul.  
Years of friendship gone  
Was that always the goal?

I'll never know what  
Made you want me dead.  
Act like you never even  
Knew me as a friend.

I get that time moves on  
And things are meant to  
change.  
I thought we'd see each other  
Laughing as we age.

Was I not worth talking to?  
Did I not act like an adult?  
Or did I do something,  
Just tell me it's my fault.

There's no closure when  
No one says a word.  
What did I do to make you  
Trip me onto your sword?

Guess if I'm dead to you  
You'll never see these words.  
This is to heal me.  
It can't get any worse.

I give up trying.  
Consider me inexistent.  
I hope I can do the same  
Delete you in an instant.



CLICK TO LISTEN



Rebecca Torrellas shares the following poem and offers a look into her inspiration: This is a piece featured in the poetry collection *“Thorns in the Rose.”* *Writing is my survival skill, and when I stumble into a life crisis, a broken heart, or a situation that I just cannot deal with, writing is my go-to. It’s the safe space I look for when nothing makes sense. If I write it, I can get it out of my system and gain clarity to deal with the situation. So, for years, I wrote — on a notebook, or a computer... one poem was even on a napkin. “Weapons of Silence,” I wrote when a friend I had unfriended not just me, but our entire group of friends. We will likely never know what happened, but it hurt me more than I ever imagined it would. I tried to reach out, but she never responded. I went to my notebook, and this was one of the pieces I wrote at the time.*

Poet Julie Poole from Austin shared this about her poetry. *During the pandemic, I became fascinated by National Parks. Fearing that I'd never get to visit them in person, I made do with images I found. Because so much of my poetry is inspired by the natural world and archival materials, I was able to view lantern slides of National Parks at the University of Texas. I would mount the glass slides on a lightbox to view them and compose a poem that matched the slide's dimensions. I liked the process of trying to imagine myself in the slide itself, seeing these iconic landscapes, and trying to make sense of that feeling of awe and wonder, while taking on the extremely difficult task of trying to describe something beyond description.*

CLICK TO LISTEN



*Long's Peak and Chasm Lake*

*Rocky Mt. National Park Colorado*

They are tiny there, one a boy, sitting on a rock, his arms stretched long, holding his laces, holding his feet, trying to tie his shoe. A taller distant individual points up. I can't look up—to look up is to see the sheer vaulting size of the mountain, vertically lined clawed-down, nothing to grip to, a few pockets of snow clinging where it can. Otherwise, the sun shines on the highest peak, an intricate mass of features, not a face—this is what's frightening, we know it's not human, we know it has never once considered us human, that it can't amidst all that rock have that thought; it's a mighty accrual, working outside our existence—to point up is to state the obvious *the mountain is big*, the Rocky Mountain is rocky and big, The boy knows it's useless to marvel in the manner of the adult, knows it's useless that the adult wants to teach him about the state of impermanence when even the cold lake says *you've seen it, now go*.

The last poem I will share is by Susie Rae Trudy. She shared her motivation for writing this piece. *This is a poem that reflects my deep love for my grandmother, who provided unconditional support and stability during a traumatic childhood. My mother lived with mental illness, and my grandmother became my anchor. She was my constant source of love and reassurance. Knowing she was always close gave me hope, and her presence helped shape the person I am today.*

CLICK TO LISTEN



# Big Yellow Bowl

Grandma made biscuits in her big yellow bowl,  
So darn good to eat with butter and Karo

She taught us how to make cactus jelly  
Putting them in the canning jars  
Grandma showed us how to grow  
All kinds of plants in her yard

Going to Piggly Wiggly for a Peanut Patty treat  
We would get back and watch wrestling on TV  
Life was fun staying on weekends in Henrietta, Texas  
Grandma taught us how to crochet during Christmas  
Showing her love and patience  
Guiding us along the way

She became the mother we so needed in life  
Mother was not present nor asked us about our likes  
She lived her own life, working and going out at night  
Grandma was always on our side,  
We didn't need to be told each time,  
The love she felt for us always showed



Mother would leave with her boyfriend  
Going to the races or chili cook off,  
For a week at a time without much thought  
Leaving a twenty down on the table,  
We fended for food for ourselves  
We dared not to talk back or else



Grandma had no say either, where we stayed  
Mother would go out on weekends and go play  
We never knew who would care for us  
Feeling awkward and not feeling trust

Grandma had no say either, where we stayed  
Mother would go out on weekends and go play  
We never knew who would care for us  
Feeling awkward and not feeling trust

Grandma kept in touch, as much as she could  
She would pick us up for a burger after school  
We had to lie and not tell mother what we would do.

Grandma became the mother  
We so needed in life  
Grandma was always on our side  
We didn't need to be told each time  
The love she felt for us always showed  
Opening up the screen door with a smile  
We knew Grandma's love was with us all the while



I hope that reading these works inspires you to express your feelings for the world around you.

### Learn more about our contributing poets.

[karla k. morton](#) has seventeen collections, with her work winning multiple book and music awards. She is the 2010 Texas State Poet Laureate and a Nominee for the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame.

[Jillian Morris](#) is the General Manager for *The Cameron Herald* and the founder of The Small Town Big Book Festival. Originally from Western Kentucky, she now resides in Texas and is the proud grandmother to six. In addition to poetry, she has published two children's books under the pen name Jill Craven and recently released her debut novel, *The Weight of Legacy*, in October 2025.

[Jamie Zenteno](#) was born to wonderful parents and raised in the small town of Santa Fe, Texas. She continues to reside in her hometown with her two wonderful daughters. Often, you may find them spending weekends at a softball field or horse arena. Jamie Zenteno Ministries was forged in 2023 with the hope of serving others in their healing journeys.

[Tim Bryant](#) is an East Texas writer, musician, and teacher whose writing often explores memory, place, family, and the spiritual weight of ordinary life. He is the author of multiple books, including *World of Rivers*, *Yorley & Sophistica*, *The Thin Place is the Porch*, and the Dutch Curridge mystery series. He lives in East Texas with his partner,

Annie, and their cat, Clyde, and teaches Live Your Life Write to people trying to tell the truth and put it in writing.

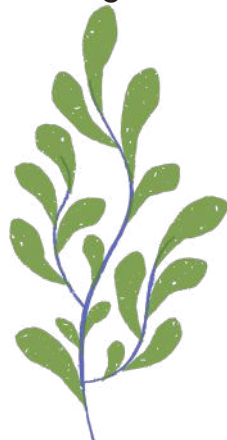
CLICK TO LISTEN



[Rebecca Torrellas](#) is the writer and creator of the four-part saga called the "Howl Series." The series tackles themes such as unrequited love, loyalty, responsibility, family dynamics, and friendship bonds. She has other published works and has some in progress. She finds inspiration for her stories in her daily experiences with friends, family, and those she's loved, lost, and admired. When not working, she finds joy in spending time with the loves of her life, Brian, and their son, Braxton.

[Julie Poole](#) is a poet, journalist, and filmmaker based in Austin. Her first book of poems, *Bright Specimen*, was inspired by the Billie L. Turner Plant Resources Center at UT. Her second book, *Gorgeous Freak*, is out now. She has published poems in *Poet Lore*, *Cold Mountain Review*, and *Denver Quarterly*.

[Susan Rae Trudy](#) is a poet whose work is deeply informed by a lifetime of listening and healing. Susan is a registered nurse with more than three decades of experience across maternal-child health, neonatal intensive care, high-risk obstetrics, trauma, and case management. She has spent her professional life bearing witness to some of the most profound moments of human vulnerability and resilience. These experiences shape the emotional depth and compassion woven throughout her poetry.





Youth teetering at the edge of adulthood is the time for dreams, love, adventure, friendships, and sometimes murder.



# THE BONE NEST

**Shanessa Gluhm**

*Lost Meridian Press*

June 30, 2026; 395 Pages

*"It was all a façade: a house of cards,  
a nest of bones."*

**I**n *The Bone Nest* by Shanessa Gluhm, it is 1986 in Bluesummer, Texas, and four friends, Troy, Hayes, Tilly, and Greer, are spending their last July Fourth together following high school graduation. Starting this next chapter in their young lives is the most natural, albeit bittersweet, experience in the world. Unfortunately, a tragic

event on that fateful night changes everything, splitting friends and families apart and leaving deep emotional scars that may never heal.

In 2024, Troy has been on death row since the murder of Tilly in 1986, and his time has finally run out. With Troy's execution date looming, Attorney Joaquin Ramos

dives into the case courtesy of the Death Penalty Abolition Project, hoping to prove Troy's innocence and put the real killer behind bars. Nothing prepares him and his team for the reality that has been decomposing for decades.

Shanessa Gluhm delivers a masterful, fast-paced mystery/suspense that keeps the reader hanging on every word, every revelation, and every deception that pushes its way to the surface. The plot is captivating; however, the

dynamic characterization drives the reader's engagement. Greer is the linchpin. She is the one who discovered her friend's body all those years ago and harbors secrets and heartache of her own. Moreover, as a retired journalist in 2024, Greer is the one finally willing and able to bring down that house of cards, discovering and spilling the devastating truth all over the place.

