CELEBRATING AN ECLECTIC, COLORFUL MIX OF VOICES
WHO IS FLORIDA’S DREAM WRITER?
FLORIDA POET LAUREATE: MINING OUR TRUTHS
THOSE OF US WHO LIVE IN THE TAMPA BAY area are no strangers to the poetic prowess of Peter Meinke. A professor emeritus at Eckerd College and a regular contributor to local newspaper Creative Loafing, Meinke was appointed Poet Laureate of St. Petersburg in 2009. We were thrilled when Gov. Rick Scott recently appointed him to be Poet Laureate of Florida.

Florida has long been Meinke’s muse—as evidenced by his poems on everything from our largest tourist attraction (“why do so many fat people go to Disney World”) to Spanish moss, azaleas, and jacarandas. I first heard him read his poem “Ibises” at our Florida Humanities Council Gathering in Mount Dora in 1999, and this verse has been lodged in my mind ever since:

O Florida our Flowerland we need to worship something beyond ourselves to learn something in detail to love something alive not a flag or a car but something that breathes maybe anything that breathes like the ibises here on our lawn

During the next three years, Meinke will have the opportunity to travel the state sharing his writing and his passion for poetry with the citizens of Florida. I can’t imagine a better emissary for the craft. As he wrote in his book The Shape of Poetry, “I think those in the profession—the calling—of writing poetry should be knowledgeable and skilled as any carpenter, passionate and dignified as any priest. I believe those who are able to spend large stretches of their lives engaged in this activity are the luckiest people in the world.”

Something tells me we are the lucky ones.

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2 An eclectic, colorful mix of voices
Meet this year’s winners of the Florida Book Awards.

4 Florida’s dream writer
Historian Gary Mormino is an original—with a passion for Florida.
By Lynn Waddell

8 FLORIDA NONFICTION
GOLD Viviana Díaz Balsera and Rachel A. May, *La Florida: Five Hundred Years of Hispanic Presence* EXCERPT
SILVER Bill Belleville, *The Peace of Blue* EXCERPT
BRONZE Thomas Graham, *Mr. Flagler’s St. Augustine* EXCERPT

12 GENERAL FICTION
GOLD Sue Monk Kidd, *The Invention of Wings* EXCERPT
SILVER David James Poissant, *The Heaven of Animals* EXCERPT
BRONZE Mark Powell, *The Sheltering* EXCERPT

16 VISUAL ARTS
GOLD Amanda B. Carlson and Robin Poyner, *Africa in Florida* EXCERPT
SILVER Mac Stone, *Everglades: America’s Wetland* EXCERPT
BRONZE Paul Aho, *Surfing Florida* EXCERPT

18 Humanities Alive!
News and Events of the Florida Humanities Council

20 POPULAR FICTION
GOLD Randy Wayne White, *Haunted* EXCERPT
SILVER Ward Larsen, *Assassin’s Game* EXCERPT
BRONZE Jean Harrington, *The Design is Murder* EXCERPT

24 GENERAL NONFICTION
GOLD David B. Axelrod, Lenny Schneir, and Carol Thomas, *Merlin Stone Remembered*
SILVER Ira Mark Egdall, *Einstein Relatively Simple*
BRONZE Ira Sukrungruang, *Southside Buddhist*

25 SPANISH LANGUAGE
GOLD José M. Fernández Pequeño, *El arma secreta*

26 Reflections On Florida Poetry
Mining our essential truths: Florida’s poet laureates
By Maurice J. O’Sullivan

29 POETRY
GOLD Erin Belieu, *Slant Six* EXCERPT
SILVER Barbara Hamby, *On the Street of Divine Love* EXCERPT
BRONZE Erica Dawson, *The Small Blades Hurt* EXCERPT

32 CHILDREN’S LITERATURE
GOLD Mike Mathack, *Cleopatra in Space*
SILVER G. Neri, *Hello, I’m Johnny Cash*
BRONZE Kerry O’Malley Cerra, *Just a Drop of Water*

34 YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE
GOLD Madeleine Kuderick, *Kiss of Broken Glass*
SILVER G. Neri, *Knockout Games*
BRONZE Crissa-Jean Chappell, *More than Good Enough*
An eclectic, colorful mix of voices

By Barbara O’Reilley

WELCOME TO OUR ANNUAL CELEBRATION of Florida writers. As you turn the pages, you’ll meet the winners of this year’s Florida Book Awards, ranging from first-time authors to well-known writers of bestsellers. (Their biographical snapshots were written by FORUM contributor Jon Wilson.) You can also read samples of their award-winning work, books that delve into 16th-century Spanish explorers and 19th-century southern abolitionists, current-day drone pilots and assassins, international spies and American sleuths—and much more.

Our poetry column introduces Florida’s new Poet Laureate, the wonderfully talented Peter Meinke, and provides a history of the writers who have held this position over the years.

You’ll also get to know Gary Mormino, an acclaimed Florida historian who is better known to FORUM readers as a writer for this magazine than as the subject of an article in it. Mormino is the recipient of the 2015 Florida Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing. Much of his work has focused on the evolution of modern Florida, from the sparsely populated rural enclave it was until the middle of the 20th century to the mega-state of nearly 20 million that it is today. To his many friends, Mormino is known as an upbeat, indefatigable researcher who revels in mining old Florida newspapers for nuggets of information that he freely shares via photocopied news clippings, as a raconteur of funny anecdotes related to Florida history—and as one who always signs his notes and emails with “Florida Dreams.”

We hope you enjoy this eclectic, colorful mix of voices and perspectives on our state and the world.

BARBARA O’REILLEY is editor of FORUM.

A note about FORUM magazine:

Look for two issues of FORUM in 2016: Spring and Fall.
In addition, Florida Humanities Council members will also receive summer and winter issues of the excellent, beautifully illustrated HUMANITIES magazine, published by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Enjoy!

We value your membership. To become a member of the Florida Humanities Council, please use the envelope in the center of this magazine or go to FloridaHumanities.org/membership.
History is just the beginning.

There’s so much cultural heritage to celebrate, we’re taking an entire year to do it.

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For a full calendar of events, visit StAugustine-450.com or HistoricCoastCulture.com.
Florida’s dream writer

By Lynn Waddell

To fully grasp the depth of historian Gary Mormino’s research, you have to visit his home office.

Just walk through the tidy St. Petersburg bungalow he shares with his wife of 46 years and climb a narrow stairway. You will need to dodge a few boxes on the way up—a hint of what’s to come. Open the office door, and behold: The room is a silverfish’s culinary dream. Almost every surface is covered in papers. His desk is buried in file folders, scribbled Post-It notes, and loose newspaper clippings (some crisp, some yellowed). Bins, books, boxes, and cascading piles are everywhere. If bookshelves could groan, his would attract an ambulance. “To an outsider this seems like chaos,” Mormino explains to a visitor, “but I can put my hand on anything I’m looking for. I have my own organization.” He demonstrates by plucking a copy of a 1945 newspaper article from a bin of material on the politics of World War II, a subject in his next book. After displaying the photocopy, he lays it back on top of the bin. “Of course the tremendous challenge is putting everything back,” he says.

As his organizational style reflects, Mormino is an original. Recipient this year of the Florida Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing, he is lauded as a prolific, insightful author of books and articles about Florida. He is a respected scholar, an emeritus history professor at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg (co-founder of its Florida Studies program), and scholar-in-residence for the Florida Humanities Council.

While he focuses on historical work, he also loves the funny, quirky stories that could be filed under “weird Florida” and probably has collected enough to fill more than a few bins. He’s the guy the New Yorker and New York Times call for insight when the southernmost state once again seems to teeter on the edge of ruin.

