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Florida books win PULITZER and EDGAR awards

THE HAUNTING CASE THAT DREW THURGOOD MARSHALL TO FLORIDA
DENNIS LEHANE’S TROPICAL WORKSHOP
A PLACE TO IMAGINE LOST SPANISH GALLEONS
WE LIVE IN A FASCINATING PLACE. To me, no other state captures the utopic/dystopic qualities of modern American life—the light and the dark, the dreams and the nightmares—better than the “Sunshine State.” As a harbinger of the America to come, it is not surprising that the dissonance and dynamics of American culture occur more vividly here at the edge of the continent where people come to reinvent themselves, start over, or just retire in the sunshine.

Nowhere is our complex state better reflected than in this year’s Florida Book Awards.

From Weeki Wachee mermaids, to prohibition’s gangsters, to racially charged violence in Central Florida, the award-winning writers mine history and legends to provide us with a more nuanced look at our state.

Florida Book Award juries preempted two national awards this year—the Pulitzer Prize and the Edgar Award. Weeks after winning the first-place award for nonfiction, Gilbert King won the Pulitzer for The Groveland Boys, the story of Thurgood Marshall’s courageous battle to exonerate four young African American men accused of raping a young white woman. Eckerd College writer-in-residence Dennis Lehane cast his literary eye on Florida in his latest novel, Live by Night, a prohibition tale set in Ybor City. The book, fusing a gripping plot with a fine sense of place, won the prestigious Edgar Award, given annually for the year’s best mystery novel.

Others also probe Florida’s darker side. But reflecting the dual nature of our state, this year’s winners also capture light, joy, and beauty, as in Lu Vickers’ and Bonnie Georgiadis’s Weeki Wachee Mermaids; and as in the Cici and Hyatt Brown collection of lush paintings in Reflections II: Watercolors of Florida 1835-2000, by Gary R. Libby.

All of the work, delightful or disquieting, opens another window so that we may better embrace—or confront, as the case may be—truths about the intriguing place where we live.
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Before launching the Florida Book Award program in 2006, Wayne Wiegand visited several other states to learn how their book competitions worked. The Commonwealth Club of California, sponsor of that state’s program, provided a special tour that left him inspired.

“I was conducted into a two-story atrium lined with shelves holding the books that had won the California Book Awards over the previous 75 years,” recalled Wiegand, now retired as an emeritus professor of library and information studies at Florida State University. “My guide led me to one bank of shelves, picked out a book, opened it to the title page, and placed it in my hands. I quickly realized I held a first edition of the 1940 Pulitzer Prize-winner *Grapes of Wrath*, inscribed: ‘To the Commonwealth Club of California, John Steinbeck.’ The thought immediately crossed my mind that someday, perhaps not in the far distant future, I might hold a Florida Book Award winner that also won a Pulitzer.”

That dream came true this year: *Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America*, by Gilbert King, received a Florida Book Award gold medal—and a 2013 Pulitzer Prize. Read this powerful book, and you’ll understand why. With page-turning intensity, it tells the story of Thurgood Marshall’s role in seeking justice for four young black men accused of rape by a white woman in a small Central Florida town in 1949. FORUM writer Jon Wilson interviewed King about delving into this chapter of Florida history. Read his gripping account in the coming pages.

Another of this year’s FBA recipients also won a top national award: *Live by Night* by bestselling author Dennis Lehane won an “Edgar” from the Mystery Writers of America. In it Lehane tells the story of 1920s rumrunners in Tampa’s Ybor City. While this is Lehane’s first Florida-based book, his connection with Florida doesn’t start here. He actually honed his writing craft as a college student in Florida. Learn more in our article by writer Lee Irby.

In addition to King and Lehane, you’ll meet more than 20 other FBA honorees in the coming pages and see samples of their work. You’ll also get to know Enid Shomer, who received the 2013 Florida Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing, sponsored by the Florida Humanities Council. The multitalented Shomer writes poetry, short stories, and novels with great insight and wit. She cites Florida as a central inspiration, as our article by writer Kathleen Ochshorn points out.

And don’t miss poet David Kirby’s description of his favorite Florida place (with its ghost galleons, sails flapping in the breeze) or Edgardo Dangond’s account of yearning for a taste of home after his family moved here from Colombia.
As someone who has spent her life teasing truth and beauty and therefore justice from words, I can tell you that the reason the impact of the arts is so difficult to measure is because they are, on the one hand, quite literally beyond rubies and pearls. The arts are a human flowering that enriches all our lives; they are the engine that drives our dreams and shapes our mythology. They provide the narratives that help us to understand ourselves. It’s often said that people read fiction to learn how to live; that they listen to music to feel grief and joy, but at one remove. I personally believe that all of that is true, and that we love the arts because they allow us to experience strong emotions in a safe way. Of course, this is part of how they entertain us.

On the other hand, and paradoxically, while the arts are beyond price, so important as not to be for sale, we know from solid economic research that every dollar spent on arts funding generates ten dollars in the economy at large. That’s a spectacular return. More than in any business I know of—at least any legal business! And in addition to this measurable growth, investment in arts and artists, in writers, composers, painters, dancers, museums, etc., gives a huge social return as well, adding definition and detail to our aspirations, and wisdom and depth to our understanding. The arts make us better people, more capable of sympathy and empathy. Without the arts, it’s much easier to dismiss other people’s suffering. It’s only through story, whether in journalism or cinema or a novel, that we learn the specifics that mitigate against snap judgments of each other. I hope you’ll keep on believing in and lobbying for public funding of all the arts. They are good for our souls and great for the economy.

—Enid Shomer
Thurgood Marshall’s legendary sense of humor failed him. Now he was just another “uppity Negro,” abducted and bouncing in the back seat of a car barreling down a dirt road through the Tennessee backcountry. The NAACP civil rights lawyer had just won stunning victories in a racially explosive court case. In retribution, local cops—likely Ku Klux Klansmen minus hoods and robes—were speeding him toward a place where nothing good ever happened. The year was 1946. Marshall knew he was bound for a lynching ground.


In the nick of time, Marshall’s legal colleagues, who had followed the KKK car, showed up on the dead-end road to rescue him. But within three years, the man who would become the first black U.S. Supreme Court justice again found himself in an equally frightening situation in Central Florida—in the small town of Groveland. There, a 17-year-old white woman claimed she was raped by four black men, setting in motion racially fueled violence, the deaths of two of the accused, and a local legal process stacked in favor of white supremacists.

In a time and place where racial justice had yet to take hold, a lack of solid evidence didn’t matter. Based on the woman’s claim, Lake County Sheriff Willis McCall, his deputies, and white residents immediately went after the black men. A posse killed one, and whites burned down houses in a black community. A local court convicted the other three, two of whom had confessed after being tortured. The judge
sentenced two of the men to death and handed down a life sentence for the other.

Marshall succeeded in overturning the death-sentence convictions. But then Sheriff McCall, while transporting the two men for retrial, shot and killed one and badly wounded the other, claiming that both handcuffed prisoners had tried to escape.

Until Devil in the Grove was published last year, Marshall’s role in the Groveland case wasn’t widely known. He is more popularly remembered as the lead lawyer in the U.S. Supreme Court case, Brown vs. Board of Education. Described as the most important civil rights case of the 20th century, this 1954 court decision paved the way for school integration.

But before that high-profile ruling, the Groveland case represented one of Marshall’s “countless battles for human rights in stifling antebellum courthouses where white supremacy ruled,” author King wrote in Devil in the Grove. For decades afterward, Marshall dramatically recounted the details of Groveland to his law colleagues. King’s gripping book tells the wider public about a grim time in Florida and Marshall’s part in it.

“I think that’s been the most satisfying of the reactions to this book [that] people generally come away with a better understanding of Thurgood Marshall’s contributions toward civil rights,” King said in a recent email interview.

“Thurgood Marshall was one of the greatest Americans I’ve ever read about. I believe that he transcended race. And the Groveland story had everything—crime, courtroom drama, heroes, villains, characters who had a change of heart halfway through the trial—and a last-ditch effort to save a young man from the electric chair,” King said.