The author expertly presents many suspects as new evidence and testimony come to light.

*Visit Archer City, Texas, home of Larry McMurtry, for a one-of-a-kind workshop experience!*

**A P R I L 1 5 - 1 9 , 2 0 2 6**

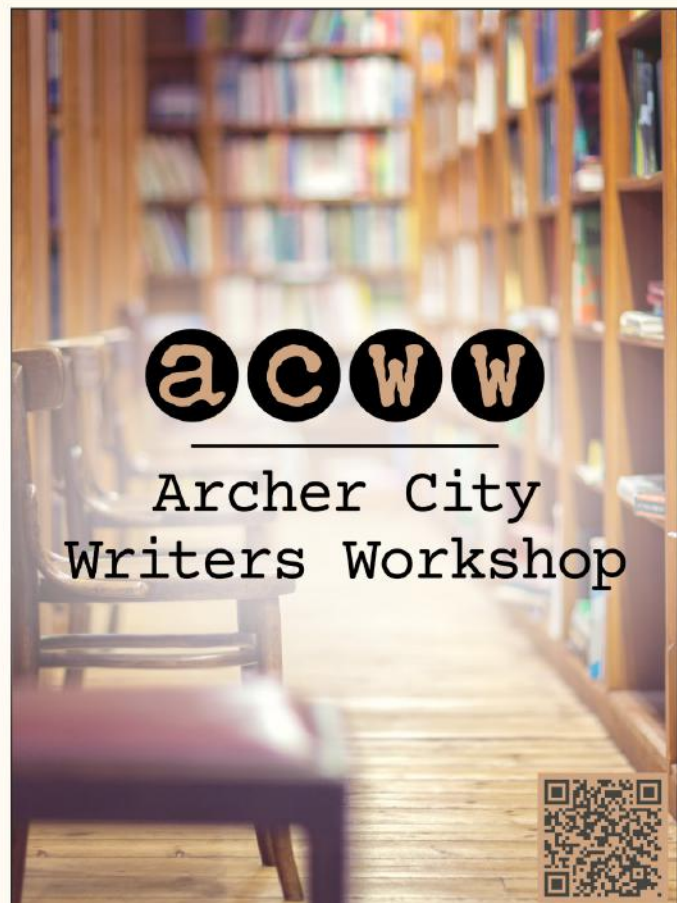
*Writing the Book Proposal ... Not Just Talking About It, with Glenn Stout*

**A P R I L 2 2 - 2 6 , 2 0 2 6**

*Fostering Fiction, with James Wade and Glenn Stout*

All workshops take place at the historic Spur Hotel in Archer City.

Visit our website for more information and to register. More events to come!



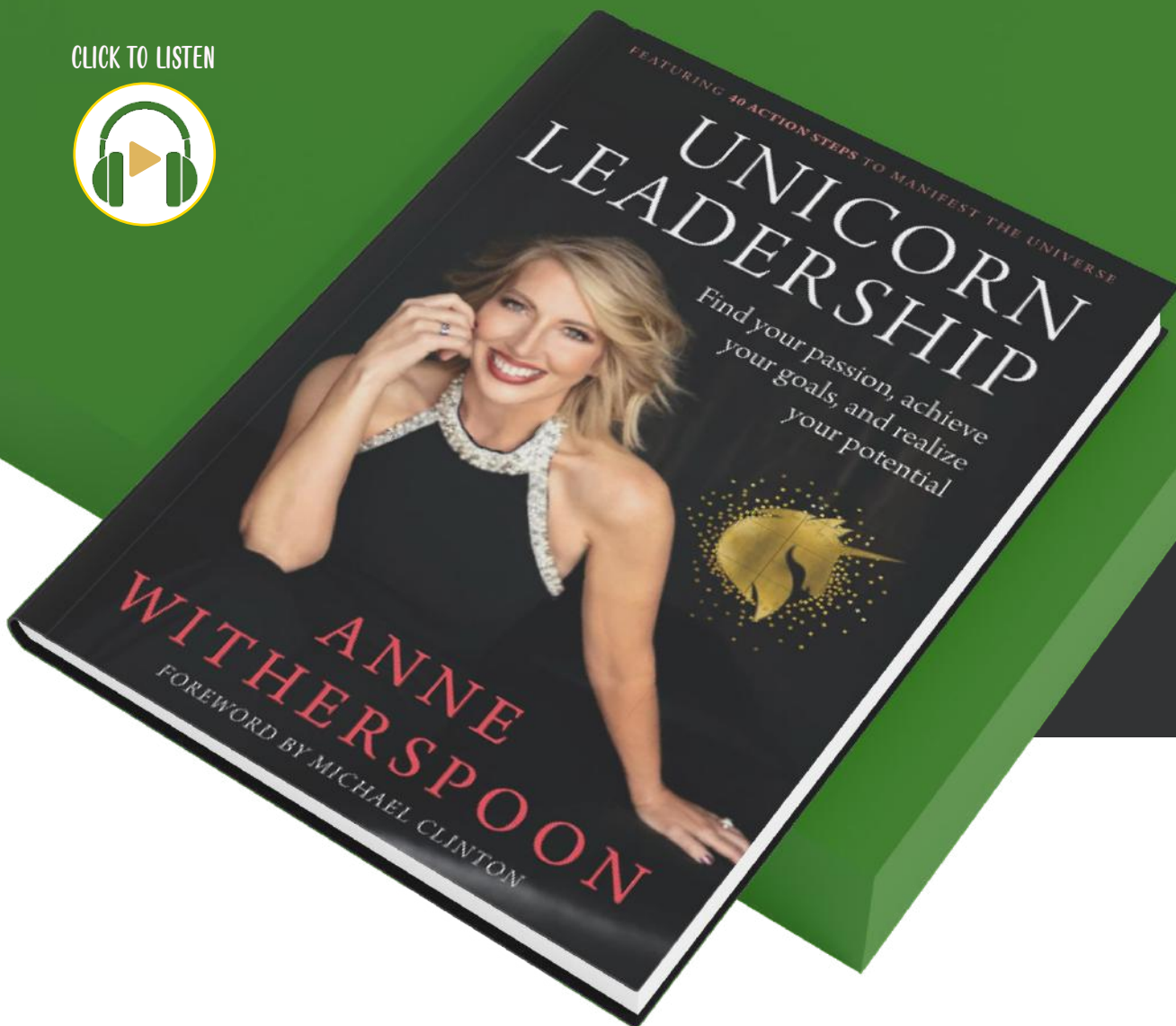
Figuring out who done it before the ending chapters is difficult, unless you pay attention to the clues and all the red herrings. The overall tone of *The Bone Nest* is an intricate mix of bleak and hopeful, sorrowful and forgiving. What makes this story so compelling, in addition to the murders and subsequent lies, is how easily family members either stick together or turn on each other when suspicion and accusations run rampant. Both scenarios can be problematic based on motive and method. Another dynamic aspect here is the tenacity of a young lawyer and his paralegal and other team members who refuse to ignore crucial evidence or leave any stones unturned. The truth is there if we are willing to fight for it and not simply accept a theory out of sheer convenience.

With everything going on in this compelling novel, several important themes are worthy of exploration: family duplicity, friends and lovers, and the lengths people will go for love, money, and self-preservation. Families often have problems and secrets, many of which remain hidden forever, while some reside in a nest of bones built and feathered by a serial killer.

*The Bone Nest* by Shanessa Gluhm is an intriguing look into the human condition and how people often alter the truth to deflect guilt, fit a specific narrative, and escape consequences, all while their loved ones suffer because of either ignorance or complicity.

**Shanessa Gluhm** works as a librarian at an elementary school in New Mexico where she lives with her husband and children. *The Bone Nest* is her third novel. You can find her first two award-winning novels, *Enemies of Doves* and *A River of Crows*, [on her website](#).

CLICK TO LISTEN



**Y**ou might think, I've already read a lot of books about leadership—why do I need another one? *Unicorn Leadership* isn't just about becoming a better leader. With honesty and humor and a lot of relatable personal experience, Anne Witherspoon offers guidance on both developing excellent leadership skills and becoming a better human being.

Witherspoon describes her career journey as combining “book learning with experience,” and she generously shares both with readers. Using the formula

***(BOOK LEARNING + EXPERIENCES) + APPLICATION TO DAILY LIFE AND CAREER = MAGIC,***

# UNICORN LEADERSHIP

**Anne Witherspoon**

*Unicorn Leadership, LLC*

October 8, 2022; 158 Pages

she walks us through the qualities Unicorn Leaders should strive for and the wisdom regarding each that she's acquired over the years.

Chapters are titled with a quality or ability, things ranging from values to teamwork to culture, and Witherspoon starts each chapter off with a quote appropriate to the topic. She combines personal anecdotes and her experience at all levels of leadership with insights from a wealth of leaders and experts, people like Gary Vaynerchuk (chairman of VaynerX), Bozoma

Saint John (CMO of Netflix), and John Maxwell (author and leadership expert).