He proudly calls himself a Luddite. He wrote all but his most recent book in longhand and shunned computers until his university forced him to adapt. He still doesn’t have a cell phone.
"To an outsider this seems like chaos, but I can put my hand on anything I’m looking for. I have my own organization. Of course the tremendous challenge is putting everything back."

and is famous for forgetting email attachments. To track him down, friends and colleagues call his wife’s cell. He’s known for spending hours in libraries and scrolling through microfilm of old newspapers. He’s also known for making photocopies of news articles and distributing them to friends, colleagues, and anyone else who might be interested—often accompanied by amusing anecdotes related to the topics.

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“His favorite phrase is ‘by the way’,” says Ron Cooper, a humanities professor at the College of Central Florida who has known Mormino for 26 years. “As soon as he gets near the end of something, he’ll say ‘by the way,’ and he’ll have some little anecdote usually about a Florida politician like Claude Pepper or somebody like that, some amusing story, and [then] he’ll find his way back to the narrative thread.”

The anecdotes often show up in his writing, too, making his books and articles more colorful and publicly accessible than those written by most academics, says Raymond Arsenault, USF St. Petersburg history professor and co-founder with Mormino of the Florida Studies program. “His writing is distinctly Gary, so personal. It’s like good jazz, not Muzak,” Arsenault says. “He loves the turn of a phrase, to make allusions to Shakespeare, and make these kinds of odd connections. It all makes him a good fit for Florida.”

Like most Floridians, Mormino, 68, didn’t start out in Florida. He grew up in the Midwest—Wood River, Ill., an oil-refinery town across the Mississippi River from St. Louis. He describes this working-class town as “paradise for European immigrants.”

Mormino’s father was second-generation Italian American with Sicilian roots, a union machinist with a fourth-grade education. Mormino once wrote: “His view of the world was simple. Life is hard. Get used to it. Never expect anyone to rescue you, especially your father.”

Choosing a Mighty Theme
Excerpt from Mormino’s speech last April at the Florida Book Awards luncheon, hosted in the Governor’s Mansion in Tallahassee:

In Herman Melville’s Moby Dick, Ishmael, contemplating the great leviathan, instructs readers: “To write a mighty book you must choose a mighty theme.” I chose wisely. My theme is Florida. I have explored the Lake Wales Ridge in search of scrub jays, walked the back alleys of Little Havana, and waded for ghost orchids in the Fakahatchee Strand.

My odyssey has also allowed me to meet some of Florida’s most memorable personalities: Loren “Totch” Brown, the Chokoloskee hunter, outlaw, and raconteur; Gov. LeRoy Collins, who richly deserved the epitaph, “Floridian of the Century”; and Wilfredo Rodríguez, the last of a fabled group of Ybor City lectores to read the novels of Victor Hugo and Miguel Cervantes to cigar makers…

Historians tell stories. We also provide perspective… The Sunshine State has become Everyman’s Metaphor:

To environmentalists, embattled Florida is the modern scrub jay in the phosphate mine. To political wonks and journalists, the I-4 corridor serves as a modern Rune stone. To crime novelists, Florida is the new capital of literary Noir. To Internet junkies, Florida is the North Star of weirdness. To retirees, Florida is the place of second starts and the early bird special in Pembroke Pines…

Florida is so diverse, so difficult to grasp, that journalists frequently ask: “Just where does Florida belong?” Florida remains America’s southernmost state and the northernmost province of the Caribbean. The answer depends upon your vantage point, your latitude and attitude. Key West is 90 miles from Cuba, while Tallahassee is a day’s walk from the Georgia border…

Walt Disney’s “Fantasia” offers a cautionary parable for modern Florida. Like the imperiled castle, Florida’s great conundrum challenges wizards and mortals: What is the proper balance? Is it possible for Floridians to maintain a dreamscape that drew so many of us here—the pristine springs, the unstraightened rivers, and enchanting beaches—with the challenges of sustaining 20 million residents and 100 million tourists! Real-life answers, unlike those provided by sorcerers and historians, are found in no book or spell.
To pay his way through college, Mormino toiled on a road crew for the Illinois Highway Department and then at an oil refinery where his father got him a union job. Old-timers at the refinery worked him hard. He later learned that his father had asked them to make the job grueling so that he would stay in school.

Mormino says writing didn’t come easy to him; he made only average grades in writing until late in his undergraduate studies at Millikin University, when he embraced revision. “I love the rhythm of language, but I learned if I relied on the first draft I would fail.” He went on to earn his Ph.D. in history from the University of North Carolina, writing his dissertation on immigration in the St. Louis Italian community known as “the Hill.”

“In a lot of ways it really shaped my career because there were not a lot of books about the place, and I was too proud to admit I had made a mistake in choosing it. So, I got a tape recorder and started interviewing people.” He later used that research method in some of his work on Florida, especially his book, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885–1985.*

After graduate school, he returned to Millikin and taught history with a focus on immigration. It wasn’t until a friend who was teaching at the University of Florida told him about a job at USF in Tampa that he was interested in working on Florida, especially his book, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida.*

His book, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida* chronicles the rapid development and growth of 20th-century Florida—and does so with the engaging wit and color that has become his signature style. Cooper calls this “the gold standard of Florida history books.”

While researching the book, Mormino moved to the USF St. Petersburg campus in 2003 to help Arsenault find the Florida Studies master’s degree program, which looks at the state through multiple academic
student Cathy Salustri. "If you have even a scrap of love for the state, you catch Gary Fever when he talks."

Salustri says Mormino encouraged her and helped find funding for her master’s thesis research, retracing the Florida driving tours touted in the 1930s Works Progress Administration book, *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State*. This led to her forthcoming book on the subject. "Most professors would have insisted on something more traditional," Salustri said, "but Gary saw the value of what I was doing and how it would add to the Florida canon."

Mormino’s role in influencing other Florida writers was cited by the judges who selected him as recipient of this year’s lifetime achievement award. They praised his work as a teacher of writers—as well as the influence his own writing has had on other writers. "He’s written about almost every aspect of Florida history and culture,” said Cooper, who nominated Mormino for the award. "He’s written innumerable newspaper articles on all sorts of things. He writes about crazy Florida all the time. He loves to write about eccentric Florida leaders and pioneers. And his style, he’s just a good writer.”

Mormino is now writing a book that focuses on the Florida homefront during WWII and what precipitated the post-war population boom—a companion to *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*. Although he retired from USF in 2012, he still teaches one class a year, usually on the history of food in Florida. Yes, he has bins of research material and is writing a book on that subject, too.

LYNN WADDELL is a freelance journalist based in Florida and author of *Fringe Florida: Travels Among Mud Boggers, Furries, Ufologists, Nudists, and Other Lovers of Unconventional Lifestyles*.

disciplines, from environmental studies to political science. Mormino says, “Sometimes I have to pinch myself to believe how successful it’s been.”

Author and former *Tampa Bay Times* “Real Florida” writer Jeff Klinkenberg was the program’s first writer-in-residence. He calls Mormino a mentor and friend, and says the historian played a pivotal role earlier in his career. “He came into my life at kind of a low time in the ’90s when I was at the *Times* and I really didn’t think anybody was interested in my work. But Gary was. So, it was extremely encouraging. It gave me the courage to do what I did, and I will forever be grateful for that.” Klinkenberg dedicated his 2011 book, *Pilgrims in the Land of Alligators*, to his Florida Studies professors Mormino and Arsenault.