In researching the book, King collected a mountain of information. Because of his tenacious requests, he gained access to rarely seen files of the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund, FBI files, and audio recordings of interrogations. Such facts fueled the story, but King didn’t let them make it ponderous. His book is described by critics as a page-turner reading more like a Southern Gothic novel.

“The trick is to bring the research in so that readers experience the depth, but they are never bogged down by it,” King said. “The story is dramatic enough on its own. When [the accused] Walter Irvin is in the hospital and tells the story of being shot by both Sheriff Willis McCall and Deputy James Yates, after pretending to be dead because he’s handcuffed to the body of his best friend, there’s not much more for me to do other than set the table for readers.”

As part of his research, King, 51, a resident of New York City, visited Lake County a half-dozen times to understand the setting. He also tried to interview Norma Padgett, whose accusations of rape sparked the Groveland case. But King said Padgett declined to be interviewed, remarking, “Let sleeping dogs lie.”

King’s work on the book wasn’t his first exposure to Florida. He established a strong connection in 1981, when sports brought him to Tampa’s University of South Florida to play baseball. “I quickly realized that the players at USF were just bigger and better than I was, and my career was mercifully cut short,” he said.

Two math credits short of graduation, King left USF in 1985 for a job back in New York. But the English major still remembers USF professor Kenneth Kay, a loveable curmudgeon who drilled hundreds of students in the art of expository writing. “To this day, I can still hear his voice in the back of my head, asking, ‘What the hell does this mean? What exactly are you trying to say?’”

King continued to practice his craft through ghostwriting on many topics—sports, science, history, and memoirs, for example. His own first book came out in 2008, The Execution of Willie Francis, a story of racial injustice in Louisiana. “It’s fair to say that I am very much drawn to spectacular but mostly forgotten criminal cases, and writing about them in a way that enables people to have a better understanding of American history,” King said in a 2012 interview for the website Saltyeggs.com.

Floridians generally have reacted positively to the book. King did get threats before a reading in Groveland, but none amounted to anything, he said, adding that the Groveland talk “was one of the best ones I had.”

At its heart, Devil in the Grove is a story about America, King said. “I never saw it as African-American history. If anything, I hope people come away with a deeper sense of respect and appreciation for some of the heroes in this story—the young lawyers, white and black, who only wanted a fair shake in court. They didn’t ask for special favors or consideration—only equal justice under the law. And they put their lives on the line for the principles they believed in.”

JON WILSON is an author and semiretired journalist who lives in St. Petersburg. He is a frequent contributor to FORUM.

Go to FloridaHumanities.org to read our complete Q&A with Gilbert King, author of Devil in the Grove.
OF ALL THE LYNCHING PHOTOS [Thurgood] Marshall had seen, though, it was the image of Rubin Stacy strung up by his neck on a Florida pine tree that haunted him most when he traveled at night into the South. It wasn’t the indentation of the rope that had cut into the flesh below the dead man’s chin, or even the bullet holes riddling his body, that caused Marshall…to stir in his sleep. It was the virtually angelic faces of the white children, all of them dressed in their Sunday clothes, as they posed, grinning and smiling, in a semicircle around Rubin Stacy’s dangling corpse...

Seventeen-year-old Norma Lee Padgett had that look—chin held high, lips pursed—when in her best dress she slowly rose from the witness box to identify for the jury the three Groveland, Florida, boys whom she had accused of rape. Like the “sworn truth” of the fictitious Mayella Ewell, the white teenage accuser in Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird, Norma Lee’s dramatic testimony against the Groveland Boys tore a county apart. Her pale index finger extended, it dipped from boy to boy as she spoke out each name, like a young schoolteacher counting heads in class, and her breathy cadence sent a chill through the courtroom.

“...the nigger Shepherd...the nigger Irvin...the nigger Greenlee...”

And like Harper Lee’s heroic lawyer, Atticus Finch, Thurgood Marshall found himself at the center of a firestorm. It would bring the National Guard to Lake County, Florida, where mob violence drove hundreds of blacks from their lives in Groveland, and in the aftermath it would prompt four sensational murders of innocents, among them a prominent NAACP executive. Despite the fact that Marshall brought the Groveland case before the U.S. Supreme Court, it is barely mentioned in civil rights history, law texts, or the many biographies of Thurgood Marshall. Nonetheless, there is not a Supreme Court justice who served with Marshall or a lawyer who clerked for him that did not hear his renditions, always colorfully told, of the Groveland story. The case was key to Marshall’s perception of himself as a crusader for civil rights, as a lawyer, willing to stand up to racist judges and prosecutors, murderous law enforcement officials, and the Klan in order to save the lives of young men falsely accused of capital crimes—even if it killed him. And Groveland nearly did.

By the fall of 1951, Marshall had already filed and had begun trying in lower courts what would become his most famous case, Brown v. Board of Education, when he was again riding the rails toward Groveland. It was on such a journey to the South that one of Marshall’s colleagues noticed the “battle fatigue” setting in on the lawyer. “You know,” Marshall said to him, “sometimes I get awfully tired of trying to save the white man’s soul.” Battling personal demons as well as the devils who brought bullets, dynamite, and nitroglycerin into the Groveland fray, the lawyer saw death all around him in central Florida. So intense did the violence in Groveland become that on one of Marshall’s visits, J. Edgar Hoover insisted that FBI agents provide the NAACP attorney with around-the-clock protection. Usually, though, Marshall negotiated Florida alone, despite the number of death threats he daily received.

From Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America © 2012 by Gilbert King
THE SCENT OF SCANDAL: GREED, BETRAYAL, AND THE WORLD’S MOST BEAUTIFUL ORCHID

By Craig Pittman

The bride glided across the lawn, her lacy white dress billowing like a sail. A sea breeze ruffled her red hair and stirred the leaves of the nearby banyan tree. Sunlight danced across Sarasota Bay, making the water glitter like distant diamonds...

Decades later, long after the marriage that began in those moments had ended in divorce, my wife and I compared our memories of that golden day when our friends tied the knot. We agreed that it had been the perfect outdoor wedding, primarily because it had taken place in such a perfect setting, the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens in Sarasota.

But as Adam and Eve could testify, even the most perfect garden is likely to have a snake in it somewhere...

Selby draws some 130,000 visitors a year. They come to gaze in amazement at its bromeliads, its Venus fly traps, and, especially, Selby’s vast orchid collection, marveling at the vivid colors and fantastic shapes.

Orchids have always been Selby’s specialty. Selby’s staff of experts has been renowned among orchid fanciers worldwide for their ability to identify and classify orchids. When its Orchid Identification Center opened in 1976, it was the first in the nation.

But the most important orchid in Selby Gardens’ history is not on view anywhere. It’s the one that made headlines around the country. The one that cost the gardens hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations and created intense internal turmoil. The one that led to search warrants, a grand jury investigation, even criminal charges.

The one that blossomed into a scandal so big that it damaged Selby’s carefully tended reputation.

From The Scent of Scandal: Greed, Betrayal, and the World’s Most Beautiful Orchid
© 2012 by Craig Pittman

When I was 12, while at a Boy Scout campout by a river, I lost my footing and the current pulled me under. I remember the rippling water closing over me, the pitiless blue sky above. I sometimes dream about this, struck by the beauty of what seemed like the last thing I’d ever see. Just before the river claimed me for good, I grabbed hold of a rope strung across the end of the swim area. To me this sums up Florida: Surrounded by dangerous beauty, in over our heads, pulled along by powerful forces, desperately grabbing for any lifeline.”

—CRAIG PITTMAN

Native Floridian Craig Pittman went to Alabama’s Troy State University, where his investigative reporting on the student newspaper prompted a dean to call him “the most destructive force on campus.”

At the Tampa Bay Times—formerly the St. Petersburg Times—Pittman has continued his hard-hitting expository journalism and since 1998 has covered environmental issues. Often honored for his work, Pittman has won the Waldo Proffitt Award for Distinguished Environmental Journalism in Florida four times, and twice has won the top investigative reporting award from the Society of Environmental Journalists.

The Scent of Scandal tells a story about the most sought-after orchid in the world and the people who pursued it. It is a tale about treaties and trade, science and smuggling, and the pursuit of a passion so powerful that not even the threat of prison deters those afflicted.