Chapters are short, so the reader can read one or two, reread, and contemplate before moving on to the next. Witherspoon's writing style is warm, straightforward, and easy to read, and perusing the book is like sitting down for coffee with a wise friend. She thoughtfully includes Unicorn Leader Action Steps at the end of each chapter, concrete things the reader can implement to become a more effective leader. These may include TED Talks



to watch, books to read, policies to put into place at work, or even suggestions for events to bring a little fun into the workplace.

And if you're not angling for a C-suite role, if you're the CEO of your empire at home or you're just starting out in your career, this book is still for you. Many of the lessons Witherspoon shares apply to growing and evolving as a good human being just as much as they do to a corporate workplace. Both work and life are "a serious endeavor. But it doesn't have to be an endeavor without joy, without fun, and without a splash of weirdness."

Whether you want to be a more compassionate and successful leader in the workplace or just want to improve yourself personally, *Unicorn Leadership* will help you achieve your goals.

**Anne Witherspoon** is a C-level leader who has spent the past 25 years working in corporate America, learning from the best and the worst. She has multiple professional credentials and expansive leadership experience. She is a professional keynote speaker and has been featured on various podcasts and webinars and included in several publications. Anne lives in Texas and loves to read, run, write and travel.

# APRIL

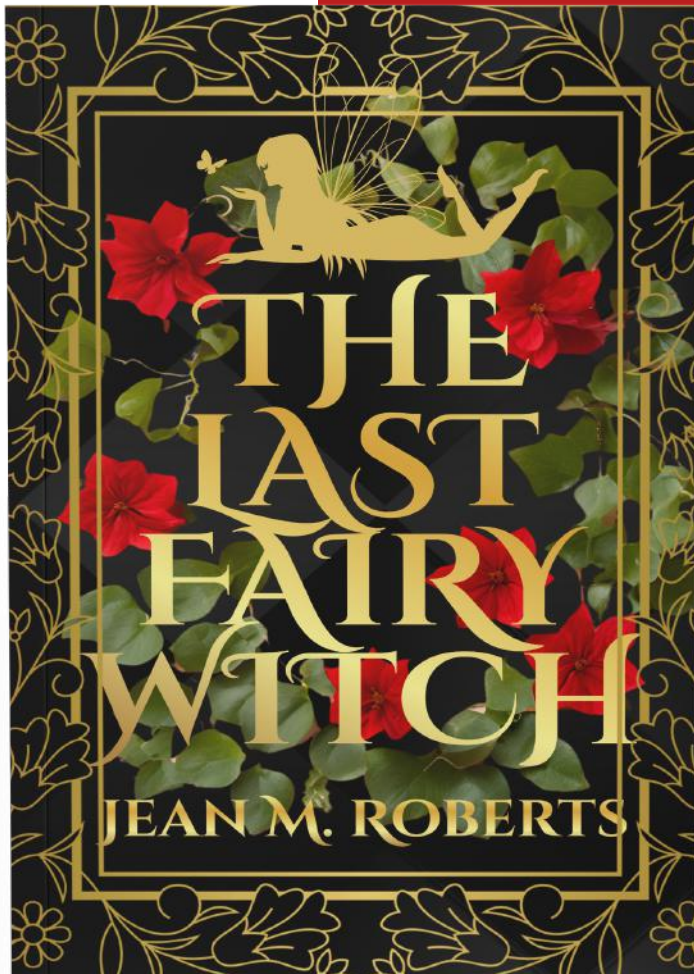
## BOOK CAMPAIGN



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**J**oin Lone Star Literary Life Book Campaigns as we celebrate a new release from Jean M. Roberts. Explore this historical fantasy where two women struggle against time itself in order to save those they love. Stay engaged on social media to join the conversation. You can find us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Threads](#), and [X](#).



## THE LAST FAIRY WITCH

*By Jean M. Roberts*

Historical Fantasy  
April 3



# TEXAS LITERARY PODCASTS



CLICK TO LISTEN



## TEXAS LITERARY PODCAST HIGHLIGHT: *Two Chicks and a Plot Twist*



If you love lively book conversations and discovering your next favorite read, the podcast **Two Chicks and a Plot Twist** deserves a spot in your listening queue.

We recently met cohost McCayleigh at the Small Town Big Book Festival in Cameron, Texas, and were delighted to learn more about the show she hosts with her friend Haley. The two book lovers bring an enthusiastic, welcoming energy to their weekly podcast, where they dive into trending titles, discuss favorite plot twists, and chat with authors about their work and the writing life.

At its heart, *Two Chicks and a Plot Twist* feels like sitting down with bookish best friends. McCayleigh and Haley share honest reactions to the stories they are reading, spotlight both viral titles and hidden gems, and create space for conversations about the wider world of publishing. Their episodes often feature author interviews as well as discussions about popular genres such as fantasy and romantasy, making the show especially fun for readers who enjoy speculative fiction and character-driven stories.

New episodes drop each Thursday, so if your TBR pile needs a little inspiration, this podcast offers plenty of recommendations, lively discussion, and a community of readers who love stories as much as you do.

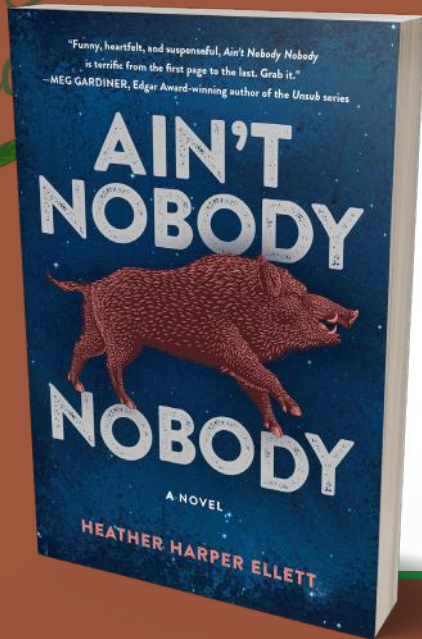
If you enjoy hearing passionate readers talk about the books that surprise them, delight them, and occasionally break their hearts, this is one podcast worth adding to your regular rotation.



## A kaleidoscope of new titles growing in our garden

**L**one Star Lit is cultivating an April book bouquet to please the eye and delight the mind. New titles are springing up in genres from fantasy to literary fiction, mystery to romance. Pick your favorites from this month's list of new Texas-connected books and head to your local independent bookstore to pluck a new gem for your TBR. Read on to explore these highlights. [Click here to experience the entire collection on our website.](#)