In the 38 years that Mormino taught at USF, he inspired many of his students to write about the state. “It’s contagious the way he talks about Florida,” says former Florida Studies
As colonies went, Spanish Florida was not especially large. Potentially, it had all of Atlantic North America for a claim, and the whole Southeast for a sphere of influence, but its ecumene was confined to the upper third of the Florida peninsula plus parts of present-day Alabama and Georgia: the mission provinces of Timucua, Apalache, and Guale…Whatever progress the 17th-century colony makes toward becoming self-sufficient will be undone during Queen Anne’s War, when slave raiders overrun the mission provinces, and…even mission-resistant South Florida will be picked clean as a whistle. We know that by the mid-18th century the Indians who met Pedro Menéndez will have vanished—some as victims of epidemics, some enslaved, and some as pilgrims in search of a better land, leaving behind them enough old fields and feral cattle to attract bands of Creeks and turn them into Seminoles. We know, moreover, that the Spanish themselves will eventually move out, twice: in 1764, after the colony is ceded to the British, and again in 1821, after the United States has shown that, when runaway slaves are at stake, it is no respecter of Spanish borders, nor Indian ones.

Knowing all this, why should we care about a colony that left no constituency to vote as a bloc and no adobe mission ruins to bring in tourist dollars? What is the point of studying Florida’s many-layered Hispanic heritage? Nothing less than a revindication of Florida’s Hispanic past. Spanish Florida was not a failure. Notwithstanding its low settler population, the colony survived, doing what it was designed to do, for two and a half centuries, longer than many a country…Florida was no remote, landlocked colony like New Mexico, where 17th-century settlers expected to fend for themselves. It was integral to the worlds of the Atlantic, the Caribbean, and the Gulf and could not be extricated from any of them without damage to Spain’s vital defense system.

“A Land Renowned for War: Florida as a Maritime Marchland”

By Amy Turner Bushnell

Viviana Díaz Balsera and Rachel A. May
Gold Medal, Florida Nonfiction

Book awards judges called La Florida: Five Hundred Years of Hispanic Presence “a very significant contribution to rewriting the history of Florida.” Sixteen nationally or internationally regarded professors, including editors Viviana Díaz Balsera and Rachel A. May, provide the content.

The book travels five centuries—using the lenses of art, architecture, literature, archaeology, politics, and at least a half-dozen other disciplines to trace the Hispanic presence in Florida that began in 1513 with Spaniard Ponce de León. The final chapters take up such subjects as the state’s burgeoning Puerto Rican population, the Cuban influence in politics, and 21st-century Miami.

“The fragile Hispanic seed implanted by Ponce de León…would never stop bearing fruit in the land,” Balsera wrote in the introduction.

Balsera is a professor of Spanish at the University of Miami. May, professor and director of the Institute for the Study of Latin America and the Caribbean at the University of South Florida in Tampa, is a three-time Fulbright Fellowship winner.
When I first studied the topo map a couple of weeks ago, I remembered an observation from the Zen poet Gary Snyder. I am now struck at how meaningful it is at this moment. “There is a tame and also a wild side to the human mind,” Snyder had written. “The tame side, like a farmer’s field, has been disciplined and cultivated to produce a desired yield. It is useful, but limited. The wild side is larger, deeper, more complex, and though it cannot be fully known, it can be explored.”

It is this wild side that has landscapes and animals within it that have surprised us, that have enriched me with discovery and hope. It can refresh us and scare us and make us whole, all at once. If we’re lucky, we can become fully human again, as alive and aware—as flawed and wondrous, complex and untamed—as we were meant to be.

As I am considering this wild side of the human psyche, the cruising gator turns from its primal business on the pond and once more is staring directly at us. From somewhere deeper in the dark woods, a barred owl wails softly, more of a plaintive sigh than a hoot. It is almost as if the swamp, having held its breath all this time, is finally exhaling. In all honesty, I do not know what will come next. But I am far more exhilarated than distressed.

I do know this: Within this gift of wildness, we might be informed with the spiritual ecotones that bind action with deep feelings, might even acknowledge the mystical contours that bridge the cusp between memory and scared dreams.

And this experience might transport us—if only for a little while—to a wild gator pond hidden deep in the swampland, tucked away at the very edges of the human imagination.
Flagler’s doctor had advised him to go to St. Augustine, but Flagler’s earlier experiences with the town’s second-rate lodging and hotel food made him hesitant. However, a new resort hotel had just opened in St. Augustine, and Flagler decided he would risk another visit to the Oldest City...

Flagler and Ida Alice (and perhaps Harry and Jennie Louise, too) stayed at the new San Marco Hotel, which stood just inland from Fort Marion and enjoyed views of the fort, the town, and the placid waters of Matanzas Bay. The San Marco had become St. Augustine’s new landmark, its white walls and red trim visible from miles away looming over the rooftops of the town...

Flagler later told the Jacksonville News-Herald of his arrival in 1885:

I was surprised when I got here. There had been a wonderful change in the former state of things. Instead of the depressing accommodations of nine years before I found the San Marco, one of the most comfortable and best kept hotels in the world, and filled, too, not with consumptives, but that class of society one meets at the great watering places of Europe—men who go there to enjoy themselves and not for the benefit of their health…

But I liked the place and the climate, and it occurred to me very strongly that some one with sufficient means ought to provide accommodations for that class of people who are not sick, but who come here to enjoy the climate, have plenty of money, but can find no satisfactory way of spending it...

On another occasion Flagler explained that he undertook his hotel business with the same careful planning he had employed at Standard Oil: “It does seem singular that I, a busy man, who never had time for leisure trips or rest, should build a hotel practically for rich people alone. But I thought at the time that somebody should consider and satisfy their wants as to a winter home in Florida…”

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Thomas Graham

Gilded Age tycoon Henry Flagler’s ambition, sagacity, and generosity—along with his inner demons—are revealed in Mr. Flagler’s St. Augustine, a study of how the entrepreneur changed the Ancient City and, ultimately, Florida’s East Coast.

Thomas Graham, a St. Augustine resident, has written two other books about the city. He was a Flagler College history professor from 1973 to 2008. Born in Miami, his family tree reaches back through the Sanchez and Alvarez families to the early 1600s in Spanish Florida.

Graham’s book on Flagler takes on some myths, such as one that claims Flagler came to St. Augustine in 1883 on a belated honeymoon. It also provides details about his life and career—for example, his love of automobiles and promotion of hard surface roads.

“There are things we didn’t know and things we thought we knew but were wrong about,” Graham told the St. Augustine Record.
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BOOKS for FALL

Available wherever books are sold
There was a time in Africa the people could fly. Mauma told me this, one night when I was ten years old. She said, “Handful, your granny-mauma saw it for herself. She say they flew over trees and clouds. She say they flew like blackbirds. When we came here, we left that magic behind.”

My mauma was shrewd. She didn’t get any reading and writing like me. Everything she knew came from living on the scarce side of mercy. She looked at my face, how it flowed with sorrow and doubt, and she said, “You don’t believe me? Where you think these shoulder blades of yours come from, girl?”

Those skinny bones stuck out from my back like nubs. She patted them and said, “This all what left of your wings. They nothing but these flat bones now but one day you gon get ‘em back.”

I was shrewd like mauma. Even at ten I knew this story about people flying was pure malarkey. We weren’t some special people who lost our magic. We were slave people, and we weren’t going anywhere. It was later I saw what she meant. We could fly all right, but it wasn’t any magic to it.

The day life turned into nothing this world could fix, I was in the work yard boiling slave bedding, stoking fire under the wash pot, my eyes burning from specks of lye soap catching on the wind. The morning was a cold one—the sun looked like a little white button stitched tight to the sky…

Already that morning missus had taken her cane stick to me once cross my backside for falling asleep during her devotions…If you nodded off, you got whacked right in the middle of God said this and God said that.
The night is cold. The buildings are tall. The sky, except where it’s starlit, is black. Black like black checker pieces or what’s left of wood after the fire. Also, I should mention that there’s a large gun pointed at my face.

And because there’s a large gun pointed at my face, things speed up the way they do in nature films, how a seed sprouts, turns to stalk, and [makes] leaves in ten seconds.

Things here are speeding up just that way. Stars pinwheel beyond the buildings. The moon rises, sets, rises again. And then things slow way, way down.

