INSIDE THE CREATIVE PROCESS WITH LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD IN WRITING HONOREES RAY ARSENAULT AND RANDY WAYNE WHITE, POETRY OUT LOUD WINNER ZHAEDYN HODGE SIGARS, AND THIS YEAR'S FLORIDA BOOK AWARD AUTHORS. PLUS, EXPLORE FLORIDA'S 500-YEAR-OLD LITERARY TRADITION.
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Letter from the Director

Stand up for the humanities as we celebrate our freedom

Steve Seibert

In the year 2026, the United States of America will commemorate the 250th anniversary of its birth. Between now and then, there will be a national discussion regarding the Declaration of Independence’s promise of freedom and equality. This is precisely the topic Abraham Lincoln addressed at Gettysburg when he recast the Declaration as a new birth of freedom founded on fresh understanding of human equality.

Because we are free and equal people, every American can engage in determining what the Declaration continues to mean; by voting, running for office, reading history, philosophy and literature, and by talking to and understanding others. These are all humanities-inspired actions.

The Florida Humanities Council has a critical role to play in this anniversary because we support democracy at the community level. The president of the Federation of State Humanities Councils, Dr. Esther Macintosh, explains, “The humanities live just not on university campuses, but in local libraries, town halls, veteran hospitals, museums, bars and prisons, around campfires, and under outdoor Chautauqua tents—all places where councils hold programs that help people make sense of their lives, have civil conversations, understand the perspectives of others and define and address the challenges facing their communities.”

The Florida Humanities Council will continue to support the community-based humanities programs Dr. Macintosh describes above and will fully participate in the discussions leading up to the 250th anniversary of the Declaration.

But here is some bad news: After many years of generous support, the Florida Legislature this year completely defunded the FHC; zero dollars for next year. State funding primarily pays for this magazine and for programs like the Smithsonian’s “Museum on Main Street” and our Speakers Series, which serves 24 locations across the state. With state dollars, we are able to reach Florida’s underserved and under-resourced communities.

The FHC will survive this financial hit and will become more nimble, resilient and mission-focused. In the meantime, however, we must discontinue certain programs until we restore state dollars or find alternative funding. We may need to reduce the number of FORUM editions. I regret all of this. But perhaps this is our needed call to action.

If you are reading this magazine, you probably understand and support the humanities. The Legislature’s decision to defund us is a stark reminder that too few people do. In this age of technology obsession, are the humanities irrelevant? Of course not, but we all need to say so publicly. As we prepare to commemorate the nation’s founding, as we recommit to our freedom and equality, as we voice our support for investment in the ideas that created the nation, let us stand together and tall for the public humanities. For more information, please visit floridahumanities.org. This nation was founded on ideas; we were humanities-driven from the beginning and with the FHC’s support—and yours—will continue to be so.

Steve Seibert

We would like to acknowledge the generous support of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.
A visit by National Endowment for the Humanities Chairman Jon Parrish Peede as part of his national tour, and a glance at what he’s reading. Plus, a look at programs around the state supported by Florida Humanities Council grants, including the Sage Project, which honors the elders of Winter Park; premieres of documentaries highlighting an endangered Florida river and a thriving Gulf Coast Greek community, and a visit to Miami’s Little Haiti, the latest Florida Stories walking tour. Also, deadlines to know.

This year, two writers, one an acclaimed historian, and the other a writer of best-selling fiction, are honored with the Florida Humanities Council’s 2019 Lifetime Achievement for Writing Award. We profile them here.

Ray Arsenault: Chronicler of a changing South
Ray Arsenault has published nine books about the South and the civil rights movement. His latest, a biography, Arthur Ashe: A Life, is drawing critical praise (including from a former U.S. president.)

Randy Wayne White: Twisting plots under the sun
The New York Times best-selling crime novelist. Randy Wayne White's Doc Ford series of novels are gripping reads set in, and celebrating, the heart of Florida — the lush Southwest Gulf Coast.

Eight of the Florida Book Awards gold medal winners discuss the joys and challenges of creating their works, and how this state influences their writing.

Meet this year’s state Poetry Out Loud winner, Tampa’s Zhaedyn Hodge Sigars — whose oratorical skills are matched by his talent for writing poetry — and his mentor and teacher, Casey Curry.

LITERARY FOOTSTEPS
500 years and counting
Travel our state’s surprisingly long literary history, rich with adventure, exploration, and lots of comings and goings.

A GUIDE TO THE FLORIDA BOOK AWARDS
Looking for something to read? Meet the 28 book award winners and get the run-down on their winning books in 10 categories. Guaranteed you’ll find something that tempts you.

Near the traffic and noise in South Florida, a photographer captures a lone tree against the sky, a transitory moment soon to disappear.

The New York Times best-selling crime novelist. Randy Wayne White’s Doc Ford series of novels are gripping reads set in, and celebrating, the heart of Florida — the lush Southwest Gulf Coast.

Meet the 28 book award winners and get the run-down on their winning books in 10 categories. Guaranteed you’ll find something that tempts you.

By Dalia Colón

By Thomas Hallock

By Jon Wilson

By Joel B. McEachern

By Dalia Colón

By Tom Scherberger

By Tom Scherberger
Adventures in the literary state

As I write this, there's a kind of literary scavenger hunt in progress on my Facebook feed.

Sparked by a question about just how many authors there are in the city where I live — dozens, hundreds? — the spirited discussion continues with an ever-expanding list. Commenters remind us, one by one, of local writers in every genre — from an internationally celebrated author of literary fiction to acclaimed environmental writers, to, at last count, 13 romance novelists, some quite celebrated. The list just grows and grows.

While our town is truly blessed and justifiably proud, it's not an outlier in Florida. Cities from Key West to Tampa to Pensacola can boast of their own impressive lists.

Our state is many things, not the least which is rich in writers. I thought of this recently while attending the Florida Book Awards banquet in Tallahassee. On this festive night, surrounded by stacks of tempting books honored in 10 categories, we celebrated the tenacious wordsmiths who crafted them (usually while holding down day jobs), and by extension, our state as a creative haven.

And that's also what we commemorate in this issue of FORUM — the perhaps surprising literary wonder that is Florida. Within these pages, we introduce you to some of the state's finest writers — poets, biographers, mystery writers, children's book authors — and tell the "stories behind the stories" of their work.

We profile our two Lifetime Achievement Award winners for writing: Ray Arsenault, University of South Florida St. Petersburg professor of Southern history and co-founder of the Florida Studies Program; and Randy Wayne White, The New York Times best-selling crime novelist.

Arsenault has published nine books about the history of the South and the civil rights movement. His latest biography, Arthur Ashe: A Life, has met with critical acclaim (including from a former U.S. president, who put it on his must-read books of the year); White's Doc Ford series of crime novels captivate its legions of readers both with gripping tales and an immersion in the lush Southwest Florida Gulf Coast.

We offer a quick guide to all 28 of the Florida Book Award-winning authors and their books, and a Q&A with eight of the gold medal winners, who open up about their writing challenges and what it means to write in, and about, Florida.

We introduce you to this year's state Poetry Out Loud winner, Tampa's Zhaedyn Hodge Sigars, whose oratorical skills were encouraged by Casey Curry, his high school's creative writing director. Curry is passionate about the power of poetry, as is Zhaedyn — writing it as well as reciting it.

And finally, we offer a look at the long literary history of our state — 500 years and counting. Thomas Hallock, professor of English and Florida Studies at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, takes us back to the beginning and up through time for a look at our rich tradition, full of adventure, exploration and surprises.

We hope you enjoy this issue, and wish you a lovely summer overflowing with wonderful books to read. Thanks, as always, for supporting the humanities in Florida.

Jacki Levine

Have an idea or feedback for FORUM? We'd love it if you'd share it with us. Write Jacki Levine at jlevine@flahum.org
Colette Bancroft has been on the staff of the Tampa Bay Times since 1997 and its book editor since 2007. She directs the annual Tampa Bay Times Festival of Reading, and was on the board of the National Book Critics Circle. Before joining the Times, she was a writer and editor at the Arizona Daily Star. She earned degrees in English from the University of South Florida and the University of Florida and taught at universities in Florida and Arizona. Bancroft grew up in Tampa and lives in St. Petersburg.

Dalia Colón, an Emmy Award-winning multimedia journalist, is a producer and co-host of WEDU Arts Plus on Tampa Bay’s PBS station and produces WUSF Public Media’s food podcast, The Zest. A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Colón was a staff reporter for Cleveland Magazine and the Tampa Bay Times. Her work has appeared in The New York Times Magazine, Los Angeles Times, on NPR, and Visit Florida. She lives in Riverview with her husband, two young children and cocker spaniel, Max.

Thomas Hallock is Frank E. Duckwall Professor of Florida Studies and Professor of English at the St. Petersburg campus of the University of South Florida. His publications include William Bartram, the Search for Nature’s Design: Selected Art, Letters and Unpublished Manuscripts. For more on his work with students recovering the early literature of Florida, go to earlyfloridalit.net.

Tom Scherberger, a communications consultant for the Florida Humanities Council, worked for 20 years at the St. Petersburg Times (now Tampa Bay Times) as state editor, Tampa city editor and editorial writer. He has extensive experience as a freelance writer for Creative Loafing, AARP Florida Bulletin, and Visit Florida. He lives in Tampa with his wife, Janet Scherberger.

Jon Wilson is a communications consultant for the Florida Humanities Council. He retired as a reporter and editor after 36-plus years with the St. Petersburg Times and Evening Independent.

Chris Zuppa is a visual storyteller who has produced videos for clients including Hillsborough County Schools, Moffitt Cancer Center, and Visit Florida. A photojournalist for the Tampa Bay Times for nearly 12 years, his awards include a first place in the news video division at the 2013 National Press Photographers Association’s Best of Photojournalism competition and a regional Emmy as part of a team for a video project about high school football in Pahokee.
NEH Chairman brings his national tour to Florida

By Tom Scherberger

Jon Parrish Peede, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, visited Florida and the offices of the Florida Humanities Council in early April as part of an ongoing national tour.

Chairman Peede, appointed by President Donald Trump to lead the agency last year, connected with arts and humanities scholars in Tampa’s historic Ybor City after a walking tour with Gary Mormino, professor emeritus of history at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. Mormino, author of The Immigrant World of Ybor City and a Florida Humanities scholar, explained the rich history of the Latin Quarter, with stops at El Centro Asturiano, José Martí Park, the Ybor City Museum, and the historic Columbia Restaurant.

The next day, Chairman Peede met with a number of scholars and officials at USF St. Petersburg.

As NEH chair, Chairman Peede oversees the distribution of more than 800 grants a year to scholars, community groups, academic institutions and state agencies, such as the Florida Humanities Council, which receives a substantial portion of its funding from the national organization.