## *Ain't Nobody, Nobody*

by Heather Harper Ellett

Fiction / Literary Mystery

Datura Books

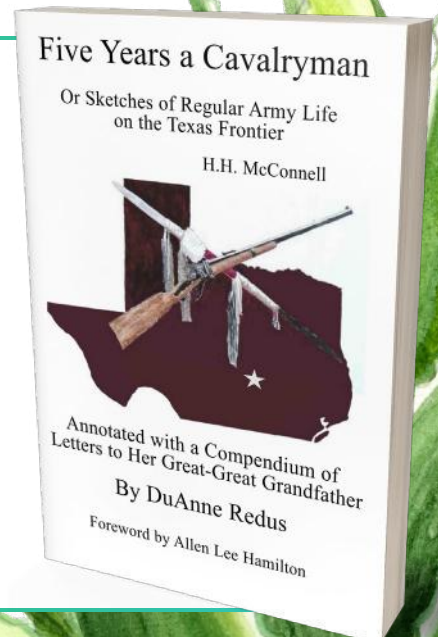
April 14, 2026

## *Five Years a Cavalryman or Sketches of Regular Army Life on the Texas Frontier*

By DuAnne Redus

Historical Fiction / Family Legacy / Texas  
Frontier

December 17, 2025



CLICK TO LISTEN





## *Forging the Chain Breakers*

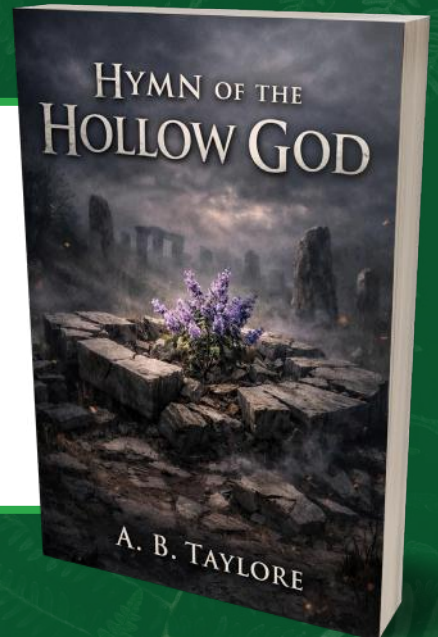
*By Malcolm T. Upton*

Steampunk Sci Fi / Alternate History / Sci Fi  
Military  
March 13, 2026

## *Hymn of the Hollow God*

*By A.B. Taylore*

Fantasy  
March 30, 2026

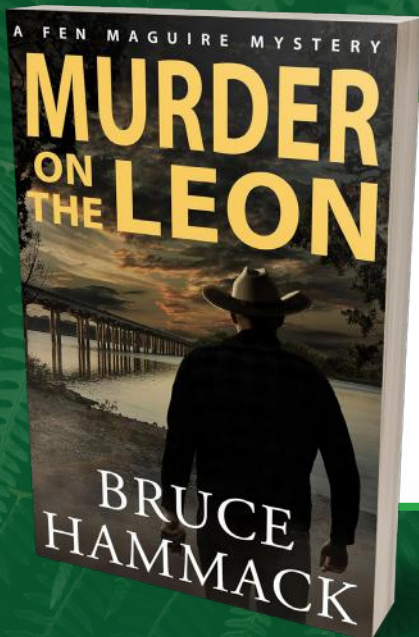


## *The Last Fairy Witch*

*By Jean M. Roberts*

Historical Fantasy / Dual Time  
March 31, 2026





## *Murder on the Leon: A Fen Maguire Mystery*

By Bruce Hammack

Mystery  
Jubilee Publishing  
April 23, 2026

## *Parallel Peril*

By Maria Lynn Barrs

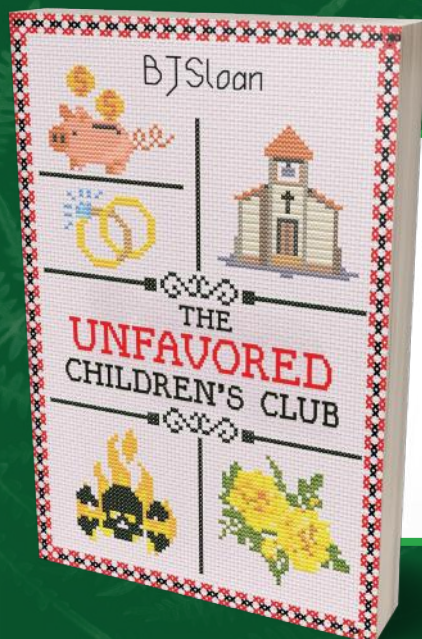
Mystery / Psychological Suspense /  
Women's Fiction  
The Wild Rose Press  
April 22, 2026



## *The Unfavored Children's Club*

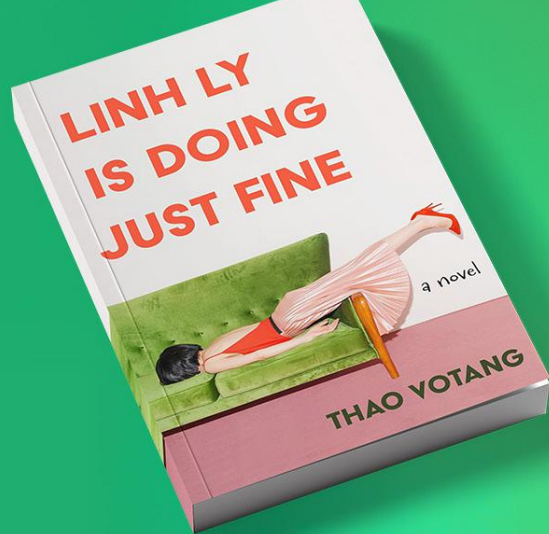
By BJ Sloan

Upmarket Fiction / Dark Humor  
Fawkes Press  
April 28, 2026



# 7 Signs

# AN AUTHOR IS ABOUT TO LEVEL UP



*Subtle signals that creative growth is already underway*

**C**reative growth rarely announces itself with a trumpet blast.

Most of the time, it arrives quietly. A writer suddenly feels dissatisfied with their work. Scenes that once seemed brilliant now feel flat. A chapter

that took weeks to write ends up cut entirely.

To the writer experiencing these moments, it can feel discouraging. But in truth, these shifts often signal something important: the writer is about to level up.



Growth in creative work rarely feels comfortable. In fact, it often feels like the opposite. When authors begin noticing deeper issues in their writing, asking more thoughtful questions, and revising with greater intention, they are stepping into a new stage of craft.

Here are seven subtle signs that an author is on the edge of meaningful growth.

## 1. They Become Dissatisfied with Their Own Work

One of the earliest signs of growth is an uncomfortable realization: writing that once felt strong now feels flawed.

Scenes seem slow. Dialogue feels forced. A character's motivations no longer hold up under scrutiny.

This moment can be frustrating, but it is actually a positive development. It means the writer's **taste and awareness have improved.**

They are beginning to see their work with a sharper eye, which is a necessary step toward improvement.

In many cases, a writer's taste evolves before their skills catch up. That tension is where growth begins.



## 2. They Start Cutting More Than They Add

Early drafts often grow through accumulation. Writers add description, expand scenes, and layer in additional details.

As authors mature in their craft, the instinct begins to shift. Instead of asking, “What else can I add?” they start asking, “What can I remove?”

Unnecessary scenes disappear. Dialogue becomes tighter. Paragraphs shrink. The story moves more quickly and with greater purpose.

The ability to cut confidently is one of the clearest indicators that a writer is developing a stronger sense of storytelling.

## 3. They Stop Writing Only for Themselves

Many writers begin by telling the story they most want to tell. This stage is important and often joyful.

Over time, however, another awareness begins to emerge: the reader.

Authors start noticing where the pacing slows, where confusion might arise, and where a scene needs more tension to keep readers engaged. They begin thinking about how the story will feel from the other side of the page.

This shift, from writing primarily for oneself to writing with the reader in mind, marks an important transition in creative maturity.

## 4. They Recognize Patterns in Their Own Work

As writers continue producing stories, they often begin noticing recurring themes.

Certain ideas return again and again: belonging, redemption, justice, courage, forgiveness. Characters may face similar emotional struggles across different projects.

These patterns are not accidents. They are the beginnings of a writer’s **creative voice**.

When authors recognize these recurring threads, they can use

them intentionally, deepening the emotional impact of their work.

## 5. They Become More Patient with the Process

At the beginning of the writing journey, many authors expect stories to fall neatly into place.

With experience comes a different understanding: good work often requires messy drafts, structural revisions, and multiple rounds of rewriting.

Instead of viewing these challenges as signs of failure, experienced writers accept them as part of the process. They understand that shaping a strong story takes time.

Patience is not only a personal virtue for writers; it is also a practical craft skill.

## 6. They Read Differently

Writers who are leveling up begin to read with new awareness.

Where they once simply enjoyed a story, they now notice how it works. They observe where

tension rises, how dialogue reveals character, and why a chapter ends exactly where it does.

Books become informal lessons in craft. Each novel offers insight into structure, pacing, and emotional payoff.

This shift from passive reading to analytical reading often accelerates creative growth.

## 7. They Ask Better Questions

Perhaps the most powerful sign of growth is the quality of the questions a writer asks.

Early in the journey, the most common question is simple: *Is my writing good?*

Later, the questions become more specific and more useful.

Why does this scene feel flat?

What emotional shift should happen here?

What does this character truly want in this moment?

Better questions lead to clearer answers and stronger stories.



## Free Download

### The Author Creative Growth Assessment

Growth can be hard to see when you are in the middle of it.

This simple assessment helps you reflect on key areas of your writing life, including craft, revision, confidence, and reader connection, so you can see where you have grown and what skills to strengthen next.

**DOWNLOAD  
THE FREE PDF**

## Growth Often Feels Like Frustration

Many writers assume that improvement should feel encouraging. In reality, it often feels unsettling.

Stories that once seemed complete begin to look unfinished. Scenes that felt powerful now appear thin. The writer's expectations for their own work rise.

This tension can feel discouraging, but it is often a sign that the writer's craft awareness is expanding.

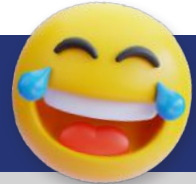
Creative growth tends to follow a quiet pattern: enthusiasm, frustration, insight. The frustration phase is not a setback. It is frequently the moment just before a breakthrough.

If writing suddenly feels more challenging than it used to, it may not mean something is wrong.

It may mean that growth is already underway.



## BOOKISH HUMOR



Chris Manno's award-winning cartoons appear in periodicals worldwide. Several of his cartoon collections are available in paperback and Kindle format. He is also the author of the award-winning Texas novels *East Jesus* and *Blood and Remembrance*. Manno earned a doctorate in English from Texas Christian University, where he teaches writing. Enjoy more of Manno's cartoons in [Cartoon Chronicle: Winter 2024-2025](#).





Welcome to *Love, Jill*, the column devoted to those of us who are enthusiasts of all things bookish. For me, nothing compares to immersing myself in the worlds created by authors and their magical minds. All in one week I can feel the grip of terror, weep tears of sympathy, and truly laugh out loud at a quirk of circumstance. Lovers of reading can find endless entertainment and enjoyment in the form of books, eBooks, and audiobooks in a dizzying array of genres.

