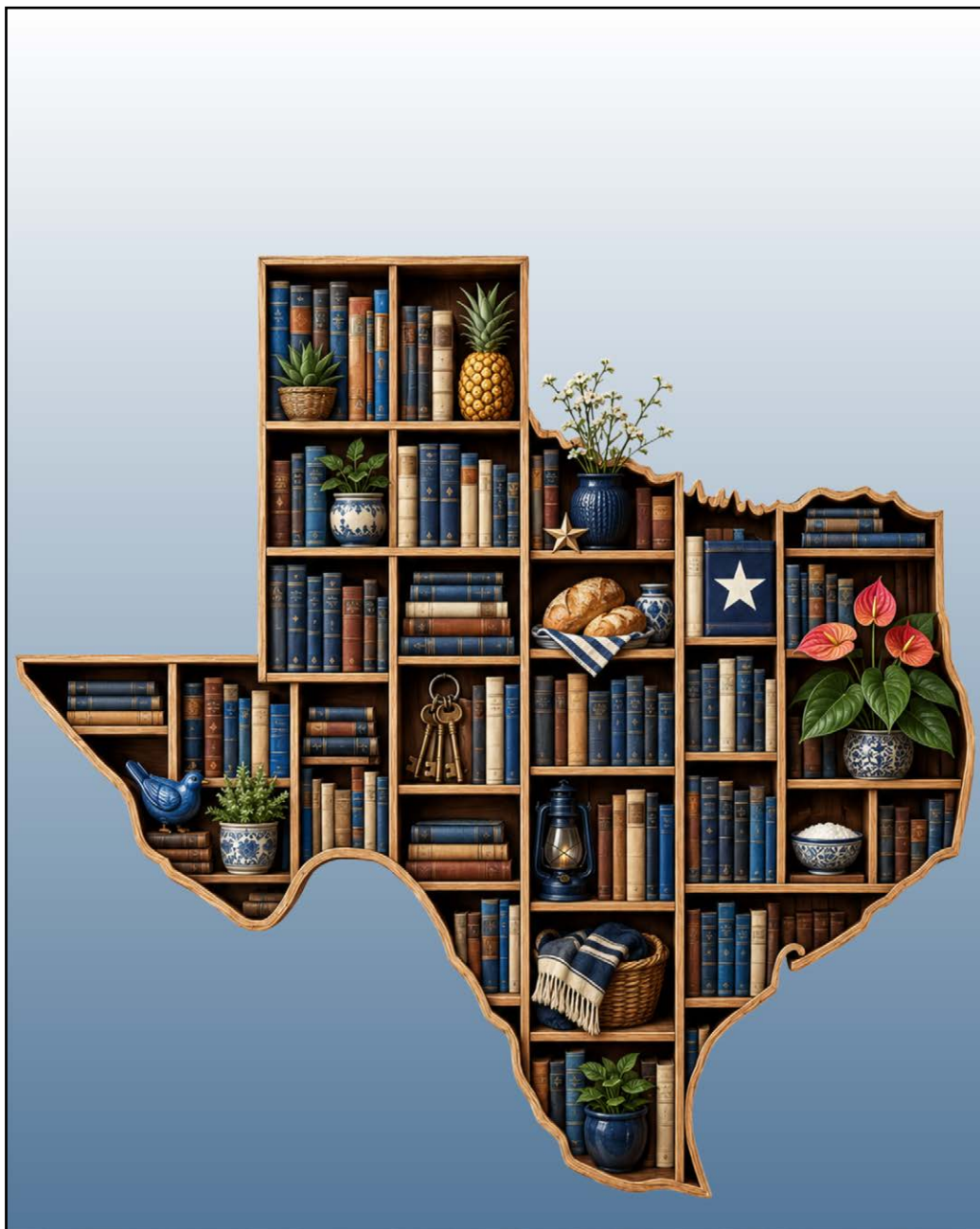


THE LONE STAR LITERARY LIFE

M A G A Z I N E



SEPTEMBER 2026

ISSUE 24





Letter from the EDITOR

Dear Reader,

What does it feel like to be truly welcomed?

For me, it feels like being anticipated. Like someone is genuinely glad I came.

I felt it this summer as I watched fellow Texans welcome visitors from around the world during the World Cup. Hospitality is woven into our Texas identity. We pull up another chair. We offer something cold to drink. We make room.





Some of the welcomes I remember most vividly, though, happened far from Texas. During the summer of 1989, I traveled through small towns in what was then the Soviet Union and is now Ukraine. In several places, our arrival was marked by a simple traditional ceremony. People dressed in native clothing greeted us with bread and salt, presenting a round loaf with its center hollowed

out and filled with coarse white salt. I remember the beauty and ceremony of it, but mostly I remember what it communicated: *We are glad you're here. We're eager to get to know you. We want you to know us.*

I feel that same sense of welcome every time I walk back into the Texas A&M library, a place that somehow felt like mine from the first time I



*To welcome is to
receive gladly.
It is an expression
of goodwill. It
is opening the
door and saying,
in one way or
another, there is a
place for you here.*

toured campus. And I feel it in the arms of my husband, who, after more than thirty years together, is still the place that feels like home.

To welcome is to receive gladly. It is an expression of goodwill. It is opening the door and saying, in one way or another, there is a place for you here.

But I've been thinking lately about another kind of welcome, one that may be harder to offer.

Can we welcome people who don't think like we do?

It has never been easier to surround ourselves with people who reinforce what we already believe. Social media can create a bubble around us, an echo chamber that was previously impossible. We can curate our feeds, our conversations, and sometimes even our friendships until very little gets through that challenges us.

That may feel comfortable, but comfort and welcome are not the same thing.

I don't have to agree with someone to welcome them. I can joke, "How are we even friends?" with one of my people over something as harmless as my shock that anyone could dislike pumpkin-flavored things. Other differences are much harder. Some can feel nearly impossible to bridge.

I recently found myself in a waiting room, talking with a woman whose beliefs about everything from the

shape of the Earth to the Moon landing were very different from mine. Finding common ground was going to be a challenge.

But both of us had family members experiencing serious health crises.

In that place of suffering and uncertainty, what became most important was our instinct to offer each other comfort, and the recognition that we were on the same path, however briefly.

Our shared humanity became the bridge.

Welcoming different perspectives does not mean abandoning discernment. It does not require accepting cruelty, harmful behavior, or every criticism someone sends our way. Boundaries matter. We can learn to welcome what is useful while leaving what is hurtful outside the door.

But I think there is much value in becoming a little harder to offend and a little more willing to listen. There is danger in creating a life where no one ever challenges our assumptions. Constructive criticism can sharpen us.

Thoughtful disagreement can expand us. Curiosity about another person can reveal common ground we never expected to find.

And perhaps that is the secret to welcome: valuing connection enough to look for bridges.

Of course, good intentions matter most when we put them into practice.



Fortunately, making someone feel welcome is rarely complicated. Look them in the eye. Smile. Say their name. Tell them, “I’m glad you’re here,” or “I’ve been looking forward to seeing you.” Listen actively. Ask questions. Restate what you heard when you need clarity. Let people know that even when you disagree, you heard them.



And when you can, add the thoughtful touch that says you paid attention. Remember the coffee they like. Save them the comfortable chair. Have their favorite snack waiting.

Welcoming is not passive. It eagerly awaits and prepares.

It says, *I made space for you.*

This September, I hope we’ll think about the places where we can make that space a little wider. For the stranger. For the friend whose opinions make us shake our heads. For constructive criticism. For a new idea. For someone who simply needs to know they are not walking alone.

The welcome mat is out.

Pull up a chair. We’ll pour the sweet tea.

Warmly,

Amy Kelly and the Lone Star Literary Life Team

Video from the EDITOR

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NOW YOU CAN LISTEN TO

Lone Star Literary Life!



We 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.

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!*
- ▶ The First Story You Tell by Cindy Vanous
- ▶ Welcome to My World by Darlene Deluca
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- ▶ Sponsored Editorial Reviews: *Indigo, the Deep* by Kellye Abernathy
- ▶ *The Frequency* by Randall St. Claire
- ▶ *If My Mom Became an Octopus* by C.M. Healy

- ▶ Book Campaigns*
- ▶ Podcast Highlight*
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- ▶ Indie Bookstore Roundup*
- ▶ Texas Reads*
- ▶ What to Read Next in Young Adult*
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The Lone Star Literary Life

SECRET SHELF

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

This month, we're welcoming you to a literary scavenger hunt hidden throughout the pages of the magazine.

Five previously published books are tucked away throughout this issue, waiting to be discovered. Your mission is simple:

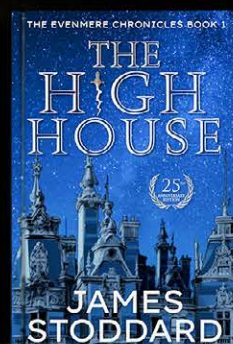
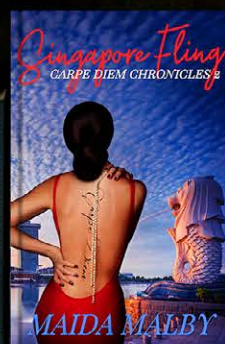
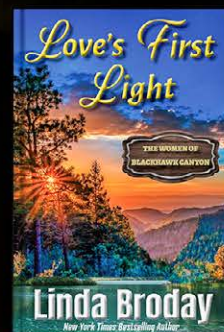
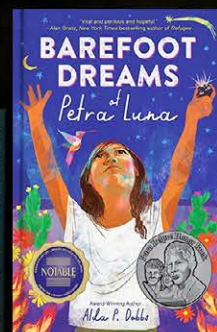
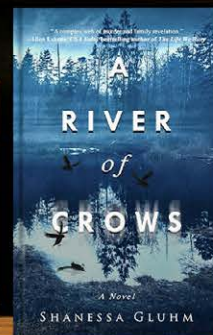
Find each cover and welcome it back into the spotlight.

It's a fun way to explore every page, and you might just discover a book that feels like an old friend or your next favorite read.

Share your discoveries with us on Instagram and tag **@LoneStarLit**

Happy searching!

Here are the books hiding on this month's
SECRET SHELF





YEARS OF “MAYBE NEXT YEAR.”

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

You are the thought leader, the coach, the expert. You have the ideas. Stop letting analysis paralysis and the myth of “finding time” stall your author dream.

A FINISHED MANUSCRIPT IS SIX MONTHS AWAY.

My Book in Six is the 183-day roadmap for nonfiction authors who need structure, not more hours.

- **20 Minutes a Day** (*Write during the cracks in your schedule.*)
- **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

The First Story You Tell Isn't in Your Book

By Cindy Vanous

Every author hopes someone will pick up their book. Better yet, buy it. But long before a reader opens the first page, they've already decided whether they're going to stop at your table.

I learned something years ago while working in sales and teaching sales training. People need a reason to stop. They need something that catches their attention, and they need to feel welcomed. That lesson has stayed with me through every author event I've attended.





Be the Welcome

*My books don't
sell themselves.
I do.*



At a recent book event in another state, I noticed nearly every author sat behind their table. But I didn't.

I stood beside my display, sometimes even in front of it. I greeted people as they walked by and welcomed them into my booth. I noticed a few curious looks from other authors. I'm sure some wondered why I wasn't sitting behind my books. The answer is simple.

***My books don't sell themselves.
I do.***

Not because I pressure people to buy them. I don't. I smile, say hello, and then hand them a book.

Once a book is in their hands, something happens. They begin turning pages. They ask questions, and we connect through conversation. For me, that's what reader engagement is all about. I don't sell every book someone picks up, but I sell enough to know that's part of the magic when welcoming someone into my world.



Share the Heart Behind Your Story

No one knows my books better than I do. Before someone decides whether to buy one, I want them to know why I wrote it. I tell them a little about the story. I explain that I work with Texas illustrators who create hand-drawn, hand-painted artwork because that's important to me. Then I step back and let the book speak for itself. It never gets old watching



people connect with the story and the illustrations.

Over the years, I've realized readers aren't just deciding whether they want to buy a book. They're deciding whether they want to spend a few minutes talking with me.

That's why I believe the author is the most important part of any display.

Readers Remember the Welcome



A reader may forget the price of your book, but they'll remember how you made them feel. You may have a beautiful display. Your books may spark their curiosity. But **you** are the welcome. You are the smile, the conversation, and the reason someone feels comfortable enough to stop.

Every author has something that makes their books different. It might be your writing style, your illustrations, your subject matter, or simply the reason you write. Share that with readers. Those conversations are often what they remember.

Sometimes the first story a reader falls in love with isn't the one inside your book.

It's the one you tell before they ever turn the first page. ★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cindy J. Vanous writes vintage-inspired children's books that inspire courage, kindness, and believing in yourself. [Discover her books here.](#)





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Welcome to My World!

by Darlene Deluca

Oh, hello there. Come on in. Welcome to my story.

Where should I begin today?

At the beginning, you might say.

But where is the beginning?

For authors, the question is real. At what point do we invite readers into our fictional world?

Beginnings are a big deal. The beginning of a book, possibly the first line or paragraph, is where we hook our reader. We pique their interest, their curiosity, and make them want to know more. In these days of fast-paced tweets, snapchats, and scrolling, we have a short window in which to capture a reader's attention and draw them into our story.





*At what point do we
invite readers into
our fictional world?*

*Beginnings are a
big deal.*

That's a tall order for a single line or two! But some novels are famous for their opening line. You may be familiar with:

-- "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times..."

-- "I am an invisible man."

-- "Call me Ishmael."