During his visit, the importance of grants was highlighted during a grant-writing workshop in conjunction with the FHC and the Division of Cultural Affairs of Florida’s Department of State put on by staff from NEH, FHC and the Division of Cultural Affairs. Fifty organizations, including museums, historical societies, artists, and local government officials attended the workshop. Participants learned about the granting processes of three agencies and asked questions. Similar efforts are planned in other regions of the state.

"Jon Peede’s visit was extraordinary," says Steve Seibert, executive director of the FHC. "He met with a couple dozen key FHC partners, toured Ybor City, met with USF students, professors and administrators, reviewed the “La Florida” project, attended a grants workshop … He spoke eloquently at each of these stops, but particularly at the 10th anniversary of the founding of the University of Florida’s Center for the Humanities and the Public Sphere.

“Florida was the 32nd state Chairman Peede has visited and we are eager to have him return to visit the southern part of the state," says Seibert.

UF’s Center for the Humanities in the Public Sphere was established with funds from the NEH. While in Gainesville, Chairman Peede met with scholars, held roundtable discussions with humanities organizations and UF students, and toured UF’s campus. In celebration of the Center’s 10th anniversary, he delivered an address on the importance of the humanities and NEH efforts to create an initiative emphasizing the intersection of humanities disciplines and civics.

Chairman Peede is a scholar of Southern literature and former publisher of the Virginia Quarterly Review. He served as NEH acting director before his appointment. From 2007 to 2011, he oversaw the National Endowment for the Arts’ funding of literary organizations fellowships to creative writers and translators. For seven years, he led writing workshops for U.S. troops in Afghanistan, Bahrain, England, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, the Persian Gulf, and on domestic bases.
In step with our state

Eight new Florida Stories walking tours offer journeys rich with detail — from Miami’s Little Haiti to Bradenton’s Old Manatee

Three years ago, gentrification threatened Miami’s Little Haiti neighborhood. Real estate developers were buying up land, changing the character and culture of the ethnic enclave, even pushing to change the name in a rebranding effort.

Activists persuaded the Miami City Commission in May 2016 to designate Little Haiti as an official city neighborhood, drawing boundaries along 54th Street and 79th Street, and Northwest Sixth Avenue and Northeast Second Avenue, leaving out the Design District.

Today, as part of an ongoing effort to highlight the immigrant haven’s unique history and character, Little Haiti is getting its own historical walking tour. It is one of eight new tours that will be included in the Florida Humanities Council’s free Florida Stories app in the coming months. What started as a handful of self-guided audio tours will total 36 by this fall.

Besides Little Haiti, the new tours are Sarasota’s Phillippi Estate Park, Lake Mary near Orlando, Bradenton’s Old Manatee, New Smyrna Beach, Indian Key in the Upper Keys, the Dunbar Community in Fort Myers, and DeFuniak Springs in the Panhandle. Download the app in the Google Play Store or iStore. A complete list of tours is available on the app.

The Little Haiti walking tour grew out of the community’s desire to preserve the neighborhood’s identity, harnessing the energy that led to the official neighborhood designation. It was spearheaded by the Haitian Heritage Museum, founded in 2014, which showcases Haitian culture and heritage with a growing collection of more than 400 art pieces and artifacts. The museum is a cultural anchor and catalyst for the urban revitalization of Little Haiti. The script was written by Sharon D. Wright Austin, professor of political science and director of the African-American Studies Program at the University of Florida.

The tour covers arts, culture, religious and educational institutions, as well as the unique Caribbean cuisine of the Haitian community.

Remembering the elders

New Winter Park exhibit preserves images, stories of African-American community

Photographs and oral histories document the lives of 17 of the oldest residents of Winter Park’s African-American community in an exhibition running through August.

“The Sage Project II: Hannibal Square Elders Tell Their Stories” runs through Aug. 31 at the Hannibal Square Heritage Center, 642 W. New England Ave. in Winter Park.

“These histories, however personal, have a familiarity that resonates with residents of African-American communities around the country,” says Fairolyn Livingston, the center’s chief historian, who collected the oral histories.

The Hannibal Square Heritage Center opened in 2007 in partnership with residents from the Hannibal Square community of West Winter Park and the city of Winter Park.

This exhibit is the second phase of a series intended to preserve and share the history of Winter Park’s historic but marginalized African-American community. The 17 residents featured in the exhibit range in age from 80 to 102.

More than half of the 18 participating elders in the project’s first phase, which began in 2012, have since died. The contributions will last forever as a part of the permanent collection at the Heritage Center.

The residents were photographed by Peter Schreyer, Heritage Center’s founder and CEO/executive director of Crealdé School of Art. The images were created in the homes, churches, or other familiar places in Winter Park that held special meaning for the participants.

The Sage Project II began in April with a dedication ceremony at Shady Park and an opening reception at the Heritage Center, followed by a panel discussion with Sage Project participants at adjacent Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church.

The exhibition will become part of the permanent exhibition, “The Heritage Collection: Photographs and Oral Histories of West Winter Park.”

The exhibit is supported by a $5,000 Community Project Grant awarded this year by the Florida Humanities Council.
Florida in film

New documentaries highlight state’s culture, environment

There is really no place quite like Tarpon Springs, a small fishing village on the northern reaches of the Tampa Bay area with the highest percentage of residents with Greek heritage in the country. Residents have resolutely and joyfully maintained their culture for more than a century through music, dance, religious customs, and food.

A new 50-minute documentary captures this rich heritage through the people who live it every day. Dancing as One: The Greek Community of Tarpon Springs, premiered in March before a capacity crowd at the Spanos/Pappas Community Center in Tarpon Springs. Afterward, a panel discussion focused on the unique nature of this community. The premiere and discussion were supported by a $5,000 Community Project Grant in 2017 from the Florida Humanities Council.

It was the second documentary premiere and panel discussion the Humanities Council supported in recent months. In November 2018, the 60-minute film Stories from the Apalachicola: An Endangered River, premiered at the St. George Island Community Center. The film is a product of a partnership among Apalachicola Riverkeeper, Florida State University School of Communication and WFSU Public Media. It was produced by Florida State University students. The premiere and panel discussion were funded partly by a $5,000 Community Project grant in 2017 from the Florida Humanities Council. It can be viewed online at video.wfsu.org

An Epiphany dove release in Tarpon Springs, from the documentary, Dancing As One.

What We’re Reading

Despite a rigorous travel schedule, National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Jon Parrish Peede is an avid reader. During his Florida visit, we asked him for a recent reading list that has shaped his thinking on the humanities:

Rita Charon, Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness
Andrew Delbanco, The War Before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America’s Soul from the Revolution to the Civil War
Camille T. Dungy, Guidebook to Relative Strangers: Journeys into Race, Motherhood, and History
Dana Gioia, ed., Best American Poetry 2018
Jill Lepore, These Truths: A History of the United States
David M. Lubin, Grand Illusions: American Art and the First World War
Ernie Pyle, Home Country
Gordon S. Wood, Friends Divided: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson

Learn more about our grants

Since 1971, the Florida Humanities Council has awarded more than $8 million in grants statewide for cultural resources and public programs to preserve Florida’s rich history and heritage, promote civic engagement and community dialogue, and provide opportunities to reflect on the future of our ever-changing state.

To learn more about our grants, how to apply and deadlines, go to floridahumanities.org/grants

Join our Board

Are you interested in joining the Florida Humanities Board of Directors? Nominations for the September election will be open until Friday, August 9.

For more information, please visit floridahumanities.org/BOD
By Colette Bancroft

Florida has long been a paradise for writers, and one of the richest elements of its cultural scene is the many authors who live in and write about the state.

Each year, a selection of those authors receive honors from the Florida Book Awards. Now in its 13th year, the awards are coordinated by the Florida State University Libraries and co-sponsored by a group of educational and literacy organizations, including the Florida Humanities Council, and were announced in March.

The awards offer a chance to peek inside how and why writers do their work. We interviewed eight of the 10 authors who won gold medals for their 2018 books, asking them how Florida shapes their writing, who or what inspired them to write, how they solve creative problems and what it's like to interact with readers.

We talked to Hernán Vera Álvarez, Miami, La Librería del Mal Salvaje (Spanish language category); Ryan Calejo, Miami, Charlie Hernández and the League of Shadows (Older children’s literature); Erica Dawson, Tampa, When Rap Spoke Straight to God (Poetry); Michael Jordan, Longboat Key, Company of Demons (Popular fiction); Gilbert King, New York City, Beneath a Ruthless Sun: A True Story of Violence, Race, and Justice Lost and Found (Florida nonfiction); Kimberly Lojewski, Ocala, Worm Fiddling Nocturne in the Key of a Broken Heart (General fiction); Silvia Lopez, Miami, Just Right Family: An Adoption Story (Younger children’s literature), and Tara Lynn Masih, St. Augustine, My Real Name Is Hanna (Young adult).

How has the state of Florida been a muse for or an influence on your writing?

Alvarez: I like to live among people from different cultures. I think it’s an ideal and refreshing environment to create fictions. I have been living in Little Haiti for some years, a neighborhood in Miami where people speak English, French, and Spanish. I’m rich without money.

Dawson: As soon as I moved to Tampa in 2010, I almost immediately felt the energy of the environment. Everything was so lush, so green. It was so hot that June; the heat felt forceful. The whole landscape seemed wild. I absorbed that energy and started writing more than I had in months, and writing with a new kind of momentum. My nature of work became a reflection of Florida’s nature, so to speak.

King: The great thing about working in Florida is that, thanks to the state’s Sunshine Law and vital organizations like the First Amendment Foundation, I’ve been able to gain access to an abundance of public records that have helped me bring much greater depth to the research I do. It also doesn’t hurt that there were many important civil rights cases in Florida that did not get the same kind of attention as cases in other southern states.
Lojewski: I grew up in Florida, so it creeps into most everything that I write. The quirky oddness of it flavors my characters. It also makes for a particularly rich and unique landscape to describe. Writing about the swamps is one of my favorite things. As I got older, I realized that what was normal to me (i.e. rambling alligators, 100-degree heat, moss-draped cypress trees) was something new and different for other people. It helps that I love it.

What writers or books made you want to become a writer yourself?

Lopez: I didn’t learn to speak English until I was 10 years old, so it wasn’t until high school and college that I was exposed to the classics, which I loved. Then, in graduate school, I took a course in children’s literature and realized I had missed out on a segment of excellent literature. As school librarian I worked my way through the lists of Caldecotts and Newberys (award winning books), plus hundreds of other wonderful books, both for my pleasure and to engage the children I served. I love fables and folktales, and admire the picture books of Dr. Seuss, Shel Silverstein, Chris Van Allsburg, and my friend Ruth Vander Zee. I always marvel at how the skillful use of simple language is able to convey powerful universal messages.

