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Featuring Winners of the Florida Book Awards

A Poet Who Creates Roller Coasters

Hurricane Haikus Get Us Through the Season

Ybor City—Coffee, Cigars, and Characters

Florida’s African Soul and Soil
I HAVE THE BEST JOB IN FLORIDA. I proclaim that frequently, without hesitation or humility. I spend my days with Florida’s most engaged citizens, insightful scholars, and inspiring writers and artists. They have taught me about Florida and guided me through many of our state’s historic landmarks and cultural sites. I have seen St. Augustine through the eyes of its most distinguished historians, ridden on airboats in the Everglades with Seminole tribesmen, and watched archaeologists unearth ancient artifacts. Their Florida stories have provided me with rich context and valuable insights into this colorful and complicated state.

Now, thanks to modern technology, we have a way that you, too, can tour Florida with the experts: our “Florida Stories” walking-tour APP, available for download on both Apple and android phone and mobile devices. These lively audio walking tours provide you with a narrated stroll through history, featuring a colorful cast of characters from Florida’s past.

Not surprisingly, we chose St. Augustine for our first walking-tour site. This oldest city in the continental United States attracts more than six million tourists each year. Our guide, Elsbeth Gordon, an architectural historian and author of Walking St. Augustine, takes us through the heart of this most historic American place. She examines the 275-year-old architectural puzzle known as the Rodriguez-Sanchez House, built by three different owners in three different cultural periods, and the nearby home of Jose Sanchez de Origosa, who built the largest cattle ranching dynasty in East Florida. While helping us understand St. Augustine’s architectural treasures, Gordon brings these buildings to life with stories of the multicultural families who lived in them—Spanish noblewomen, confederate soldiers, and British Governors.

Florida historian Gary Mormino wrote our tour of Tampa’s historic Ybor City. Mormino, author of The Immigrant World of Ybor City, guides us through this famed Cuban-Italian-Spanish neighborhood, where cigar workers built ornate Social Clubs and Jose Marti rallied support for the Cuban Revolution. (See Mormino’s colorful story about Ybor City in this issue of FORUM.)

We are currently at work on several more tours of Florida communities, which will soon be added to the "Florida Stories” APP. We hope you will take them along on your next Florida outing.

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.
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SOME GREAT TREATS await you in the next pages—our tenth annual issue devoted to some of the best writers Florida has to offer. First, you’ll meet the delightful David Kirby, prolific poet and essayist, insightful wit and “generous soul,” and winner of the 2016 Florida Humanities Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing. Read the Q&A with this wonderful writer and mentor of budding writers at Florida State University and then savor one of his recent essays and a poem that will take you on the “roller coaster” of emotions that he strives for in his work.

You’ll also meet this year’s winners of the Florida Book Awards—a program we co-sponsor with a dozen literary and cultural organizations around the state to recognize, honor, and celebrate the best work of Florida writers each year. Some of this year’s 24 winning authors will take you on intriguing journeys into the worlds of our environment, cultural history, even military life related to wars past and present. Others will entertain you with wild rides through their crime novels, thrillers, and mysteries. Still others will enchant you (and your children) with artful stories for the younger set. You’ll get to know each author through biographical sketches written by Jon Wilson and sample the work of many through excerpts of their award-winning work.

You’ll discover a couple of special columns in this issue, too. Our poetry columnist Maurice J. O’Sullivan takes a fascinating look at African-American poetry in Florida, starting with those who arrived on the earliest European voyages and moving through time to James Weldon Johnson, a leading intellectual force in the Harlem Renaissance. And Florida historian Gary Mormino takes us on a stroll through the past 130 years of Ybor City, the storied Latin community just northeast of downtown Tampa, and introduces us to colorful characters along the way.

Enjoy what is ahead.

BARBARA O’REILLEY is editor of FORUM.
Haiku ready? Read our trove of hurricane lore, wisdom and, yes, woe!

**First Place**

Paths and cones on maps
Pit of my stomach, churning
Please not here, or there.

Janie Seal is a painter who teaches art at S.S. Dixon Primary School in Pace, near Pensacola, to 730 students (kindergarten through and 2nd grade). While Seal has lived in Florida for 21 years and experienced many hurricanes, she describes vivid childhood memories of category-5 Hurricane Camille (1969) hitting Gulfport, Mississippi, where she grew up. Her family slept in the hallway, and she watched “sideways rain” through a gap in the plywood nailed over sliding-glass doors. “The next morning, there were no roads or grass, just trees and limbs everywhere.” People on the Gulf Coast “thought Camille was the worst that could happen, but Katrina proved them wrong. My family members have harrowing stories of rising floodwaters, lost homes, etc. I’m so thankful that they all survived.” When she sees a storm brewing now, she said, “I know what those people are going to have to go through. Those emotions.”