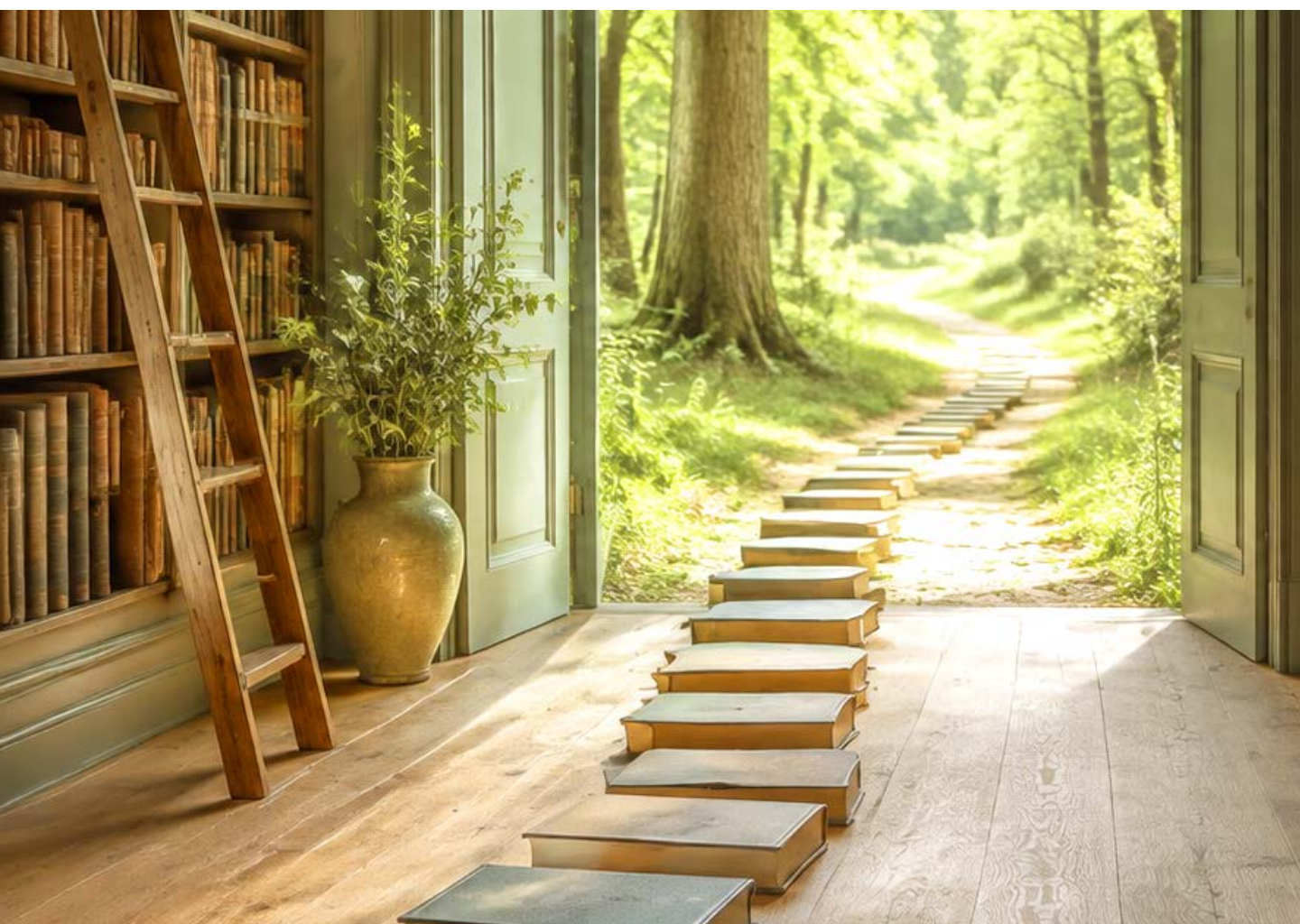
-- “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”

-- “Mother died today.”

They’re all compelling lines that have stood the test of time. They do the heavy lifting of making a reader wonder. We don’t have space here to analyze all of them, but think about what kind of question or feeling each

one evokes. Do they make you want to know more?

Clearly, an author needs to start with a bang — an unusual premise, a change, a puzzle, a tantalizing question that needs answering, a twist of fate or possibly a play on words. A mystery novel might evoke a gasp with a gruesome murder or an unexpected clue. A romance might begin with a life-changing moment



for one of the main characters or the meet-cute where the hero and heroine meet for the first time and establish a like or dislike of each other, or what we call an “inciting incident.” Something significant has brought these two together.

In workshops and craft books, writers are advised to bring readers into the story in the “right” place, which suggests a “wrong” place. These days, most writing experts tell authors to drop the reader right into the action. Don’t start with a description of the weather or the routine of a character’s day. Don’t start with backstory. To determine the best place to begin a novel, an author must consider what situation poses a dramatic story question and how much the reader needs to know right away. Intrigue is key.

One of my all-time favorite romances, *Paradise* by Judith McNaught, was published back in 1991. Things were different then. Books were longer. Authors were allowed a slower pace, to take a little time to gently draw the reader in. If it were published new today, I don’t think the book would start in the same place. The meet-cute happens on page 78. The “inciting incident” takes place on page 102. But in this particular story, McNaught welcomes us to curl up with a favorite beverage in a comfy place and go on a journey. We get to know the character, we meet her friends, and get a look inside her family situation first. In today’s market, that’s considered backstory—information to be sprinkled in sparingly as necessary.

*These days, most writing experts
tell authors to drop the reader
right into the action.*



Prologues are a bit controversial in the publishing world. Some people like them; some hate them. I've used them in a couple of my books when I felt readers needed to know about a past situation that may have caused or led to the inciting incident of the novel. These are the kinds of choices an author must make to find the "right" beginning.

As author Graham Greene noted at the start of his novel *The End of the Affair*, **"A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead."**

If something in the past is of utmost importance to the start of the book, authors can insert a prologue—a peek into the before the beginning.

Where and when to welcome a reader in is one of the most important decisions authors make in telling their stories. ★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Darlene Deluca is a tea-drinking, sun-loving author who writes contemporary romance and women's fiction that explores relationships – what brings people together or keeps them apart. [You can find her books here.](#)



THE TRUE STORY OF THE WILD BUNCH'S FORGOTTEN OUTLAW QUEEN

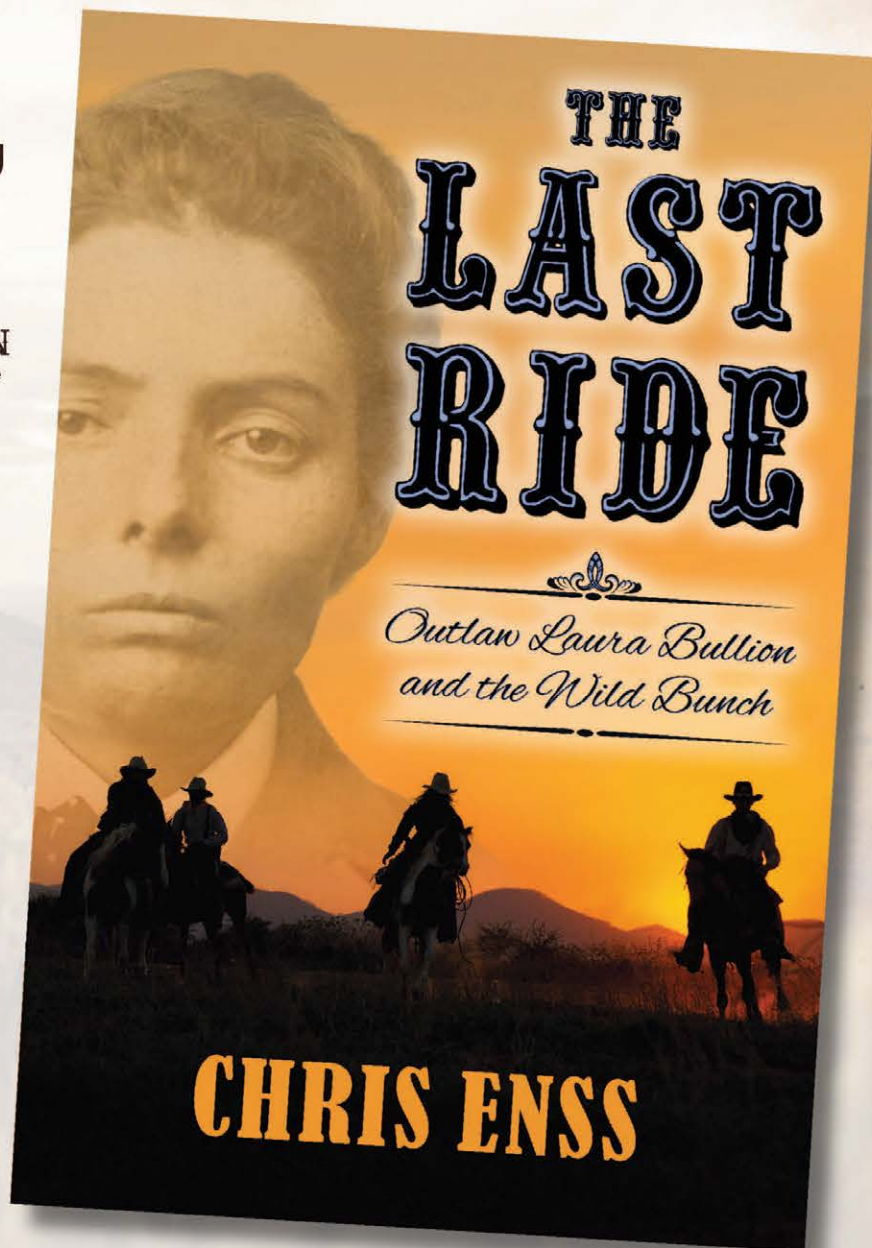
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don't want
to miss!"**

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of old west
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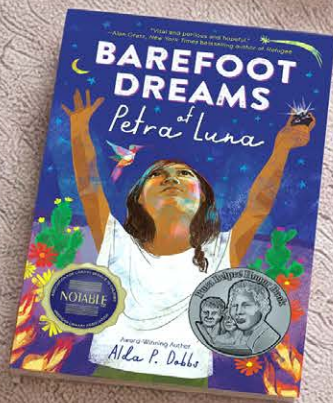

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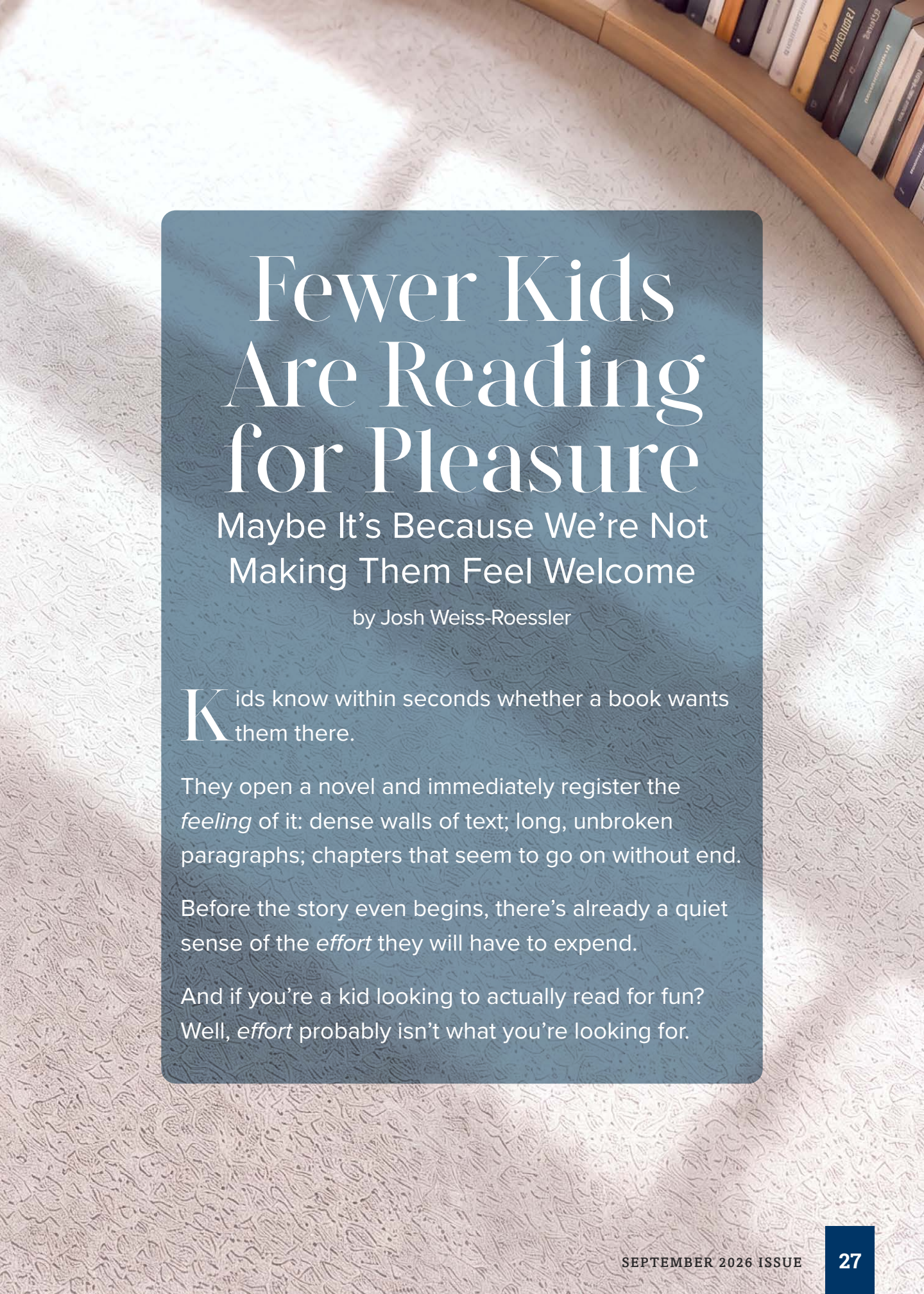
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*Your reading
experience changes
dramatically.
One version asks
the reader to push
through. The other
pulls them forward.*





Fewer Kids Are Reading for Pleasure

Maybe It's Because We're Not
Making Them Feel Welcome

by Josh Weiss-Roessler

Kids know within seconds whether a book wants them there.

They open a novel and immediately register the *feeling* of it: dense walls of text; long, unbroken paragraphs; chapters that seem to go on without end.

Before the story even begins, there's already a quiet sense of the *effort* they will have to expend.

And if you're a kid looking to actually read for fun? Well, *effort* probably isn't what you're looking for.

You've Heard It Before: We Need Shorter Books

There's a persistent narrative in children's publishing right now. Reading is declining because kids' attention spans are shrinking.

The solution? Make books shorter. Lower word counts. Trimmed-down narratives. Faster, simpler reads.

And yes, shorter books absolutely have a place. Slim prose books with high-impact, fast-paced stories are essential entry points for reluctant readers. Graphic novels and novels in verse, too, serve important functions.

But *shortening* books is not the same thing as making them *more welcoming*.

Because, contrary to popular belief, today's kids aren't really afraid of lengthy stories.



A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a child's hand holding a book near a window. A green plant is visible through the window. The image is partially obscured by a dark vertical bar on the far left.

Reading is declining because kids' attention spans are shrinking. The solution? Make books shorter.

Books' Lengths Matter Less Than How Intimidating They Feel

Think about it: Modern kids (and more than a few of their parents... I've heard) spend hours inside sprawling video games, complex fictional worlds, and long-form digital narratives *without hesitation*.

The issue is rarely the *size* of the story. It's the friction present at the point of entry.

A welcoming book doesn't reduce scope or ambition. It reduces the desire to tune out.



*“Come on in.
Take my hand
and let’s look
around.”*

So, How Do We Make Middle Grade and Lower YA Books More Welcoming?