Calejo: The first book that opened my eyes to what a novel was or could be would most definitely be A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L’Engle. There’s just so much creativity and imagination crammed into those pages. It made me want to try to write stories like that.

Masih: Growing up I was steeped in fairy tales, fantasy, and mysteries. First by writers such as Andre Norton and Phyllis Whitney, then by Agatha Christie. The books themselves didn’t inspire me to become a writer, it was the process of reading, of getting immersed in another world and another life.

Jordan: As a kid, I devoured the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs and wanted to someday write a book of my own. Ken Follett, Robert Ludlum, and Frederick Forsyth were all influential, as were Kathy Reichs and James Patterson. Although outside of my genre, the writing of Barbara Kingsolver, Leon Uris, and Laura Hillenbrand is so exceptional that it motivated me to improve my own. The single best book that I read on the craft of writing was by Stephen King, On Writing.
Can you describe a challenge you encountered in writing your winning book, in research or in the writing process, and how you solved it?

**Lopez:** At first, the character of the mother in *Just Right Family: An Adoption Story* was a single parent. After extensive research it became clear that, although single-parent international adoptions are possible, laws that seek to protect against child trafficking make this more difficult. That would have required too much information for a picture book, especially since my primary intention was to show a child's acceptance of the new role of big sister and the obvious love that exists in her multiracial, multiethnic home. For this reason, I changed the characters to a more traditional, two-parent family.

**Dawson:** The whole process was a challenge. It was the hardest thing I've ever done, writing-wise. I wanted to be as honest and blunt as I could be; I really wanted to write a testimony of my experiences as a black woman living in the South at this point in time. I had to put aside my anxieties about how people would receive the book; I had to put aside my anxieties about acknowledging and facing my experiences. I pushed forward, hoping someday that someone may read the book and understand a little about my world and start thinking about their own world.

**Jordan:** A major problem was how to incorporate the true story of the Torso Murderer, who terrorized Cleveland decades ago, into a modern-day murder mystery. I solved the problem by creating an elderly character who possesses first-hand knowledge of the Torso Murderer's crimes and now finds himself immersed in the modern-day murder.

**Masih:** The whole book was one big challenge from start to finish. I had no idea what I was getting into when I began, intellectually or emotionally. First, there is little info on the Holocaust in Ukraine, especially in the small villages. And I don't speak Polish, Yiddish, or Ukrainian. A large amount of the documentation hasn't been translated yet. I relied heavily on Esther Stermer's autobiography (her family story, written in English, is the inspiration for the novel), research at Holocaust museums, and discussions with survivors from the same area in which I set the novel. Finally, this was an emotional challenge. Living for so long with the unspeakable horror of the Shoah is not something I'd recommend, but it was worth it to get the story out.
How important to you as an author is interaction with readers – does communicating with readers, in person or on social media, affect your writing, and how?

**King:** I do a lot of talks and presentations around Florida, and the interaction with readers has been invaluable. I’ve struck up friendships with everyone from private investigators in Miami, to Florida Supreme Court justices in Tallahassee. So I’m always being tipped off about fascinating, untold stories. There are so many good-hearted people in Florida who care about justice, and who love to read. They truly inspire me.

**Calejo:** For me, it is quite important — and a privilege. There’s nothing like hearing from a reader that your book impacted them in some way or brought back memories of their childhood. It’s one of my biggest sources of motivation.

**Lojewski:** This is my first book, so it’s all been a very new and strange experience to me. I’ve been lucky enough that, at least this go around, most of the reader feedback has been positive. It encourages me to keep writing. I’m always surprised at what people pull out of the stories. The things that they identify with are completely unpredictable to me, and often I don’t even notice that I wrote them in there. Without readers, a book would just be paper.

**Alvarez:** Publishing a book is to throw a bottle into the ocean. When a reader picks it up, I feel it’s the best communication a writer has ever had.
A life of history

Ray Arsenault’s writing chronicles a changing South, from biographies of civil rights champions to the legendary Arthur Ashe

By Tom Scherberger

As Ray Arsenault looks back at the trajectory of his life, one moment stands out.

He was studying history at Princeton University and working a student job as a busboy in the dining commons. “After two years if you were a good busboy you could become a captain and make everyone else do the work,” he recalls with a laugh. “The day before they were going to make a decision, I was carrying eight trays of plastic glasses and I tripped on the stairs. I dropped 400 glasses.” That was the end of the captain job.

“But they still had to find a job for me,” Arsenault says. A young history professor named Sheldon Hackney needed a research assistant and hired Arsenault. He would spend the next 2 1/2 years working closely with Hackney, who would go on to become one of the most prominent figures in higher education — youngest Princeton provost, president of Tulane University and the University of Pennsylvania, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities and, most importantly for Arsenault, an expert in the history of the American South and the civil rights movement.

“He was an extraordinary figure,” Arsenault says. “It was just the most amazing revelation for me to work for Sheldon. I was deeply touched by his devotion to civil rights and justice. He changed my politics and my view of life. I’ve modeled myself after him for my entire career. I don’t know where I would be if I hadn’t dropped those glasses!”

Arsenault has had a distinguished academic career of his own. He is the John Hope Franklin Professor of Southern
History at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, where he has taught for 39 years and where he co-founded the Florida Studies Program. He's written or co-written nine books, including Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice. Arsenault consulted on a documentary on which it was based, winning three Emmys and a Peabody.

His latest book is Arthur Ashe: A Life, the first definitive biography of the tennis champion and civil rights champion. Barack Obama included it on a list of his favorite books for 2018, and Hollywood has expressed interest in making a feature film. The Washington Post called it “an insightful narrative of the evolution of a remarkable human being” and The New York Times praised it as “a deep, detailed, thoughtful chronicle of one of the country’s best and most important players.” It recently won the Florida Historical Society’s Harry and Harriette Moore Prize, named for the late civil rights activist and his wife whose home was bombed on Christmas night 1951.

Arsenault’s 2010 book, The Sound of Freedom: Marian Anderson, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Concert That Awakened America, which examined race through a single 1938 concert, is being turned into a documentary for the PBS series American Masters.

That large body of distinguished work has led to Arsenault’s latest honor: co-recipient of the Florida Humanities Council’s 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award. “I am such a fan of the Humanities Council,” he says. “I’m so proud of what I’ve been able to do with them over the years. Sometimes I wonder if we’d have culture in Florida without them!”

While Hackney had a profound impact on Arsenault’s work, his fascination with the South, and particularly civil rights, can be traced to a Yankee grandmother. “I’ve lived in Florida a good part of my life, but I’m not a Floridian,” Arsenault says. “I was born in Cape Cod, which is about as Yankee as you can get, so I’m really a transplanted New Englander and always thought of myself in that way.”

Excerpt from:

Arthur Ashe: A Life

By Ray Arsenault

It was late June 1955, and a Junior tournament sponsored by the all-black American Tennis Association (ATA) was about to begin on the public courts at Turkey Thicket Park, in the University Heights section of northeast Washington, D. C.

One girl eager to play that day was Doris Cammack — an up-and-coming 15-year-old harboring dreams of becoming the next Althea Gibson — the talented young woman from Harlem who six years earlier had become the first black female to breach the color line in competitive tennis. A victory in the Washington tournament would solidify Doris’s ranking as a regional star, but as the first round began she faced an unexpected problem. On that sultry Saturday morning in June, her dreams took a tumble when she learned that an odd number of competitors had registered for the girls’ draw, leaving her with no girl to play in the opening round. Her only option, the ATA organizers explained, was to play a first-round exhibition match against an eleven-year-old boy borrowed from the male draw.

Though disappointed, Doris reluctantly agreed to the unusual arrangement. Yet when she saw how small and scrawny her opponent actually was — a boy with arms as thin as the handle of his wooden racket — she balked. “I’m not playing against him,” she sneered, convinced that she had been set up as a foil in what was to play a first-round exhibition match against an eleven-year-old boy borrowed from the male draw.

What happened next stunned the small crowd of spectators that had gathered to watch an impromptu battle of the sexes. Brandishing amazing foot speed and a slingshot forehand that had gathered to watch an impromptu battle of the sexes. Brandishing amazing foot speed and a slingshot forehand that whatever confidence she had mustered before the match was gone. Losing only a handful of games, he needed less than an hour to win two sets and the match. Doris did her best to smile in defeat as she walked to the net and reached down to shake the boy’s hand, but whatever confidence she had mustered before the match was gone. A few weeks later she gave up the game altogether, disabused of any notion that she would find glory on a tennis court.

Little Art, as he was known then, was polite and respectful in victory, just as his parents had taught him to be. Yet he also felt the full flush of victory, even at the age of eleven. Soon his aspirations would move beyond mere victory as he began to dream of becoming a tennis star, but he never lost his manners or his sportsmanship — or, for that matter, his boyish enthusiasm for a game that brought him so much joy and satisfaction.

A longer version of this excerpt can be read at floridahumanities.org/blog

Ray Arsenault’s must-read list

Gilbert King, The Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America

C. Vann Woodward, The Burden of Southern History

John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom

Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God

John Lewis, Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement


Gary R. Mormino, Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida

Jeff Klinkenberg, Alligators in B-Flat: Improbable Tales from the Files of Real Florida

Tananarive Due and Patricia Stephens Due, Freedom in the Family: A Mother-Daughter Memoir of the Fight for Civil Rights
Randy Wayne White spent 13 years working as a full-time fishing guide out of Tarpon Bay Marina on Sanibel. He was on the water 300 days a year and had more than 3,000 paid charters when it all came to a sudden halt.

It was 1987 and government regulators closed Tarpon Bay to power boats. White found himself suddenly out of work, with a wife and young kids to support. “So I wrote a novel,” he says. “It was a great, yet terrifying opportunity.”

And one that would change his life.

White had already written numerous freelance articles for national publications and cranked out 18 crime novels in his spare time, all of them quickie books-for-hire under pen names. “The longest any of these books took me to write — on an old Underwood typewriter — was four weeks, always at night before charters,” he recalls. “It was frustrating. I wanted to write books that would sell, but were also literate and literary.”

Three years after the marina closed, White published Sanibel Flats, featuring Doc Ford, a former government agent turned biologist living on Sanibel.

It was a hit. White would go on to write 24 more Doc Ford crime novels. His books have not only been New York Times bestsellers, but have also earned him a place among the elite of American crime fiction.
best-sellers but widely praised for their vivid descriptions of Florida. He has been called "a wonderful writer" by the writer Paul Theroux and "a fine storyteller" by Peter Matthiessen, the noted Florida author and fellow fishing guide. White has won the John D. MacDonald Award for Literary Excellence, and the Conch Republic Prize for Literature.

And now White is co-recipient of the Florida Humanities Council’s 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award. "It still hasn't hit me, the enormity of it," says White, 69. "My grandchildren will know it's a big deal. I'm very honored."