**Second Place**

Forceful winds and rain
Nature’s violent tango
Tear up the dance floor

Douglas Burkett moved to Central Florida in 1982 when his father took a position as a landscape architect at Walt Disney World. A resident of Lady Lake, Burkett says he has a deep love for orchestral and electronic music and enjoys composing “space-agey” tracks. His haiku inspiration came from experiencing Category-4 hurricanes Charley (2004) and Floyd (1999). During Charley, he was the only one on duty at a call center and fielded calls for doctors and hospitals. Before Floyd, he remembers being the only driver heading south on I-95, while traffic in the northbound lanes was bumper-to-bumper. In creating his haiku, Burkett said, “I imagined the twisting of a woman’s tango dress spinning around to be like that of a hurricane’s bands spinning around the eye. Florida was ‘the dance floor,’ the hurricanes leaving parts of the state torn-up in their wake, just as tango dancers figuratively tear up the dance floor.”

**Third Place**

If enough wind blows
It is given its own name
A breeze is nameless

Jim Gustafson has authored poetry books, *Driving Home* and *Drains and Other Depressions*, and a book of essays, *Take Fun Seriously*. Originally from Evanston, Illinois, he has been a Floridian for the past 17 years. The Fort Myers resident teaches creative writing at Florida Gulf Coast University and world religion at Florida Southwestern State College. His haiku focuses on the human tendency to assign names to things. “There’s a sense that if we can call something by name, like a flower, it becomes important to us,” he said. “A storm, which is clearly something we can’t control, if we can give it a name, we feel like we have some control over it.”

BRIGITTA SHOUPPE, an intern at the Florida Humanities Council, contributed to this report.
David Kirby has been called a literary treasure of our state. This year he received the Florida Humanities Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing, the latest in a galaxy of honors he has earned during a sparkling career.

Kirby, an internationally recognized poet and essayist who has taught and inspired thousands of Florida students and writers, says his love for the written word had its roots on the 10-acre South Louisiana farm where he grew up. There (as you will learn in the accompanying Q&A), he absorbed nature, communed with animals, and met quirky Cajun characters. His storytelling mother told him tales about voodoo spells and people who lived in trees. His father was a medievalist college professor who could read 12 languages and speak many of them.

All those elements—and others, including a bout with a dreaded childhood disease—combined to inspire his love of writing at age 5.

"Seeing my hand clutching an oversized pencil and watching words spool out of the tip of that pencil onto that rough, gray paper we had, and listening to stories of my mom on our porch, made me feel like storytelling was a great form of capital…I never thought of it as part of schoolwork, it was just what we did."

His work includes poetry, essays, criticism, and children’s literature. His biography of Richard Penniman—better known as Little Richard—defined one of rock ‘n’ roll’s earliest architects.

Kirby, who received his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University, has taught since 1969 at Florida State University, where he is the Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor of English. The judges for the Lifetime Achievement Award praised him for mentoring thousands of students over the years as well as for demonstrating to all “how craft, humor, and insight can create enduring works of art.” They added: “David makes us feel fortunate that we can be in the company of such a witty guide and generous soul.”

Sometimes serious, often humorous, here is Kirby in his own words:

**Please tell us about your background growing up on a farm in South Louisiana, near Baton Rouge. What was your childhood like? Who were the influential people in your life? How do you think the culture of that distinctive area (which includes Cajun country) informs your outlook?**

I’ve always felt as though I had three parents. My mom and dad were older when they had me. And to say there was no helicoptering in those days is an understatement: the aircraft itself was barely known, and certainly no one hovered over yours truly. Instead, my folks turned me loose in the vast acreage that surrounded our house, and it was there that I learned to observe, to entertain myself, to engage with people and animals. So that farm was my third parent. We lived on the border of Cajun country, which featured some of the oddest, sweetest people I ever met, ones who showed me how you could be responsible and trustworthy yet reach for the fiddle and the whiskey jug when you needed to (which was every Friday and Saturday night, at least).

**What drew you to writing? How did you get started? Why are you attracted to the written word and to the nuances of language?**

I remember writing before I remember remembering. I can still see my five-year-old hand scrawling on a tablet, probably trying to entertain my mother but also just wanting to figure things out. I had polio when I was a little kid, which gave me a lot to think about.
Polio also made me realize I’d better learn how to have fun, because it was apparent early on that life consisted of a lot more than free movies and popcorn.