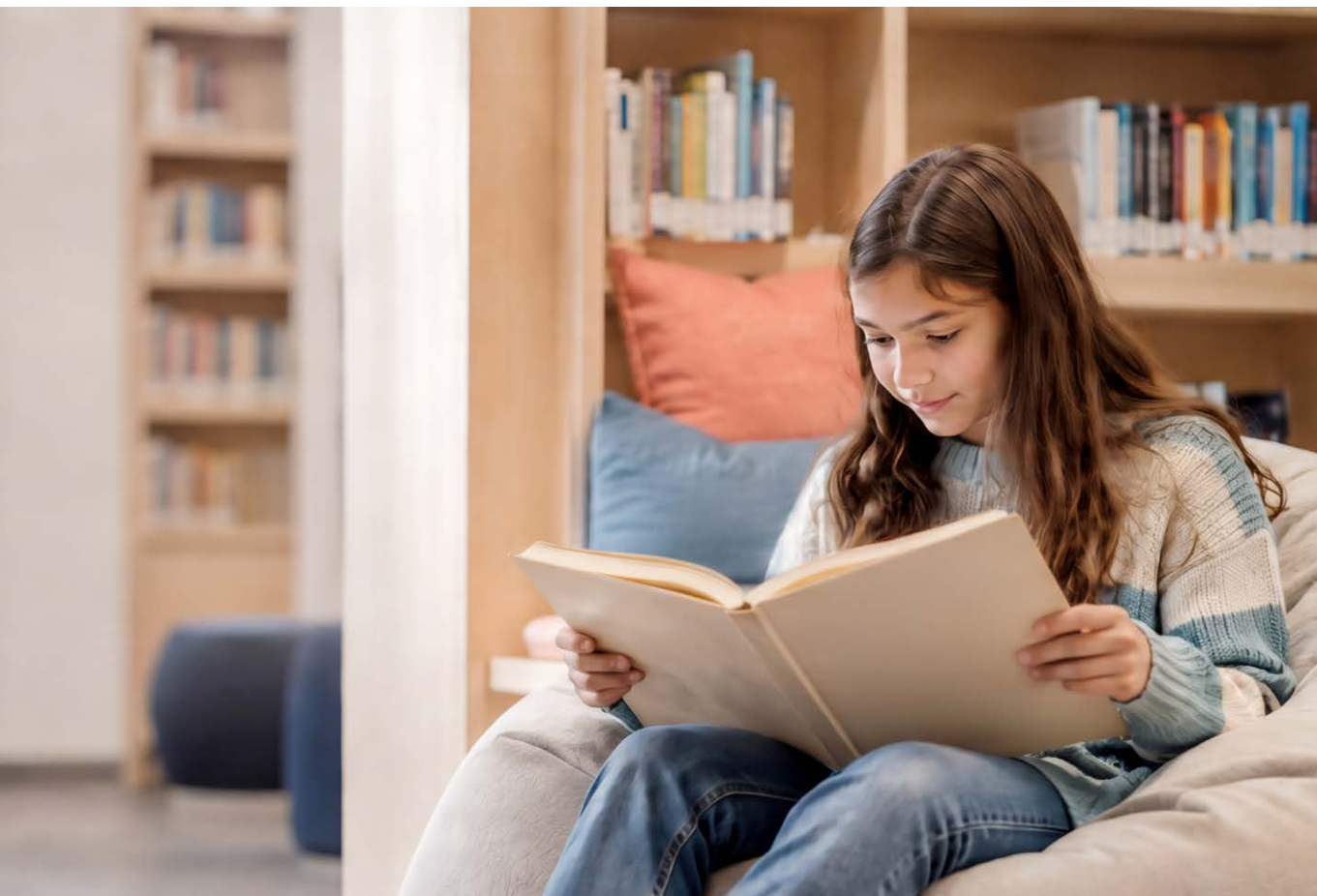
As a writer with a background in copywriting, I think about this in terms of user experience.

In digital spaces, dense blocks of text are a barrier. Readers don’t fail to engage because the ideas are too complex, but because the presentation itself creates fatigue.

So we use structure as guidance:

- ★ Short paragraphs
- ★ Clear breaks
- ★ White space that draws the eye toward the text

There’s no reason fiction can’t do the same thing.



Not to simplify *meaning*, but to shape how the reader moves through the book – and the page – utilizing tools like:

Short, punchy chapters. Because “just one more chapter” works way better when it doesn’t feel like a commitment. Keep them short, and use techniques like cliffhangers to drive readers forward.

Paragraphs that let you take a breath. A page that breathes feels navigable. A page that doesn’t?

Well, it can feel like an impenetrable wall – even if the story inside it is compelling.

Try to stick to no more than three lines per paragraph. If you go beyond this, make sure it’s for a good reason.

Sentences that don’t overstay their welcome. We don’t think in long, flowy sentences. Or, generally, use them when talking. So why do we think kids would want to read this way?

This Isn't About Changing the Information – It's About Altering How It's Presented



Imagine a dense block of description. Now picture it broken up into smaller chunks. Fragmented. Rhythmic.

Your reading experience changes dramatically. One version asks the reader to push through. The other pulls them forward.

Now, neither is inherently better craft, but one is absolutely more immediately welcoming.

That distinction matters more than we often admit.

Because a welcoming book doesn't assume a reader will work hard to earn access. It opens the door and says:

“Come on in. Take my hand and let's look around.”

It says, in short, *you belong here*. ★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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, **Future Me & the VR Prison**, which debuted in August.



September

BOOKISH EVENTS

Welcome to a September filled with bookish events for Texas communities. Our calendar is sortable by city, so you can find out which authors are signing at a fabulous indie book store near you. Click here for [links to the September events below](#), or visit the [Lone Star Lit Bookish Events calendar](#) for information on all upcoming author signings and bookish events across Texas. ★



SEPTEMBER 5

The Muses of Storytelling



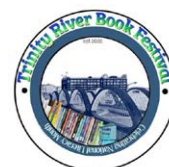
SEPTEMBER 11-13

Armadillo Con



SEPTEMBER 12

Trinity River Book Festival



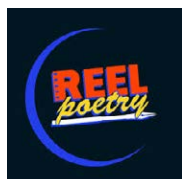
SEPTEMBER 12

Hill Country Author Event



SEPTEMBER 18

REELPoetry



SEPTEMBER 19

BIPOC Book Fest



SEPTEMBER 25-27

P-Con



SEPTEMBER 25-26

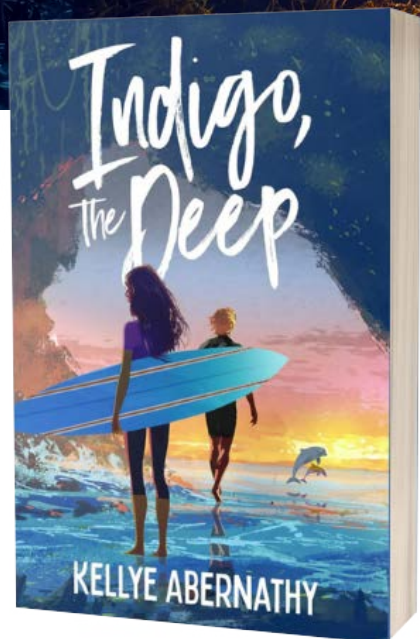
Texas Word Wrangler



SEPTEMBER 26-27

Readers Fest

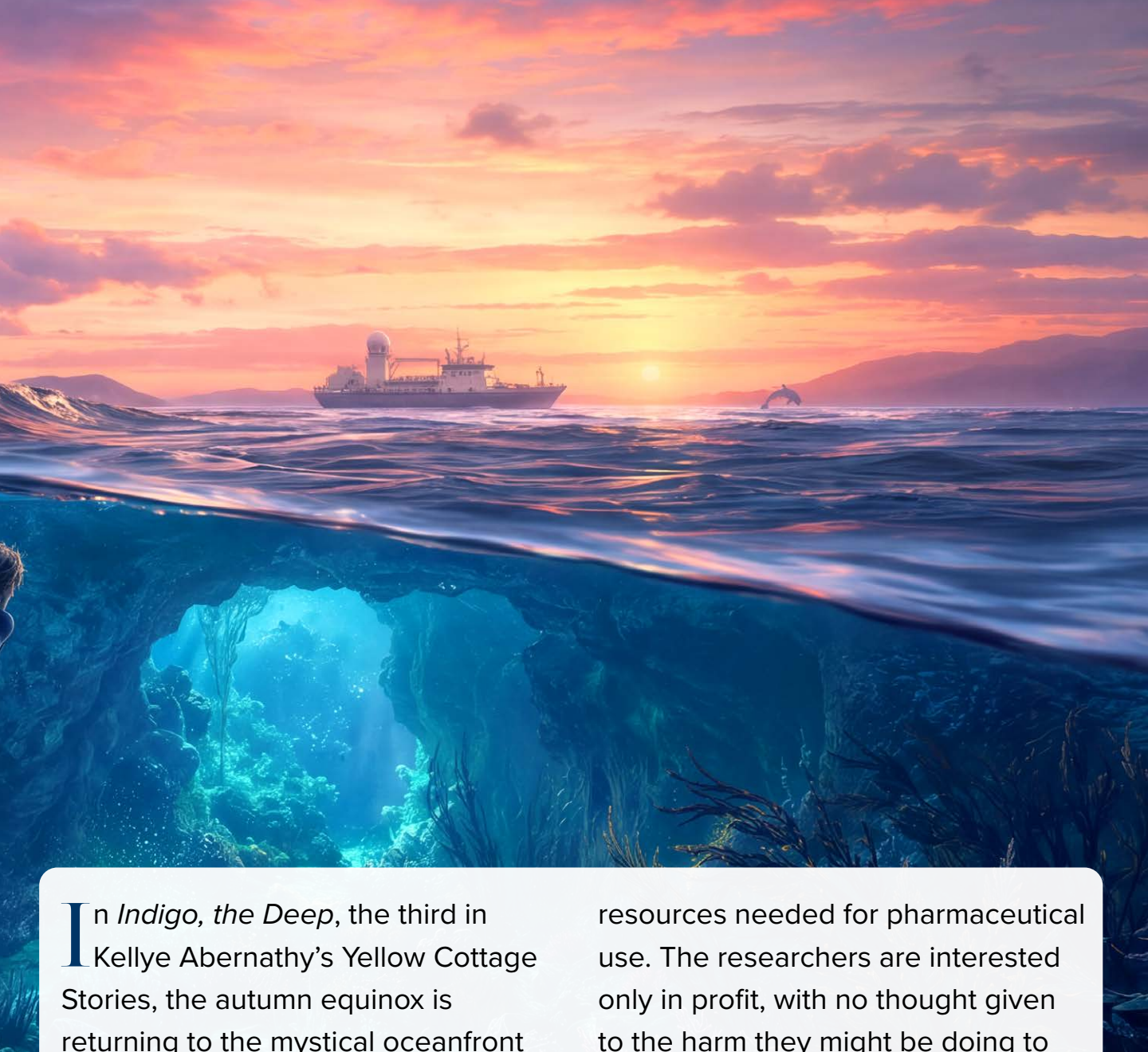




Indigo, the Deep

By Kellye Abernathy
Atmosphere Press
July 7, 2026
289 pages





In *Indigo, the Deep*, the third in Kellye Abernathy's *Yellow Cottage Stories*, the autumn equinox is returning to the mystical oceanfront town of Dipitous Beach. And so, thinks Condi Bloom, must the magic. To whom will it appear in this season?

In the previous books in the series, difficulties have come from conflict within the community. Here, Dipitous Beach faces an external challenge: a medical research ship parked just off the coast, harvesting marine

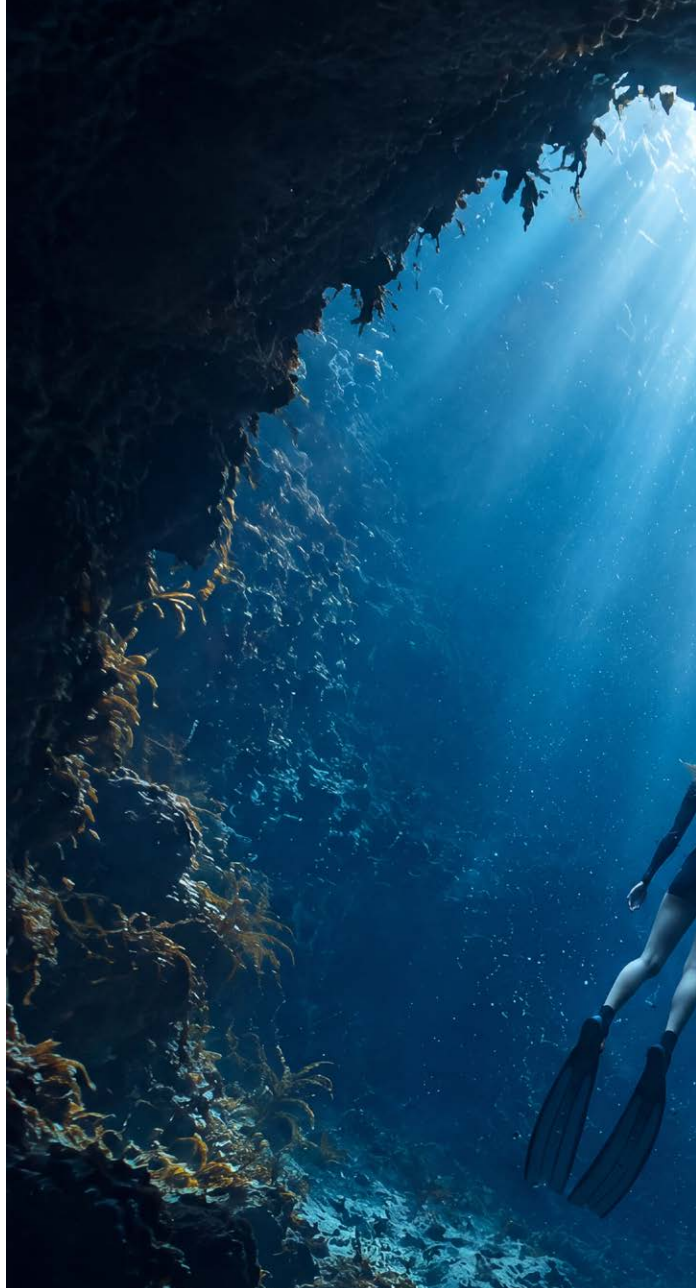
resources needed for pharmaceutical use. The researchers are interested only in profit, with no thought given to the harm they might be doing to the surrounding environment. Is it possible for science and the magic of the ocean to coexist, even to work together?