“If you don’t want to be caught dead in that shirt,” he says, “you’d best take it off.”

The guy with the gun’s not f—ing around. I don’t know anything about guns, but this is a big one. It looks like the kind that holds a lot of bullets, the kind that leaves your corpse unrecognizable when the cops come, which is okay because there’s no one to miss me, no one left on this spinning planet to faint when the coroner lifts the sheet from my bullet-riddled face.

The gun’s pointed at me because the guy asked for my wallet and I said no. “No,” I said, and he said, “How’d you like to die?” and I said, “Well, I wouldn’t want to be caught dead in this shirt.”

Which isn’t exactly true. If I hadn’t wanted to be caught dead in this shirt, I wouldn’t have worn it. It seemed fitting for the occasion. The shirt’s black with a skull-and-crossbones emblem on the pocket, what you see printed on bottles, the kind with caps to keep out babies and old people.

Maybe the skull and crossbones wasn’t an inspired choice, but f— you. Pick out your own death-shirt.

The guy with the gun didn’t like my tone. He said, “I don’t like your tone.”
he listened as the reaper circled nine thousand feet above the valley floor, green eye fixed on what appeared first as a rectangle of white light but looking closer—and Luther Redding had been looking closer for three days now—revealed itself as a squat aluminum-sided building, a worn Chevy Bronco parked against it. That he had come to hear the sound of the drone’s engine, even here, six thousand miles away, a planet between them—he understood this as perfectly normal. A form of projection, he had been told by a psychiatrist at Holloman out in New Mexico, a coarse-handed woman who wore a flight suit and stuck pencils in her hair. A form of alignment, she said, the bodies need not to be separate, evolution having not prepared the soul for this form of disjunction, stick-and-rudder, fiber-optic line.

“Motherf—er has to have ants in his pants,” the man beside him said and Redding did not bother to look. To look would be a deep violation of the intimacy he had come to feel with the man hiding inside the building. Kareem Saman was holed up with his wives and bodyguards, perhaps a few trusted lieutenants in what composed a small cell of the Haqquani network. Redding had been twelve hours on, twelve hours off since Tuesday but actually it was more like eighteen hours on, coffee and Red Bull taken like sacrament, followed by four Tylenol PM and six hours of sleep on a break-room couch. It was the world he knew, had come to know. Outside the control room it was all unreal: glittery sand and surf, mermaids and the Fountain of Youth. And somewhere beyond it Mickey Mouse and his crew of trademarked goons. But Luther was staring at the mountains of Southern Afghanistan, Luther was in Southern Afghanistan, and he didn’t know when he would come back.
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www.pineapplepress.com
Amanda B. Carlson and Robin Poynor
Gold Medal, Visual Arts

Amanda Carlson and Robin Poynor spent 11 years rounding up the numerous scholars who produced content for the lushly illustrated *Africa in Florida*, a look at the history of Africans on the peninsula—beginning with Ponce de León’s 1513 voyage. They found theorists, historians, anthropologists, poets, artists, and others who provided 23 essays and numerous photographs and works of art.

Carlson, associate professor of art history at the University of Hartford, Conn., is a specialist in African art studies. She has conducted research in the Cross River region of Nigeria on nsibidi (an indigenous writing system), masquerades, and women’s ritual performances.

Poynor, professor of art history at the University of Florida, has researched the arts of Africa for more than 40 years.

The book was timed to mark the 500th anniversary of the first diaspora of free Africans to Florida. Juan Garrido and Juan González, who arrived with Spanish explorer Ponce, began the African presence in Florida.
Mac Stone
Silver Medal, Visual Arts

Florida native Mac Stone grew up swimming with manatees in Crystal River—and nurturing a passion for photography. “I often showed up late to my first-period class in high school because I was shooting sunrises,” Stone said at the 2015 Florida Book Awards banquet. “My mom would have to call the school” to smooth the way back to class, Stone said.

His book *Everglades: America’s Wetland* contains more than 240 of his photographs as well as essays by Stone and others, including former governor and senator Bob Graham; Michael Grunwald, journalist and author of an award-winning book about the Everglades; and widely known environmental advocate Nathaniel Reed.

In addition to his work in Florida, Stone has done nature photography in other parts of the world—including Honduras, where he taught photography to underprivileged young people as a way to raise environmental awareness in the region. Some of his students went on to win international acclaim and start up their own eco-tourism businesses.

Stone says none of the exotic parts of the world beat his home state for its natural beauty. “What we have in the state of Florida rivals anything I’ve ever seen,” he said.

Stone currently resides in Greenville, S.C.

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Paul Aho
Bronze Medal, Visual Arts

An artist, educator, and surfer since age 11, Paul Aho demolishes the notion that the surf is never “up” along Florida’s Atlantic and Gulf coasts. *Surfing Florida* provides a wave-riding journey up and down both sides of the peninsula in spots as diverse as Sarasota, Deerfield Beach, Pensacola, Flagler Beach, and Cocoa. In photographs and text, the book offers an education about a fascinating Florida subculture. When professional surfing emerged as a serious niche in the 1980s, Florida surfers became a bit of a rebel group somewhat at odds with the established California crowd and Hawaii’s “soul surfers.” But Florida soon began to produce world champions.

The author sheds light on the sport’s origins, heritage, and personalities—even the infamous ones such as Jack “Murf the Surf” Murphy, a convicted murderer and jewel thief who rode the Atlantic waves in South Florida.

Aho lives in Paducah, Ky., where he is dean of the Paducah School of Art and Design at West Kentucky Community and Technical College.
Florida veterans tell their stories in our public-television documentary

Watch this fall for our public-television documentary featuring the compelling personal stories of six Florida military veterans and one spouse. Listen as the returning warriors talk about the challenges they’ve faced, the traumatic injuries they’ve suffered, and their search for a new purpose as they transition back to a civilian world that doesn’t understand what they’ve been through. This program will premiere on Tampa’s WEDU-PBS TV on Veterans’ Day, Nov. 11.

We are sponsoring this documentary as part of the national Telling Project, which is designed to bridge a communication gap between military veterans and the American public. During the last dozen years of war, less than 1 percent of the population has served in the armed forces. Returning veterans often feel isolated as they try to build new lives.

As part of our Telling Project initiative, we are also producing live stage performances featuring local veterans in Florida cities. Pensacola-area veterans will tell their stories on stage to local audiences this fall, including on Nov. 8 at 2:30 p.m. in the Pensacola Little Theatre. For additional performance dates, go to FloridaHumanities.org/veterans. Last spring, Tampa Bay-area veterans, featured in five performances, received standing ovations from community audiences.

All stage performances are scripted using the veterans’ own words, based on in-depth interviews. Each is followed by a question-answer session with the audience. All are free and open to the public.

Think Florida, Think Water

Water is the essence of Florida’s identity and is key to our survival. How has this liquid life force shaped our lives in Florida — and what challenges do we face now? We’re offering several programs and opportunities for you and your community to explore these questions. Bring a speaker to your local group meeting or apply for a grant to fund your own water program. More information at FloridaHumanities.org.

Teachers, bring Poetry Out Loud to your high school classrooms

Apply now to bring Poetry Out Loud to the budding bards in your high school classrooms. This national program, which we are sponsoring in Florida in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation, provides NEA resources to incorporate poetry into your classroom curriculum and prepare students for school-wide poetry recitation competitions.

Each school’s winner advances to the state competition, and the statewide winner receives an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C. for the finals. The national winner receives extreme bragging rights and a $20,000 scholarship.

Interested in bringing Poetry Out Loud to your school? Find out how at FloridaHumanities.org/poetry.

GRANT DEADLINES ARE LOOMING!