Although you are known most widely for your poetry, you also write essays, literary criticism, children’s literature—and even a biography of rock legend Little Richard. What is your favorite form of writing—and why?

Oh, poetry’s just the best. Poetry is where the true freedom is. I’ll always work in the other genres, just as I won’t have a tuna sandwich for lunch every day. But I’ll always come back to poetry.

What are your current areas of interest? What would you say are some of the main areas of interest and themes running through your work over the years?

Well, it’s always interesting to look back and see how things have changed, isn’t it? I used to write fairly traditional twenty-line poems, but everyone was doing that, so I started writing the big fellows. And it’s funny: editors would say “nice poem” about the traditional ones, but they either loved or hated the big guys, so I knew I was on the right track. I’ve always seen the world as a pretty amusing place, so I don’t know that my themes have changed that much over the years, though recently there has been more tenderness in my writing, more awareness of the world’s beauty. Oh, and just recently, I’ve started writing short poems again.

Those who know your body of work describe it as serious—often including deeply profound observations and insights. Yet you are known for your witty, engaging personality and entertaining style of public speaking, as well as for hilarious wit in some of your poems. Some might even describe you as a humorist. Would you discuss these contrasting perceptions? How you see yourself as a writer?

That’s an easy question for me. Here’s the deal (1) I do use slapstick humor in maybe half my poems, but I also use irony, dry wit, tragedy, pathos, bathos, and everything else in the poetic toolbox. I want to build a real roller coaster for you so you can experience as many highs and lows as possible. Now (2) if you read much contemporary poetry, you realize that most poets are pretty sober. There are actually a fair number of poets who use comedy from time to time, and you’ll find a good many of them in Seriously Funny: Poems About Love, Death, Religion, Art, Politics, Sex, and Everything Else, an anthology I co-edited with my wife, the beloved Barbara.
Praying by Doing, Classroom Edition

By David Kirby

In the summer of 1825, young Ralph Waldo Emerson took a break from his theological studies to work on his Uncle Ladd’s farm near Newton, Mass. There he met a laborer known to history only as “a Methodist named Tarbox,” who told Emerson “that men were always praying, and that all prayers were granted.” The idea of constant prayer was not new to Emerson, writes his biographer, Robert D. Richardson Jr., but Emerson “first felt its force for real life” there in his uncle’s fields.

What is prayer? In its simplest form, prayer is an address to a deity. But in “Self-Reliance,” Emerson says that “prayer is in all action”: in the farmer kneeling to weed his field, for example. And clearly Emerson means mindful action: No farmer wakes at mid-morning and says, “Gee, I wonder what I should do today?” Emerson’s sense of prayer as mindful action appeals to my students at Florida State University, especially as graduation nears and the world of work beckons.

I teach English, and in this job market you can say of humanities classrooms what is said often of trenches: There are no atheists there. My students are prayerful, though in the Emersonian way, which is to say they pray by doing, because they know that before they find their place in the world, they have a journey ahead of them.

When you go to an airline website to plan a trip, you’re asked whether you want a one-way or a multi-city ticket. Like many humanities grads, my student Joanna, who earned her diploma in 2009, was a multi-city traveler. Joanna double-majored in creative writing and theatre. Deciding against the bohemian life of the New York playwright, she took the law-school admissions test but realized that what she really wanted to do was help others.

David Kirby, at the Florida Book Awards banquet in April, accepts a whimsical painting of rock ’n’ roll legend Little Richard—subject of one of his books. Kirby is recipient of the 2016 Florida Humanities Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing.

Hamby. But as I say, most poets are pretty stone-faced, so most readers think of most poetry as joyless. Therefore (3) I’m always hearing, “Oh, David Kirby is the funny poet.” But I’d say no, David Kirby is the poet who tries to make sure you get the full roller coaster ride.

You have been a professor at Florida State University for 45 years and are highly respected and lauded as a teacher and mentor of young writers. What have you learned about teaching and what is your philosophy about how to mentor writers? What advice would you give to budding writers?

Teaching is like anything else; you just have to do the heck out of it and let it show you what your style is. Mine is to know everything I can about the subject, lighten all that freight with a joke from time to time, and, mainly, to be enthusiastic: for my subject, for my students, for myself. After that, it’s just time. Time, time, time. Spend as much quality time as you can with your students, and they’ll get better. Spend as much quality time as you can with your poems, and they’ll get better, too. And you will as well.

What do you think the role of a poet is in our society? What do you think it should be?