Condi is chasing dangerous waves, trying to ease the ache in her heart over the departure of Trustin Davis, her first love. It's been two years, but his absence still stings. One person

she doesn't want to chase is Firth Cristo, one of the three children to whom Grand Ella has opened her home. Prickly Firth hides the heart of a healer behind a veneer of moodiness and teenage rebellion. He is a daring free diver, going into caverns not easily accessible to gather healing plants from the sea. As Firth deals with possibly losing Trippy, his mentor and the head of the Beachlings, he is drawn into Koan's undersea world for lessons he must learn to make full use of his healing gifts.

Once again, Abernathy handles weighty topics with grace and sensitivity. The conflict of science with the natural world, learning to see the past rightly and release it, coming of age and coming into one's own—she touches gently on each topic with her lyrical writing. This is not a fast-moving, action-packed story, although there are some tense moments. She creates an engaging world, laced with natural beauty and supernatural grace, and lets her characters grow, change, and become who they were meant to be.

This book can be read as a standalone, but to really experience



Dipitous Beach, readers should start at the beginning with *The Aquamarine Surfboard*. As with the other two books in the series, vintage surfboards and their marks play a part in the story, and it will come as no surprise to those familiar with Abernathy's works that one of those boards finds its way into Firth's hands.



As one would expect, the story doesn't end on a note of finality, but of awe and of mysteries that may be yet to come. Kellye Abernathy leaves room for the reader to imagine what happens next and where life takes our friends in Dipitous Beach, and it will be a treat for those who appreciate the awe of possibilities. ★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

An avid reader and writer, **Kellye Abernathy** is the author of *THE AQUAMARINE SURFBOARD* (2022, Atmosphere Press), *AMETHYST, THE SHALLOWS* (2024, Atmosphere Press), and *INDIGO, THE DEEP* (2026, Atmosphere Press). Set in a mystical beach town, this well-reviewed series explores complex themes such as grief, poverty, and isolation while celebrating the healing elements of adventure, hope, and wonder.

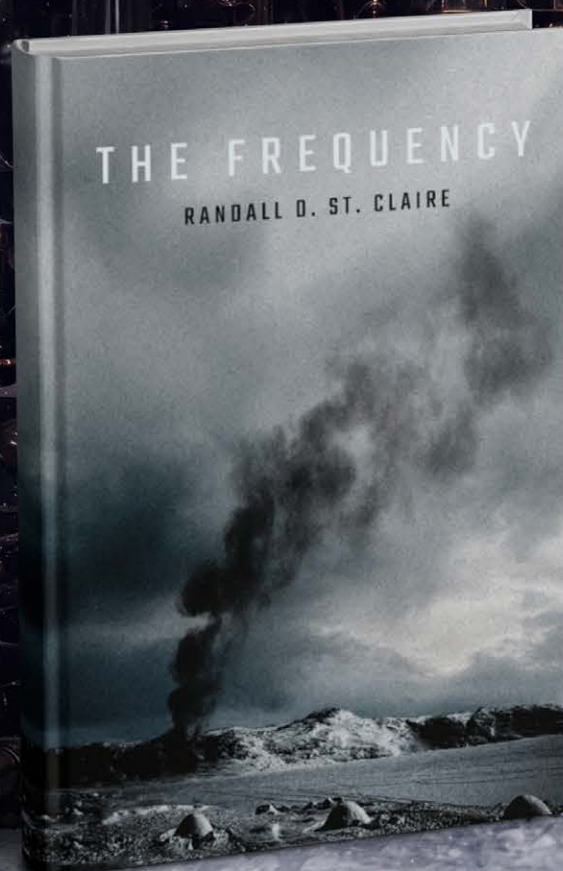
Kellye teaches practical life skills, creative writing, yoga, and mindfulness within the trauma survivor community in Dallas, Texas. She hopes to inspire healing through healthy body and breath awareness, creativity, consistency and compassion.

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.

*“Wrong wasn’t always loud.
It had a quiet side, too.”*

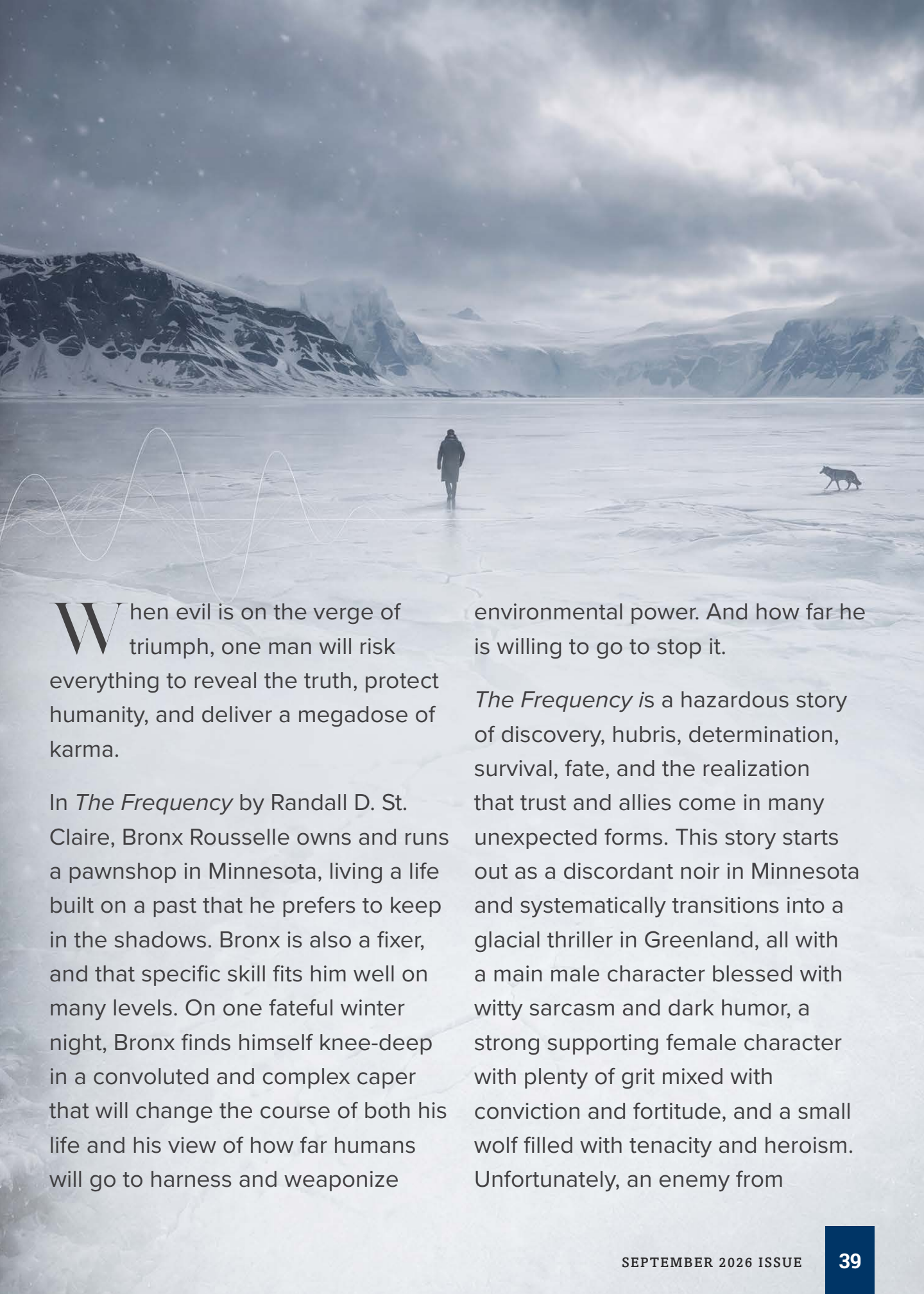
THE FREQUENCY

By Randall D St. Claire



Atmosphere Press
July 21, 2026
185 pages





When evil is on the verge of triumph, one man will risk everything to reveal the truth, protect humanity, and deliver a megadose of karma.

In *The Frequency* by Randall D. St. Claire, Bronx Rousselle owns and runs a pawnshop in Minnesota, living a life built on a past that he prefers to keep in the shadows. Bronx is also a fixer, and that specific skill fits him well on many levels. On one fateful winter night, Bronx finds himself knee-deep in a convoluted and complex caper that will change the course of both his life and his view of how far humans will go to harness and weaponize

environmental power. And how far he is willing to go to stop it.

The Frequency is a hazardous story of discovery, hubris, determination, survival, fate, and the realization that trust and allies come in many unexpected forms. This story starts out as a discordant noir in Minnesota and systematically transitions into a glacial thriller in Greenland, all with a main male character blessed with witty sarcasm and dark humor, a strong supporting female character with plenty of grit mixed with conviction and fortitude, and a small wolf filled with tenacity and heroism. Unfortunately, an enemy from

Texas continues to lurk and follow, methodically intent on destroying anyone who gets in his way, all in the name of avarice and ego. What is this enemy after? Why is Bronx traveling across snow and ice to find a stone whale? What does Nikola Tesla have to do with any of this? This story extracts and parcels out the answers quickly and with surgical precision. No stone is left unturned; no life is left unscathed.

“This was it. Where questions ended. Where answers began.”



A recurring theme throughout *The Frequency* is winter: freezing weather, arctic tundra, and cold-blooded murder, providing a backdrop of hardship and adversity, followed eventually by revival, resilience, and transformation. The protagonist's arc is steep and fraught with peril, introspection, and expansion, allowing the reader to connect with and relate to his resulting enigmatic character development.

With *The Frequency*, Randall D. St. Claire masterfully delivers a one-two punch by creating both a mysterious and an historic narrative, complete with a skillfully crafted denouement and a knowing nod toward retribution and harmony.

The Frequency will no doubt resonate with readers who love a thrilling mystery led by a man who is exasperating, endearing, and audacious all the way to the last line of an excellent epilogue. ★

“Secrets were fine when they were about money or history. Not when they could crack the sky open.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Randall D. St. Claire crafts mysteries and thrillers that dwell in the shadows where most dare never look. Now living in Texas, he writes stories that explore what happens when people chase the truth too far -- and what it costs them when they find it. He is professionally represented by Three Seas Lit.



CM Healy combines wit, charm, engaging rhyme, and a heartfelt message to create a picture book that children will enjoy and parents will appreciate.



If Mom Became an Octopus

by C.M. Healy

Most children have probably wished for a little more time with their mom. In *If Mom Became an Octopus*, written by C.M. Healy, one little boy imagines different animals his mom could become to help solve the everyday problems she complains about. As he listens to her, he imagines a new animal that could make her busy life a little easier.

The story is built around everyday moments children can easily understand. His mom has too many chores; she's trying to get everyone out the door on time, and she has too much to carry. These are things many families experience. But children don't always see those frustrations the same way adults do. This little boy hears his mom's complaints and, with a child's imagination, comes up with simple animal solutions that make perfect sense to him. It's a creative way to show how children often use their imagination to make sense of the world around them.

The book is written in rhyme, and the repeating pattern makes it easy for children to anticipate what comes next. As each new problem comes up, they'll





an Octopus, they do exactly that by bringing the boy's imagination to life in a fun and engaging way.

The simplicity of the storytelling is one of the book's greatest strengths. Its simple structure is well matched to its intended audience of preschoolers and early elementary readers. The animals are fun, but they're really just a way for the boy to figure something out. As the story progresses, it becomes clear that the animals aren't really the point of the story. Rather than asking whether his mom could become an octopus or another animal, the story looks at how a child sees a parent's busy world. Ultimately, the imagined animals reveal what the story is about: it's a story about the relationship between a little boy and his mom.

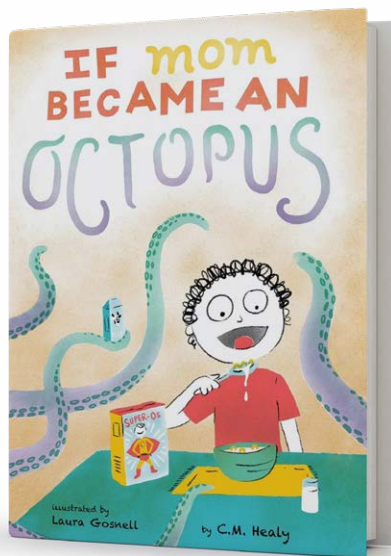
While young children are the obvious audience, I think parents will appreciate this story just as much. Parents who have ever wished there were a few more hours in the day may even see a little of themselves in this mother, making the story relatable for adults as well as children. The playful animal premise makes the story fun for children, while its thoughtful look at family life gives parents just as

enjoy wondering which animal will appear. The rhyme also keeps the story moving along without drawing attention to itself, which isn't always easy to do. Many children will have fun joining in with the repeated words once they pick up on the pattern.

The heart of the story becomes clear in the ending. The message comes across naturally instead of feeling like the story is trying to teach a lesson.

The illustrations continue telling the story beyond the words on the page, and that's an important part of a picture book. They should support the story and help tell it, not just decorate the page. In *If Mom Became*

much to enjoy. CM Healy combines wit, charm, engaging rhyme, and a heartfelt message to create a picture book that children will enjoy and parents will appreciate. ★



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

C.M. Healy currently lives in Dallas, Texas with his wife, baby girl, dog, and two giant cats where he teaches science. When he's not busy writing, he enjoys building Lego sets, playing video games, reading comic books (The Flash is his favorite), and watching TV with his best buddy, his wife. He earned the distinguished award of Eagle Scout during high school and went on to obtain his masters in child development from Oklahoma State University. He has been working with and entertaining children of all ages ever since.