White grew up in Ohio and was working as a lineman and phone installer in the Midwest in the early 1970s when he decided he wanted to be a reporter. He started calling newspapers in the South. "No respectable newspaper would hire someone with no experience or credentials," he says. "I didn't go to college at all. I had nothing."

Somehow he talked his way into a job as a copy editor at the Fort Myers News-Press, even though he was (and still is, he says) a "terrible speller." He started writing feature stories for the paper in his spare time and soon was given his own column. He started working part-time as a fishing guide and eventually quit the newspaper to be a guide full time.

He kept writing, though, and one day submitted an unsolicited story to Outside magazine about a canoe trip from Pine Island to Key West. The story was rejected, but the editor liked it enough to ask him to write about "backcountry Florida, the Everglades to the Keys." He would go on to become a contributing editor for Outside.

His magazine writing has taken him all over the world, but Florida remains a source of endless fascination. "Florida is just rich and alive," White says. "I love roaming the backcountry areas of Florida and trying to record that original Florida voice …. If I lived to be 300 I would never run out of ideas."

White started writing while living in an old house on Pine Island, just north of Sanibel, on land where Calusa Indians once lived, "a remote place with an uninterrupted sense of history that reaches back thousands of years...I would remind myself that in that precise intersection people have been telling stories for at least 4,000 years," he says.

He still owns the house and visits often, but his success

continued on Page 37

Excerpt from:

Hunter’s Moon

By Randy Wayne White

Fog isn’t mentioned in guidebooks about sunny Florida because tourists are seldom on the water at midnight, when a Caribbean low mingles with cool Gulf air. The cloud now settling was as dense as any I’d seen. Gray whirlpools of vapor descended, condensed, then re-formed as moonlit veils. Water droplets created curtains of pearls, so visibility fluctuated. Each drifting cloud added to the illusion that the island was moving, not me, not the fog. Ligarto [Key] appeared to be a galleon adrift, floating on a random course and gaining speed. I had to start paddling soon if I hoped to keep up.

I did.

Too long, cautious strokes. Paddled so quietly I could hear water dripping from foliage, drops heavy as Gulf Stream rain. The reason I didn’t want to make noise was because I knew a security team was guarding the island. Pros, the best in the world. They would be carrying rocket launchers, exotic weapons systems, electronic gizmos designed to debilitate or kill, no telling what else. Probably five or six men and women, all bored—a little pissed-off, too—forced to work on a favorite adult party night: Halloween.

A dangerous combination for any misguided dimwit foolish enough to attempt to breach island security.

Dangerous for me, the occasional misguided dimwit.

Every few strokes, I paused. In fog, there is the illusion that sound is muted. In fact, fog conducts sound more efficiently than air. If there was a boat patrolling the area, I would’ve heard it. Instead, I heard only an outboard motor far away—someone run aground, judging from the seesaw whine. I could also hear the turbo whistle of a jetliner settling into its landing approach, as invisible from sea level as I was invisible to passengers above.

A longer version of this excerpt can be read at floridahumanities.org/blog

Randi Wayne White’s must-read list

Peter Matthiessen, Far Tortuga
Archie Carr, The Windward Road
Richard Powell, I Take This Land
H.M. Tomlinson, The Sea and the Jungle
Thomas McGuane, Ninety-two in the Shade
Lauren Totch Brown, Totch, A Life in the Everglades

FLORIDAHUMANITIES.ORG SUMMER 2019 FORUM 17

PHOTO BY CARLENE BRENNAN, 1980S.
Zhaedyn Hodge Sigars paced the school hallway.

_I am the Smoke King..._

Classmates stared at him as they headed to their lockers.

_I am black!_

But Zhaedyn continued, unfazed. “People asked me, ‘Are you all right?’” he recalls. “Are you going insane?”

Perhaps it was insane to believe that a student from an inner-city school could win top honors in a statewide poetry recitation contest. But that’s exactly what happened in March, when Zhaedyn, a junior at Tampa’s Howard W. Blake High School of the Arts, was declared the statewide winner of Florida’s Poetry Out Loud contest.

Started in 2005, Poetry Out Loud is a national competition that invites high school students to memorize and perform poems they select from an extensive online catalog of works by historical and contemporary poets. The contest is administered through a partnership of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Poetry Foundation and state arts agencies, including the Florida Humanities Council. During the most recent school year, more than 275,000 students participated in Poetry Out Loud nationwide, including 4,856 in Florida.

Participants are judged on five criteria — physical presence, voice and articulation, dramatic appropriateness, evidence of understanding and overall performance — first by their peers or adult volunteers in a classroom competition, then schoolwide, then regionally and eventually statewide. At the March 2 Florida-wide competition at USF St. Petersburg, the judges included college-level creative writing professors and Florida Poet Laureate Peter Meinke.

So was Zhaedyn nervous? “Very,” admits the soft-spoken 16-year-old. But performing gives Zhaedyn confidence, and he took to the ballroom stage round after round, bellowing poems chosen for him by his classmates and Blake’s director of creative writing, Casey Curry:

_Discrimination_ by Kenneth Rexroth,
_The Paradox_ by Paul Laurence Dunbar and the crowd favorite, _The Song of the Smoke_ by the late African-American activist and educator W.E.B. Du Bois.

“That particular poem fits — we call him Z — it fits because Du Bois was so regal,” Curry says. “I thought he was regal and confident and sure of himself and his place in the world as an African-American male.”

Just like Z.

Zhaedyn’s first place in the world was Aurora, Colorado. During middle school, he moved to Florida to live with his father and stepmother while studying his original passion, dance, at Tampa’s Orange Grove Middle Magnet School of the Arts.

“Since Orange Grove and Blake were essentially sister schools, I was recruited for the dance program [at Blake] and really looked forward to extending my stay in Florida,” he says. “Later in my freshman year, I decided to make the switch to creative writing to focus on my poetry.”

When a teacher introduced the Poetry Out Loud competition in one of Zhaedyn’s classes, “I saw it as a way to enhance my own poetry,” he says.

It was dance that taught Zhaedyn the value of “muscle memory” — a technique that came in handy as he paced the school hallway memorizing his verses for Poetry Out Loud.

In the end, Zhaedyn wasn’t the only one moved by his poetry recitation.

In the ballroom, when the judges declared him Florida’s Poetry Out Loud champion, the usually stoic Curry cried. “Glasses off, and everything,” Zhaedyn notes with a laugh.

Curry’s tears had been a long time coming. She first introduced the Poetry Out Loud competition to Blake High School, a magnet school, more than a decade ago, and the closest Blake had come to winning was third place in 2014.

“It was a lesson in perseverance, that you just don’t give up,” Curry says. Inner-city schools like Blake are often
Always Apply Pressure to Pain

By Zhaedyn Hodge Sigars

“It hurts to love”
That is the most vital lesson I have learned thus far
A statement that is slowly withering me away,
Living through each pump of my disseminating blood.
Beating my heart day by day,
It took far too long for me to see what my right hand loved to do so well.
It enjoyed killing me.
Gouging this organ out,
My veins palpitate
When the thumb and index apply a great amount of pressure
Squeezing and thrashing what pounds my interior
Until it no longer causes me to quiver with hope and tremble with fear
Yes,
I wish that what terrifies me most won’t come into fruition
My intuition warns me that I’ll lose everything I’ve ever held a deep affection for
Soul ties are slashed,
passion red in my eyes,
trauma makes my head throb,
don’t rob me of my sensitivity.
Fast rates, then it flat lines
I love when blood pours,
I love when compassion is reciprocated
Love when aches aid attacks,
(depleting me of my life until I am defeated)
But love has nothing to do with it when you don’t love yourself
For sympathy reveals the character held prisoner within.
How can you be so attached
to the person that harms those whom you are fond with?
Drunken with rage,
oxogen begins to escape my lungs as carbon fills me until I die
The gore that spouts from my reminiscent scars
that came from sentiments is shockingly endearing
Harmful shots sent to mental out of bad habit
Only lead to emotion wreaking havoc on each chamber
I’m chained to the one I hate most.
Pleading him to allow me to gift you the love you need,
yet his heart holds no empathy
Pathetic and unapologetic he is,
red rubies shine as roses stem from his abdomen
I attempt to pry open his chest
so I may take of this corrupted core and shatter it
and stain flesh with its darkness.
Yet,
this only gave him power over me
as those I fought so hard for in order for them to receive
what they deserve race away from my fingertips
Who would want to sit and mend a broken heart?
Scared that what is now being repaired might slip out of their hands,
they don’t trust themselves with a piece vital to me.
Straining to protect this kinship,
each lineage experiences the hurt from loving one another.
Through and through again,
I injure those closest to my chest due to the worst qualities manifesting into a unlovable side of me.
Yet, I find my palms
Wounded
From picking exterior beauty and determining who is worthy of my affection,
my petals,
my heart,
my sable soul
As I learn a greater lesson.
“Every Rose has its thorns”
Dear FORUM Reader—help support the Florida Humanities Council!

The Florida Humanities Council (FHC) has been investing millions of dollars back into communities across Florida since our inception four decades ago. Through the lens of the humanities—history, literature, philosophy, anthropology, ethics and art—FHC supports thought-provoking and meaningful public programs that explore Florida’s rich cultural landscape and bring them to citizens from the Panhandle to the Keys.

Becoming a member of the FHC will help sustain our work. Annual memberships provide a critical base of funding for our day-to-day activities, including the Museum on Main Street programs, Speaker Series, Florida Stories walking tours and our award-winning FORUM magazine.

If this is your first time picking up FORUM magazine, or if you are an avid reader, we ask that you help support FHC by making a donation and becoming a member. If you are already a member, please consider renewing your annual membership to the Florida Humanities Council. Memberships start as low as $25. You can give securely at FloridaHumanities.org/membership or use the envelope attached in the centerfold of this issue.

For a limited time, all new and renewing members at the $125 level and higher can choose to receive this year's premium, Big Cypress Swamp: The Western Everglades by Clyde Butcher. This beautiful book features the stories, adventures and history behind Clyde Butcher’s renowned black and white photos of Florida.

Thank you for supporting the Florida Humanities Council!
Museum on Main Street is a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and the Florida Humanities Council to bring traveling exhibitions and engaging public programs to small towns across our state. With its impassioned focus on local history, education and community redevelopment, Museum on Main Street is one of the Smithsonian’s most inspirational and enduring outreach programs.

Statewide and local sponsors are being sought now for the following exhibitions:

**American Democracy: A Giant Leap of Faith**
March 2020 – January 2021

**Crossroads: Change in Rural America**
August 2020 – June 2021

**Water/Ways**
June 2021 – April 2022

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pputman@flahum.org
www.floridahumanities.org/moms
Florida’s 500 years of literary tradition begins with tales of adventure and exploration

By Thomas Hallock

Not much survives at the childhood home of Florida native and renaissance man James Weldon Johnson. A sign marks the site, previously misidentified. Interstate 95 has carved up LaVilla, the once thriving Jacksonville neighborhood that nurtured his genius. The Stanton School, where Johnson attended and served as principal from 1894–1902, was replaced by a brick structure after a 1901 fire, and is blocked today by a locked fence and snarl of one-way streets.