We offer grants to fund public humanities projects in communities around the state. Here are the upcoming deadlines:

**Aug. 28** Letters of intent to apply for major grants of up to $15,000.

**Sept. 1 and Oct. 1** Applications are due for mini-grants of up to $5,000.

To browse our funded grant programs and to apply, go to FloridaHumanities.org/grants.

Let’s stay in touch!

Update your contact information on our website, FloridaHumanities.org.
We're Gathering! Join our cultural tours in four Real Florida communities

Meet interesting people and get behind-the-scenes looks at the history and culture of Pensacola (Sept. 18–20, 2015 SOLD OUT), Apalachicola (Nov. 13–15, 2015), Tarpon Springs (March 4–6, 2016), and The Everglades (April 8–10, 2016). Guided by pre-eminent scholars, local cultural and civic leaders, and longtime members of the communities we visit, our heritage tours uncover the distinct qualities that define a community’s history and create its cultural identity. Come and discover a Florida not experienced by the casual tourist.

For more information and to register, go to FloridaHumanities.org/gathering.

Calendar: FloridaHumanities.org

Here are some highlights of the hundreds of free public events we sponsor around the state. Dates and times are subject to change, and new events are continually added. For complete, up-to-date listings, go to FloridaHumanities.org/calendar.

**MULBERRY—SEPT. 17, OCT. 15, AND NOV. 1**

6 p.m. Mulberry Public Library. Discussions of books that feature the theme of work and industry in the American lifestyle.

**VERO BEACH—OCT. 29**

7 p.m. Emerson Center. A historian dressed in period costume discusses the small agricultural town of Fellsmere that once was the center of commerce in Indian River County.

**WEST PALM BEACH—NOV. 14**

1:30 p.m. Mandel Public Library. Author Gary Monroe relates the story of the Highwaymen, artists who taught themselves to paint idyllic versions of the Florida landscape.

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*Everglades: America’s Wetland*
Mac Stone
Hardcover, 304 pages
University Press of Florida, 2014

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For more information visit www.floridahumanities.org/membership
I grew up on the Gulf Coast of Florida but had never been in downtown Palm Beach. Condos and shops possessed a gilded indifference, the streets edged with royal palms from Prohibition days. Residential areas were screened by towering hedges and a muffled Rolls-Royce hush that warned of money and double standards.

“Relax,” Birdy kept telling me in the car. “Just be yourself. If the Great Dame starts interrogating you—and she will—just smile and compliment her jewelry. Or bring up astrology. She loves guessing people’s signs. While she’s boring you with that, signal the staff for another martini. Dame Bunny likes them icy cold.”

Dame Bunny, that’s how my friend referred to her wealthy, socialite aunt. There was no need for me to relax because I wasn’t nervous. I’m a light tackle fishing guide who deals with wealthy clients day after day in a small skiff around Sanibel and Captiva Islands, although I live across the bay on the island of Gumbo Limbo. I’ve learned that the rich are no different than the rest of us when it comes to tangling lines, or whoops of delight when a big fish jumps, or when their bladder demands a bucket and a moment of privacy.

Birdy was the nervous one, not me.

Odd, I thought. She had summered in Palm Beach as a girl and during college. Her mother, Candice, had been a Palm Beach debutante prior to graduating from Wellesley, then joined a commune near Aspen, which, I was told, had only solidified the family’s Palm Beach-Boston ties.

“To people with money, politics are more of a fashion statement,” Birdy had explained.

But when I’d spent some time with her Aunt Bunny, I understood why my friend was nervous.

Randy Wayne White

Gold Medal, Popular Fiction

A repeat Florida Book Award winner, Randy Wayne White chooses to work in a century-old stilt house on Pine Island when putting the finishing touches on his books.

“This place has layers and layers of human history and discourse. I like the fact that people have been telling stories here for 3,000 years,” White recently told the Wall Street Journal.

Haunted is an eerie, history mystery with a cast of strange characters, including a couple of brutal chimpanzee-like creatures whose bloodlines aren’t entirely clear. The novel stars White’s relatively new hero Hannah Smith, who is trying to straighten out a shady real estate deal. A historic house is for sale, and the seller has not disclosed the dwelling’s sinister past.

Just like some of his characters, White is an adventurer. He has been a dogsledder in Alaska, a founder of re-established Little League baseball in Cuba, and a boatman ferrying Cuban refugees to safety during the Mariel boatlift.

White’s primary residence is in Sanibel, where he also owns Doc Ford’s Rum Bar and Grille, named for one of his popular characters.
Bloch did as instructed.

He found the incumbent director of Mossad feeding peanuts to an obese squirrel. If the human form could have a generic equivalent, it would be Raymond Nurin. He was average in height and build, hair thinning but not bald, a trace of gray at the edges commensurate with his fifty-something years. His facial features were completely unremarkable, no hooked nose or brilliant eyes or distinguishing marks. The clothing was in line with the man, neither expensive nor cheap, neither bright nor drab. Raymond Nurin was the man you would meet at a cocktail party whose name escaped you ten minutes later. For an insurance salesman or an actor, a certain detriment. For a spy chief? He was the model of somatic perfection.

Nurin had taken over Mossad when Bloch was forced out. They’d had a few meetings in the weeks after the transfer of command, sessions intended to cover ongoing operations and facilitate a smooth transition. Bloch had barely known the man going in, and he’d expected little. Nurin had surprised him with an intellect that belied his unexceptional appearance. Since those initial meetings they’d had no contact whatsoever. Consequently, Bloch had no idea what sort of empire his successor might have built. Even less an idea of what he wanted today.

“Good morning, Anton.”

“Raymond.”

The two exchanged a polite handshake.

“Thank you for coming,” Nurin said. “I know it was short notice, but I can assure you my reasons are sound.”

Bloch said nothing. He looked idly around the park and saw no one else. No widows with grocery sacks or spandex-clad mothers pushing strollers on a trot. Bloch hadn’t spent much of his career in the field, but enough to recognize a sterile perimeter that reached at least two hundred yards. Even the bodyguards—there had to be an army—were keeping out of sight.

EXCERPT FROM:

ASSASSIN’S GAME

BY WARD LARSEN

Ward Larsen
Silver Medal, Popular Fiction

Ward Larsen, who, as a U.S. Air Force fighter pilot, flew more than 20 combat missions in Desert Storm, is well-suited to writing action thrillers. He also has served as a federal law enforcement officer and is a trained aircraft accident investigator.

In Assassin’s Game, the Israeli intelligence organization Mossad wants a former killer to eliminate an Iranian scientist who has developed a nuclear-tipped ballistic missile. The protagonist does not want to do any more killing, but finds that he must in order to save his wife’s life.

Larsen, a three-time book-award winner, says on his website that he gets his ideas from reading nonfiction and by staying on top of current events. “It doesn’t hurt that I spent seven years in the military and am a current airline captain,” he says.

“Because most writers complete no more than one book each year, coming up with that ‘big idea’ is far less daunting than the day-to-day grind of editing and rewriting. That for me has always been the most challenging part,” he says.

Larsen lives in Sarasota with his wife Rose, whom he met as a third-grader. They have three children.
Written in a tight, crabbed hand with fancy flourishes, the letter wasn’t easy to read, and I had to wade through the squiggles twice to understand it. Despite the poor handwriting, the letter was obviously the work of a focused person and, for some reason, I believed Number 24601 was sincere in writing to me. Then again, I tend to root for the underdog. I’m from Boston originally, and the Red Sox are my beleaguered team. Though they seldom make it to the Series, I love them anyway. As for a guy in prison reaching out to help his fellow cons, he deserved a break, didn’t he?