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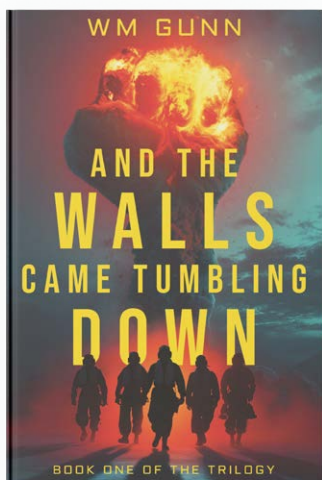
September

BOOK CAMPAIGNS



Lone Star Literary Life Book Campaigns welcomes you to join in book campaigns for two stellar new titles. We present a mystery surrounding a widow and a tragedy no one sees coming, as well as an alternative fiction reimagining the twentieth century. Follow along as our reviewers share their perspectives. Stay engaged on social media to join the conversation. ★

Find us on:

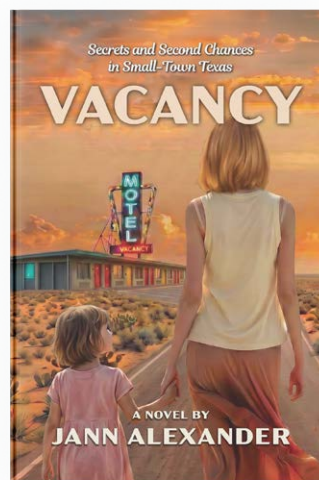


ALTERNATIVE HISTORY /
HISTORICAL FICTION / FAMILY SAGA

And the Walls Came Tumbling Down

Atmosphere Press
September 15, 2026

By W.M. Gunn



WOMEN'S FICTION / MYSTERY / CRIME

Vacancy: Secrets and Second Chances in Small Town Texas

Black Rose Writing
September 24, 2026

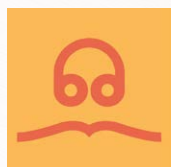
By Jann Alexander



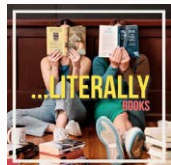
The Beautiful and the Banned Podcast



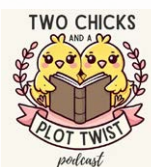
The Currently Reading Podcast



Good Scribes Only



The Literally Books Podcast



Two Chicks and a Plot Twist



The Write Atmosphere

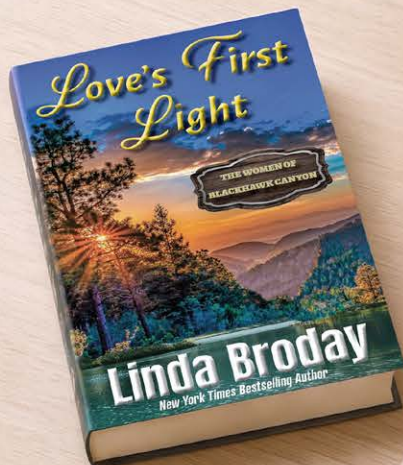


Podcast

Highlights

There is something uniquely welcoming about a podcast. Podcasts meet us where we are, whether we are driving, walking, cooking, or winding down at the end of the day. With headphones, the experience can feel especially intimate, with a familiar voice speaking directly into your ear. It feels less like a broadcast and more like being invited into a conversation.

Podcasts also give stories and conversations room to unfold naturally. Listeners get to know hosts, guests, and personalities over time, creating a sense of connection that keeps them coming back. Texas has plenty of thoughtful, entertaining voices worth welcoming into your day. Here are a few of our favorites. **You can find a more comprehensive list on our website.** ★





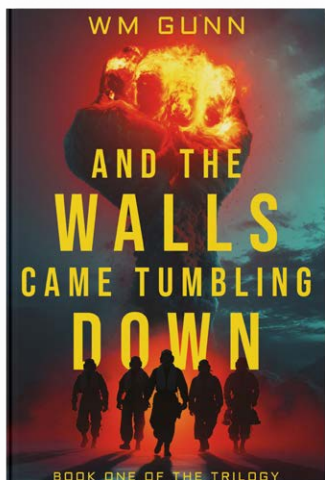
W e l c o m e

Lone Star

Take the September Texas Books Preview train to reach the latest and greatest Texas-connected new releases. Join your significant other on a trip to Romance Station. Grab a connection to New Nonfiction. Buy a ticket to Mystery and Suspense. Join the littles in your life on a visit to Children's Fiction. Follow the rails to Fantasy and Adventure. Need some direction? The LSLI Conductor has these first-class titles to put you on the track to your next favorite read. Enjoy these standouts, and [click here to visit the full collection on our website](#).

Aboard the Lit Express!



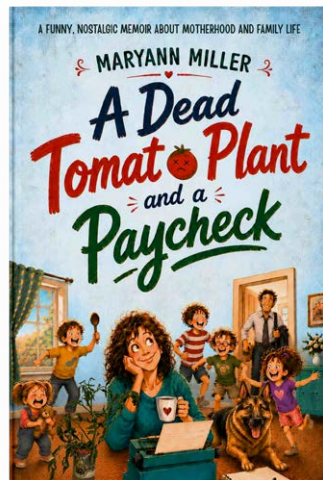


ALTERNATIVE FICTION / HISTORICAL FICTION /
ACTION & ADVENTURE

And the Walls Came Tumbling Down

By WM Gunn

Atmosphere Press
September 12, 2026

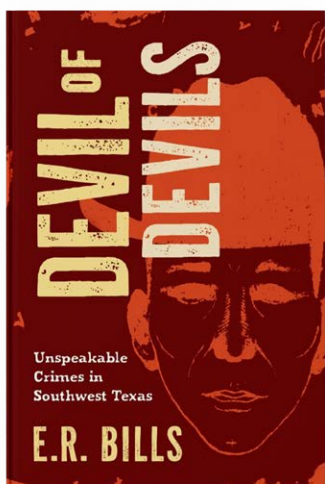


NONFICTION / HUMOR / FAMILY

A Dead Tomato Plant and a Paycheck: A Nostalgic Memoir about Motherhood and Family Life

By Maryann Miller

August 28, 2026

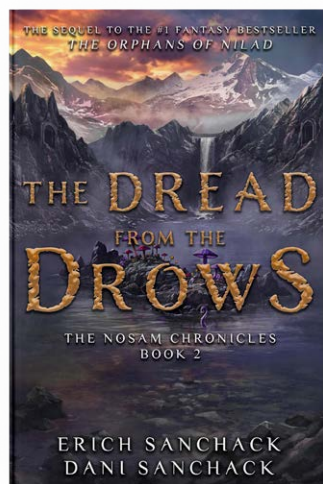


NONFICTION / TRUE CRIME

Devil of Devils: Unspeakable Crimes in the Southwest

By E.R. Bills

The History Press
September 22, 2026



FANTASY / EPIC FANTASY

The Dread from the Drows: Book 2, Nosam Chronicles

By Erich Sanchack & Dani Sanchack

September 22, 2026



UPPER MIDDLE GRADES / SCIENCE FICTION

Future Me and the VR Prison

By Josh Weiss-Roessler

Future Generations Press
September 1, 2026



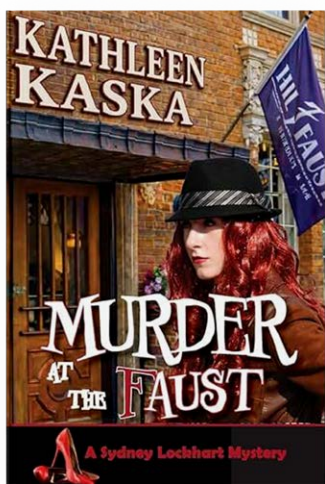
CHRISTIAN FICTION / SUPERNATURAL /
CONTEMPORARY FANTASY

The Lion's Whisper:

Voices from the Fortress

By Nicole Charles

July 3, 2026



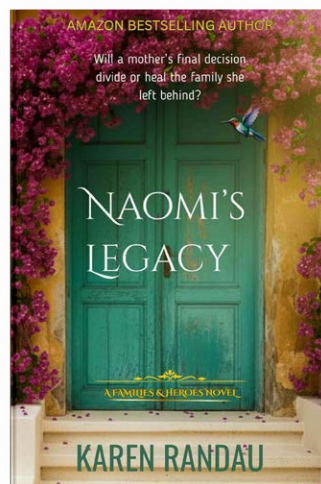
MYSTERY / COZY MYSTERY

Murder at the Faust:

A Sydney Lockhart Mystery

By Kathleen Kaska

Anamcara Press
September 8, 2026

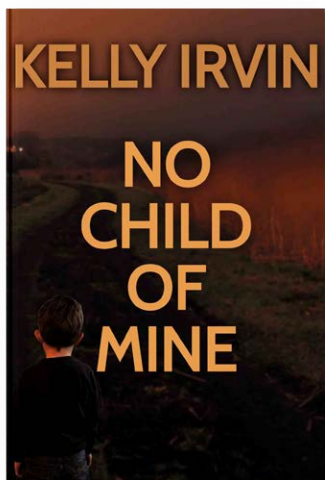


WOMEN'S FICTION

Naomi's Legacy

By Karen Randau

September 15, 2026

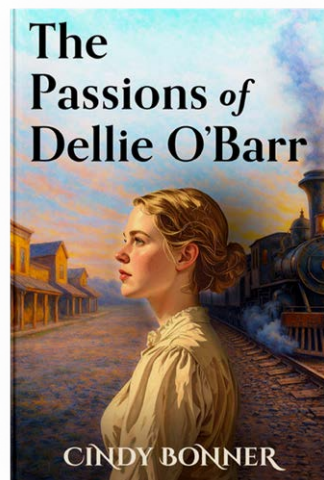


ROMANTIC SUSPENSE / MYSTERY

No Child of Mine

By Kelly Irvin

September 8, 2026

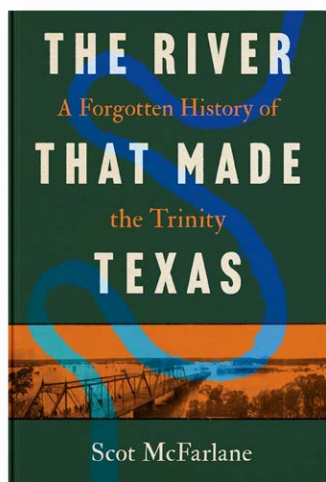


HISTORICAL FICTION / MAINSTREAM

The Passions of Dellie O'Barr

By Cindy Bonner

Deck Night Press
September 22, 2026

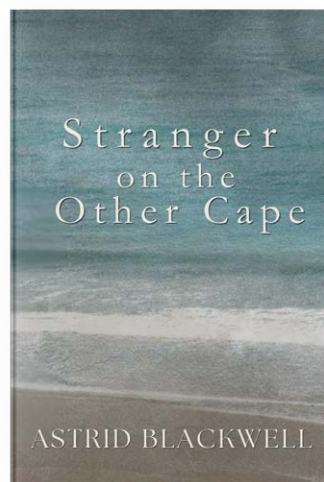


NONFICTION / HISTORY

The River That Made Texas: A Forgotten History of the Trinity

By Scot McFarlane

University of North Carolina Press
September 29, 2026

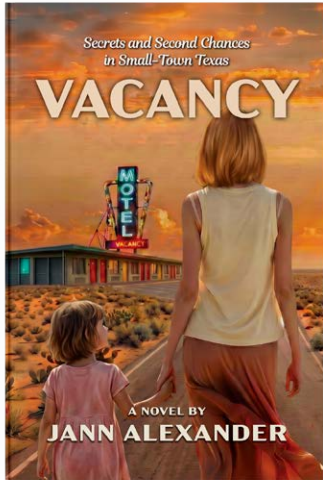


THRILLER / MYSTERY

Stranger on the Other Cape

By Astrid Blackwell

Small Gray Dog Publishing, LLC
September 1, 2026



MYSTERY / CRIME / SECOND-CHANCE
ROMANCEFICTION

**Vacancy: Secrets and Second
Chances in Small-Town Texas**

By Jann Alexander

Black Rose Writing
September 24, 2026



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Date & Time: Saturday, October 17, 2026 | 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Location: Hood County Senior Center
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Limited spaces available

Register at: www.tomlinsonpress.com

Contact: Kelli Martin, Owner – 682-205-4500

Deadline: September 1st | Payment due upon registration



BUILD A READER-WELCOMING BRAND

Turn Marketing into an Invitation

Good marketing is about creating a space where the right people recognize something they like, step a little closer, and think.

Welcome Readers In

Marketing advice often sounds like a list of things you should be doing.

Post more often.
Start a newsletter.
Make Reels.
Go live.
Join TikTok.
Run ads.
Be everywhere.





**Stop
Trying to
Impress
Everyone**

One reason marketing becomes exhausting is that authors often feel as though they are speaking to an enormous, invisible audience.

Every caption has to be clever. Every graphic has to look professional. Every post has to somehow convince people to buy.

That is a lot of pressure to put on one Instagram post.

Instead, picture one reader.

Not every reader. Not the algorithm. Not the publishing industry.

Before long, marketing can start to feel less like sharing your book and more like auditioning for a role you never wanted.

But what if marketing is not really about performing at all?

What if it is about **welcoming people in?**

That small shift changes the question from *What should I be doing to market my book?* to *How can I help the right readers feel at home here?*

And that is a much more useful place to begin.

**Give Readers
Something to
Walk Into**

Every caption has to be clever. Every graphic has to look professional. Every post has to somehow convince people to buy.

The person who would genuinely enjoy your book.

What would make that reader pause?

What would make them curious?

What might make them think, *Oh, this author writes for people like me?*

That is the beginning of a welcome.

You are not trying to convince everyone to enter. You are helping the people who belong there recognize the door.

Authors sometimes hear “build a platform” and imagine they need to create an elaborate marketing machine.

You don’t.

But you do need to give readers some sense of what they will find when they spend time with you.

Maybe you write small-town mysteries filled with eccentric characters and local secrets.

Maybe your romances are funny, hopeful, and built around found family.

Maybe you write historical fiction because you love uncovering overlooked pieces of the past.

Those things are not just descriptions of your books. They are invitations.

They give you subjects to talk about beyond “Buy my book.”

A mystery writer might share strange historical crimes, favorite fictional detectives, or the inspiration behind a setting.

A romance writer might talk about favorite romantic tropes, fictional couples, or the moments that make a love story irresistible.



**You Don't
Have to
Welcome
Readers Like
Someone
Else Does**

This may be one of the most important things authors can learn about marketing:

There is no single personality required to be good at it.

You do not have to become the funny author on TikTok if humor is not your strength.

You do not have to record videos every day because another author swears that video changed her career.

You do not need a beautifully curated Instagram feed if designing graphics makes you want to close your laptop and disappear.

Marketing becomes much harder when you spend your time trying to imitate someone whose strengths, interests, audience, or energy are completely different from yours.

A historical novelist might share research discoveries, photographs, places, or the questions that sent them down a research rabbit hole.

The goal is not to manufacture content.

It is to open the door to the world surrounding your work.



Make the First Step Easy

The better question is:

How do I naturally
make people feel
welcome?

Do you love explaining things?

Sharing stories?

Starting conversations?

Making beautiful or interesting things?

Think about what you already do well when you are connecting with people in ordinary life.

Your marketing does not have to fight that instinct. It can build on it.

That idea is a big part of what we explore in *Why You Hate Marketing*: sometimes the problem is not that you hate marketing itself. You hate the version of marketing you think you are supposed to do.

Imagine inviting someone into your home and then making them figure out how to get through the front door.

Readers should not have to work that hard either.

Look at your online presence through the eyes of someone discovering you for the first time.

Can they quickly tell what you write?

Can they find your books?

Is there an obvious place to learn more about you?

If they enjoy what they see, is there an easy next step?

That next step might be visiting your website, joining your newsletter, reading a sample chapter, following you, or exploring your books.

Marketing often becomes complicated because we are thinking ten steps ahead.

Try thinking about just one.