Have you seen that Woody Allen movie Stardust Memories? At the end, Woody’s character asks this space alien what he should do to be a better person, and the alien says, “Tell funnier jokes.” That’s our job: grow better crops, build better houses, play better songs, write better poems. Don’t worry about the rest of it. I always tell my students to take a self-inventory every few years. If you avoid the things you can’t do well or don’t like to do, which are usually the same, then you can spend your whole time being good at something that others will appreciate and that will be a reward in itself. The poet William Matthews says, “Life is fun when you’re good at something / good.” But not everybody has to be a poet; you just have to do something worth doing.
Her first stop was an adjunct position at a local community college. From there she went on to teach ninth grade, where she found herself mired in local bureaucracy and school politics. She could do more good by moving beyond the local level, she figured, so Joanna got a master’s in higher education administration and is now in a doctoral program that she loves, preparing for a life of teaching and research devoted to improving outcomes for students at all levels.

Ben, a 2003 graduate, was also a multi-city traveler. He wrote a master’s thesis, a collection of poems, under my direction but was also the lead singer of a band that signed with a major label and started touring. Ben tired quickly of the lifestyle and decided to become a teacher. However, teaching freshman comp as an adjunct at three different schools took its toll as well, so Ben enrolled in an online Ph.D. program in technical communication and is now an assistant professor at a big state university. “I wasn’t able to find my identity as a scholar until I made connections with what I’d done in the past,” he says. “Once I saw those connections I realized that I am still a poet and strive for the poetic, but that training informs my work in ways I never expected.”

Another former student, Laura, a 2010 graduate, is what I call a one-way traveler: She knew what she wanted from the beginning, which was to get into trade publishing. Like Joanna, she wrote a creative undergraduate thesis; unlike Joanna, she headed straight to New York, where she juggled unpaid editorial work at a small press with a magazine job and taking literature classes at night. Then came her break. Laura became a publisher’s assistant at a major press. At first that meant fetching coffee and answering phones, though lately her responsibilities have increased, and becoming a book editor is now on the horizon. “With every project I work on, titles that I acquire, and young agents I connect with,” Laura says, “I feel this goal becoming more and more tangible.” Already, she says, she has an office “with an actual door.”

All three of my former students are living fulfilled, creative lives because they practiced prayer in the Emersonian manner: not kneeling to ask for something, but through mindful action. And as Tarbox promised, their prayers were answered, if not always in ways they foresaw.

Oh, and there’s a third choice when you buy an airline ticket. In addition to one-way and multi-city, there’s round trip. But that’s the thing about praying the Emersonian way: There’s no such thing as a round trip. You will never end up where you started. Tarbox knew that. He wouldn’t have known what an airplane was, but he knew that all prayers are answered, that every life is transformed, even if you don’t know when or how. All you have to do is keep praying.

Taking It Home to Jerome

BY DAVID KIRBY

In Baton Rouge, there was a DJ on the soul station who was always urging his listeners to “take it on home to Jerome.” No one knew who Jerome was. And nobody cared. So it didn’t matter. I was, what, ten, twelve? I didn’t have anything to take home to anyone. Parents and teachers told us that all we needed to do in this world were three things: be happy, do good, and find work that fulfills you. But I also wanted to learn that trick where you grab your left ankle in your right hand and then jump through with your other leg. Everything else was to come, everything about love: the sadness of it, knowing it can’t last, that all lives must end, all hearts are broken. Sometimes when I’m writing a poem, I feel as though I’m operating that crusher that turns a full-sized car into a metal cube the size of a suitcase. At other times, I’m just a secretary: the world has so much to say, and I’m writing it down. This great tenderness.

Kirby, as pictured recently in “Humans of FSU,” a student Facebook project.
“Who made the world?” asks Mary Oliver in her poem “The Summer Day.”

“Who made the swan, and the black bear?”

Who made the coast? I have wondered. This particular coast, these saintly islands, these powerful passes, these bounteous life forms?

A mountain-born river is the answer.

If you look at a satellite photo of Florida’s Panhandle between Bald Point and Panama City, your eye cannot miss the channel that has delivered our shoreline’s sediment. For 2 million years, quartz sand weathered from Appalachian rock washed down the Chattahoochee and the Flint rivers. At their confluence, the Apalachicola River carried the sand down to the Gulf of Mexico and opened like a fist, showering and shaping ground-up mountain into a broad, blunt-tipped arrowhead. Over many eons, the river punched through its own accumulations, growing out the land.