Pittman also wrote Paving Paradise: Florida’s Vanishing Wetlands and Manatee Insanity: Inside the War over Florida’s Most Famous Endangered Species.

He lives in St. Petersburg with his wife and two children.
EXCERPT FROM:

REBELS AND RUNAWAYS: SLAVE RESISTANCE IN 19TH-CENTURY FLORIDA

By Larry Eugene Rivers

The majority of Florida’s enslaved blacks of the 19th century lived and worked in “slave labor camps,” as Peter Wood articulated the situation; most did so as nonviolent dissenters, even though many men, women, and even children physically resisted slavery and its cruelties. This resistance occurred despite the fact that bondservants understood the dire, self-destructive, and even deadly consequences of outright rebellion or retaliation. As early as 1828—only seven years after the United States had assumed control over the former Spanish colony—this reality had hardened into law. That year, Florida’s criminal code was amended to create latitude for the exercise of cruelty by slave owners through the stipulation that “Slaves, Free Negroes, and Mulattoes” could suffer whippings and even death depending upon the severity of the infractions committed. Historian James M. Denham correctly noted that “with some minor revisions, the code remained in force throughout the entire antebellum period, and all blacks—bond or free—were subject to its proscriptions.”

In the circumstances, the enslaved usually and creatively opted to utilize a wide variety of options when it came to forms of dissent. Most commonly, their actions understandably were based on a conservative approach. That typical nonviolent approach being the case, it should be emphasized that numerous individuals refused to hide behind deferential facades when addressing their discontentment or dissatisfaction with their lot; they simply spoke their minds. Others stole food, hogs, cattle, sheep, poultry, money, liquor, cotton, indigo, corn, and just about anything else they could get their hands on. Added to those ranks were slaves who revealed their irritation with what they had to wear by making or acquiring additional clothing. Others simply worked slowly or carelessly. Some bondservants quietly resisted by learning to read and write. They might also have destroyed wagons, carriages, or equipment or mistreated livestock. Most at some time feigned illness for brief reprises from work routines. Bondpeople, as Kenneth M. Stampp aptly noted, became a daily “troublesome property” for their owners. This clearly was the case in Florida...

From Rebels and Runaways: Slave Resistance in 19th-Century Florida
© 2012 by the Board of Trustees at the University of Illinois

“Race war, whether hot or cold, had driven Florida’s evolution as surely as the sun beat down on its beaches and hundred-year hurricanes eventually would devastate its shores.”

—LARRY RIVERS
ENID SHOMER STEPS OUT OF HER SUNROOM and into her verdant garden, her tiny dog Mink at her side. Surrounded by her vegetable patch, her Meyer lemon, her trumpet tree in bloom, she seems the quintessential Floridian. She says her writing would be quite different if she’d lived somewhere else, and describes Florida as “a central inspiration.”

This deep sense of place is reflected in an exquisite evocation of locale in her novels, short stories, and poems. In her first collection of stories, *Imaginary Men*, one character says of the Suwannee River, “I’ve drunk the water, eaten the fish, picked my way through the poison ivy and stinging nettles, and danced away from the snakes. I love it the same way a person comes to love her own body or a close relative—not with a sense of choice but with a sense of destiny.”

Shomer, this year’s recipient of the Florida Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing, has lived more than two-thirds of her life in Florida (in Miami, Cedar Key, Gainesville, Tallahassee, and Sanibel—and currently in Tampa). In accepting the honor in March at a luncheon in the Governor’s Mansion, she said, “We Floridians live in a fabulously dynamic place with an amazing natural and social landscape. It makes me very happy to be able to give back through my work to the place and people that have nurtured me.”

The first woman to receive this award, Shomer also happens to focus on women’s lives in much of her writing. “Women’s stories are not as well known,” she says. “They are still evolving in an elemental way. It hasn’t been that long since we gained control of our bodies. The roles of men are changing too.”

In *Tourist Season*, her second story collection, she characterizes women tourists in a variety of ways—some wildly imaginative. One woman wakes up younger each day; another is called upon by Tibetan messengers who announce that she’s a reincarnated Buddhist saint; others are gathered at a Las Vegas convention on gay, pop-culture-themed erotica. This book, published in 2007, won the gold medal for fiction in the Florida Book Awards competition that year and was selected for the Barnes and Noble “Discover Great New Writers” series.

Remarkably, Shomer is an equally accomplished poet, having published four full-length books of poetry and two chapbooks. Of her book *Stalking the Florida Panther*, former U.S. Poet Laureate Maxine Kumin wrote: “To enter here is to be met and be moved by the gambling father, the long-lost lover, a Jewish child’s version of Jesus, women at the tomato packing plant, and Old World ancestors, all fully realized.”

Whether inspired by complex family histories, the art of Balthus or Klimt, the wild plum tree, or a luncheonette in Live Oak, Shomer’s
At five o’clock on a balmy May afternoon, Garland McKenney and her dog, Judy, scrambled down the levee to the backyard dock and into the family motorboat. Graduation was a week away and Clarence had something special planned for her at his fish camp deep in the bayou, where the Sweetheart River converged with the land. She was thrilled by the invitation. He’d never even shown the place to his wife. His innermost sanctum would soon be open to her.

It had been raining for weeks and the river was brown with tannin from the run-off upstream. Garland loved it like that—dark as a cup of brewed coffee. Against the solid blue of the sky, a quarter moon hung like a chalk mark. She had been boating or swimming on this part of the Sweetheart all of her life. She knew it so well she could chart her progress in the shoreline’s reflection—in the tree trunks laid out like submerged catwalks, the leafy treetops knitting together, then unraveling.

She reached a granddaddy cypress with the first bandanna (red for a left turn, blue for right, Clarence had said) and took the branch to Tate’s Inlet, a familiar stretch dotted with floating fish camps. Tailing her hand in the water, she ticked off the structures fastened to rafts and barges as they bobbed into view: the abandoned A-frame infested with squirrels, the fake log cabin, the garish pink Victorian with gingerbread trim. After the last one disappeared around a curve, two blue bandannas appeared in quick succession. Two turns into twisting meanders, and she found herself on a part of the river she didn’t recognize. The creek narrowed into a choke of weeds. Garland ducked under a dense overhang of tupelo branches and cut the motor. In the sudden stillness, Judy, a muscular pit bull mix, snapped at a dragonfly and rose on her hind legs, poised to jump overboard. “Down, girl!” Garland commanded. Judy was a strong swimmer, but Garland knew that water moccasins and cottonmouths hunted in the sluggish shallows.

Just beyond the tangle of vegetation, the bow of a partially submerged john boat stuck out of the mud, the locals’ version of a NO TRESPASSING sign. It was rumored that drug dealers and moonshiners strung steel wire across their creeks, that people had been slashed and even beheaded for venturing too far into the Sweetheart. She broke off a tupelo branch and waved it around, like a magician proving no strings were attached, then punched the motor and proceeded upstream. She looked at her watch: seven-thirty. It would be dark soon, and she had no idea how much farther the camp was.
Dennis Lehane developed writing chops in Florida

By Lee Irby

A YOUNG MAN COMES TO FLORIDA looking to start over. Things back in Boston haven’t gone exactly as planned. But the kid has faith in himself and can almost feel the renewal offered by the warm sun and the languid skies. In Florida he’ll know no one, and can begin the process of refashioning himself. Maybe, finally, if he gets his act together, he can live up to the promise and show his old man that the years of struggle weren’t in vain.

The above might sound like the plot of Dennis Lehane’s new novel, *Live by Night*, but it also captures, to some degree, the dynamics that brought the author to the Sunshine State in the first place. Lehane is a writer whose association with Boston runs deep, but in his crucial years as a student, before fame ever knew him, Lehane used Florida as a tropical workshop to hone his craft.

Not surprisingly, the main attraction that Florida offered the footloose novelist-to-be was the weather. The decision to head south came at a pivotal time in Lehane’s life. Like many other young people, the future seemed rather fuzzy to him. He had already dropped out of two colleges. In 2012 he told an interviewer with the website Literary Traveler that he didn’t know exactly what he wanted to do with his life, because he felt he wasn’t good at anything else except for writing. So writing it would be.