When the right reader finds you, **what would you like them to do next?**

Then make that step obvious.



**Give Them
a Reason
to Stay**

Welcoming someone is not the same as constantly asking them for something.

Imagine arriving at a party and having the host immediately hand you a sales brochure.

You probably would not stay long.

Readers are much the same.

Yes, you want people to buy your books. Marketing exists, in part, to help that happen.

But before someone becomes a buyer, they are a person deciding whether they enjoy being in your world.

Give them something while they are there.

Make them laugh.

Tell them something interesting.

Introduce them to another book they might love.

Ask their opinion.

Share something that makes them feel understood.

Let them see the person and the interests behind the books.

You are building familiarity, and familiarity takes time.

**Your One
Small Shift**

This month, instead of asking:

What should I post?

Try asking:

**How can I
welcome my
reader today?**

Maybe you share the story behind a character.

Maybe you ask readers about their favorite trope.

Maybe you show them the place that inspired your setting.

Maybe you recommend a book.

Maybe you simply start a conversation.

It does not have to be impressive.

It has to feel like an open door.

Because good marketing is not about standing in the middle of the internet

shouting loudly enough to get everyone's attention.

It is about creating a space where the right people recognize something they like, step a little closer, and think:

I want to stay here awhile. ★





WELCOME IN: COMMUNITY
AND CONNECTION IN

North Texas Indie Bookstores

Two friends sit engrossed in conversation. They lean forward in their plush armchairs under the wooden mantel. The coffee table between them is strewn with books, journals, and little treats to snack on and sip. Bookshelves fill the walls to their left and right.

You'd think they were in a home living room, but they're not. They're in a well-loved independent bookstore, downtown Grapevine's Talking Animals.

Lexi is a teacher here in North Texas. Alexis is a local jeweler. Both avid readers, they come to Talking Animals to get away from distractions and connect in analog. "It just feels nostalgic in a world where technology is everywhere," Lexi says. But not any bookstore will do. "I like to support local, and there's something that's cozier in a smaller space," she adds.

Around these friends, the space hums with readers browsing and connecting. From students underlining in the cafe corner to couples chatting by the Texas shelves, people stepping into Talking Animals report seeing it as more than

"My goal is that every person that comes into any bookstore feels seen by either the stories or the people that they encounter there."

-Alexis

just a store. "Having a third space to read and be around books is so important," shares Alexis. "And I'm an artist myself, so I know how hard it is to have a small business."

It's true, independent bookselling is no easy feat. And yet, indie bookstores are gaining serious ground across the country and the state. The American Booksellers Association reports that independent bookstores have grown by 70% since 2020. For every closed store, four new ones open. So, what is the indie bookstore providing that readers can't get elsewhere?

Many North Texas booksellers noticed that the 2020 pandemic changed their customers' behavior. They saw that people read more when staying home more. The

larger shift, though, was a renewed intentionality around supporting small local businesses. Again and again, North Texas readers interviewed expressed the same preference: They'd much rather buy from an indie bookstore than from Amazon.

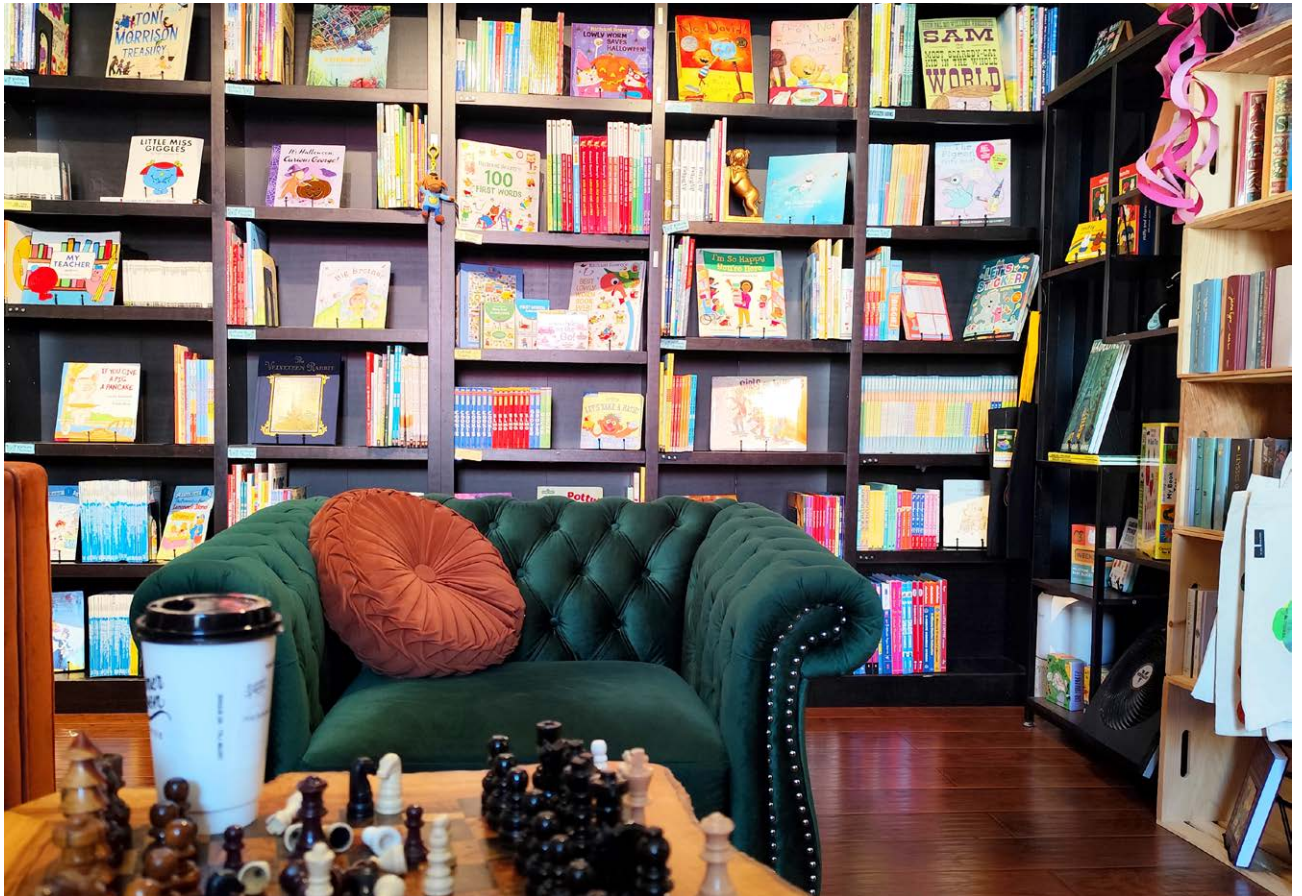
"That's because it's more than just the reading that people are interested in," Talking Animals co-owner Katy Lemieux confirms. "People are craving the face-to-face human interaction that just happens when you're in the bookstore. We're making a real, conscious, intentional effort to create a place that people feel welcome, that they want to come back to."



Across the region, booksellers and readers echoed Lemieux's assessment. People care about buying local, but they care even more deeply about what their local bookshop *feels* like – and North Texas indie bookstores know it. They're curating a kind of literary hospitality that the big-box retailers can't offer.

"You have to offer something to people that feels like they're getting the best deal out of their money. And that deal, as far as we're concerned, is the recognition, the community, the creativity, the joy, and this story that they leave with. And that we just happen to believe that that's extraordinarily important."

Offering opportunities for that connection was the intention behind the store's coffee shop and book club. It's also the driving force behind Talking Animals' prominent role in organizing this August's Indie Bookstore Crawl. "My goal is that every person that comes into any bookstore feels seen by either the stories or the people that they encounter there."



This August, the second annual North Texas Indie Bookstore Crawl brought together more than 30 independent bookstores and hundreds of readers.

North Texas took inspiration for this model from Houston, whose own bookstore crawl covered a similarly sprawling metropolitan area. “It is difficult when you have an area that is pretty bound by highways and driving, and doesn’t have as many walkable areas,” Lemieux explains. “So what we’re trying to do is let people know that, no, actually, this is

a booming industry. We are all here.”

One Dallas-based accountant and avid reader learned about the Crawl on Instagram. She was drawn to one particular photo in that post: the map. It stretches from Granbury to Garland and beyond, marking each indie bookstore with bright red pins. “The map was so interesting because I rarely go to Fort Worth, being on the Dallas side, but you can see how to make a trip fit,” she explains. “You don’t realize how many of these bookstores there are!”

This sentiment holds even as far as Midlothian, where Lisa O'Brien of O'Brien's Bookshop has seen a huge increase in foot traffic from this year's event. She's most struck by the way readers are equally dedicated to their local indie bookstores and curious about new ones. "I knew people were passionate about books," she says, "but just the numbers of people on the Crawl, and how much time it takes! If anyone tells you bookstores are going away or that Amazon is gonna take over, you can say no way."

For some readers, finding new independent bookshops also meant forging new connections. At Daydream Books in Arlington, staff member Grace noticed one woman starting a conversation with two other readers once they spotted each other's Crawl-issued bookstore passports. Then, the three left for the next bookstore on the Crawl route – together. "They're making a community once they're here," Grace observes.

While readers can sometimes have a reputation for keeping their noses in books, this event has encouraged them to look up and make



connections. "People that come in with their head down end up leaving laughing," Grace says. "Usually with books, and sometimes even with new friends."

Each North Texas independent bookstore has its own secret to making community members feel welcome.

For reader and Crawl participant Kaylee, it's the people that make indie bookstores so welcoming. "It's just that sense of community. The staff are so nice," she says, "and willing to help you and to chit-chat."

And Kaylee's not an outlier. Every reader interviewed mentioned the people who make them feel welcome in indie bookstores.

For Talking Animals co-owner Katy Lemieux, being welcoming starts with the intention behind the business itself. "Our employees are not told they need to sell a certain number of books a day," she says, unlike some other major retailers. "Someone's not going to buy something every time they come in, even our regulars, and that's totally fine... We want people to value the experience." This third-space approach carries over into the North Texas Indie Bookstore Crawl. Participants receive a stamp on their passport just for coming in – no purchase necessary.

At O'Brien's bookshop, the welcome is almost literal. Owner Lisa O'Brien describes the space as small, warm, and inviting. Her customers feel at home in the shop's living area, complete with two chairs, a couch, and a chess table. There's often a natural intimacy in a space so small that customers can't help but overhear one another. More often than not, O'Brien says, visitors end up chatting with each other. "And

when people first come in," she adds, "we're right there by the door with a 'Hi, welcome in, how are you doing.'"

When Texans say, "Welcome In," we really mean it. The trademark warmth of Lone Star hospitality brands Texas independent bookstores with a deep sense of responsibility to their readers and to one another.

"I think Texas hospitality is very much a part of what we do," says Katy Lemieux of Talking Animals. "Obviously I'm biased because I'm a native Texan. But I do know in our area, we have made an effort to all know each other now. We're totally collaborative and we are all benefiting from each other's communal success."



From its geography to its southern hospitality, Texas seems to be built for a friendlier model of bookselling. “When I’m in New York, I love it because I can walk five minutes and get to the next bookstore,” says Lemieux. “But here, I love it because we are not as competitive with one another, because geographically we’re all so far apart and we each do something different...We’re all big believers in the idea that the rising tide raises all boats.”

Since the first Crawl, the region’s indies have built relationships and banded together. Plano’s Bibliobar sparked what is now a quarterly meeting for the community’s independent bookstores. In the true neighborly spirit of the Lone Star State, these indie booksellers gather to share challenges and to lend a hand to newly opened stores. As it turns out, they’re just as welcoming and warm with one another as they are with their customers.

“In my personal opinion, Texas is a bit friendlier than other places,” shares Daydream staff member Grace. This approachability carries over to Denton’s buzzing new indie bookstore, Plot Twist. “This store is

perfect for Denton because Denton itself is a very open and welcoming community,” a Plot Twist staff member and lifelong local explained.

While indie bookstores nationwide tend to be motivated more by the human aspect of their work than by profit margins, the welcome in North Texas bookshops takes on a distinctly Texan warmth. For example, over in Grapevine, Talking Animals’ co-owner Katy Lemieux heard a lot about Texas hospitality from World Cup visitors to the neighborhood.

“I think that hospitality gets lost in the larger narrative about Texas across the United States,”





“prescription” of joy. “We are here to serve people in whatever way that happens,” she says. For Lemieux and many others, that often means connecting Texans with both stories and community.

Lemieux also prides herself on Texans’ tradition of taking personal ownership of their work. “The way I want to run my business is with a big smile,” she says. “I want everyone to come in there and feel welcome and have the best time.”

Lemieux adds, pointing to negative stereotypes of the state as stubborn and insular. “As Texans, I think that’s a responsibility we have to be welcoming and friendly and to do the work to offset that reputation.”

For Lemieux, the region’s indie bookstore industry is a

In a state of 32 million people, each Texan has their own story. And yet, we are always seeking out new stories in the books that we read and in the people that we meet. For North Texans seeking community and connection, their local independent bookstores are keeping the door open. ★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christen Scalfano is a writer, editor, and literacy specialist. Her work and travels across 49 countries have shaped her passion for the way stories connect people across borders. Born and raised in Texas, she recently returned from a decade abroad to tell stories from her home state. She spends her free time learning languages, volunteering at the library, gulping Earl Grey tea, and annotating secondhand paperbacks. She is firmly Team Dog-Ear.



THE TRIALS OF ODYSSEUS.



“Your wife says the sink’s clogged
and the lawn needs mowing ...”

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 **Song of Many and Much.**

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*You're not failing.
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Most authors are applying the wrong strategy for their stage.

START THE QUIZ



Out and About

with Lone Star
Literary Life

September's theme is **WELCOME**, and few things feel more welcoming than gathering with fellow book lovers. This month's Out and About photos capture author hangouts, bookstore visits, and the people and places that make Texas's literary community feel like home. We're also keeping our friends at Folklore Grove Books in our thoughts as they recover from a recent fire, and sending them all the support of the LSLL community.



Author Kimberly Fish and
Reviewer Lisa Henson



Boss Lady
Books
Amy and
Amy Isbell



Romancing Mr Rabbit
Vicki Rhodus,
Jill Anderson,
Elaine DeLany

September's theme is WELCOME, and few things feel more welcoming than gathering with fellow book lovers. This month's Out and About photos capture author hangouts, bookstore visits, and the people and places that make Texas's literary community feel like home. We're also celebrating **Boss Lady Books** on their grand opening and keeping our friends at **Folklore Grove Bookstore** in our thoughts as they recover from a recent fire. Here's to the bookstores, authors, and readers who continue to make bookish Texas such a welcoming place. ★



Folklore Grove
Chrissy and Amy



Talking Animal Books
Kellye Abernathy and Amy

Indie Bookstore Roundup

Texas bookstores are opening, fundraising, relocating, and receiving accolades. We welcome all these amazing new stores to the Texas bookish community.