Newspaper clippings at the city’s Historical Society honor Johnson as “Forgotten No Longer” (1972), with “Recognition Belated” (1993). Born in 1871, the Bahamian-American stands as a giant of the Harlem Renaissance. Diplomat, activist and scholar, Johnson produced a staggeringly diverse body of literary work. Johnson’s songwriting credits include the lyrics to “Lift Every Voice and Sing” (music by his brother Rosamond), regarded by the NAACP as the Negro National Anthem. From a family of ministers, he set several sermons to verse in the breathtaking collection God’s Trombones, and his picaresque novel Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man grounds 20th century African-American literature.

Born June 17, 1871, in Jacksonville, James Weldon Johnson was a teacher, poet, essayist, social activist, diplomat, and songwriter. He was the first African American admitted to the Florida Bar and served as the first African American General Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) from 1920–1930.
Johnson does not leap immediately to mind, however, as a Florida writer. Although the product of Jacksonville’s vibrant black community, he said he was “born to be a New Yorker,“ and his horizons extended far beyond the Sunshine State. He did not write about manatees or citrus. But Johnson captures another side of our state’s literature: mobility. From the first Spanish chronicles to the 20th century and beyond, Florida’s literature tells the story of authors passing through, wandering and getting lost, wrecked by storms. Moving in, moving out, moving on.

Surprisingly to some, Florida claims the longest literary legacy of the 50 United States, starting in 1528 with Pánfilo de Narváez’s landing off Tampa Bay. Seeking treasure, Narváez and his army met only shipwreck and privation. Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca recorded the disastrous expedition in a 1542 chronicle, sometimes called the Naufragios, which Colombian Nobel Laureate in Literature Gabriel García Márquez marked as the start of Latin American fiction.

Cabeza de Vaca’s fabulous tale set the stage for a second masterpiece, a history of the Hernando de Soto expedition titled La Florida, by the mestizo author El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. Born in Cuzco to a conquistador and an Incan princess, El Inca Garcilaso lived his adult life in Spain. He never stepped foot in Florida, instead mixing together other sources (including the reports of veterans from de Soto’s North American disaster) and reflecting back upon his own childhood in Peru.

**A PLACE OF PASSAGE**

Modern readers who trace de Soto’s route through El Inca Garcilaso will invariably lose their way. Set on a landscape imagined rather than real, La Florida del Inca more captures the complexities of translation. The author El Inca Garcilaso, himself between languages, relates the story of Juan Ortiz, a castaway from the Narváez mess. Juan Ortiz serves as an early parable of the immigrant experience. After a dramatic rescue by the chief’s daughter, Princess Ulele or Hirrihigua, he lives among the natives off Tampa Bay. Rediscovered by his countrymen in 1539, the adopted Spaniard can barely pronounce the city of his birth: “Xivilla, Xivilla,” he signs. The mispronounced words lead El Inca Garcilaso to speculation upon his own linguistic loss; with no person in Spain “with whom I may speak my mother tongue” of Quechua, he poignantly explains, “I cannot construe a sentence.”

Florida’s early literature clicks into focus when we think of it as lost in translation. Because Florida lacked a strong cultural center, no Harvard College or Ben Franklin’s printing press, the stories flicker on a projector screen, located somewhere else.

A tangled up document like Juan de Paiva’s “Ball Game Manuscript,” from the Apalachee Mission San Luis outside present-day Tallahassee, nestles native cosmology into colonial containers like a set of mismatched Russian dolls. An Apalachee (identified by his Spanish name as Juan Mendoza) recounts the story of Nicoguadca, or “Lightning-Flash,” who moves with supernatural athletic ability. Paiva packs the mythology and commentary on the hard-hitting “chunky,” or “ball game” into a report to his superior,
recording the custom so it could be eradicated. Today’s readers must sift through the biases, which are part and parcel of translation, to recover traditions otherwise lost.

Florida’s literary landscapes spin like a top between the Gulf Stream on one side and Loop Current on the other, jumping to unexpected directions. The Quaker Jonathan Dickinson, for whom the Southeast Florida state park is named, washes up near Jupiter Inlet after a devastating 1696 storm. Dickinson’s early captivity narrative *God’s Protecting Providence* tells the story of how his shipwrecked party — including Dickinson’s wife, his 6-month-old son, 10 slaves, and the story’s martyr, an elderly Robert Barrow — wander up the chilly Atlantic coast for two months. To pass freely by the natives, the English deny their nationality – the natives ask “Nickaleer, Nickaleer?” (presumably a corruption of “Inglaterra” or England). Eventually they are held by the Ais people, before winding up in Spanish St. Augustine, never understanding the significance of their own interactions.

Florida is the place sailors pass by, or where they wash up, marking trade routes between Europe and other colonies, lost amid the skeins of a twisted, upside-down world.

**FLORIDA AS PARADISE … IN MEMORY**

Two generations after Dickinson, the Philadelphia Quaker William Bartram homesteaded on the St. Johns River, clearing a plantation with six enslaved Africans. Bartram failed as a planter, and he does not mention the site in his celebrated *Travels* (1791). The first chronicer of Florida as Paradise was miserable as a resident. Bartram (whose writings continue to draw tourists to the river and today’s Bartram Trail) lived in a “disagreeably hot,” leaky hovel, wrecking his health. His glowing account of the St. Johns, with its “homage and adoration” of Florida’s natural beauty, came only after the author had returned home, to Philadelphia.

The “Florida” in early literature unfolds between physical setting and where the stories got published. François-René de Chateaubriand read Bartram’s *Travels* and set his *Atala* on some semblance of the naturalist’s great Alachua Savannah, today’s Paynes Prairie State Preserve just outside Gainesville.

John Howison’s romantic anti-slavery tale, *The Florida Pirate*, recounts the fortunes of Manuel, a black seaman coasting the Straits of Florida. The Seminole Wars produced several women’s captivity narratives, including Mary Godfrey’s *Authentic Narrative of Seminole War* (1836). Testing credibility, Godfrey’s overlooked history recounts her family’s rescue by a solitary maroon (or free black) from marauding natives. Verse responses to the Seminole Wars varied, depending upon how the United States was faring. Where earlier poems paid tribute to the officers who died in buggy swamps, later authors eulogized the feared Osceola. Walt Whitman’s 1890 poem “Osceola” describes the hero’s decline with fated resignation:

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WHEN his hour for death had come,
He slowly rais’d himself from the bed on the floor,
Drew on his war-dress, shirt, leggings, and girdled the belt around his waist,
Call’d for vermilion paint...
```

This celebration of a feared opponent was possible only after the wars had ended.

Throughout the 19th century, Florida literature would capture a world in motion. Great authors who visited Florida often came up short in their work; lesser-known writers, paradoxically, issued masterpieces. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote forgettable poems during a St. Augustine sojourn, while the lesser light Thomas Wentworth Higginson penned one of our state’s most gripping river adventures. The white colonel of a
Florida remains a place (following Lanier) for us to "interpret." Impressions of Florida vary person to person, depending upon the position of one’s chair. Lanier’s lyrical passage presents the Ocklawaha as much a physical site as an embodied calculus of perspective and recollection.

Florida literature makes sense as a story of transit. Few writers embody the state’s heritage more than Zora Neale Hurston — novelist, folklorist, and Florida traveler.

Hurston’s signature novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) tells a foundational story, the founding of the black community of Eatonville, where she grew up, just outside Orlando. But the characters in her beloved story — like Hurston herself — also move around.

Bookending Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, Hurston’s tale follows the main character Janie, who leaves her first husband Logan Killicks to go with Joe Starks, who becomes Eatonville’s first mayor. Scenes from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* draw heavily from the author’s research as a folklorist, which took her from New York City to Haiti.

Not one to settle as a small-town politician’s wife, Janie leaves Joe Starks and slips off with the rolling stone known as Tea Cake, who secrets her to the bustling railroad town of Jacksonville, and down to Lake Okeechobee. Then a storm (based on the Hurricane of 1928) wakes up “old Okeechobee” and the people disperse. Tea Cake dies during their flight and Janie returns home, unashamed.

By the mid-20th century both the literary and physical landscape of Florida shifts. People flock to the Sunshine State after World War II; writers follow suit. Some, like Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, find a niche in unincorporated communities like central Florida’s Cross Creek. Ernest Hemingway’s Key West retreat, inhabited on and off until his death in 1961, draws boatloads of tourists today. Literary vagabond Jack Kerouac, restless from the fame of *On the Road*, drank himself to death in his St. Petersburg block home.

Florida’s literature captures a wandering bent. From beginnings through the 20th century, authors chase down a restless dream. They translate the exotic, finding wonder along the way. Some authors establish roots. Many more describe a place far off, like frequent visitor, poet Wallace Stevens, who finds in Key West “the end of the imagination.” Then winter turns to spring up North, or an initial promises fall to come. And the writers move on, like Hurston’s Janie, sliding further down the road.
Meet the winners of the Florida Book Awards

Searching for an inspiring read? A guide to some of the state’s top authors of 2018 — and a look inside their winning offerings

By Jon Wilson

You will find here a selection of some of the best Florida books published in 2018. The authors include longtime writers whose names may be familiar, and others whose winning works are first novels.

All these written-word artists are dedicated to their craft, as you will see and sense when you read their books. The work of these 28 award-winning authors, chosen from 212 books in 10 categories, includes history, adventure novels, mysteries, fiction and nonfiction for children, essay collections, poetry, visual arts, and Spanish-language books. The winners primarily come from Florida.

Established in 2006, the Florida Book Awards honor literature by Florida authors and books about Florida published during the previous year. Authors must be Florida residents, except in the nonfiction and visual arts categories, in which the subject matter must focus on Florida.

“The Florida Book Awards recognizes and celebrates the master storytellers of Florida’s literary communities,” says Jennie McKnight, executive director of the Florida Book Awards for Florida State University Libraries, which coordinates the program. “As a proud Florida tradition, the awards continue to acknowledge the importance of honoring great writers as part of our commitment to the support of the humanities.”

The program’s co-sponsors include the Florida Center for the Book, the State Library and Archives of Florida, the Florida Historical Society, the Florida Humanities Council, the Florida Literary Arts Coalition, the Florida Library Association, Just Read! Florida, the Florida Association for Media in Education, the Center for Literature and Theatre at Miami Dade College, Friends of the Florida State University Libraries, the Florida Writers Association, and the Florida Chapter of the Mystery Writers of America.

Youth Literature

Silvia Lopez

Just Right Family: An Adoption Story

Gwen P. Reichert Gold Medal

As a child, Silvia Lopez read fairy tales and superhero comics. Later, she discovered the Nancy Drew and Trixie Belden mysteries. She continued perusing children’s lit when she became a librarian. Finally she began writing it.

“I call a good children’s book a ‘microcosm of the human experience,’ Lopez tells Albert Whitman and Co., her publisher. “Those are big words. They only mean that everything we feel as human beings — grief, joy, jealousy, courage, the list is endless — can be found in the simplest stories.”

Just Right Family: An Adoption Story tells the story of Meili, a 6-year-old girl from China adopted by an interracial family. She is upset when her parents tell her they are going to adopt a baby from Haiti. But Meili learns the joy of being a big sister and grows as a person. The 2010 earthquake in Haiti provided inspiration for Lopez. A native of Cuba who came to the United States as a refugee, she lives in Miami.
Margaret Cardillo

*Just Being Jackie*

*Silver Medal*

Margaret Cardillo won the 2011 gold medal for *Just Being Audrey*, a sweet look at the life of film star Audrey Hepburn.

She reprises her approach with *Just Being Jackie*, which is about the remarkable life of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, the elegant former first lady.

“When my first book about Audrey Hepburn was so well received, I wanted to follow it up with an equally strong female role model,” Cardillo tells FORUM. “As I learned more about Jackie Kennedy Onassis and her strength, perseverance, and style, I knew I found the right person.

“Jackie is iconic for a reason. She was incredibly smart, fiercely independent, and she was strong when her family and her country needed her most. Her love of reading really resonated with me and has resonated with every classroom I’ve visited. She is a great symbol of elegance, style, and sophistication who knows the importance of a good book: all great messages for our young readers.”

A Florida native, Cardillo won an Emmy in the student category for her film *Posthumous*, a young girl’s coming-of-age story set in the Florida swamps.

Cardillo lives with her family in Miami.

Rob Sanders

*Peaceful Fights for Equal Rights*

*Bronze Medal*

A gold medal winner last year, Rob Sanders returns with his book about standing up for what is right. *Peaceful Fights for Equal Rights* has a message to youngsters: One person can make a difference.

Sanders worked for 15 years in children’s religious educational publishing as a writer, educational consultant, editor, editorial manager, and product designer.

In 2006, he moved to Florida and became an elementary classroom teacher. He drew inspiration from his students and eventually decided to try creating his own work.

“When I began to write nonfiction, those two worlds came together like never before. My fourth-grade students are always concerned with fairness and will let me know right away if something is not fair or is inequitable,” Sanders tells FORUM.

“To me, the fair-play aspect of childhood is the beginning of the development of a concern for social justice and that concern has led me to explore equality, pride, hope, justice, and equity in my writing.”

Sanders lives in Brandon where he teaches at Mintz Elementary School.

Ryan Calejo

*Charlie Hernández and the League of Shadows*

*Gold Medal*

Charlie, the novel’s protagonist, loves his Latin American heritage and its magical tales. Then he starts to experience startling sensations that seem to take him into another dimension. Mythical characters walk straight out of the pages of Hispanic folklore.

*Charlie Hernández and the League of Shadows* is Ryan Calejo’s first novel. Charlie finds himself caught up in an apocalyptic battle between La Liga, a society sworn to protect the land of the living, and La Mano Negra, a cabal of evil spirits determined to rule mankind.

His girlfriend and a wise grandmother help him navigate a world of witches, monsters, and things that go bump in the night.

“I was fortunate enough to have two grandmothers who loved to share with me the myths and legends they’d grown up listening to,” Calejo tells FORUM. “I wanted to honor them by writing a book that blended some of those wonderful tales.”

Born and raised in south Florida, Calejo graduated summa cum laude from the University of Miami. The Miami resident teaches swimming to elementary school students, chess to middle school students, and writing to high school students.

To read excerpts from many of the winning books, please visit floridahumanities.org/blogs
Jennifer Swanson

*Astronaut-Aquanaut: How Space Science and Sea Science Interact*

*Silver Medal*

Jennifer Swanson has merged two worlds — one of science, the other of writing. With that happy combination, she has produced more than 25 fiction and nonfiction books for children.

She started writing at age 5 when she wrote and illustrated books for her kindergarten class. She began a science club in her garage at age 7.

*Astronaut-Aquanaut* delves into the challenging realms of space and deep sea, and their explorers’ world-changing discoveries.

“It was so amazing to work on this book. I got to speak to actual astronauts and aquanauts. It was tons of fun to write,” Swanson told KitLit TV.

Astronaut Kathryn Sullivan and aquanaut Fabien Cousteau wrote the book’s forewords. “Aquanauts and astronauts share the same passion — to set off on a quest to learn more and to better ourselves,” wrote Cousteau, the grandson of Jacques Cousteau, an explorer and innovative scientist.

Teachers’ organizations and school librarians’ groups have honored Swanson for her work, and the author regularly visits schools to talk about her favorite subjects.

She lives in Jacksonville.

Dawn Davies

*Mothers of Sparta*

*Gold Medal*

Like many writers, Dawn Davies began practicing her craft “when I was a little kid,” as she puts it. She experimented with styles such as those found in Reader’s Digest’s “Life in These United States” feature. She tried writing comedy skits for radio, which she produced on a cassette player in her bedroom.

She also spent lots of time with adults in interesting places.

Kevin Begos

*Tasting the Past: The Science of Flavor and the Search for the Origins of Wine*

*Silver Medal*

“I write about energy, science, wine, the environment, and everyday people,” says Kevin Begos on his website. He is a much-decorated, widely traveled journalist who had a stint at the Tampa Tribune.

Perhaps his most fortuitous experience involved a chance encounter with an esoteric Middle Eastern red wine.

“I had spent the day reporting about medicine in the Arabic world. I was exhausted — and really wanted a drink! In the minibar was this little bottle from Cremisan Winery and Monastery, which is located between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. It was 2008. Who knew monks were still making wine? Anyway, it was delicious,” Begos says.

The experience sent him on a 10-year journey to find the origins of wine in general.

*Tasting the Past* offers much of what he discovered on the trip: for example, a world of forgotten grapes, a scientist who wants to code the DNA of every wine grape in the world, and a researcher trying to figure out what wines Caesar and Cleopatra enjoyed.

Begos lives in Apalachicola.
Luis Martínez-Fernández

Key to the New World: A History of Early Colonial Cuba
Bronze Medal

Luis Martínez-Fernández is recognized as one of the most prolific and influential scholars in the field of Caribbean Studies.

Besides Key to the New World, his books include Fighting Slavery in the Caribbean and Revolutionary Cuba: A History, widely acclaimed as the most comprehensive and systematic study on the subject.

In that book, Martínez-Fernández says he experienced a breakthrough. “I started to see myself both as an author of serious history books and a writer who cared about the quality and aesthetics of his prose,” he says.

Internationally famous Cuban writer Antonio Benítez-Rojo praised Martínez-Fernández: “He has the rare virtue of reconciling both the analytical incisiveness of a mature historian and the sweeping breadth of an impassioned storyteller.”

Martínez-Fernández says he applied a similar combination of history and literature in Key to the New World.

The University of Central Florida history professor, who has also written numerous articles, contributed to anthologies, and edited books, lives in Orlando.

Kimberly Lojewski

Worm Fiddling Nocturne in the Key of a Broken Heart
Gold Medal

Can a worm truly fiddle a nocturne? And if so, can it do so in the key of a broken heart? As Orlando Weekly notes, readers will have to roll with the weird in Kimberly Lojewski’s debut story collection.

Lojewski began her imaginative approach when she was 13 years old, writing then, for example, about a girl named Dew Rain who runs off to join a Renaissance festival, and another girl who fell through a magic portal to Ireland and meets friendly leprechauns.

“Writing is always finding that mix between the familiar and the unfamiliar,” Lojewski tells the Rumpus Book Club.