“Of course, he does, darlin’,” echoed in my head. Dear Nana again, though she’d been gone for fifteen years now. “Help the lad, if you can.” Gone but not silent…

The Yarmouthport sleigh bells on the entrance of my interior design shop suddenly did their job, jangling like mad as the door opened, admitting a distinguished middle-aged gentleman. What else would you call a silver-haired man cradling a Maltese puppy in his arms, and wearing a silk suit and cravat on a hot July day in Southwest Florida…

“Yes, I’m Deva Dunne. How may I help you?”

He took a step forward and said, “Do forgive me for not offering my hand, but Charlotte won’t let me put her down…”

“She’s adorable,” I said, sort of meaning it…

“I’m sure she’s easy to indulge, Mr—”

“Stahlman. James Stahlman.”

I gulped. Hard. His name wasn’t one easily forgotten, not after being plastered all over the Naples Daily News for days on end. That had been some months ago, yet the cloud hovering over him then still lingered. Had he, or had he not, killed his wife?
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**TARPON SPRINGS** (March 4–6, 2016)
**THE EVERGLADES** (April 8–10, 2016).

Meet great people. Experience our behind-the-scenes looks at the lives and lore of these special Real Florida places. Enjoy local cuisine, music, art—and much more.

Get information and register at [FloridaHumanities.org](http://FloridaHumanities.org) (Use special promo code F815)

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Lenny Schneir was a professional poker player when he met pioneer feminist Merlin Stone. The two became life partners and were together for 34 years until Stone’s death in 2011. “Everything I am, have become, or will become, I owe to Merlin,” Schneir said in April at the annual book awards banquet. “She transformed me from a male chauvinist to a male feminist.”

Though nonfiction, *Merlin Stone Remembered* is a kind of love story. It celebrates the life and work of Stone, a powerful feminist who helped define the women’s spirituality movement. She is most widely known for her groundbreaking book, *When God Was a Woman*.

When Schneir first met her in the summer of 1976, Stone was posed in a yoga lotus position on Miami Beach. They began talking and discovered they had a few things in common, including being natives of Brooklyn. The couple soon began living together in New York City.

Schneir co-authored *Merlin Stone Remembered* with friends David B. Axelrod, an author and arts administrator, and Carol Thomas, a writer and counseling psychologist. Schneir and Axelrod live in Daytona Beach, and Thomas lives in nearby Ormond-by-the-Sea.

Ira Mark Egdall

Silver Medal, General Nonfiction

Ira Mark Egdall said a high school teacher threw him out of her English class “because she didn’t think I was a good enough writer.” But Egdall went on to write two books after earning a degree in physics. He notes that Albert Einstein, the subject of his most recent book, said: “It’s not that I’m so smart, it’s just that I stay with the problem longer.”

Florida Book Award judges said *Einstein Relatively Simple* should be required reading in high school physics classes to help students understand the depth and beauty of the scientist’s work. The book’s goal is to explain in clear language Einstein’s complex theories about general relativity, time, space, black holes, and wormholes.

Egdall, who retired after a 35-year career in the U.S. aerospace industry, teaches courses in modern physics and gives talks about Einstein and time travel, often dressing like “Grandpa Albert.” He lives in Hollywood, Fla.
Ira Sukrungruang

Bronze Medal, General Nonfiction

Ira Sukrungruang says he didn’t necessarily start out to be a writer. In college, he spent “five years jumping from major to major before choosing the writer’s path,” he writes on his website. Once he found his calling, he went on to earn an MFA at Ohio State University.

*Southside Buddhist*, a series of essays, recounts the author’s attempts to define himself as a Thai immigrant living in Chicago. He has also published a memoir, *Talk Thai: The Adventures of Buddhist Boy*, and a poetry collection *In Thailand It Is Night*. Sukrungruang is currently working on several projects, including a memoir about his time as a Thai monk, titled *Monk for a Month*; a memoir about his love for dogs; a collection of short stories; and a collection of poetry.

He is a professor in the Master of Fine Arts program at the University of South Florida in Tampa. When he’s not writing or teaching, he says he spends time playing video games, watches reruns of TV’s “West Wing,” and is “a little addicted to disc golf.”

José M. Fernández Pequeño

Gold, Spanish Language

José M. Fernández Pequeño, known by the nickname Jota Small, is a writer and editor born in Cuba who became a naturalized citizen of the Dominican Republic, where he lived for 15 years. He has published 14 books of literary criticism, essays, and narrative.

His winning book, *El arma secreta* means “The secret weapon.” A volume of nine short stories, the collection explores reality in unusual ways—the appearance of a bluebird on the wall of a house, for example, or an eye in the middle of someone’s forehead suddenly sprouting a 7-year-old child. One story is titled “The Art of Snoring.” Most are set in Cuba or the Dominican Republic.

The secret weapon is self-knowledge. “I firmly believe that life is a journey toward self, toward the person we were born to be,” Pequeño says in the introduction to his blog. A university professor of literature, film, and communications, Pequeño currently lives in Miami.
WHEN FLORIDA’S POET LAUREATE, the genre-challenging Edmund Skellings, died after a long illness in 2012, both the state’s poets and legislators, in a rare show of harmony for each group, agreed that the position should be redefined from a lifetime appointment to a set term. After all, in the country’s third most populous state and the one with America’s oldest literary tradition, talent abounds. With due metrical diligence, the state Legislature agreed to allow each newly elected—or re-elected—govemor to select a poet to serve a four-year term.

But who would fill the position? In a state flowering with talent, newly re-elected Governor Rick Scott had a dazzling range of possibilities. Would he choose one of the Panhandle’s multi-talented Anhinga writers or a Central Florida slam poet? Might he celebrate our history with a Cracker cowboy poet or a Seminole singer? Perhaps someone from South Florida’s dynamic, multilingual Caribbean community? Or maybe even one of our singer/songwriters like Jimmy Buffett or the aptly named Flo Rida?

In June, when the governor finally chose Peter Meinke as our fourth Poet Laureate, everyone smiled. A remarkably talented writer, gifted mentor, and generous colleague, Meinke has long been one of the state’s treasures.

Whether writing gracefully romantic poems to his wife Jeanne (“When I with you so wholly disappear/into the mirror of your slender hand”) or comparing Lord Byron to Joe DiMaggio as artists, or trying to invent a new literary form that might surprise God, Meinke mixes elegant phrases and striking images with everyday speech as he mines the essential truths underlying our most common experiences. His pragmatic “Advice to My Son” offers a deceptively profound set of truths that reflect paternal anxiety and hope far more realistically than the elegantly phrased platitudes Polonius recited to his son Laertes in Hamlet:

The trick is, to live your days as if each one may be your last (for they go fast, and young men lose their lives in strange and unimaginable ways) but at the same time, plan long range (for they go slow; if you survive the shattered windshield and bursting shell you will arrive at our approximation here below of heaven or hell).

To be specific, between the peony and rose plant squash and spinach, turnips and tomatoes; beauty is nectar and nectar, in a desert, saves—but the stomach craves stronger sustenance than the honied vine. Therefore, marry a pretty girl After seeing her mother; speak truth to one man, work with another; and always serve bread with your wine.

But, son, always serve wine.

The position of poet laureate is an odd one. It may not be the world’s oldest profession, but it is one of the least understood. Long before press secretaries or public relations firms existed, tribal chieftains and clan leaders sought bards and scops to celebrate their reigns. As part of uniting those clans into larger realms, emperors and kings appointed court poets and balladeers to construct an idealized history and shape a communal vision for their people. Ancient legends hold that Homer’s epics helped the fragmented tribes of Greece’s dark ages forge a common identity and that Virgil’s Aeneid defined Caesar Augustus’s dream of an Imperium Romanum.

Perhaps because England had become so closely associated with the term “Poet Laureate,” appointing to the position such iconic writers as Edmund Spenser, John Dryden, William Wordsworth, and Alfred Lord Tennyson, an egalitarian U.S. Congress felt a bit uncomfortable about the title’s sense of privilege, noblesse oblige, and elitism. For
years it chose instead to recognize a “Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress” rather than a laureate. Finally, in 1986 a still tentative Congress capitulated and awkwardly renamed the position “Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry.”