Austin



Reverie Books held a fundraiser to help open a second store with a larger venue and a coffee-and-wine bar. They plan to continue business in both locations. **Participants in the effort** are entered for a chance to get their name on the wall, unique prizes, tickets to the preview party, and more.

Beaumont



Boss Lady Books closed their Lumberton location in July. The new, expanded store opened in Beaumont on August 29. The owners are excited to have more room for books and events.





Cedar Park



We discovered the ‘new to us’ bookstore **Phat Tracks Books & Records** recently. Their goal is to offer an alternative to the average bookstore. If you’re looking for offbeat nonfiction, banned books, dark romance, and more, give them a visit.

Coppell



Diana Garibay of **Cardinal Books** in Coppell was one of 8 recipients of the Book Industry Charitable Foundation’s Macmillan scholarships, which support underrepresented groups to attend booksellers association trade shows. Additionally, the online/pop-up store is holding a **crowdfunding effort** to open a permanent location focused on creating a cultural and community space to foster literacy and creativity.

Dallas



White Rock Books announced their plan to open an independent publishing house dedicated to contemporary romance fiction.

Frisco

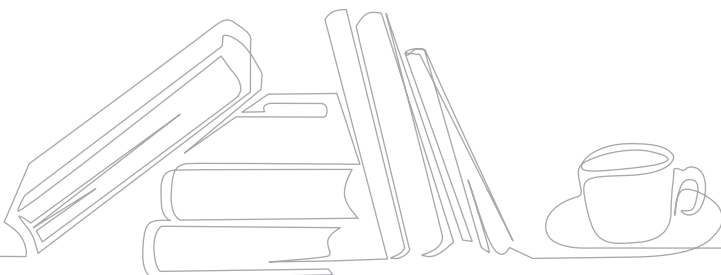


Frisco Booksellers announced that they will be opening in downtown Frisco this fall. After operating via pop-up events in the area, owner Jennifer Bischof found a permanent location in the Rail District on Main St. The store will offer a wide variety of books, a dedicated children's space, and a gathering place for the community. She also plans to connect with local authors and carry their books in the store.

Grapevine



Talking Animals Books opened a kid-focused bookstore at its original location, 103 W. Worth St. Readers can still find a smaller selection of adult and YA books there, but the larger selection will be at their 909 S. Main St. location.



Houston

Half Price Books **announced** their return to the area of their former Montrose location. The company has plans for a new location a few blocks down from the old store, opening sometime in 2027.

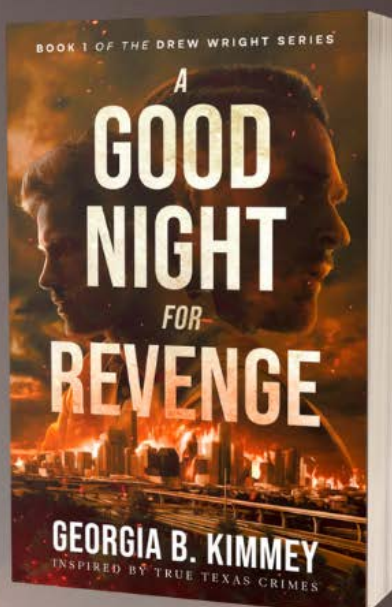
Katy



The Lost Story is a woman-owned indie bookstore centered on women authors and elevating their voices. The store opened on August 29 with bookish-themed mimosas and goodie bags.

THE DREW WRIGHT SERIES

by Georgia B. Kimmey



REVENGE
HAS MANY
FACES.



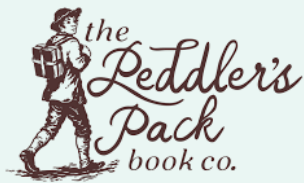
WHO SAID BLOOD IS
THICKER THAN
WATER ?

San Angelo



Rooted Ranch Bookstore celebrated its grand opening in July. In addition, they plan on hosting cultural night markets, midnight release parties, and a pumpkin patch.

Tomball



The Peddler's Pack Book Co. opened in May. They offer used books, used vinyl, gift items, audiobooks, kids items, and more. They aim to “provide a space where our community can come together and embrace a shared love of literacy.”

Weatherford



Romancing Mr. Rabbit, a romance-focused bookstore, held their grand opening on August 15. Friends Vicki and Elaine prepare to create a space filled with romance, adventure, imagination, and community.



Texas Word Wrangler Book Festival



SEPT. 25-26, 2026

FRI 9/25 9A-5P ★ SAT 9/26 9A-2P



MEET PROFESSIONAL AUTHORS AT FREE COMMUNITY EVENT

The Texas Word Wrangler Book Festival actively promotes Texas literature and provides readers an opportunity to connect directly with published authors.

- ★ Meet authors
- ★ Purchase books
- ★ Get autographs
- ★ Attend readings



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www.giddingspubliclibrary.org/word-wrangler

AUTHORS, LET'S GET THE WORD OUT—FOR FREE!

At Lone Star Literary Life, we love helping Texas authors shine—and that starts with two totally free tools just for you:

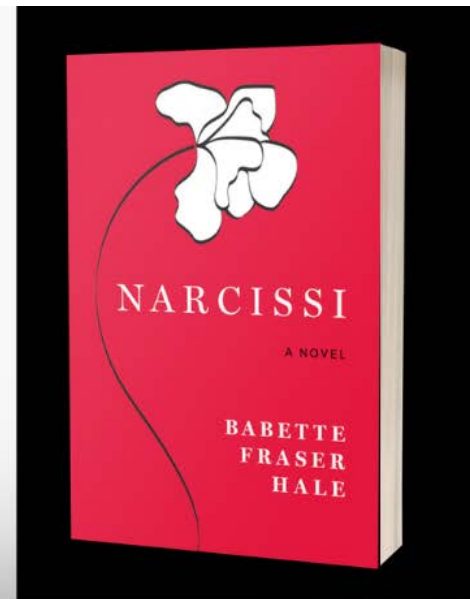
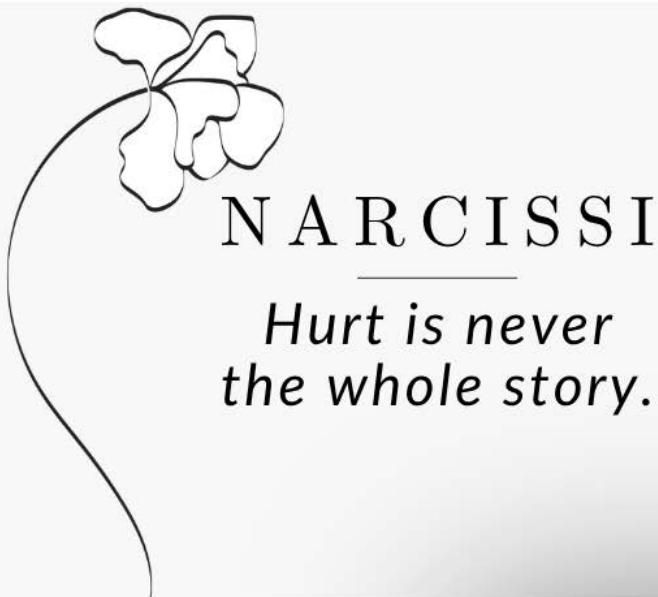
✦ **Texas Books Preview**

Have a new release? Submit it for a complimentary listing in our monthly Texas Books Preview—a go-to feature for book lovers, librarians, reviewers, and bookstore buyers across the state.

Texas Bookish Events Calendar

Hosting a launch party, book signing, or workshop? Add your event to our statewide calendar and connect with readers who are ready to show up and support.

LET'S TELL TEXAS ABOUT YOUR BOOK!



B A B E T T E H A L E

COMING SOON

TEXAS READS

Women's Fiction

By Jann Alexander, Author, The Dust Series

Like a Texas road trip that can seem daunting, women's fiction is all about the journey. Both are colorful, fun, informative, and often challenging along the way. At journey's end, everyone's been changed.

Women's fiction requires the crux of the story to be the emotional journey of the protagonist, who evolves over the course of the novel. And it intersects with other genres, too, when it's placed in a historical or fantasy or sci-fi setting.



With its relatable life themes, women's fiction excels with characters undergoing transformative journeys. When cloaked as historical fiction, like my novel, *Unspoken: Secrets and Survival in the Texas Dust Bowl*, women's fiction is nonetheless recognizable to female readers,

who've had similar experiences, relationships, and life stages—no matter the era. Women's fiction appeals to me for its charged realism, too, like my contemporary novel *Vacancy: Secrets and Second Chances in Small-Town Texas*, in the way it tackles family dynamics, while portending hopefulness despite difficult circumstances.



This spring, I took myself on a women's fiction road trip, reading these realistic, emotional tales from times past, all debuts by Texas authors:



ELIZABETH WETMORE

VALENTINE

Set in Odessa, Texas, 1976

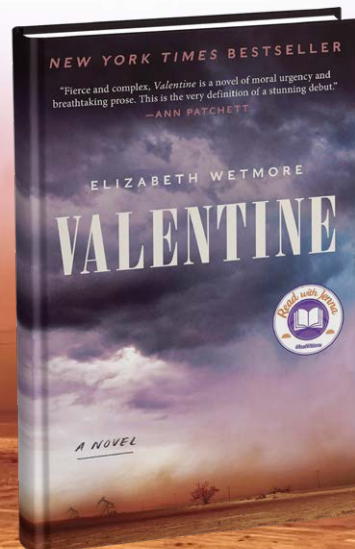
Valentine, written by West Texas native Elizabeth Wetmore, is a harrowing story set in 1976 in Odessa, Texas that “explores the lingering effects of a brutal crime while illuminating women’s strength and vulnerability.”

In a *New York Times* interview, the author talks about the town where she grew up, in West Texas. “It took me a long time to be able to see the place clearly. I had to fall back in love with the land and the people in a way that made it

possible to write with nuance and sympathy.”

Wetmore has written a debut that’s “a haunting exploration of the intersections of violence and race, class and region in a story that plumbs the depths of darkness and fear, yet offers a window into beauty and hope.” (*from the publisher*)

Valentine is gripping, realistic, and doesn’t shy from emotional impacts, with the relationship dynamics women’s fiction readers love.



LESLIE R. SCHOVER

FISSION

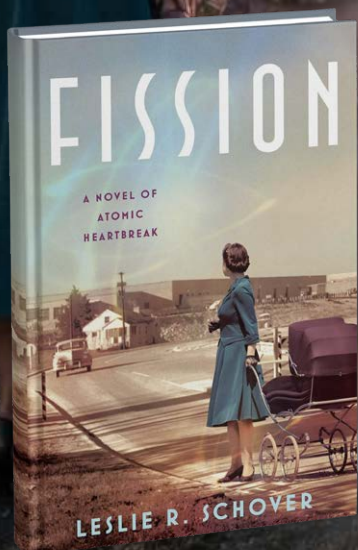
A Novel of Atomic Heartbreak

Set in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, 1940s

Leslie R. Schover's novel, *Fission: A Novel of Atomic Heartbreak*, is based in part on her parents' stories of life during the Manhattan Project in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

"I had long wanted to do something with my parents' Oak Ridge stories," the long-time Houston resident, a retired MD Anderson psychologist, says. "I was inspired when news broke several years ago about two, previously unknown Soviet spies at Oak Ridge, Oscar Seborer and George Koval. I wondered if my parents had known either one?"

Like fission splits an atom's nucleus, the marriage of *Fission's* protagonist threatens to break her heart in two. She struggles to nurture her daughter while her husband works around the clock. As she tries to withstand her loneliness, she falls for an army engineer—only to realize that he may be a Soviet spy. *(from the publisher)*



“Whether I write about nuclear fission or nuclear families,” Schover says, “I always write about the chain reactions sparked in relationships.” Schover’s themes are relatable to women’s fiction readers who’ve struggled with a newborn or with marriage dynamics.

AMANDA CHURCHILL

THE TURTLE HOUSE

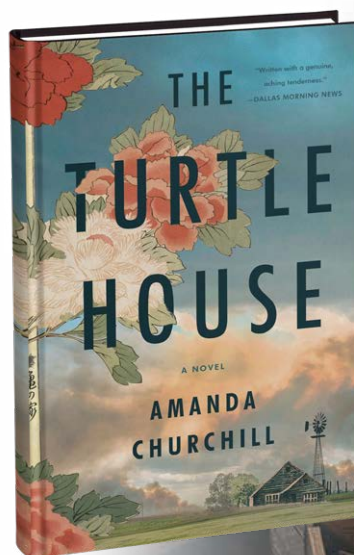
Set in 1999, in Curtain, Texas

Texas author Amanda Churchill’s grandmother (who said, “this would make real good book one day,” as she was dying), inspired *The Turtle House*, and images from the past inspired her writing, including a photograph near her grandmother’s hometown in Osaka Prefecture, Japan.

In *The Turtle House*, a Japanese-American grandmother and her granddaughter connect over a beloved lost place, and the secrets they each carry. The grandmother, a Japanese war bride by necessity, came to small-town Texas with her military husband and their children in the 1950s. Her book explores family connections, intergenerational trauma, the meaning of home, and the damage done by secrets—themes found in women’s fiction.