“That’s the way I try to do it,” she says. “The familiar element makes stories relatable to us. I always think of fairy tales and folk tales. Those same tropes being told and retold in different ways, but changed by different storytellers in order to make them their own. That’s how this collection was for me. I didn’t go crazy with ‘plot.’”

Lojewski lives in Ocala. She got her start telling stories on weekend camping trips in the Everglades with her family.

Ron Cooper

All My Sins Remembered
Silver Medal

Ron Cooper, besides being a prolific writer, is an amateur bluegrass musician. The mandolin specialist says he challenges anyone to play and sing worse than he does.

The philosophy professor at the College of Central Florida has written three other novels and published short stories, poetry, essays, and reviews.

His first book was a study titled Heidegger and Whitehead: A Phenomenological Examination into the Intelligibility of Experience. Cooper jokes that book “was highly praised by both its readers.”

In All My Sins Remembered, a deputy sheriff tries to solve a murder in a national forest while struggling with heavy drinking, depression, suicidal thoughts, and the recent murder of his wife. In addition, a Cat 5 hurricane approaches Florida, someone is killing bears in the forest (where a vagabond cult squats), and the deputy tries to track down his runaway daughter.

Cooper was born in the South Carolina low country, moving to Florida in 1988. He lives in Ocala with wife, Sandra, and their three children.
Gale Massey
*The Girl from Blind River*
Bronze Medal

*The Girl from Blind River* is Gale Massey’s first novel. She says it took her several years to write and did not come easily.

“I’d given up on a novel I’d been working on for several years. I was empty and feeling very down about it,” Massey tells book reviewer Sam Ali. “I had the feeling that I’d run through all my good options and was at a dead end with my writing. This is how my main character Jamie Elders starts out in the book.”

Set in rural New York, the coming-of-age story revolves around family dysfunction, illegal gambling, and small-town corruption. Jamie feels empty and depressed. But she has one big thing going for her: poker.

“Jamie is an impoverished girl with no options other than mad poker skills,” Massey says.

Massey has received scholarships and fellowships at The Sewanee Writers Conference and the Eckerd College conference Writers in Paradise. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, which honors small presses and new authors. She lives in St. Petersburg with her family.

Jim Ross
*In Season: Stories of Discovery, Loss, Home, and Places in Between*
Silver Medal

Jutting toward the Caribbean, geographically the most Southern of the lower 48 states, Florida has always projected an air of mystery. Just what is our state all about? *In Season* offers some answers.

Its collection of 23 essays explores some very human experience through a Florida lens. Among the writers are Pulitzer Prize winner Rick Bragg, highly decorated author Lauren Groff, widely read newspaper columnist Bill Maxwell, and multicultural writer Chantel Acevedo, to name a few.

“Gathering the essays for this collection was a joy. Florida isn’t just a setting in these essays; it’s a character,” Jim Ross, the editor of *In Season*, tells FORUM.

Ross, who is managing editor of the *Ocala Star-Banner*, said all but two of the essays in the book were previously published in magazines or literary journals.

“Most of those publications have relatively small audiences. I hope readers of *In Season* will be inspired to explore those publications. There is so much good essay writing out there, but many of the places publishing that work aren’t well known,” Ross told FORUM.

His essays have been published in several literary journals, and two of those pieces have been listed as notable essays in the annual *Best American Essays* series.

Ross lives in Ocala with his wife and three children.
Bruce Horovitz

**Gamble Rogers: A Troubadour’s Life**

*Bronze Medal*

Gamble Rogers played and sang stories about real Florida. His work hearkened to a time before commercialization made the state a commodity. He died a hero trying to save a drowning man in the Atlantic Ocean surf — when he himself could not swim because of a bad back.

Despite his popularity, Rogers has remained virtually unknown outside of folk music circles.

**Gamble Rogers: A Troubadour’s Life** is the first biography of Rogers and is Bruce Horovitz’s first book.

“What I learned from the more than 50 interviews and countless hours of research over a three-year period is that Gamble Rogers was more than just a brilliant performer and entertainer,” Horovitz tells *FORUM*.

“He was a humble humanitarian who had a unique ability to connect with people regardless of their social standing. I have been amazed at the number of folks who have approached me at book signings about a personal interaction they had with Gamble Rogers. He had that kind of lasting impact on those he encountered.”

A musician himself, the former Jacksonville Journal reporter plays in two bands. He lives in Jacksonville.

**POETRY**

Erica Dawson

**When Rap Spoke Straight to God**

*Gold Medal*

Erica Dawson’s poetry has been described as intense, elevated, saucy, dazzling, and tender, to just name a few of the applausive adjectives critics have applied to her work.

A book-length poem, *When Rap Spoke Straight to God* is Dawson’s third poetry volume. Major awards came to all three, and Dawson has been described as a “rock star” among the poets of New Formalism, an American poetry movement that emphasizes a return to meter and rhyme.

This year’s winning book “was inspired by, and written in response to, my almost nine years in Tampa — the good and the bad. I am incredibly honored to receive this recognition. It means the world to me;” Dawson told the *Tampa Bay Times*.

Dawson earned her bachelor’s degree from Johns Hopkins University, her master of fine arts from Ohio State, and her Ph.D. from the University of Cincinnati. She directs the University of Tampa’s Master of Fine Arts program in creative writing. Dawson grew up in Maryland and lives in Tampa with her Shih Tzu, Stella.

D.M. Aderibigbe

**How the End First Showed**

*Silver Medal*

Florida State University doctoral student D.M. Aderibigbe writes about multigenerational family violence in his first full-length poetry collection. It began with two poems Aderibigbe published in the journal *B O D Y* in 2013. They spoke to domestic abuse, hunger, and a son’s anger toward his runaway father.

“ Toxic masculinity is my history,” the native of Lagos, Nigeria, told *The Rumpus*, an online literary magazine.

Aderibigbe explains further:

“I lived in a kind of house known as ‘face me I face you.’ It’s a bungalow with rows of tiny rooms on either side of a passage. The bungalow housed twenty rooms in total — ten on either side. So privacy was foreign. There was hardly any morning that a woman’s bruised voice wouldn’t rise before the sun. If it wasn’t my mother (whenever my father made his yearly cameo in our life), then it would be the woman in the next room or the one in the next.”

*How the End First Showed* won the Brittingham Prize in Poetry from University of Wisconsin Press. Aderibigbe lives in Tallahassee.
**Erin Hoover**

*Barnburner*  
*Bronze Medal*

Erin Hoover contemplated law school and her father encouraged her to enter politics. New York University accepted her to a screenwriting program and she had a chance to attend an art school.

But she wanted something different.  
“I wanted to make a mark, to make a contribution, to create something I would be proud of, and poetry was a way for me to do that,” Hoover told Tallahassee Magazine.  
“I have never lost my passion for poetry. I would keep writing it, even if no one told me it was any good.”

A third-generation native of Pennsylvania, Hoover saw drugs and a dying factory damage her rural hometown. The experience shows up thematically in some of her work that looks at addiction and the ills of capitalism.  
*Barnburner* was the winner of Elixir Press’ Antivenom Poetry Award in 2017.

Hoover earned a doctorate in poetry at Florida State University and worked for a time as a writer at Rowland Publishing before accepting a teaching position at FSU. She lives in Tallahassee.

**Michael Jordan**

*The Company of Demons*  
*Gold Medal*

*The Company of Demons* is Michael Jordan’s first book. He worked for years as an attorney in Cleveland, Ohio, and was consistently named to the Best Lawyers in America list. Jordan wrote a lot as a lawyer, but was able to focus on learning the craft when he retired — and he says he has no regrets about the decision to concentrate on writing.

In *Demons*, a friend’s brutal murder stuns lawyer John Coleman and sends shock waves through Cleveland. Elements of the story include a vicious biker gang, an ex-cop with a shadowy past, romance outside a troubled marriage, and the dead man’s drug addicted son.

“The technique of the killing recalls memories of the Torso Murderer, who dismembered at least twelve people decades ago and then vanished — eluding even legendary crime fighter Eliot Ness,” Jordan says in the book’s promo video.  
An adventurer, Jordan has climbed Mount Fuji, swum in the Devil’s Pool near Victoria Falls, and trekked a glacier in Patagonia.  
He and his wife, soft pastel artist Linda Gross Brown, live on Longboat Key.

**Veronica H. Hart**

*The Knife*  
*Silver Medal*

Veronica H. Hart has lived a peripatetic life. Born in Manhattan, she attended 21 schools before graduating from high school in Miami. She traveled and lived abroad for many years, immersing herself in the culture of other countries. She was fluent in Farsi and Russian, and she still has a fair understanding of Spanish, French, and German.

She says that because of a tumultuous home life, one of her favorite pastimes was taking an evening walk and looking at the lighted windows of homes, imagining a family enjoying dinner or maybe watching television together.  
Perhaps reflecting her varied background, Hart’s writing is wide ranging. She deals with danger, deceit, love, and survival in various genres. Her settings range from the Civil War to the future. But all have a common theme: Strong women surviving against incredible odds.

*The Knife* is a paranormal murder mystery set in Carroll County, Georgia. A spirit haunts the abandoned school building where protagonist Anna Edgewater hopes to establish her design business.

Hart lives in Ormond Beach.
**Tom Lowe**  
*The Jefferson Prophecy*  
**Bronze Medal**

*The Jefferson Prophecy* is the second book in a thriller trilogy about former CIA codebreaker Paul Marcus. It won Lowe’s second Florida Book Awards medal; his first was for the 2016 book *A Murder of Crows*.

In *The Jefferson Prophecy*, an encrypted letter written by Thomas Jefferson is found hidden in the attic of an old farmhouse in Virginia. The information could offer a clue as to who killed a U.S. Special Forces soldier more than two centuries after the letter was written. Marcus must figure it out.

“I knew that I couldn’t change any event involving Jefferson in terms of what he did or didn’t do, as it was documented later in history,” Lowe tells *FORUM*.

“However, I knew that Jefferson was a gifted cryptographer, a man who’d invented the cipher-wheel used for decades after his death to send and receive covert messages. That’s where I whispered, ‘What if?’ and let the story begin.”

A scuba diver and sailor in his spare time, Lowe began his career as a novelist in 2009. He has written a dozen books.

Lowe and his wife, Keri, live in Windermere.

**SPANISH LANGUAGE**

**Hernán Vera Álvarez**  
*La Librería del Mal Salvaje*  
**Gold Medal**

As a young Argentine journalist, Hernán Vera Álvarez wrote music reviews for *El Nuevo Herald*, the *Miami Herald*’s Spanish language edition.

Then he started interviewing rock bands which, although they were popular in Latin America, were unknown in the states. He moved on to alternative film reviews — and finally to a novel. *La Librería del Mal Salvaje* is his first.

The title means *The Bookstore of the Wild Savage*. The story focuses on the characters who frequent the bookstore. They are described as extravagant, lovable, and somewhat cunning.

While not always a paradise, working in a bookstore pleased the Miami resident. Customers would come and ask for “the Argentine” to recommend a book, he says.

“That comforts you. You found … the work that was for that reader,” Alvarez told *Mundiario*, a global, Spanish-language newspaper specializing in analysis and opinion.

Álvarez was born in Buenos Aires in 1977. He studied Latin American and Spanish Literature at Florida International University, and he teaches creative writing at the Koubek Center at Miami Dade College.

**Glenda Galán**  
*Ventanas: Entrevistas de Glenda Galán a Escritores Latinoamericanos*  
**Silver Medal**

Glenda Galán’s interest in Latin American literature motivated her to discuss the subject with dozens of writers over the past five years. To do so, she traveled widely through the United States, Europe, and South and Central America.

The result is *Ventanas: Entrevistas de Glenda Galán a escritores latinoamericanos*, or *Windows: Glenda Galán Interviews Latin American Writers*.

The book offers insight into the lives of numerous writers, their work, and their ways of perceiving the world. Portraits of the writers by artist Jennie Santos are included.

Galán, a Dominican Republic native, has a master’s degree from the University of Barcelona.

She has worked as a journalist and producer in United States and is currently director of a Dominican Cultural Magazine in Miami, *Dominicana en Miami*. She has won an Academy of Arts and Science Emmy for excellence in writing and producing.

“I never imagined that, over the years, the magazine would count with thousands of readers who, every month, are interested in our publications, but this happened, and I celebrate!” Galán says in the magazine.

She lives in Miami.
Félix Anesio
Los Cuervos y la Infamia
Bronze Medal

Félix Anesio spent more than 25 years as a civil engineer in the Cuban province of Guantánamo, where he is from. A Miami resident now, his engineering projects remain a great source of pride.