Florida had no such reservations. In 1928 the state Legislature passed a resolution establishing a state Poet Laureate. When no one objected to the idea, Gov. John W. Martin appointed Franklin N. Wood the following year. (Wood, a corporate lawyer who had retired to Daytona Beach for his health, had dedicated his second collection of poetry, Sunset Horns, to the governor.) The new laureate saw himself as an impressionistic formalist who loved juxtaposing a variety of brief visual and auditory images in lines with a very regular beat but unexpected rhymes. “At St. Augustine” suggests how he links contemporary images with the city’s exotic history:

A palm tree smears an ochre moon,
A sprawling spider on a lime;
That yellow light upon the bay
Is said to be from pirates’ gold
Which rises to the water’s top,
Upon each night of All Souls Day.
Then ghosts of Spanish soldiers move
About the towers of the fort,
And if one listens, he can hear
The rattle of an anchor chain,
A sentry pacing on the walls,
On All Souls Night of every year.

Wood’s lifetime appointment lasted only two years. A few months after his death in 1931, Gov. Doyle E. Carlton appointed Vivian Yeiser Laramore Rader, already a significant cultural figure in Miami, to the position. During her long tenure—she died in 1975—she encouraged writers throughout the state with workshops, festivals, and a series of annual anthologies of writers in Florida. Those anthologies, as Antonin Garcia Carbonell pointed out in a tribute to her in The Florida Book Review, were groundbreaking in their inclusivity. She published not only Robert Frost and the Chilean Nobel Laureate Gabriela Mistral but also African-American writers like Alpheus Butler and little known writers from across the state.

A traditionalist in meter and rhyme, Laramore Rader’s best poems reflect her sense of place, religious curiosity, and affection for the natural world. In “Grasshopper,” she offers a playful reflection on aging, morality—and insect rights:

I never see your shadow pass
Across a startled blade of grass,
Your jeweled eye and agile knee,
But what there comes again to me
That childhood morning, shiny new,
When first we said, “How do you do?”
When balanced on your sticky toes
You nonchalantly chewed my rose.

To grind you with my heel had been
Most cardinal of any sin;
An elf that dined on pale perfume
Was more important than the bloom,
A thing fantastic as a sprite
Could break the rules and still be right...
And yet with all He had to do,
I wonder why God thought of you.

How gross my heel has grown since then,
Descending on you ten times ten
To crush the jewels that were eyes
And dull the look of hurt surprise.
For love of leaf I’ve come to be
A giant who is your enemy;
And yet the child in me still knows
You have the right to munch my rose.

After Laramore Rader’s death, the laureateship stood vacant until the election of Gov. Bob Graham in 1979. The new governor, an avid reader and embryonic author, held a competition for the position and in 1980 chose Edmund Skellings, then a professor at Florida International University, from over 400 applicants. As interested in technology as literature, Skellings, who later moved to Florida Atlantic University and ultimately to the Florida Institute of Technology, taught both creative writing and electronic communication. He created the
first computer-generated and 3D-animated poems while also developing an innovative microcomputer information system for the Florida House of Representatives and its district offices in 1986.

His poetry is equally eclectic, much of it better appreciated as a multi-platform experience for its psilocybinic effects than through reading. One of his more traditional works, “Florida,” reveals his fascination for the paradox, history, and idiosyncrasy that abound in the Sunshine State.

We are South looking North.
Or vice versa.
We are international
And exceptionally local.

From here you can go to the moon.
And we can prove it.

Even the natives are transients.
Arriving and departing,
We are of two minds.

Coast to coast here means
One hour through our cotton mountains.
The sun rises and sets under salt waters.

Knowing in the bones that space is time,
We are wise as any peninsula.
We mine the dried beds of forgotten seas.
Fresh mango and orange bloom from the silt.

Outside Gainesville once, I reached down
Into time and touched the sabre tooth of a tiger.
No atlas prepared me for the moist
Sweet smell of his old life.

Suddenly a flock of flamingoes
Posed a thousand questions,
Blushing like innocence.

But the moon, perfectly above Miami
Like some great town clock, whispers,
“Now . . . yesterdays . . . tomorrows . . .”

And standing tropically and hugely still
At this port of meditation,
Reduced to neither coming nor going,
We are together on the way to somewhere.

In good time.

Like all artists, poets encourage us to pause and reflect on all that coming and going. Our laureates have accepted an additional responsibility. By describing the remarkably complex, fragile, and precious human and natural environment we share in this most diverse of all states, they remind us that we are always together on our journey.

MAURICE J. O’SULLIVAN, an award-winning teacher, writer, and filmmaker, is professor of English and Kenneth Curry Chair of Literature at Rollins College in Winter Park.
SOMEONE ASKS, WHAT MAKES THIS POEM AMERICAN?

And I answer by driving around, which seems to me the most American of activities, up there with waving the incendiary dandelion of sparklers or eating potato salad with green specks of relish, the German kind, salad of immigrants, of all the strange, pickled things we carry over from other places, like we did on Easter mornings in Nebraska, stuffing our Sunday shoes full of straw so that either Jesus or the Easter Bunny could leave us small, bullet-shaped candies in honor of what, I was never quite sure. Where do such customs come from? Everywhere!

Americanness is everywhere, wedged into everything, is best when driving around a frowsy Gulf Coast city with its terrific mini-marts like Bill’s, the very best of all marts! UN of toasted boat rats and boys from the projects revving their hoopties; of biscuit-shaped ladies who penny their scratch cards and hold up the line, where Panama (from Panama) commands the counter, and Mr. Bud, the camel-faced man, offers every kid a sweetie, producing a jar of petrified lollies from a shelf also displaying an array of swirlly glassed pipes and Arthurian bongs, where Raul the Enforcer idles at the back, packing since the incident in the parking lot last summer...
EXCERPT OF POEM FROM:

ON THE STREET OF DIVINE LOVE

By Barbara Hamby

ODE TO MY 1977 TOYOTA

Engine like a Singer sewing machine, where have you not carried me—to dance class, grocery shopping, into the heart of darkness and back again? O the fruit you've transported—cherries, peaches, blueberries, watermelons, thousands of Fuji apples—books, and all my dark thoughts, the giddy ones, too, like bottles of champagne popped at the wedding of two people who will pass each other on the street as strangers in twenty years. Ronald Reagan was president when I walked into Big Chief Motors and saw you glimmering on the lot like a slice of broiled mahi mahi or sushi without its topknot of tuna. Remember the months I drove you to work singing “Some Enchanted Evening?” Those were scary times. All I thought about was getting on I-10 with you and not stopping. Would you have made it to New Orleans? What would our life have been like there? I’d forgotten about poetry. Thank God, I remembered her. She saved us both. We were young together. Now we’re not. College boys stop us at traffic lights and tell me how cool you are. Like an ice cube, I say, though you’ve never had air conditioning. Who needed it? I would have missed so many smells without you—confederate jasmine, magnolia blossoms, the briny sigh of the Gulf of Mexico, rotting ’possums scattered along 319 between Sopchoppy and Panacea. How many holes are there in the ballet shoes in your back seat? How did that pair of men’s white loafers end up in your trunk? Why do I have so many questions…

Barbara Hamby
Silver Medal, Poetry

Barbara Hamby was raised in a fundamentalist household, which she says gave her a “muscle of belief.” But she discovered that much of her eventual spiritual strength was generated by work in the humanities.

“I want to believe in something, but I don’t believe in what my parents believed in. Poetry has taken the place, or I think the arts have taken the place, of religion in my life,” she told Guernica, a magazine devoted to art and politics.