Recently, the *Heated Rivalry* phenomenon reminded me of another key force at play. I have always believed that stories help us open our minds and hearts so that we can grow as humans and become better versions of ourselves. We can develop new connections, gain unique perspectives, and build empathy.

As the mom of humans in the LGBTQ+ community, I frequently seek out books with queer main characters of all sorts in an effort to better understand their needs and perspectives (and to learn what not to do as a mom). I was lucky enough to stumble across Rachel Reid's *Game Changers* series last summer and quickly burned through the books. Primarily, I enjoyed the mixture of romance with a healthy dose of fun. Reid built a world that pulled me in fiercely from the first book. My empathy for my kids, myself, and everyone in the community swelled with each story.

As anyone who read the books or watched the fantastic TV series from *Crave* can attest, there are a few parents who really shine in their ability to provide love and support. Kip's dad and Shane's parents serve as great examples of how to best navigate the world of parents and adult children. I took many a mental note.

While most people grab non-fiction when they're seeking to improve some emotional aspect of their life, I find that fiction can be just as vital a tool. Each story helps me exercise my empathy in new directions. Each life I explore expands my spirit in a unique way. Here's hoping the next book you experience helps you to grow as well.

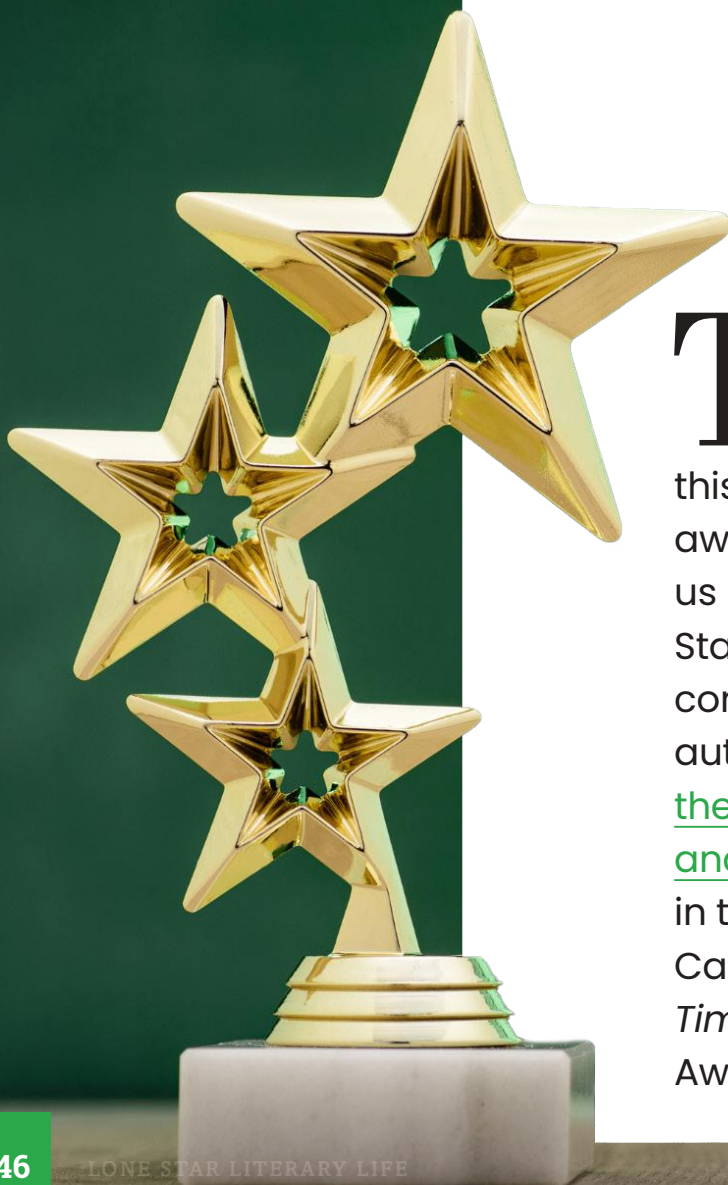
*Jill Anderson is a former teacher and academic advisor who focused her career on helping students find their voices and develop confidence in their own wonderfulness. A misplaced Texan, she currently lives in Tacoma, WA, but thinks the weather might keep her there permanently. Jill@LoneStar-Lit.com*

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# AUTHOR AWARDS ROUNDUP

CLICK TO LISTEN



**T**exas authors continue to grow their reputation in literary circles with this month's collection of awards and accolades. Join us in celebrating the Lone Star literary community! Send congratulations to your favorite authors today. [Click here to view the complete list of winners and finalists](#), including Texans in the running for the Joyce Carol Oates Prize longlist, the *LA Times* Book Prize, and the Selah Awards.

## Texas Institute of Letters 2026 Inductees



Adrianna Cuevas,  
Carlos Kevin Blanton,  
Char Miller, David  
Wright Faladé, Diane  
Wilson, Dianna  
Hutts Aston, Glenn

Shaheen, James Wade, Jasminne  
Méndez, Jim LaVilla-Havelin,  
Katherine Center, KB Brookins,  
Liliana Valenzuela, Lise Olsen, Lynne  
Kelly, Mary Helene Specht, Maurice

Chammah, Mike Blakely, Patty  
Griffin, Peniel E. Joseph, Rebecca  
Sharpless, Roberto Tejada, Steve  
Earle, and Tomás Q. Morín.

Ire'ne lara silva is the recipient of the [Texas Institute of Letters 2026 Jesse H. Jones Fellowship](#). The fellowship consists of a \$9,000 award to fund the completion of a literary work of fiction, poetry, or nonfiction for a general audience.

## American Library Association Awards



**Coretta Scott King Honor Book**—  
*Split the Sky* by Marie Arnold

**Ralph Caldecott Medal Honor Book**—  
*Sundust* by Zeke Peña

**Belpré Illustration Honor Book**—  
*The Invisible Parade* by John  
Picacio

**Pura Belpré Young Adult Author Honor Book**—  
*The Story of My Anger* by Jasminne Mendez

**Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature**—  
*Legendary Frybread Drive-In: Intertribal Stories*  
edited by Cynthia Leitich Smith

**Odyssey Award for Young Adult Honor Book**—  
*Legendary Frybread Drive-In: Intertribal Stories* edited  
by Cynthia Leitich Smith

**American Indian Youth Literature Award for Best Young Adult Book**—  
*Legendary Frybread Drive-In: Intertribal Stories*  
edited by Cynthia Leitich Smith

## Western Heritage Awards

**Nonfiction**– *The Undiscovered Country* by Paul Hutton

**Western Novel**– *Narrow the Road* by James Wade

## Maincrest Media Book Awards



**Mystery/Noir**– *A Hush at Midnight* by Marlene M. Bell

**Cozy Mystery**– *Home to Comfort* by Kimberly Fish

Theo Boyd won the January [Prestigious International Hope Book Awards](#) in the Inspirational Memoir of Hope & Resilience for *Hope All the Way*.



Angela Dominguez's book *Gabby Torres Gets a Billion Followers* is a Middle Grade Honor book in the [2026 Golden Kite Awards](#) from SCBWI.



Lucie Frost won the Bronze medal in the Nonfiction/Humanities category of the [Reader Views Reviews Choice Awards](#) for her book *How the Hell Did I Not Know That?*

Sydney Dunlap won the Middle-Grade Fiction category of the [2025 Northern Lights Book Awards](#) with her novel *Racing the Clouds*.





J.M. Kirkley captured Best Christian Historical Romance from the [Artisan Book Reviews International Book Excellence Awards](#) for the novel *A Writing Upon the Sand*.

Veronica Sites earned Honorable Mention in the Picture Books 6 & Older category of the [Royal Dragonfly Book Awards](#) for her book *The Quiet Mushroom*. The book was also a recent recipient of the [Christlit Awards](#).



Raúl the Third earned a spot on the Honors list of the inaugural [ALA Graphic Novels & Comics Round Table Award](#) for *The Snips: A Bad Buzz Day*.

Harold J. Weiss and Bruce A. Glasrud received the [Gail and Chuck Swanlund Award for Best Texas History Anthology](#) from the Texas State Historical Association for their book *Tracking the Texas Ranger Historians*.



Amy Woods won the Novel with Romantic Elements category of [The Emily](#) contest from the League of Romance Writers for her novel *Christmas in Honeybee Harbor*.





## THE PECAN SHELLER

By: Lupe Ruiz-Flores

Lupe Ruiz Flores is a remarkable Texas author and historian. *THE PECAN SHELLER* transports us back to 1930s San Antonio in an important and memorable middle-grade novel. A testament to the grit and determination of the brave women and girls who sought to expose unfair pay and often deadly conditions in the pecan-shelling factories of the Depression era, this story stands tall and proud.