But poetry, both reading and writing it, has given his life a different sense of fulfillment. Anesio says he often writes in the wee hours, even if he has to sacrifice sleep, because “the muses are around solicitously” at such times.

Los Cuervos y la Infamia — Crows and Infamy — explores who we are and who we want to be through our desires, anguish, and fears.

The crows symbolize bewilderment, horror and risk, Anesio says; the infamy represents the qualities that oppose honor, kindness, and nobility.

“My poetry would be failing if I focused it from happiness; I believe that anguish is an indispensable catalyst for my verses,” Anesio told El Nuevo Herald.

“Human history is basically a history of infamies: wars, conflicts, abuse of power, domestic and social violence, in short, a sea of things to regret, but my personal world is always saved by art, family, friends,” he says.

Sharon Koskoff
Murals of the Palm Beaches
Silver Medal

Miles of murals help define Palm Beach County. You can find them in museums and on public school buildings, commercial establishments, and landmarks.

Sharon Koskoff, artist, designer, educator, community organizer, and preservationist, has made sure the colorful paintings become a legacy of art, history, and cultural significance for future generations.

Her Murals of the Palm Beaches stamps a durable sense of place on Florida’s third-largest county.

Koskoff’s approach can be daring. In 2008, she and some young students created a mural using markers, rather than paint, on a wall of the Cornell Art Museum of Old School Square.

“As a professional artist, I am always ready to experiment, learn something new, discover ideas, collect art books, visit museums and collaborate with others. My life is about anything and everything to do with art! I eat, sleep and drink art,” Koskoff tells Delray Newspaper, which called her “relentless in filling empty spaces with beauty.”

Koskoff grew up in Brooklyn. She has lived in Delray Beach since 1985.

Richard Shieldhouse
William Morgan: Evolution of An Architect
Richard E. Rice Gold Medal

William Morgan is among the most widely recognized Florida architects. His definitive legacy is his fusing of ancient and modern architectural styles, and his early advocacy for the principles of green design.

Richard Shieldhouse’s Evolution of an Architect reflects Morgan’s life and the development of his design principles.

“Morgan is arguably one of the most interesting people to emerge from Jacksonville, and from Florida,” Shieldhouse tells WJCT television.

In Jacksonville, Morgan designed the police memorial building and the Museum of Science and History. He designed the Florida State Museum on the University of Florida campus in Gainesville, the Admiral’s Building and Submarine Base in Kings Bay, Georgia, and a structure in Atlantic Beach known as the “dune house” because it is built into the sand.

The dune house reflects Morgan’s interest in the architecture of America’s native people before the Europeans arrived.

Shieldhouse is a city planner, preservationist, and an expert on the economics of tourism. He is based in Jacksonville.
Andre Frattino

A Land Remembered, A Graphic Novel
Bronze Medal

Many Floridians love the late Patrick Smith’s A Land Remembered. The book traces Florida history from 1858 to 1968 through the experiences of the McIvey family. Andre Frattino tells the story in a new way that is true to Smith’s work in scope, intent, and title.

It took Frattino two years to produce A Land Remembered, A Graphic Novel. His first goal: Create a work equal in quality to Smith’s.

“I didn’t want anybody to read my graphic novel and feel like it was a cheaper version of the story,” Frattino tells District, the independent news website for the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). “You want to make sure you’re respectful to the source material, willing to bring your own imagination to it, and that’s a tricky place.”

Born and raised in north Florida, Frattino says he has spent his life creating stories with a Florida setting. He earned a bachelor’s degree in sequential art from SCAD and a master’s in art education from the University of Florida.

He lives in Savannah, where he balances his time writing, illustrating, educating future artists, and moonlighting as a ghost tour guide.

Tara Lynn Masih

My Real Name is Hanna
Gold Medal

Tara Lynn Masih was a single parent for years, but still was able to develop her writing chops.

“Making a living and raising my son was the priority. The short story and flash fiction fit that survival mode well,” she tells Necessary Fiction, an online literary magazine.

“I could always find time to write a fragment or a flash story during naps or at night.”

Flash fiction is a challenging genre in which stories are just a few hundred words long. But Masih kept the idea of a novel in the back of her mind, and My Real Name is Hanna became her first one. Masih wrote the story — or at least its first draft — in three months.

“I was sort of dumbfounded that I’d finally written a novel from start to finish, and so quickly,” she says.

Protagonist Hanna Slivka is nearly 14 when Hitler’s army crosses into Ukraine. Her Jewish family is on the run. When her father disappears, Hanna has to find him while she tries to keep her family and friends alive.

Masih grew up on Long Island and now lives in St. Augustine.

Kristina Neihouse

Knowing When to Leave
Silver Medal

Each year, Kristina Neihouse participates in a difficult international writing event known as National Novel Writing Month, in which participants attempt to write a draft of a 50,000-word novel in 30 days.

The effort produced her first novel, Knowing When to Leave. A mysterious virus and a terrible hurricane season has devastated the United States and south Florida. The result is a dystopian world battered by climate change and challenged by a new race of beings.

“As with many writers, I feel like I’ve always written, from diaries to gushy poems and now slightly less gushy poems, stories and novels,” Neihouse says.

She has a bachelor’s degree in English from the University of Southern Maine and a master’s degree in library and information science from the University of South Florida.

The Key West resident is a full-time librarian at Florida Keys Community College. When not reading, writing or feeding cats, Neihouse participates in 5K runs and triathlons. She spends Saturday nights in the Monroe County Detention Center talking with female inmates about writing and life choices.
His father was a naval officer, and the family moved frequently. Arsenault attended 12 schools before graduating from high school. “One year I went to three different schools,” he recalls. “That either kills you or saves you.”

The family moved between North and South, living in very different worlds. “I think I was inevitably confused and curious about the differences. The town on the Cape had a large Cape Verdean population. All colors of the rainbow. Probably as close to an integrated community as you can find in the United States. So I had that point of reference. A lot of friends with dark skin. And then we’d be back in the South, with Jim Crow and segregation cradle to grave.”

His mom’s mom, who often lived with his family during their Southern excursions, had a huge influence on him. When they attended church in Pensacola, “she always insisted we sit in the back row with the black folks. And on the bus in Pensacola, we sat in the back. I thought at the time it was strange,” he says. “But later in life I was very proud of her for that.” She was a spitfire, he says.

Arsenault was attending high school in Fernandina Beach the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. “Kids were screaming with joy because they heard he’d been killed and now they wouldn’t have to go to school with black kids,” he says. “I’d never felt so alone in my life. Those things really hit me hard. And when I was a Princeton undergraduate I really got interested in Southern history and civil rights.” He had wanted to be a history professor since he was 11 years old, “if I didn’t make the NBA.” (He was 6 feet tall in 8th grade).

After graduating magna cum laude from Princeton, Arsenault turned down Harvard to attend Brandeis University because it had “the most remarkable history program in the U.S. It was a very small program. You got essentially tutorials.” Its graduates have won six Pulitzers. He was the only Southern historian there.

His first teaching job was at the University of Minnesota. His wife, Kathleen, was a Florida girl — they met in Fernandina Beach — and in 1980, after four brutal winters in Minnesota, “the next thing I knew we were in a U-Haul truck heading for St. Pete. We’ve been here ever since.” Kathleen Arsenault is the retired dean of the USFSP Poynter Library. They have two daughters, Amelia and Anne.
Ray Arsenault's latest work shares a bookshelf in his office with books about the South.

His first big splash in academia came in 1984 with the publication of a groundbreaking article, “The End of the Long Hot Summer: The Air Conditioner and Southern Culture.” It won the 1986 Green-Ramsdell Prize for the best article published in the Journal of Southern History over the preceding two years and is the journal’s most requested article. “For better or worse everyone in the field reads it,” Arsenault says. “I’ll never do anything else as famous as that.”

It was an early example of Arsenault’s approach to history telling: “You take one element of a culture and look at it from every conceivable angle. That’s what I did with air conditioning.”

“Many of us believe it is the best thing Ray has ever written,” says historian Gary Mormino, who founded the Florida Studies Program at USF St. Petersburg with Arsenault. “The article bears all the elements of a classic hit: Great title, easily understandable, and the result of a lifetime of reading and research.”

Arsenault has found St. Petersburg the perfect perch for observing the South. “It has an interesting confluence of people,” Arsenault says. “It’s southern but it’s not. I would have had great difficulty teaching in Mississippi or Alabama, with kids indoctrinated with neo-Confederate mythology.”

At age 71, he figured the Ashe biography would be his last book. “I said this was it. I killed enough trees, nine books is enough.” But he has proposed writing a biography of Martin Luther King Jr. for the Oxford University Press series Very Short Introductions. “I think that’s all I’ve got in me,” he says.

Mormino, a previous recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing, says Arsenault was not content with writing for the cloistered world of academia. “Ray Arsenault likes to engage a wide audience with irresistible content with writing for the cloistered world of academia.”

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Randy Wayne White on his paddleboard.
draws fans who want to see the cracker house where the famous writer lives. So he now lives in nearby Sanibel with his singer-songwriter wife, Wendy Webb. He has two grown sons, Lee and Rogan.

By now he has written 50 books and countless magazine pieces for national publications and has launched a new series of young adult fiction. But it’s still a battle every time he sits down to write. “It never gets easier,” he says. “It’s just one terrifying freaking day after another.” Still, he writes every day. “Seven days a week, no matter where I am,” he says. “Once you get a hold of a storyline, if you take a break for three or four days you’re in trouble.”

An idea for a story usually starts with a place and grows from there. “I wish I could do outlines,” he says. “Rarely do I know an ending.” His stories feature adventure, exploration, history and spirituality. And finely etched, often quirky characters. “I write lengthy bios of all the characters,” he says. “I want to know them better than any reader will ever know them.” And White is his toughest critic. He once threw away 33,000 words of a Doc Ford novel.

He’s also an adventurer. During the Mariel boatlift of 1980, White piloted a 55-foot boat to Cuba. He had planned to pick up the aunt of a Cuban-American friend but wound up returning with 147 refugees, jammed elbow to elbow. Another time, he was on an assignment in Colombia when he met some pepper growers. He wound up buying peppers they couldn’t sell to make his own line of Doc Ford’s hot sauce. The hot sauce led to another venture: Doc Ford’s Rum Bar and Grill, a seafood restaurant first in Sanibel and now with locations in Fort Myers Beach and Captiva. He figured getting involved in a restaurant would be a good way to sell hot sauce. Soon a fourth location will open in downtown St. Petersburg. “I have yet to make a cent on the hot sauce,” he says with a laugh.

With his long sense of history, White is optimistic about Florida’s future. “Florida is a liquid creature and it’s a very tough place, very resilient,” he says. “I think the state of Florida is going to be just fine. I don’t share the apocalyptic view of many people. Florida has survived human habitation and manipulation for 12,000 years. Florida is a survivor.”

So is White. He has survived every terrifying day of writing and returned the next day for more. He’s now working on his 26th Doc Ford mystery. It is set in Sanibel.
Florida is the light of my dreams. My images are made in their own place and time. I claim no right to alter or amend that which I have been privileged to witness and record. The morning this image was taken was no different. I visited this sacred spit of land many times. It became a familiar sanctuary for me. Minutes away from the noise and speed of South Florida, I captured the quiet grace of this dancing red mangrove with a baby moon winking above. I photograph a vanishing land — that tree and many others were lost in the last big storm.

My tools are a slightly worn Canon A1 camera and the fidelity of color slide film. No filters or Photoshop. I have become a keeper of the light; my work changing from method to meditation, each frame an honoring of place.

Photographer and writer Joel B. McEachern is a third-generation Floridian. He is completing work on his first book of Florida’s vanishing landscape. Widely published and exhibited, his photographs encourage the appreciation and protection of Florida’s natural environment. He lives in Mount Dora. His email address is jbmceachern@yahoo.com.

Do you have a photo for State of Wonder? Please email Jacki Levine at jlevine@flahum.org
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