But where? “Once I made the decision to become a writer,” he related in an interview with downtownstpete.com, “I searched out creative writing programs that worked on the workshop system and were south of the Mason-Dixon because I was fed up with the cold. Eckerd College leaped out at me for some reason.”

Waiting for the young writer were Peter Meinke and Sterling Watson, two accomplished authors and gifted teachers who spearheaded Eckerd’s creative writing department. Also awaiting him: a Florida that was struggling to deal with explosive growth, inadequate infrastructure, rampant drug use, and high rates of crime.

For a budding novelist, the perfect laboratory to hone his craft.

Lehane’s Florida experience also coincided with the advent of what has come to be called “Florida Noir,” novels based on the surreal happenings in a state where the unusual was expected. Whether it was the gruesome death of the Everglades, the terrible murders of the fugitive Ted Bundy, or the blood-soaked savagery of the cocaine cowboys, Florida served up spectacle on a nearly daily basis.

By the late 1980s, Lehane was at Miami’s Florida International University, enrolled in its MFA program, headed by a master of Florida Noir, James W. Hall. It would be a propitious matriculation, for Hall allowed Lehane to fuse tightly plotted suspense with street-smart lyricism. While some MFA programs frowned upon commercial endeavors, Hall felt unrestrained by high-brow conventions or what Lehane has derided as “navel-gazing.”

By the time Lehane graduated in the early 1990s, Miami had become its own urban stereotype. Its corpse had already been picked over by countless writers, not to mention Brian DePalma (director of *Scarface*) and Don Johnson (star of TV’s *Miami Vice*). Even though Lehane by then had spent over six years living in Florida, he knew better than to try to become a Florida novelist. What Florida had given him was freedom and perspective, and he used his gifts to re-imagine the city that had raised him, Boston. This artistic choice would make him famous the world over—as his Boston-based novels became bestsellers and were made into major motion pictures.

But Florida never left his blood. He maintained relationships with Eckerd College, where he teamed up with Sterling Watson to create “Writers in Paradise,” a writing workshop held in January that has featured many prize-winning authors. He rented and then purchased a home in St. Petersburg. Got married, had children.

And his interests began to turn to the historical. Here he managed to combine his two homes. *The Given Day* (2008) is an epic that uses the 1919 Boston Police Strike as a backdrop to tell the story of the Coughlin family, the youngest son of which, Joe, appears as the protagonist of
**Live by Night.** (The last installment of a planned trilogy takes place during World War II.)

The reasons for Joe Coughlin’s relocation to Florida fill up the first third of *Live by Night*. After serving a stint in a Charlestown prison, he is ordered by his mob boss to Tampa’s Ybor City to take over the rum trade during Prohibition, the details of which Lehane lavishes on the reader.

History in Florida plays tricks on novelists. There are few places in the country where the demarcations between historical epochs stand in such stark relief that the passage of time seems almost haphazard. Explanations are demanded; something must account for the discontinuity, the dislocation. Ybor City had this effect on Lehane. “Most of Florida, a building gets so much as a paint peel, and they knock it down and put up a Hooters,” he told National Public Radio in describing the inspiration for the novel, “but in Ybor they’ve just kept it completely preserved, and it looks exactly like it did back in the 1910s, 1920s, as long as you remove the cars.”

Ultimately, the novelist who uses Florida’s history to fuel the fictive drive is searching for authenticity, which is housed in a distant mist that glints in the little that remains of it. The Florida of the 1920s, which Lehane labors to bring to life, represents a lost world, a pre-Disney, pre-*Miami Vice* simulacrum that will forever beguile those of us disgusted by the hucksters and hustlers who have poisoned our springs and bulldozed our scrub. And perhaps what Lehane does in *Live by Night* is pay homage to Florida, where he was allowed to become himself.

LEE IRBY teaches history at Eckerd College. He has published three novels and was last seen playing the History Professor in the film *Spring Breakers*.

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**EXCERPT FROM:**

**LIVE BY NIGHT**

**BY DENNIS LEHANE**

SOME YEARS LATER, ON A TUGBOAT IN THE GULF OF MEXICO, Joe Coughlin’s feet were placed in a tub of cement. Twelve gunmen stood waiting until they got far enough out to sea to throw him overboard, while Joe listened to the engine chug and watched the water churn white at the stern. And it occurred to him that almost everything of note that had ever happened in his life—good or bad—had been set in motion the morning he first crossed paths with Emma Gould.

They met shortly after dawn in 1926, when Joe and the Bartolo brothers robbed the gaming room at the back of an Albert White speakeasy in South Boston. Before they entered it, Joe and the Bartolos had no idea the speakeasy belonged to Albert White. If they had, they would have beat a retreat in three separate directions to make the trail all the harder to follow.

They came down the back stairs smoothly enough. They passed through the empty bar area without incident. The bar and casino took up the rear of a furniture warehouse along the waterfront that Joe’s boss, Tim Hickey, had assured him was owned by some harmless Greeks recently arrived from Maryland. But when they walked into the back room, they found a poker game in full swing, the five players drinking amber Canadian from heavy crystal glasses, a gray carpet of cigarette smoke hanging overhead. A pile of money rose from the center of the table.

Not one of the men looked Greek. Or harmless. They had hung their suit jackets over the backs of their chairs, which left the guns on their hips exposed. When Joe, Dion, and Paolo walked in with pistols extended, none of the men went for the guns, but Joe could tell a couple were thinking about it.

A woman had been serving drinks to the table. She put the tray aside, lifted her cigarette out of an ashtray and took a drag, looked about to yawn with three guns pointed at her. Like she might ask to see something more impressive for an encore.

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From *Live by Night* © 2012 by Dennis Lehane
THOUGH RUMORS OF JOLIE HOYT’S STAR-CROSSED ROMANCE with Sam Lense would dog her reputation for many years to come, in truth their grand affair was a little short of grand: barely three months long, and as quickly ended as it had begun.

To the casual observer, it bore all the earmarks of a swift, overheated bit of late-adolescent romance and might never have happened at all if not for the inspired manipulations of Jolie’s best friend, Lena Lucas, who would later rise to minor-celebrity status as the dashing wife of an international televangelist darling. Lena would often be seen on TV, sitting in the front pew of her husband’s enormous church and beaming up at him with childlike devotion.

But those days were far in the future, and back then, in the final weeks of summer ’96, Lena was technically not even legal, being seven months shy of her eighteenth birthday. She’d come late to Jolie’s childhood, halfway through their freshman year of high school, when Lena’s father had retired from the air force and taken a part-time job managing a KOA campground in the tiny backwater of Hendrix, two hours southwest of Tallahassee, between the Apalachicola River and the coast. Their meeting was inevitable as Hendrix was hardly more than a crossroads—a scattering of bait shops and churches and listing cracker dogtrots and trailers, with nothing but the river and the National Forest to recommend it.

Lena had caused a stir the moment she set foot in town, for reasons of her personality, which was effervescent, and her looks, which were extraordinary. She was northern Italian on her mother’s side and had inherited all the attendant excitability a Milanese DNA might imply, along with the copper-blond hair, olive skin, and charming, pointed-chin smile. It made for a potent package, and added to the general astonishment of her beauty was the small matter of her dress. Her father’s last berth had been at Homestead Air Force Base outside Miami, where Lena had adopted a casual, semi-naked personal style: bikini string tops and frayed jean shorts; pink toenails and well-worn flip-flops.

To say that it was a compelling combination would be a great understatement: when she went to work for her father at the counter of the concession stand at fifteen, she’d inadvertently caused a countywide run on live crickets and bait minnows. Jolie’s brother, Carl, was among the stampede of local men wanting to make her acquaintance...

From American Ghost © 2012 by Janis Owens

“I am native born, and the truth that shapes my love of Florida is the obvious one: her uncommon, unearthly beauty, which isn’t distant and untouchable, but inviting to the point of seduction.”

—JANIS OWENS
EXCERPT FROM:

PLUNDER

By Mary Anna Evans

The Gulf of Mexico lapped at Faye Longchamp’s toes, as flawlessly blue as the water that wrapped around her home on Joyeuse Island. The waves splashed on her bare feet, blood-warm, just as they did on her own beach. The scent of salt water was as familiar as the soap smell on her husband’s neck.