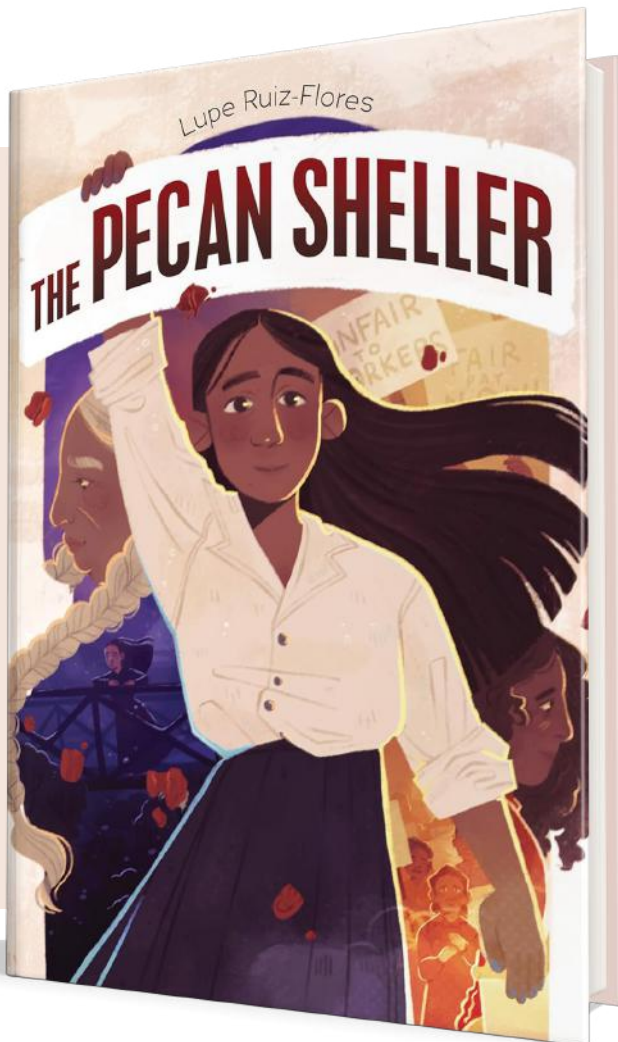


**Kellye Abernathy** is the author of a YA science-fantasy series: *The Aquamarine Surfboard* (2022), *Amethyst, The Shallows* (2024), and *Indigo, The Deep*, coming soon!

A former wireless business executive and a graduate of the University of Kansas, Kellye teaches practical life skills, creative writing, yoga, and

mindfulness within the trauma-survivor community in Plano, Texas. She hopes to inspire healing through body and breath awareness, creativity, consistency, and compassion.

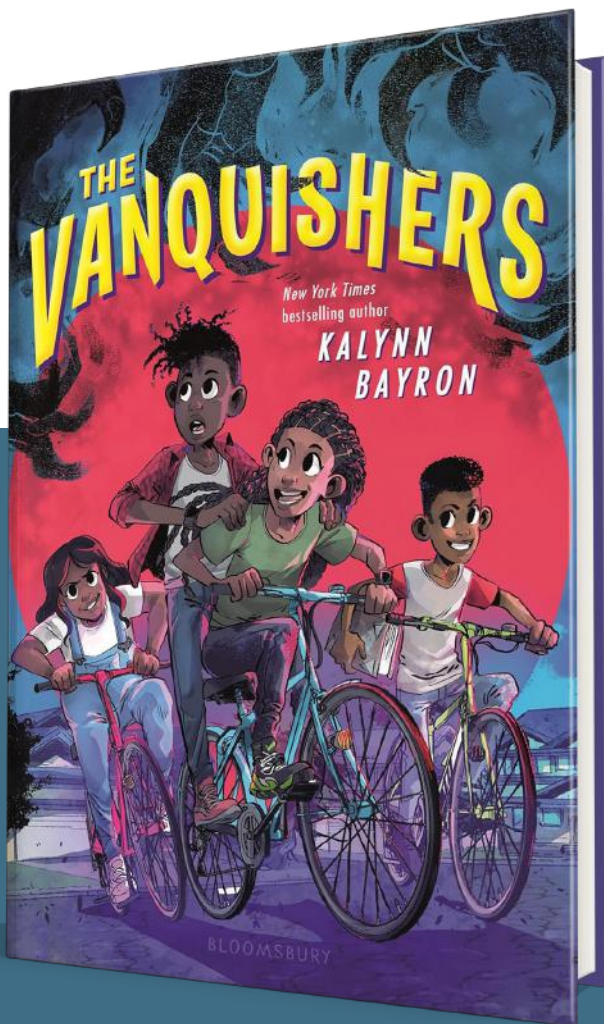
Her joys are many and varied, among them neuroscience, oceanography, swimming, biking, family adventures, and great conversation. She believes in staying curious, showing up, and keeping her heart open.



Ruiz-Flores writes with ease and flow, revealing the challenging world of thirteen-year-old Petra, the resourceful heroine of this captivating tale. In a time when young girls were often forced to leave school to work to support their families, Petra is determined to find a way to keep her writing dreams alive by fighting for change in the factories, despite almost insurmountable odds.

Lupe Ruiz-Flores exposes a dark period in Texas history with a story that is richly colored, fierce and tender, about a courageous girl who never gives up on her dreams. *THE PECAN SHELLER* is a book I will recommend over and over again.





Kalynn Bayron's diverse characters are bold, wise, and vulnerable, taking us on a thrilling ride, forcing us to let go of the cape of familiar vampire lore. Old myths morph into something fresh and new, in classic Bayron style.

## THE VANQUISHERS

By: Kalynn Bayron

One of my favorite Texas authors is Kalynn Bayron, a master storyteller who doesn't shy away from turning age-old stories upside down, daring the reader to stare new perspectives straight in the eye.

THE VANQUISHERS is the first novel in Bayron's middle-grade series about kid vampire hunters. The adventures begin when we meet Malika, "Boog" Wilson, and her quirky, madcap friends, known as the Squad, as they embark on a quest to find a missing friend.

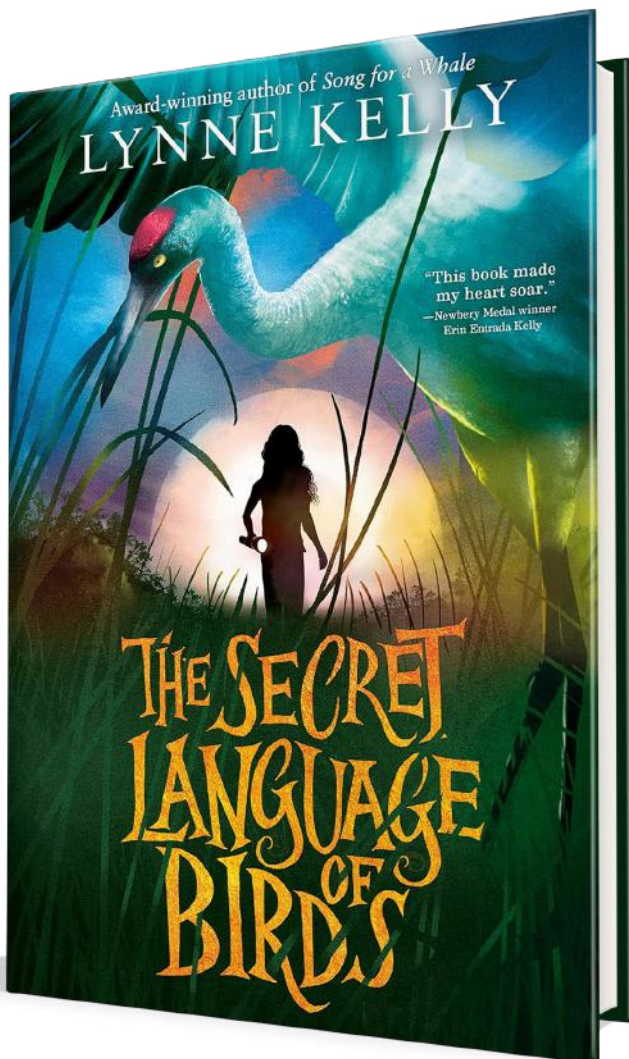
## THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF BIRDS

By: Lynne Kelly

A gifted middle-grade author, Texan Lynne Kelly's work sings with a love for young readers and a deep reverence for the complex mysteries of the natural world.

THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF BIRDS is a poignant coming-of-age tale, touched with the spice of

an old ghost story. The mystery begins when Nina, a budding amateur birdwatcher, decides to attend a Texas summer camp, though her biggest fear is of being left out and never making friends. After Nina discovers that an abandoned infirmary in the camp may be near the unlikely habitat of endangered cranes, her curiosity soars, along with her courage. Enlisting the help of new friends, she vows to help the birds, no matter what it takes.



Lynne Kelly's stories are infused with the wonder of nature. Did you know whale and nightingale songs are similar? THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF BIRDS is bound to touch your heart and teach you something new.