While Churchill’s novel is fiction, the University of North Texas graduate

modeled one character on her teen years and the other protagonist after her own grandmother. Other family member in her book were “very much like my own. A grandfather who is distant at best, and abusive at worst. There is a granddaughter, begging to know more. There are an aunt and a father, Americanized, accidentally separated from their mother, not by geography, but by memory and culture. And there is a lost love. The one never forgotten.” ★



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

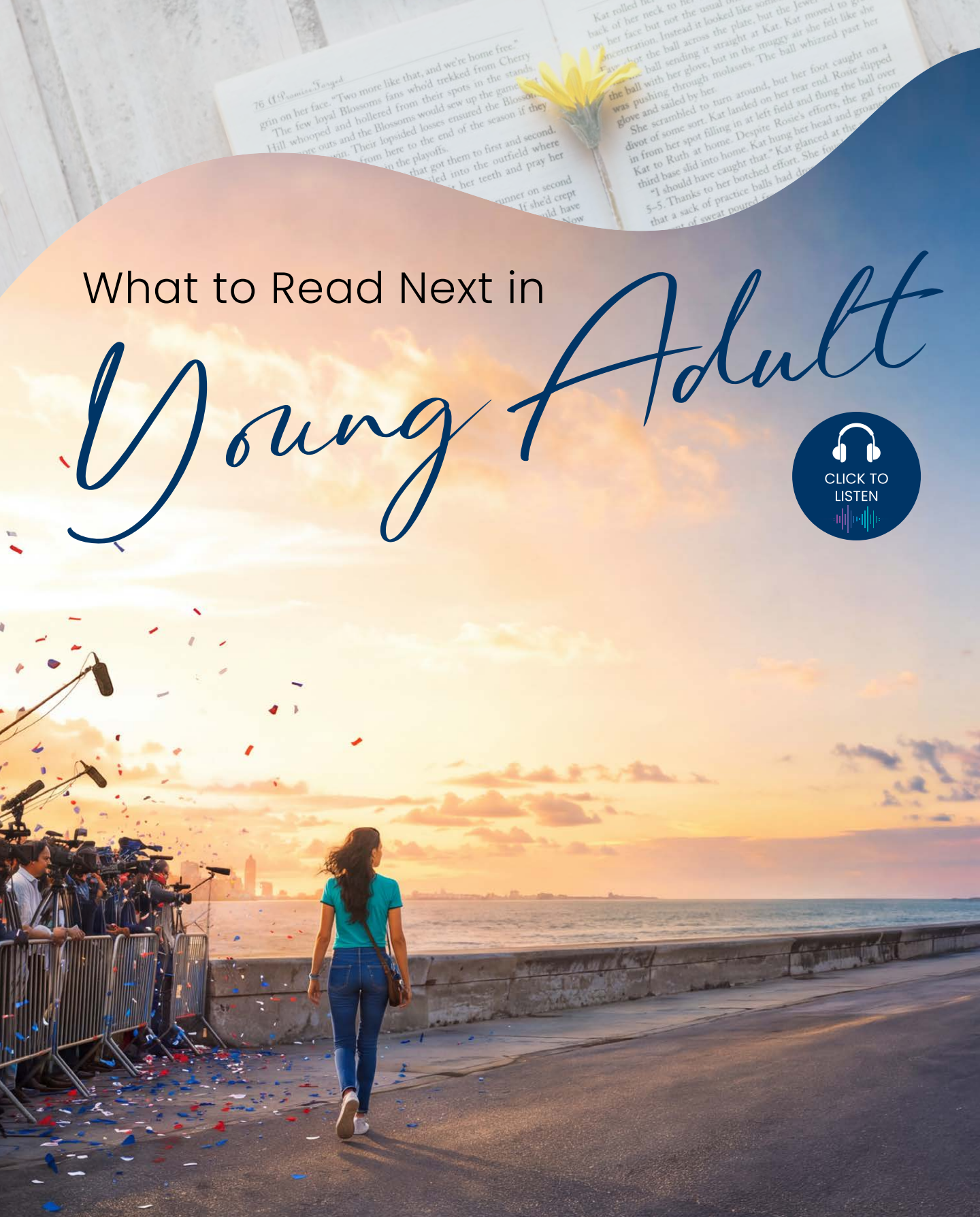
Jann Alexander is an author, photographer, and public speaker on all things Texas history. She's a 22-year resident of central Texas and creator of the Vanishing Austin photography series. Her lifelong storytelling habit and her more recent passion for Texas history merged in 2025 to become the historical novel *Unspoken*, set in the Texas Panhandle during the Dust Bowl and Great Depression, and is her first book in *The Dust Series*.

Vacancy, releasing in September 2026, is the second novel in the series. She holds a B.S. from the University of Maryland. When Jann is not reading, writing, or creating, she bikes, hikes, skis, and kayaks. Jann always brakes for historical markers.



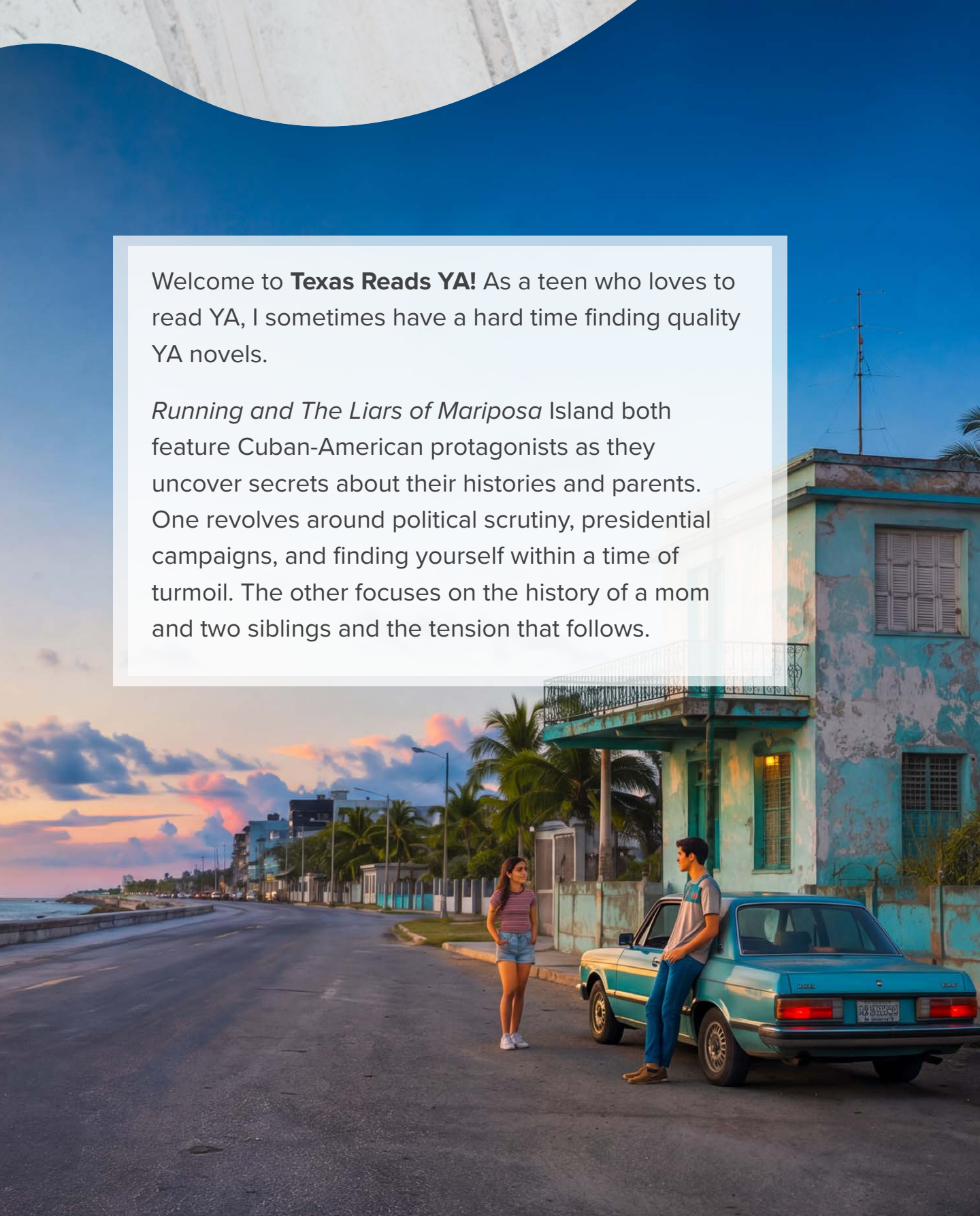
REEL

What to Read Next in *Young Adult*



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

Running and The Liars of Mariposa Island both feature Cuban-American protagonists as they uncover secrets about their histories and parents. One revolves around political scrutiny, presidential campaigns, and finding yourself within a time of turmoil. The other focuses on the history of a mom and two siblings and the tension that follows.



RUNNING



When fifteen-year-old Cuban American Mariana Ruiz's father runs for president, Mari starts to see him with new eyes. A novel about waking up and standing up, and what

happens when you stop seeing your dad as your hero—while the whole country is watching.

In this thoughtful, authentic, humorous, and gorgeously written

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Natalia Sylvester is the award-winning author of books for kids, teens, and adults among them the Pura Belpré- and Schneider Family-honor winning YA novel *Breathe and Count Back from Ten*, the picture book *A Maleta Full of Treasures*, and for adults, the novel *Everyone Knows You Go Home*. She is an engaging speaker and writing instructor who shares the power of storytelling with readers of all ages.

novel about privacy, waking up, and speaking up, Senator Anthony Ruiz is running for president. Throughout his successful political career he has always had his daughter's vote, but a presidential campaign brings a whole new level of scrutiny to sheltered fifteen-year-old Mariana and the rest of her Cuban American family, from a



Running is a novel about finding your voice amidst the scrutiny and power dynamics of a presidential election. Mari deals with coming of age and forming her own views with grace and strength. She empowers others and shows what it's like to stand up for what you think is right even when it is hard.

60 Minutes—style tour of their house to tabloids doctoring photos and inventing scandals. As tensions rise within the Ruiz family, Mari begins to learn about the details of her father's political positions, and she realizes that her father is not the man she thought he was.

But how do you find your voice when everyone's watching? When it means disagreeing with your father—publicly? What do you do when your dad stops being your hero? Will Mari get a chance to confront her father? If she does, will she have the courage to seize it?

Parker County Literary Fest 2026

Presented by William Xavier Chandler and Vellichor Bookshop

Aledo Community Center, Aledo, TX

Saturday September 19, 2026

10:00am to 4:00pm

FREE
TO THE PUBLIC

FREE
TO THE PUBLIC

Come meet Parker County and Texas' brightest and best creative writers of Romance, Fantasy, Horror, Christian, Children's, Young Adult, and more! Virtually every genre of fiction and non-fiction will be represented.

Enjoy pastries and other refreshments, & Raffle giveaway prizes.

Current Sponsors include:





THE LIARS OF MARIPOSA ISLAND

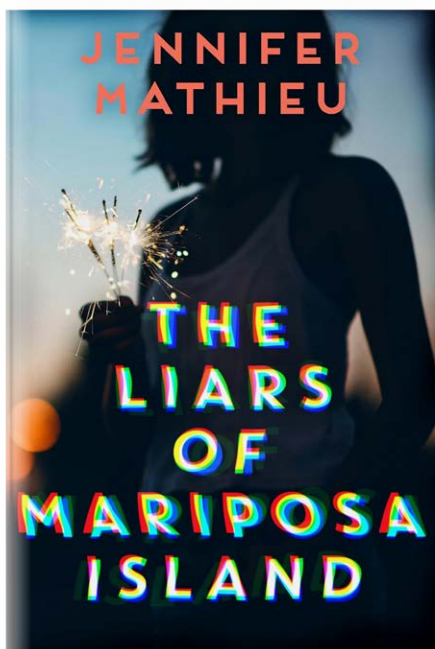
Every year, summer begins when the Callahans arrive on Mariposa Island. That's when Elena Finney gets to escape her unstable, controlling mother by babysitting for their two children. And the summer of 1986

promises to be extra special when she meets J.C., the new boy in town, whose kisses make Elena feel like she's been transported to a new world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Mathieu is the critically acclaimed author of seven novels for young adults including *Moxie*. A former journalist, Mathieu is a graduate of Northwestern and has been a teacher for twenty years. She lives with her family in Houston.

Joaquin Finney can't imagine why anyone would want to come to Mariposa Island. He just graduated from high school and dreams about going to California to find his father and escape his mother's manipulation.



The Liars of Mariposa Island features unreliable narrators who complicate the story and create a web of lies fueled by varying motivations. As the characters untangle the web, they also find love and joy with each other.

The Liars of Mariposa Island follows siblings Elena and Joaquin, with flashbacks to their mother's experience as a teenage refugee fleeing the Cuban revolution.

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.

Tex-Indie Author Book Fair 2026



Discover Texas Indie Authors

Sat, Oct 17 | 10 AM – 5 PM

10510 Westview Dr, Houston, TX

Fall Into a Fresh Writing Season

Embrace the process and cherish every step of the way.



New seasons arrive dressed for change, and September's entrance into fall brings a shift from the hot, lazy days of summer to the colorful sights and sounds of today. We enjoy cooler temps, autumn leaves, the sound of marching bands, schoolyards erupting in children's laughter, and crisp apples that burst with sweetness. I've always thought September felt more like a fresh start than January.

Writers seek new seasons to embrace their writing dreams and goals. Seasons are psychological, and that's why September fills me with energy and excitement for writing, as though a veil's been lifted, and I'm ready to approach my writing like a child heading back to school—wearing a new outfit and thrilled at seeing friends.

Several years ago, I wrestled with wanting to switch from writing historical romance to contemporary romantic suspense, but fear held me back. What would my agent and publisher say? Would I need to find both an agent and a new publisher? How would my readers react to a change? What if I failed?

Then I realized my longing to write suspense was stronger than my fears. If the new genre resulted in poor sales, then I'd evaluate my writing process. I took a deep breath, wrote a romantic suspense novel, and never stopped.

Your season of change doesn't have to match mine, which brings me to my first point.

REEL



What is a sign that it's time for a change?

- Boredom with a current writing project. The passion is gone, and we can't seem to find it.
- Curiosity about a different genre, methods of treatment, voice, tone, and theme.
- Stuck in our old writing habits. Do we need to experiment with how we conduct characterization, plotting, setting, emotion, dialogue, symbolism, and research?
- A longing to stretch ourselves in a unique project, but we don't know what.
- Put off writing, even projects on a deadline. We no longer enjoy our chosen craft.



What does embracing a new season look like?

- Switch from writing in the evening to the morning or reverse it, dictate your work, create a playlist, write in longhand, or reinvent your office.
- Study the following for what appeals to you and your new season: read the blogs that make us better writers and marketers, join a writing group and give back, invest in online classes, conferences, how-to books, read more, and write consistently.

- Kick old habits and stalled projects to the curb. These are holding you back from writing your best.
- Try something new. What is the one project that nudges your mind and heart, but you keep pushing it away?
- Revisit old goals. Analyze how they have changed or been achieved.
- Develop new writing habits and rituals to fit your personality. Perhaps try outlining or the adventure of a discovery writer.





How do we kickstart our new season?



- Set 1-3 achievable writing goals for the fall.
- Journal your thoughts and feelings about the challenge of walking into a new season. Be honest about your desire to rekindle your passion for writing.
- Write an article, blog, or poem about your frustration, even if no one reads it but you.
- Experiment with various techniques, genres, voices, themes, point of view, and all those literary topics that dance in your head, but you haven't tried the steps.
- Take nature walks and experience your imagination.
- Linger along the path of discovery. There, in the beauty of the moment, may be what you lost.

Just like we can't rush nature, we can't rush our exploration into a new season of writing. Embrace the process and cherish every step of the way.

Friends, writing is your old friend, and it's been waiting for you to accept an invitation to restore the joy of creativity. This is your season, new beginnings for fresh writing. What is one habit you're ready to release for fall?



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



The Lone Star Literary Life

★
M A G A Z I N E



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

ISSUE 24