Strictly speaking, she wasn’t really looking at the Gulf of Mexico. Faye wasn’t sure how to name this water. In south Louisiana, the land just drifts to sea. The water at Faye’s feet was connected to a bunch of canals and island-dotted estuaries and grassy coves that extended south and west until they eventually connected to Barataria Bay, and it was connected to the Gulf of Mexico. Regardless of its name, this water smelled like the gulf breezes that blew in her bedroom window every morning.

Faye had never traveled much. There had simply been no money. Starting her own archaeological consulting firm had held the promise of frequent business trips, paid for by someone else. What could be better than seeing the world and being paid to do it?

This first out-of-state consulting trip had brought her here to south Louisiana, five hundred miles from her front door...to a place that looked and felt pretty much like home. Maybe someday she’d land a client who wanted to send her someplace exotic, but not this time.

This client had just called with a change in assignment, and Faye was still trying to wrap her brain around it. Everything had changed in the days since the Deepwater Horizon rig exploded and sank, though none of those changes were visible to the naked eye. Yet.

The water at her feet was still just as clear. The sky was as blue. Pelicans flew overhead without a care in the world. Actually, one ripple from the offshore disaster had already reached shore—fear. It showed on the faces of boaters at this marina, where a rented cabin served Faye as project headquarters. It showed in the reluctance of shoppers to part with money at the marina’s tiny convenience store. It showed in the concern on the face of the marina’s manager, Manny, as he stood at the cash register and surveyed an empty restaurant.

It showed the most at the waterfront. Every time someone walked to the shore and stood there looking, as Faye was doing now, the fear showed...

From Plunder © 2012 by Mary Anna Evans
D.J. Niko
Gold Medal, Popular Fiction

D.J. Niko, the nom de plume of world traveler Daphne Nikolopoulos, calls herself a modern nomad. The journalist, author, and editor spent the better part of 20 years visiting remote spots on six continents. She has backpacked around the world and been to India nine times, once on her honeymoon.

Born and raised in Athens, Greece, Niko learned English as a second language. But she became a writer and editor for the regional magazine Palm Beach Illustrated. The self-described magazine junkie began writing fiction while spending a summer alone in Slea’s Head, Ireland.

*The Tenth Saint* is a conspiracy novel about a sinister clique, a sealed Ethiopian tomb, and prophecies about earth’s final hours. The protagonist is an archaeologist who risks her life to save humanity.

Niko was ecstatic when she received her first piece of fan mail about the book.

“He said it sent him to his computer to learn more. That was music to my ears. Anytime we read something that ignites curiosity or moves us to action, we grow in some, even small, way. For a writer, that is a huge reward,” Niko says in the blog she writes for her website.

"Florida's pull on me always has been a function of its cultural diversity: Where else can you have a cortadito with the Cubans (Calle Ocho, Miami), explore a swamp with a Seminole Indian (the Everglades), and have dinner with a Nobel Laureate and a U.S. ambassador (Palm Beach), all on the same day?"

—D.J. NIKO

Michael Lister
Silver Medal, Popular Fiction

In the 1990s Michael Lister became the youngest chaplain within the Florida Department of Corrections. For nearly 10 years, he served as a contract, staff, and senior chaplain at three different prisons in the Florida Panhandle.

These experiences inform much of his writing, as does his love for the part of Florida where the Gulf of Mexico and the Apalachicola River meet.

"I feel like I live regionally, so I feel like I write regionally," Lister said. But regionally based stories are just as appealing to a wide audience as those whose authors try to create "general" settings, he said.

The second-time Florida Book Awards medalist noted that his books are nearly as popular in Germany as they are around North Florida, the setting for *Blood Sacrifice*.

The suspicious death of a young woman undergoing an exorcism is the subject of this fifth book in his John Jordan series. The protagonist is a prison chaplain and former cop.

Lister also writes screenplays, makes films, and writes and produces plays. In addition, he writes for, edits, and operates the oldest newspaper in Gulf County, the *Gulf County Breeze*. 
Mary Anna Evans has achieved a rare triumph by winning medals in two categories for the same work. In addition to a Bronze Medal in Popular Fiction, her book *Plunder*, a story about an archaeologist with a knack for unearthing sinister mysteries, also scored a bronze in the General Fiction division. (See page 15 for more about Evans and her book.)

“The only way I know to bring my imaginary Florida settings to life is to immerse myself in reality. What a pleasure it has been to share...the clarity of our springs, the warm breath of Florida’s breezes, the grit of sand beneath bare feet, and the urgent need to save these fragile things for our grandchildren.”

—Mary Anna Evans
How did your family come to Florida?

Don’t miss ‘Journey Stories’ exhibit

Don’t miss “Journey Stories,” a traveling exhibition created by the Smithsonian Institution. This free, multimedia exhibit, which continues its journey to selected Florida museums this summer and fall, is part of the Smithsonian’s Museum on Main Street program. It tells the American stories of immigration and migration that are so relevant to Florida, where two out of three residents come from someplace else. Each museum also presents its own programs related to the topic and invites local people to tell their journey stories. Here is the exhibition schedule:

NOW THROUGH JULY 6 at the Center for Gulf Coast Folklife in Tarpon Springs (tarponarts.org/folklife).

JULY 12–AUG. 24 at the Amelia Island Museum of History in Fernandina Beach (ameliamuseum.org).

AUG. 31–OCT. 12 at the Citrus County Historical Society in Inverness (cccourthouse.org).

OCT. 19–NOV. 30 at the Elisabeth Lahti Library in Indiantown (772-288-5400).

Two new members appointed to Florida Humanities Board

Gov. Rick Scott has appointed Michael Cavendish of Jacksonville and Glenda Walters of Lynn Haven to the Florida Humanities Council Board. He also reappointed board member Steven Seibert, founder of The Seibert Law Firm, located in Tallahassee, and former Secretary of the Florida Department of Community Affairs.

Michael Cavendish is a partner in the Gunster, Yoakley and Stewart law firm. An essayist on ethics and human rights, Cavendish has served three terms as chair of the Jacksonville Bar Association’s human rights law section. With former President Jimmy Carter, he helped lead a campaign to free American teacher Aijalon Gomes from North Korea. To commemorate Florida’s 500th anniversary, he has compiled an online journal, AcrossFlorida.org, which contains a year of his thinking about Florida and Floridians.

Glenda Walters is an adjunct professor who teaches history at Gulf Coast State College. She moved to Florida in 1964 and attended Gulf Coast State and the University of West Florida’s Panama City campus. She earned a doctorate in history from Florida State University in 1995. For the past 25 years, Walters has taught history at both the secondary and college levels. Now semiretired from the classroom, she finds time to enjoy historical research and writing. She has written books about the history of Lynn Haven and Panama City.

Be a part of the Florida story. Contribute to the Florida Humanities Council

Peter Belmont
Member since 1998

Please visit FloridaHumanities.org/support
Top scholars to discuss ‘Race and the South’

Former U.S. Ambassador Andrew Young and a roster of nationally recognized scholars will headline Flagler College’s “Race and the American South: St. Augustine in Context,” a program series starting next fall.

Funded by a $15,000 Florida Humanities grant, the programs are scheduled to begin Sept. 19 and run through April 9, 2014. They will coincide with community activities commemorating such events as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s birthday, Black History Month, and the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

Among scholars expected are Elijah Anderson, Yale; Jane Landers, Vanderbilt; Bill Malone, Tulane; John Shelton Read, University of North Carolina; and Charles Regan Wilson, University of Mississippi. All programs are free and open to the public. The venue is Flagler’s Lewis Auditorium in St. Augustine. Go to FloridaHumanities.org for more information.

Exploring Our Spanish Roots in St. Augustine and Spain

Journey with us this fall as we explore Florida’s Spanish heritage in both the Old and New Worlds.

At our weekend Gathering in St. Augustine, Sept. 20-22, you’ll learn from scholars about the history of this centuries-old city, explore its colonial buildings, observe an archaeological dig—and much more.

During our scholar-led week in Spain, Oct. 13-20, we’ll trace Florida’s Spanish roots in medieval cities and villages, view 16th-century architecture, sample local cuisine, hear historical music, and more while traveling from the capital city of Madrid to the ancient port of Avilés. More information at FloridaHumanities.org.