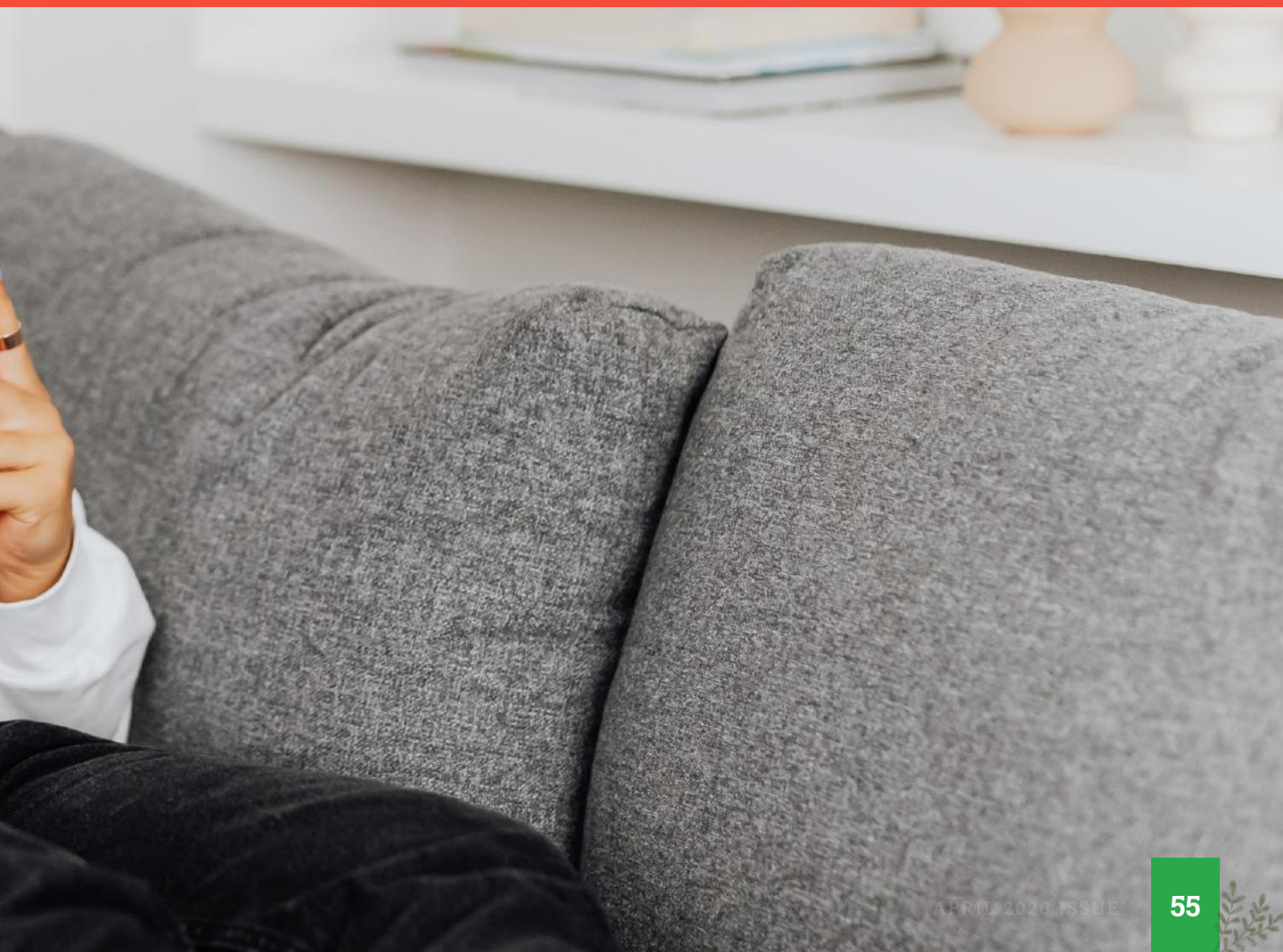
# WHAT TO READ NEXT IN YOUNG ADULT

CLICK TO LISTEN



**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 novels are retellings of classic stories we all know and love, but with twists. One adds an even more fantastical element to the story of Cinderella, and the other adds a real world historical aspect to the story of *Romeo and Juliet*.





**Michelle Miles** writes fantasy, paranormal, and young adult books packed with adventure, action, and swoon-worthy romance. A Texas girl through and through, she loves getting lost in a good book, binge-watching movies, hiking the trails, and sipping a glass of wine.

## **ONCE UPON A MIDNIGHT CLEAR: A CINDERELLA RETELLING**

Ella Rose Tremaine lives a life of drudgery as a servant in her own home, catering to the whims of her stepmother and stepsisters. All she wants is a life to call her own, but with no way out, she's trapped. Even when the royal ball is announced, she is forbidden to attend.

Left alone on the night of the ball, a mysterious package arrives addressed to her. Inside, a pair of beautiful glass slippers. When she puts them on, she's transformed and whisked off to the ball by none other

than her fairy godmother—but with a warning. Remove the slippers before the last stroke of midnight to break the spell and all will be as it was before.

Lost in the magic of the evening while dancing with a handsome stranger, she is heedless of her fairy godmother's warning. With the last strike of midnight, she is transported to the Christmas realm of Rovenheim.

Her arrival garners the attention of a dangerous queen determined to have the slippers for herself. She'll stop at nothing to get them by issuing an ultimatum—bring her the slippers or she'll destroy the enchanted realm and the Spirit of Christmas itself.

With time running out, Ella embarks on a perilous journey through the mystical realm on a quest to save it. She must embrace her destiny and discover the power of love and magic. But will it be enough to overcome the darkness that threatens to consume them all?

*Once Upon a Midnight Clear* is an inspiring story that uses Cinderella and Christmas to weave a story about knowing your worth and holding on to hope. The novel is unique in its retelling and is overall a feel good, easy read!

## SHAME THE STARS

In this reimagining of *Romeo and Juliet*, eighteen-year-old Joaquín del Toro's future looks bright. With his older brother in the priesthood, he's set to inherit his family's Texas ranch. He's in love with Dulceña—and she's in love with him. But it's 1915, and trouble has been brewing along the US-Mexico border. On one side, the Mexican Revolution is taking hold; on the other, Texas



Rangers fight Tejano insurgents, and ordinary citizens are caught in the middle.

As tensions grow, Joaquín is torn away from Dulceña, whose father's critical reporting on the Rangers in the local newspaper has driven a wedge between their families. Joaquín's own father insists that the Rangers are their friends, and refuses to take sides in the conflict. But when their family ranch becomes a target, Joaquín must decide how he will stand up for what's right.

*Shame the Stars* is a rich reimagining of *Romeo and Juliet* set in Texas during the explosive years of Mexico's revolution. Filled with period detail, captivating romance, and political intrigue, it brings Shakespeare's classic to life in an entirely new way.

*Shame the Stars* is a compelling novel that depicts aspects of the true history of the Rio Grande Valley wrapped up in a story we all know and love. It is a powerful story about family, persecution, and truth.

**Guadalupe Garcia McCall**

was born in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico. She grew up in Eagle Pass, a small, border town in South Texas. She has a BA in Theatre Arts and English from Sul Ross State University. Currently, she is an Assistant Professor of English at George Fox University in Newberg, OR and lives with her husband in the Pacific Northwest.



**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.



## YEARS OF “MAYBE NEXT YEAR.”

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

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- **Idea to Done** (*Month One is dedicated to finding your best idea.*)
- **Real Community** (*Find your author people. No one succeeds alone.*)

**WRITE YOUR BOOK TODAY**



# Grow Your Manuscript

A Self-Editing Guide to Pulling Weeds and  
Strengthening Your Writing

**DiAnn Mills**

CLICK TO LISTEN





**A**pril is the month to pull weeds so beautiful green and flowering plants can burst through the soft earth. Editing is like weeding our lawns, flowering plants, and gardens. If we don't yank out the typos, redundancies, and inconsistencies—and revise and strengthen our manuscripts—the weeds will push through and threaten to choke the life from our beloved prose. Most important is an up-to-date edition of the [\*Chicago Manual of Style\*](#). For writers whose publishers use [MLA or Modern Language Association](#) (used mainly for research papers) note the differences and learn what the publisher prefers. On the heels of the CMOS and MLA are the publisher's guidelines. Request those from the publisher.

When you believe it's time to pull weeds from the writing project, let it sit for at least two weeks. The waiting time gives the writer a fresh perspective to edit with a critical eye.

The following suggestions ensure your manuscript is weed-free and ready for the eyes of an editor:

### **Active Voice**

Strive to make sentences active. Remember that "as" and "-ing" words tend to weaken a sentence. Note not all -ing words are passive.

## Adverbs

Use sparingly and not with dialogue tags.

Do a global search in your manuscript for:

- “ly” with a space after it
- “ly.” with a period after it.

## Avoid Clichés

Create your own metaphors and similes.

## Beginnings

Begin with a strong hook that immediately draws the reader into the project.

Does your story begin with the lead character’s name and his/her current situation?