The poems in On the Street of Divine Love sometimes reflect the search for religion. They also can carry the reader on a funhouse ride that has plenty of surprises. Each word may be, as the title poem’s closing line suggests, “some ragged bird…perched on a palm tree, singing its heart out for everyone walking alone through the alleys and fields of this broken night on earth.”

Hamby, a Distinguished University Scholar at Florida State, is married to David Kirby, also a poet who has been a Florida Book Awards Medalist.

To watch author Barbara Hamby read and discuss her writing and her life, go to Digital FORUM at FloridaHumanities.org.
**FLORIDA FUNERAL**

The tussocks grow up tall and June’s hardcore
As hell. Storm winds heave Christmas palms. The fronds
Life raft along a squall. Mosquitoes soar,
Anhinga snake, runoff bellies to stagnant ponds.
The sinkholes never lose their quick. The sky
Disguises heat in dawn’s abandoned rind.
Haze shadows everything. No wonder I
Can see humidity has left me blind.
It’s been a minute since I’ve seen the sun
In lightning bolts impelling docks to sparks.
Each volt burns so I look at every one
And see a thousand lights in a million darks.
Burned. This is how Florida leaves me. I know
The reason why the river water stinks
Is its own weight, desire to overgrow,
Pervade the air, though the channel calms its kinks
And tides know some part of the day is low.
A gecko climbs, preserved in the veneer
Of oil. It’s dead and, still, it seems to know
I’ve got to get the f— up out of here...
Mike Maihack
Gold Medal, Children’s Literature

Mike Maihack says he spends his time drawing cats, superheroes, space girls, and anything else he might think of that involves a ray gun.

*Cleopatra in Space* is a fictional portrayal of the Egyptian ruler in her youth—and, yes, she totes a ray gun. Maihack’s story transports her to the distant future where she must save the galaxy from a tyrant, all while doing homework, making friends, and trying to avoid detention.

*Cleopatra* is Maihack’s first graphic novel. He also created the popular web comic, “Cow and Buffalo,” and illustrated a card game (for all ages) called “Goblins Drool, Fairies Rule.” Maihack also has contributed art to a number of books and television shows, including “Storyteller,” by Muppet creator Jim Henson.

A graduate of the Columbus College of Art and Design, Maihack lives in Tampa with his wife Jen, two sons, and two Siamese cats.

G. Neri
Silver Medal, Children’s Literature

G. Neri became a filmmaker before he started writing in 2005. Much of his work is about street-savvy youngsters. An example is his book *Knockout Games*, which also won a medal in this year’s Florida Book Awards. He has been a digital media producer and, while at the University of California Santa Cruz, made an animated film with jazz legend Chick Corea.

*Hello, I’m Johnny Cash* is a departure for Neri. It tells the story of a rural, rather than an urban, youngster who found success in the larger world. The book depicts Cash’s hardscrabble youth and his rise to country-music fame. It is Neri’s first picture book and biography, is written in free verse, and is illustrated by A.G. Ford, who published a previous book about President Obama and the First Family.

Neri, whose first name is Greg, lives in Tampa with his wife Maggie, daughter Zola, and a cat. “I spend most of my time in my studio, but I do like to troll the rivers by our house looking for alligators,” he says on his website.

Kerry O’Malley Cerra
Bronze Medal, Children’s Literature

The events of Sept. 11, 2001, and some of the author’s reactions to them, inspired this book, which tackles post-9/11 issues through the experiences of two Florida middle-school boys. One of the boys is an Arab-American, and tension crackles when it is learned that one of the airplane hijackers lived nearby.

Long before the tragedy, Kerry O’Malley Cerra had become friends with a young man and his devoutly Islamic family. During the days immediately after the attacks on the World Trade Center, Cerra found herself doubting her friend and his family.

For doing so, Cerra says on her website, “The feeling of regret stuck with me for a long time. Being a teacher, I looked at kids around me who rarely saw racial lines and I wondered if this boy—my college friend—and I had been younger when September 11 happened, would I have ever doubted his family?”

Eventually, Cerra admitted her feelings to her Muslim friends, and they were reconciled. Her friend’s father helped edit *Just a Drop of Water*. Cerra lives in Coral Springs.
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Madeleine Kuderick  
**Gold Medal, Young Adult Literature**

Madeleine Kuderick has been writing since at least the third grade, when her mother would type the little girl’s stories and put homemade covers on them. “Those little things help you believe in yourself,” she said. Kuderick went on to become editor of her Oak Park, Ill., high school newspaper, which claims famous alumnus Ernest Hemingway.

In her debut novel *Kiss of Broken Glass*, Kuderick features a 15-year-old girl under “psychiatric watch” after she was found cutting herself in a school bathroom. The novel is written in verse.

On her website, Kuderick says she likes to write about underdogs. “Because let’s face it, underdogs are a lot more interesting than those fluffy pedigrees with pom-poms and perfect teeth,” she writes on the website. Kuderick lives in Palm Harbor.

G. Neri  
**Silver Medal, Young Adult Literature**

G. Neri, who also was honored in the Children’s Literature category, is among only a few authors to receive more than one Florida Book Award medal in the same year.

In his young-adult book, *Knockout Games*, he writes about a white girl who is a new student in an almost all-black high school. She has no friends, so her video camera becomes her only companion. She is pressured to use it to record the “knockout games,” in which teens pick out strangers at random and try to knock them out with one punch.

In addition to writing, Neri has worked in other media, including from 1993–2003 as head of production for two successful new media companies whose clients included Disney, Mercedes, Motorola, Microsoft, Reebok, and General Motors.

Neri describes himself as “a great example of globalization.” He can trace his heritage to ancestors in Mexico, the Philippines, France, Spain, Africa, and “Native North America.”

He lives with his family in Tampa. His wife Maggie is a sociology professor, and their daughter Zola “likes to draw like her old man,” he says.

Crissa-Jean Chappell  
**Bronze Medal, Young Adult Literature**

“I call it my love letter to Florida,” says Crissa-Jean Chappell of her book, *More Than Good Enough*. She credits much of its inspiration to her friend Houston Cypress, a Miccosukee Indian. The book “would not exist without his generous spirit. He welcomed me onto the Miccosukee Rez and answered all my questions with tremendous patience,” Chappell writes on her website.

The book opens with protagonist Trenton, a skateboarding, bass-playing handful, holding a baby alligator on his lap. It follows Trenton through the struggles of being a half-white, half-Indian urban teen who suddenly finds himself living on an Everglades reservation.

Chappell grew up in Miami, where she and her family lived in a wooden cottage. “As a kid, I climbed the oak trees in my backyard near the bay and imagined that their branches were the scaly skins of flying dragons,” she says on her website.

She and her family rode out Hurricane Andrew in the cottage, which was still intact after the storm. “And so were we,” she says.

Chappell, who won a bronze medal in 2007 for Young Adult Literature, still lives in Miami.
FLORIDA BOOK AWARD WINNERS

Learn more about these authors at the websites below:

Africa in Florida
Five Hundred Years of African Presence in the Sunshine State
Edited by Amanda B. Carlson and Robin Poynor
www.upf.com

La Florida
Five Hundred Years of Hispanic Presence
Edited by Viviana Díaz Balsera and Rachel A. May
www.upf.com

The Invention of Wings
by Sue Monk Kidd
www.SueMonkKidd.com/books

Haunted
by Randy Wayne White
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Kiss of Broken Glass
by Madeline Kuderick
www.epicreads.com

Cleopatra in Space
by Mike Maihack
www.scholastic.com

Everglades
America’s Wetland
by Mac Stone
www.upf.com

The Peace of Blue
Water Journeys
by Bill Belleville
www.upf.com

Knockout Games
by Greg Neri
www.lernerbooks.com

The Heaven of Animals
by David James Poissant
http://www.davidjamespoissant.com/

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