Calendar:

FloridaHumanities.org

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

Hobe Sound—July 10 at 11 a.m. Hobe Sound Library: Florida Seminole historian Willie Johns describes early Seminole settlers and their forced migration to reservations.

Orlando—Aug. 17 at 2:30 p.m. Marriott World Center: Three historical figures come alive on stage to reveal their hopes for Florida—and for themselves. “Dreamers & Schemers” features Osceola, Francisco Menéndez, and Mary McLeod Bethune—portrayed by actor/scholars.

Safety Harbor—Sept. 19 at 6 p.m. Safety Harbor Public Library: Jeff Moates of the Florida Public Archaeology Network discusses the early Spanish/Cuban ranchos (fishing camps) that once populated the Tampa Bay area.
Is poetry spontaneous? Opinions vary, although seasoned writers tend to lean toward the idea of revision.

The acclaimed Campbell McGrath’s take is that if a poem starts sinking, you put it aside for a revisit later. Maybe you can fix it or, as McGrath told the online arts magazine Fiddleback, “you realize that it is utterly horrible and completely unsalvageable.”

“Which is like walking into the garage and realizing how unbelievably dirty and cluttered and disgusting it is. The heroic thing might be to roll up one’s sleeves and clean up the mess, but the proper answer is to close the door quietly and sneak away,” said the MacArthur Genius Award winner.

His latest poetry collection, *In the Kingdom of the Sea Monkeys,* is an eclectic mix including dreams about Dick Cheney; a holiday Walmart “and the Values therein”; a heart-hitting piece about parents; and, of course, the power of expectations and dreams as defined by comic-book sea monkey ads.

McGrath, twice before a Florida Book Awards winner, lives in Miami Beach and teaches creative writing at Florida International University.

One of the jacket comments on Terri Witek’s cutting-edge *Exit Island* calls the collection an effort “to remake nothing less than the language.” Witek, who also won a Florida Book Award medal in 2008, arranges her words in pictures—shapes on a page that convey feeling as much as does the text itself.

This visual impact is no accident. She has collaborated with Brazilian visual artist Cyriaco Lopes in some of her work, and she draws much of her inspiration from other kinds of art.

“I’m completely enthralled by museums, galleries, and contemporary art sites…I have had some of my very best moments in the presence of great art—sometimes even not great art that just catches me in a certain way,” she told 32 Poems magazine.

As rarified as her art is, Witek has a worldly daily schedule that has included regular strength-training workouts and long beach walks several times a week. “The early morning or late afternoon beaches are never far from my poetry—all the blue and gold musing,” she said.

Witek holds the Sullivan Chair in Creative Writing at Stetson University in DeLand.

Lola Haskins, formerly a computer science teacher at the University of Florida, writes much of her poetry about the natural world. *The Grace to Leave,* for example, portrays such varied elements as Withlacoochee turtles, a moor in northern England, and an alligator on an island’s curved shore.

Much of her poetry evokes visual images, which often have “more spangles than a glacier,” a phrase Haskins coined in one series of short verses titled “Sky Shots.”

The second-time poetry medal winner loves to collaborate with other artists, turning the written word into music or visual images. Poetry, she says, is “a kind of music in your bones.”

She has worked with visual artists such as collage artist Derek Gores, photographer Diane Farris, painter Ruth Harley, and printmaker Kenneth Kerslake.

Her favorite experiences with musicians include performing *Forty-Four Ambitions for the Piano* with composer James Paul Sain and pianist Kevin Sharpe, *Scattered Voices* with Sain at two composers’ conventions, and a *Forty-Four Ambitions* song cycle with composer Paul Richards.

She lives in Gainesville and North Yorkshire in England.
William A. Link
Silver Medal, General Nonfiction

William A. Link’s book does what many in the immediate post–World War II generation would like to do: define their parents’ role as part of the Greatest Generation and contemplate how it influenced the succeeding generation.

In the cleverly titled Links, he has written an unsentimental biography of his mother, a social activist, and father, an acclaimed historian. The North Carolina couple moved north, abandoning the quiet, small-town South for a new life entirely.

Link, himself an accomplished and award-winning historian, puts his parents’ lives in the context of a world-changing era whose elements included World War II, the coming of integration, and the Cold War.

A professor for 23 years at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro, Link specialized in North Carolina history, the history of the American South, and 20th-century American history.

He currently is the Richard J. Milbauer Professor of History at the University of Florida.

Tracy Crow
Bronze Medal, General Nonfiction

A former United States Marine Corps officer, Tracy Crow tells new writers to pour emotion into their work and to cultivate relentless determination.

“If I have any advice, it’s to get a little angry. Nobody but you is really going to care whether you ever publish a book, so you have to care a great deal,” Crow told r.k.v.r.y. Quarterly Literary Journal.

Eyes Right: Confessions of a Woman Marine is, as the title suggests, Crow’s memoir. It is far-reaching, telling how a troubled teen rose above her difficulties to become a military journalist and public affairs officer while dealing constantly with gender inequity and harassment.

Moments of tragedy and humor abound as does high drama when Crow is court-martialed for conduct unbecoming an officer.

An Eckerd College assistant professor of writing and journalism, Crow also advises the student newspaper. The Current has been judged Florida’s best college newspaper by the Florida College Press Association and recently won a Mark of Excellence Award for Best College Newspaper and Best College Website for small schools in the Southeast.

“Florida is still a scam, Ponzi scheme, a fever dream where we’re perpetually eating our golden goose. We’re still governed by liars who do all they can to make paradise unattractive and uncompetitive. But it’s still paradise. I still love it.”

—MICHAEL GRUNWALD
These gold-medal winners make quite a team. Writer Lu Vickers published a book in 2007 telling the story of the famous roadside attraction. Bonnie Georgiadis lived the story. Georgiadis worked there for 37 years, first as a mermaid, later as a choreographer, and eventually as a falcon trainer.

_Weeki WACHEE Mermaids_ displays never-before-published vintage photographs, postcards, and publicity shots taken over 30 years, starting with the first mermaid performance in 1947 and ending with the extravagant “underwater Broadway” shows created by ABC-TV.

Vickers traces the evolution of the park from its origins. She pays particular attention to the ways entrepreneur and underwater-photography pioneer Newt Perry made Weeki Wachee unique among Florida springs.

The water was so clear, and the scenarios so cleverly straightforward that television audiences initially doubted that the show was really underwater; and newspaper editors across the country suspected the photographs might be faked. But, as many a tourist discovered, Weeki Wachee mermaids were a real part of Old Florida.
A former quail-hunting plantation, now an ecological research station, is situated in idyllic longleaf pine grassland that stretches from Tallahassee into South Georgia. Sportsman Henry Beadel bought the property in 1919 to use as a hunting ground. But he encountered problems when the forest service outlawed his controlled burns to clear undergrowth and keep the land appealing to birds. Beadel then dedicated himself to conserving the land and studying the effect of prescribed burns on wildlife.

When Beadel died in 1958, his will directed that the estate become a research center. It now is called Tall Timbers.

The Legacy of a Red Hills Hunting Plantation uses vintage and modern photos, maps, postcards, and paintings to tell much of a saga that extends back thousands of years.

William R. Brueckheimer, a retired geography professor, researched the plantation and wrote the original manuscript between the years 1973 and 1984. Robert L. Crawford, who edited it, was formerly a biologist on the Tall Timbers staff.

Gary R. Libby, a veteran director of art museums, has brought together watercolors from the collection of Cici and Hyatt Brown depicting Florida from 1835 to 2000. The lush paintings in Reflections II: Watercolors of Florida were created by artists who traveled through Florida from territorial days to the early 21st century.

They include Andrew Wyeth, Thomas Moran, John James Audubon, Winslow Homer, and more than 100 others. Biographies of all of the artists accompany their work, which includes depictions of wildlife, jungle or woodland settings, street scenes, domestic life, buildings, and beaches.

Watercolorists played a different role in Florida than other artists, wrote Harvard University art historian and curator Theodore E. Stebbins Jr. in the book’s foreword. “Their practice was to make watercolors of local scenes, which they in turn sold to a middle-class tourist audience rather than to art collectors, as such,” he wrote.