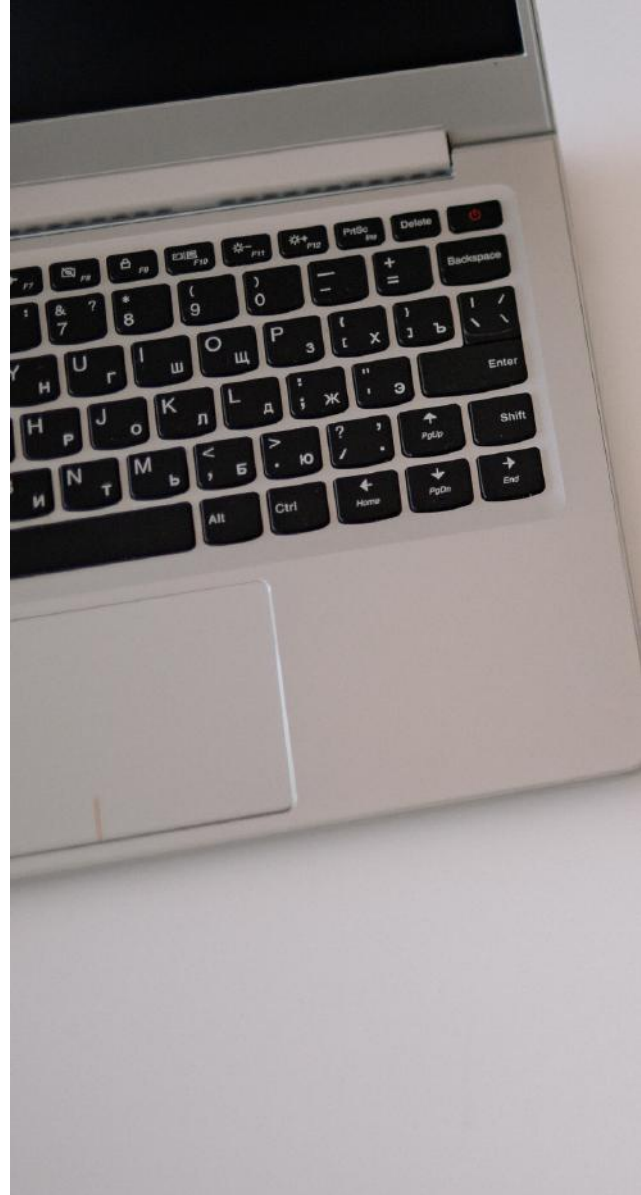
## Chapter and Scene Hooks

Does every chapter and scene begin and end with a hook?

## Characterization

Hero, heroine or protagonist:

- What is it about them that you like or dislike?
- Is there a positive and negative trait that is not yours? Create unique characters.



- If you were to spend a vacation with the hero or heroine, what about them would appeal to you?

Villain or antagonists:

- Is the character truly evil or badly behaved?
- What is the one trait that gives the antagonist a redeeming quality?



- Sol Stein states that no villain can attract victims unless he has charm, charisma, position, or wealth. Establish your villain’s manipulation strengths.

## Chronology

Use a calendar to keep track of your chapters’ timeline.

## Conflict and Tension

Include conflict and tension in every sentence.

## Consistency

Spelling Numbers—written or spelled out

## Cut Extra Words

Be clear and concise



## Dialogue

- Clear and tight.
- In character, genre, and time.
- Punctuated correctly.
- Do you need a tag?
- Do you need a beat?

## Emotional Conflict

Have you made it your goal to have emotional conflict in every sentence?

Every line?

Show emotions.

## Examine Plot

Have you asked the four crucial questions about every chapter?

1. What is the POV character's goal or problem to solve?
2. What does the POV character learn that is new information.
3. What backstory is revealed?
4. How are the stakes raised?

## Genre

Have you written with a clear genre in mind?

How do you want the story to "feel" to the reader (creepy, brooding, inspirational etc.)?

## Grammar

Invest in a grammar guide or English book.

Eliminate dangling participles.

## Hyphen, En-Dash, and Em-Dash

Learn the differences, application, and correctly type the proper punctuation.

Consult publisher guidelines or *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

## Plot

Is it tight?

Are there no holes?

Loose threads?

## Pronoun Preference

Make sure the reader knows which noun the pronoun stands for.

## Redundancy

Avoid repeated phrases

Don't insult the reader by telling more than once.

## Scenes

Rate every scene in your book. Each one should propel the story forward, constantly building conflict and tension.

Smooth transitions

## Sensory Perception

Does each scene use all the senses?

## Sentence Order

Count the number of syllables: **beans**, **cabbage**, and **tomatoes**

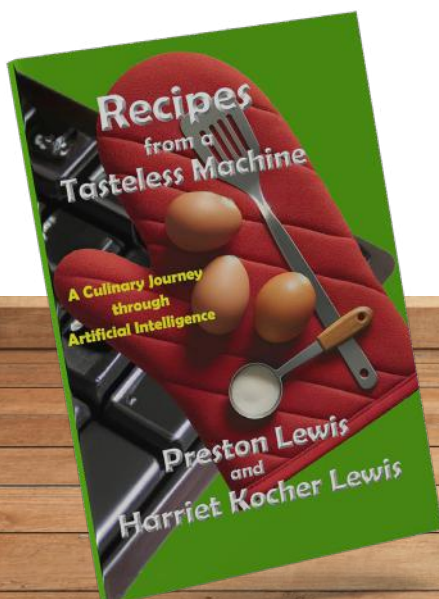
instead of **huckleberries**, **pear**, and **banana**.

Count the number of words. He enjoyed green beans, deep-fried onion rings, and buttered corn-on-the cob.

If all the items have the same number of syllables, then consider their position in the alphabet.

An exception to this is chronological order, obvious sequence, familiar sequence, and unintended modifiers.

Sometimes the way we are accustomed to hearing items in a list contradicts the above guidelines. If the items in your



list do not sound appropriate when you adhere to the above rule, change them so they are acceptable.

Tea with lunch, dinner, and breakfast should be tea with breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Cream and peaches should be peaches and cream.

The bees and the birds (alphabetical sequence) should be the birds and the bees.

Gold, myrrh, and frankincense should be gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

## Setting

Research more than you think you will ever use.

Fictitious towns are best.

Map out your town ahead of time, filling in street names, residential, business, etc.

## Telling Words

Think	Want
Know	Remember
Understand	Imagine
Realize	Desire
Believe	Need

## Text to Voice Software

Research software for what works best for you.

Scrivener has text to voice.

Word has this incorporated.

## Vary Sentence Length

Do the sentences have rhythm?

## Weasel Words and Phrases

**\*research online for a complete list**

Absolutely

Actually

All of

All right

As a matter of fact

As being

As yet

At all times

Basically, essentially

Beginning sentences with "There" or "It"

Being that

Cell phone cliches: pull out, scroll across, hang up

Completely

Definitely

During the course of

Each and every

Extremely

For all intents and purposes

For the most part  
I mean  
In order  
In the process of  
Just  
Literally  
Okay  
Of course  
Point in time  
Pretty  
Quite  
Rather  
Really  
Shrugged  
Simply  
Smiled  
So  
Some  
Somebody  
Somehow  
Someone  
Something  
Sometimes  
Somewhat  
Somewhere  
Suddenly  
That  
Then  
Thing  
Totally  
Up, down  
Very  
Which

## Word Choice

William Shakespeare said: "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action."

## Word Frequency Finder and Phrase Frequency Finder.

## Unintended Modifiers

Make sure all modifiers modify clearly what is intended.

## Online Resources:

- 👉 [Calendar](#)
- 👉 [Grammarly](#)
- 👉 [Scrivener](#)
- 👉 [ProWritingAid](#)

For a polished manuscript, print the writing project and read line by line. Read the project one last time before sending it to an agent or editor. Editing is cultivation. And cultivated manuscripts bloom.

Now relax. Tomorrow you can begin to grow the next manuscript.



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

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

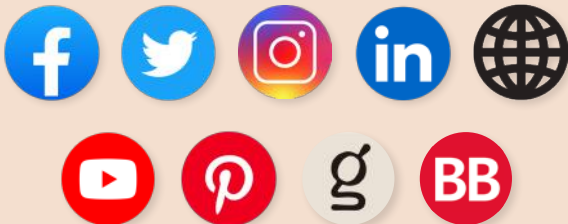
DiAnn is a founding board member of American Christian Fiction Writers and serves as Conference Advisor for the Blue Ridge Mountains Christian Writers Conference. She is also active in Advanced Writers and Speakers Association, Mystery Writers of America, International Thriller Writers, the Jerry Jenkins Writers Guild, Outliers Writing University, and The Christian Pen. Passionate about helping others

succeed, she invests in writers through mentoring, book coaching, editing, and dynamic workshops she teaches across the country.

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

Connect with DiAnn for behind-the-scenes glimpses, writing tips, and lively conversations at **diannmills.com**, or on Facebook, X, Instagram, Pinterest, Goodreads, BookBub, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

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# 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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