Libby has been honored numerous times by the Florida art community. In 2000 he received the Florida Art Museum Directors Association Lifetime Achievement Award.

“Paradise, romance, mystery, myth, greed, murder, racism, swindles, larceny, hope for a better future and characters and stories larger than life all flow into my mind when I hear the word, Florida.”

—GARY R. LIBBY
Laura Lascarso  
*Gold Medal, Young Adult*

One of Laura Lascarso’s Tweets not long ago said: “Is anyone looking to hire a professional sleeper? References available upon request.”

But for someone who confesses a soft spot for the sandman, Lascarso has managed a busy life. She has been a “pizza slinger, Renaissance wench, hostess, waitress, ice cream scooper, barista... camp counselor, reporter, wedding photographer, graphic artist, and substitute teacher."

Now the Tallahassee resident has penned her first novel. *Counting Backwards* is a sensitive story about a troubled teenage girl whose antisocial activity lands her in a juvenile psychiatric care center.

When Lascarso, who also writes poetry, learned she had won the gold medal, she wrote in her blog that she was "squeezing all over the place.” And lest anyone think "squeezing" was a typo, she noted that she learned about the award on her birthday. “My squeezing cannot be contained,” she blogged.

Lascarso’s young fans will be interested to know her favorite fictional hero is Katniss Everdeen of the *Hunger Games;* her top villain is Darth Vader of *Star Wars* fame.

Carl Hiaasen  
*Silver Medal, Young Adult*

Carl Hiaasen’s fame has spread throughout Florida and beyond since he went to work at age 23 for the *Miami Herald.* Still a regular columnist, Hiaasen is better known nationally and internationally for novels that helped jump-start a genre—Florida Noir.

For his journalism and commentary, Hiaasen has received numerous honors, including the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Society of Newspaper Columnists. He also received the 2012 Florida Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing from the Florida Humanities Council.

In *Chomp,* Wahoo Cree lives in a zoo with his animal-wrangler father, who gets a job in a TV reality show called “Expedition Survival.” The show’s star insists on using wild animals in his stunts. Wahoo acquires a friend called Tuna, a girl who got a black eye from her dad and needs a place to hide out.

Even writing for younger people, Hiaasen creates a zany mood. Here’s how *Chomp* begins: “Mickey Cray had been out of work ever since a dead iguana fell from a palm tree and hit him on the head.”

Alex Flinn  
*Bronze Medal, Young Adult*

*Bewitching* is one of Alex Flinn’s 11 novels, some of which are spins on fairy tales or folklore. Flinn’s second consecutive Florida Book Awards medal features Kendra, a witch, and chronicles the first 300 years of her life.

Flinn became a voracious reader early in her life, but refused to read the school system workbooks that come with questions. “Alexandra marches to her own drummer,” the teacher told Flinn’s mother.

Her self-directed outlook has led her to become an opera soprano who also has a law degree (and practiced law for 10 years). The Palmetto Bay resident said her legal education helped her write her first novel, which was about girls whose boyfriends hit them. She based the book on her experiences as an intern for a state attorney’s office and a volunteer who worked with battered women.

Her experience in middle school furnished background for Flinn’s writing. Her family had moved, and she became the new kid on the block. “I had a really hard time making friends, so I spent a lot of time reading and writing then,” she said.

Flinn lives with her husband and two daughters a half-mile from her old middle school.
FLORIDA HUMANITIES COUNCIL
FORUM

Secrets of San Blas
Charles Farley

In the 1930s, a grisly murder out at the Cape San Blas Lighthouse drags old Doc Berber, Port St. Joe’s only general practitioner, into a series of intrigues that even he can’t diagnose.

$14.95 • Softcover • ISBN 978-1-56164-514-5 • 6 x 9 • 218 pages

Fall 2013:
Secrets of St. Vincent

In the second book of the Secrets trilogy (following Secrets of San Blas), things are not always as serene as they seem in the little Florida Panhandle village of Port St. Joe. When bluesman Reggie Robinson is wrongly arrested for the gruesome murder of Sheriff Byrd “Dog” Batson, old Doc Berber mounts a Quixotic search for the real killer.

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Adrian Fogelin
Silver Medal, Children’s Literature

Adrian Fogelin honed her story-telling technique as a 12-year-old babysitter.

To beat the competition, she started creating scary tales. The ploy worked. Children wanted her back even though she made them want to hide under the bed.

Fogelin no longer specializes in the hair-raising genre, but her stories continue to be engaging, with characters both funny and fallible. In Summer on the Moon, the three-time medal winner tells of Socko, a tenement youngster who moves with his mother and crotchety great-grandfather to a subdivision that itself is a wasteland.

Reaching out to youngsters remains a priority for Fogelin. She regularly visits schools, has inspired lesson plans, and, with the help of others, has transformed the Tallahassee house that she inherited from her father into a neighborhood children’s library. It now holds about 1,400 books.

The shape of my personal Florida is a small neighborhood in Tallahassee...This is the place that tugs at my sleeve when I sit down to write...This is my Florida, familiar and local and always ready to lean on its handlebars and tell me a story.”

—ADRIAN FOGELIN

Dianne Ochiltree
Bronze Medal, Children’s Literature

While growing up, Dianne Ochiltree lived in a home “zoo” with rabbits, chicks, stray cats, hamsters, and other critters. So it was no accident that Molly Williams, the heroine of Ochiltree’s book, kept a house full of cats.

But that’s just a small dimension of the title character’s multidimensional personality.

Molly, By Golly is a true story about America’s first known female firefighter. Ochiltree became interested in her life while researching firefighting methods for another work of historical fiction.

“Having been a little girl who wanted to drive a fire truck, I immediately set out to learn more,” Ochiltree says.

The story includes colorful depictions of early 18th-century firefighting techniques in New York City, created by illustrator Kathleen Kemly. Like her co-author, Kemly has a menagerie of pets in her home in Seattle, where she, her husband, and two grown sons live with a dog, cat, and flock of chickens.

Ochiltree and her family divide their time between Sarasota and Pennsylvania.
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“Will surely open a new window and a new appreciation for the complexity and beauty of nature in Florida.”
—ORRIN PILKEY
Florida was always a dream state to me, and oddly, it still is. I’ve lived here for 43 years, longer than I’ve lived anywhere else. Since that whole time has been in Tallahassee, I’ve seen the legislature come into town and leave 43 times. For a while, my wife Barbara even worked for the House of Representatives, which means that I have watched laws get made and unmade, seen opportunities grasped and, just as often, fumbled. And yet I still think that Florida is where dreams are born. How is that possible?

I spent the first 21 years of my life on a South Louisiana farm, and as we were people of modest means, a vacation usually meant a car trip to Biloxi, or, in flush years, to Panama City and Destin. From the get-go, Florida was that place just beyond the horizon, where the water was bluer and the seafood tastier. It was where my parents drank Old Fashioneds instead of iced tea and seemed happier, though it was hard to tell whether that was because of the whiskey or the extra money in their pockets.

My friends must have had similar experiences, because when we were students at Louisiana State University and spring break rolled around, a dozen or so of us would pile into cars and head to our version of the Promised Land. We stayed in Grayton Beach, always at the same house that we rented for what would be a laughable figure today. For sustenance, we’d bring crates of Campbell’s cream of tomato soup, boxes of dried milk to make it with, tubs of peanut butter, and several of those yard-long loaves of white bread. The rest of the budget went for beer, the cheaper the better. Sometimes the nose of the car would be higher than the body because there’d be so much beer in the trunk, and, once, the car got stuck in the sand. We had to get helped out by troopers who took the beer but left us with our soup and peanut butter. Our plan was to meet girls—Florida girls—but we never did.

I spent some of the happiest years of my life in grad school in Baltimore, reading and writing about great books and talking to smart people about them, until the day my major professor said, “You’re going to graduate soon, David. Are you looking for a job?” I wasn’t, actually, but I started sending out résumés and found myself with offers from several schools, one of which was Florida State University. We didn’t do fist pumps and say, “Yessss!” in those days, but that’s the way I felt. I was going to my Dream State. I was going home.

Once I got set up in Tallahassee, I found out that Florida was a lot bigger than I had thought. So I set out to discover the rest, and by now, I feel the whole state is mine. In my years as a Floridian, I’ve zigzagged from one metropolis to another and through most of the small towns.
I’ve reeled down Duval Street in Key West, gone to the opera in Sarasota, and picked up shells on Sanibel Island. I’ve listened to a sizzling Little Richard concert in St. Augustine, talked to people who ran cockfights in a town whose name I better not mention, and poured champagne for Barbara at the Ritz Carlton in Fernandina Beach one Thanksgiving when we decided to play hooky from all the domestic hoopla.

I’ve strolled arm in arm with Cuban-American friends down Miami’s Calle Ocho and even tried my clumsy Spanish on the smiling women who’ve sold me little cups of bitter black coffee. When my older son was completing his residency at Miami Heart Institute, he would take Barbara and me to the clubs of South Beach, the female denizens of which often seemed to be clad more in skin than fabric. Once I thought I said to myself, “Where were you when I was a teenager?” though when Barbara scowled at me, I realized I’d said it aloud.

But my favorite Florida place is the one that’s just a bike ride away from home. The St. Marks National Wildlife Preserve lies due south of Tallahassee, and towards its western edge one finds the fort of San Marcos de Apalache.

The fort is located at the confluence of the St. Marks and Wakulla rivers, an area first visited by Europeans when Panfilo de Narváez and his men arrived in July 1528. Narváez had been sent to Florida by the Spanish king in 1527 to subdue and colonize vast tracts of land, but a high desertion rate and hurricane casualties reduced his force considerably, and belligerent Native Americans didn’t make the job any easier.

He and his troops had originally landed near current-day Tampa and marched north. When they reached what is now the town of St. Marks, they waited for the expedition’s vessels to pick them up. When the ships didn’t appear, they built rafts and took to sea again. One by one the rafts disappeared, including the one Narváez captained. Of 600 men who had set out from Spain a year and a half earlier, only four survived the expedition.

The fort of San Marcos that visitors see now on this site was built by the Spanish in 1679. Of the original structure, little remains but the stone foundations, although interpretive exhibits inside the fort museum give an idea of how it looked. Outside, grassy lawns and mossy oak trees invite the visitor to explore the premises and get an idea of what life must have been like centuries ago. Breezes off nearby Apalachee Bay cool one’s skin even on warm days, but it’s best to stay away from the sawgrass that lines the sandy path, for it can slice you like a razor.

If you take that path as far as it goes, you’ll reach the tip of land where the two rivers come together and where Narváez probably sat and watched in vain for the galleons that would rescue him and his men. I first sat on that spot myself in 1969, shortly after I arrived in Tallahassee. I found a stone to sit on, put my back against a tree, listened as the water lapped at my feet, and smoked a cigar after a meal of Gulf seafood at the St. Marks Café, a wonderful little...
hole-in-the-wall that has long since disappeared and where I was waited on by an “old lady” who was younger than I am now.

Back then I had no idea what was coming, how surprising and wonderful it would be. I’ve lived most of my adult life in Florida, though I’ve traveled the world over. I’ve taught at FSU’s international campuses in England, France, Italy, and Spain, and two summers ago, Barbara and I took a 4,000-mile train trip from St. Petersburg, Russia, to Beijing. I’ve published dozens of books and won awards for both writing and teaching, I’ve seen thousands of my students find their own place in the world, and we’ve raised two wonderful sons who are raising families of their own. Best of all, I get to wake up every morning next to Barbara. We drink coffee and read the newspapers and then grin at each other like children, as though to say, “What next?”

And when I can, I still go out to that tip of land where the St. Marks and the Wakulla rivers flow into each other. I don’t smoke as many cigars as I used to. I still love shrimp and grouper, but my doctor wants me to order them broiled now rather than fried. The legislators just left town again, and again it seems as though they dropped the ball more often than not.

But there’s a kid inside me who still gets excited when he hears the word “Florida.” When I sit on that little tip of land, I can see the outlines of those ghost galleons; I hear the wood creaking and the sails flapping in the breeze. And again I say to myself, Florida is the land of dreams.

DAVID KIRBY, author of more than 30 books, is the Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor of English at Florida State University and a three-time winner of Florida Book Awards for poetry.
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My wife Adriana, my sons Nicolas and Felipe, and I came to Florida from Colombia. We were only going to stay for two years while I got my master's degree in journalism at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. Since Adriana and I both had lived in this country as students in the late 1980s, we thought the biggest challenge would be our children's adaptation to their American school and social life in a new country.

We weren't really concerned about the cultural changes. Our country has been influenced a lot by American media, including music, TV shows, and movies. The way we dress is basically the same; even many of the brand names are the same. And, though we ate very traditional Colombian foods at home, we were familiar with many of the American fast-food brands that can be found in Colombian cities.

As it turned out, though, the things we worried about were no problem. Our sons, who had attended a bilingual (Spanish-English) school in Colombia, did just fine—especially through the international language of soccer. But after our first months of feeling as though we were on a vacation, we really began craving a taste of home. All of us suffered from culture shock when it came to food. And, over time, we realized that in the United States, we were labeled “Latinos” along with people from many Spanish-speaking countries very different from ours.

In the beginning, we enjoyed eating American, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, Italian, Cuban, and other ethnic foods from the cultural melting pot. Our traditional Colombian food was not readily available at retail stores or restaurants. But after a while it hit us: It’s one thing to choose to eat exciting and delicious multicultural foods; it’s a very different thing not to be able to go back to our normal Colombian dinners.

We missed our arepas (grilled cornmeal flatbread, sometimes stuffed, that mostly is eaten as a replacement for bread), our bittersweet hot...
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chocolate drink, our savory corn-based soups, and our other foods from home—like fried yucca and carne oreada (beef that is marinated with a sweet-and-savory rub and vinegar, then sun dried and grilled).

Adrianna and I started looking for "our kind of food." And when we discovered the ethnic-food section at the grocery store and the local "Latin" food stores, it felt like we’d found a direct connection to our motherland. We found all kinds of familiar items, like sodas from our country; empanadas (Colombia’s quintessential street food—fried wheat or corn turnovers filled with lots of different ingredients like beef, chicken, or cheese); all sorts of canned and fresh "Latin items"; and even arepas.

We picked up a few of those items and rushed to the register. That’s when we first learned that things were not as good as they looked. Every "Latin" item comes with a mark-up. (For example, an American soda costs $1.25, but a Colombian one costs $2.) But we bought everything anyway. Finally we had found what we were looking for; we were not going to stop just because it was a little pricey.

We rushed home and couldn’t wait to see our sons’ faces when they saw what we had found. But when we all sat down together and started eating, we experienced our second blow. Nothing tasted the same as it did in Colombia. The labels on these "Latin" products indicated they were made with the same basic ingredients as in Colombia, but the truth was that most of them didn’t taste like food in Colombia.

When we thought that was all the cultural shock we could take, we came to the final realization that in the United States, we had become part of that undefined multicultural ethnic group called "Latinos." It’s not about Colombians, Venezuelans, Hondurans, Mexicans, Argentinians, Peruvians, or Bolivians, to name several. "Latino" covers us all, which is ridiculous because we are all very different.

Where Americans see Latinos, we see people from different countries who speak very differently, eat very different foods, and listen to very different music. In fact, the most dramatic difference has to do with the language. There are cases in which I would not understand what someone from another Spanish-speaking country is saying. Even worse, I could be offended by someone or offensive to someone without even knowing it, because some words considered bad in one country are used quite innocently in another. Spanish speakers share some customs and values, and we can establish a connection with other Spanish speakers, but there are big differences among us. People from each Spanish-speaking country are proud of what differentiates them from other Spanish speakers.

Ultimately we decided to deal with our culture shock by cooking our own Colombian food at home and dropping out of the "Latinos" designation. But we still also love and enjoy all of the good American, Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Mexican, Cuban, and other food that this wonderful, multicultural state of Florida has to offer. We ended up diving into the cultural melting pot of this country, got a little bit of everything, and came out ready to enjoy all of the cuisines and customs. The best part is that we figured out how to do this without losing our Colombian heritage and culture.

EDGARDO DANGOND received a master’s degree in Journalism and Media Studies from the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, where he is now the Technical Director for the master’s program in Digital Journalism & Design.
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