But the birth of the barrier islands required something even more than this enormous supply of sediment: a slowly rising sea to push back against. That time came about 18,000 years ago, at the end of the Pleistocene Ice Age. The planet’s ice caps and glaciers were slowly melting as the Earth warmed. Sea level rose, and the Gulf Coast shoreline receded into its present position. By about 4,000 years ago, the Apalachicola was delivering sediment faster than coastal wave energy could sweep it away. At the same time, the climate stabilized and the rate of sea-level rise accordingly slowed. Conditions were perfect for the deposition of sediment into a barrier rim.

As the sand accrued, it formed a cirlet around what we now call Apalachicola Bay, the configuration of our present-day coast. First St. Vincent, and then St. George and Dog Islands and the St. Joe spit began to build upward from the sand and clay cupping the river’s mouth.

Two thousand years before the present, the islands had nearly approached their modern positions and were still growing in area and elevation.
The train trip from Baltimore to South Florida took two days and was tedious. But despite the incessant stops and frequent change of trains, George could not help but see the journey as a *Swiss Family Robinson* adventure. His romantic mind imagined South Florida to be like the Robinson’s tropic isle. Surely, the Massachusetts Family Merrick’s adventure would end as happily. His father, on the other hand, viewed the move like he viewed life. It was neither romantic nor exciting but simply necessary. He stoically faced the future with clenched teeth and his usual no-nonsense resolve.

George was 13 and just beginning the tumultuous rush to manhood. He relished the opportunity to spend time alone, man-to-man, with his usually distant father. But even George would have felt despair had he known what awaited him in Florida. His childhood was whizzing by as fast as the strange scenery he saw from the open window. Within days, he would take on the work of a man and face adult responsibilities beyond those experienced by his favorite Dickens characters.

If Solomon, who, unlike George, always saw the glass half-empty, had known what lay ahead, he would have been more depressed than usual. At some point during the trip, he heard the shocking news that yellow fever had broken out in Miami and the young city was quarantined. Now, with no way to turn back, they faced not only an unknown place but also a deadly tropical scourge that was worse than anything they had experienced in the frozen North. Because of the quarantine, George later wrote, the train could not continue on to Miami, so a sympathetic minister who lived near Florida’s Loxahatchee River offered him and his father a place to stay. Their sojourn was brief; by early November, just two months after they left Baltimore, *The Miami Metropolis* recorded the Merricks among the newcomers.

Arva Moore Parks
Silver Medal, Florida Nonfiction

Florida’s story often reflects a place that is up for grabs and developers who want a fast buck from real estate. But George Merrick wanted to distinguish himself from developers who sought only profit.

Arva Moore Parks is the former chief curator, interim director, and chair of the Coral Gables Museum. She brings special expertise to *George Merrick: Son of the South Wind*, which tells how Merrick transformed his family’s citrus grove into the Miami suburb of Coral Gables.

“I wanted to create a story of planning history. I hope the book elevated Coral Gables and its planning,” Parks said at the Florida Book Awards banquet.

Parks, a Miami native, taught history at her alma mater, Edison High School. It was her first career. Renowned historian Dr. Charlton Tebeau became her mentor after a teachers’ workshop and encouraged her to study Miami history.

She went on to write several books and has produced films about Miami and Coconut Grove, winning an Emmy from what was then called the Florida Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. She was inducted into the Florida Women’s Hall of Fame in 1986. The Miami resident is a former Florida Humanities Council board chair.
The 1941 lynching of Arthur C. Williams in Gadsden County was the first recorded in Florida during the decade, and the fourth to take place in the nation that year. While there had been a general decline in the number of extralegal murders in the state over the previous two decades, and in the nation for that matter, the scourge of lynching continued to be a painful indicator of the intractability of race relations in Florida. Racial violence had blotted the state’s record frequently during the previous decade, which witnessed a total of 15 lynchings, including the gruesome killing of Claude Neal in 1934, which earned Florida notoriety as the scene of the largest mass or “spectacle” lynching in the nation’s recent memory. Throughout the 1930s, newspapers across the nation increasingly reported the grisly extralegal murders in the South. The heightened awareness of southern atrocities by people living above the Mason-Dixon Line brought unwanted criticism and outrage from outside the region. The usual justification for these abominable activities—that white men needed to protect white women from bestial black men—became increasingly less convincing, while the details of bloody lynching bees became too much for many ordinary Americans, black and white, northern and southern, to tolerate without comment. The circumstances of Williams’s lynching attracted condemnation for two reasons. First, the lynchers demonstrated an alarming boldness and persistence in the pursuit of their victim—coming after him again when their first attempt to kill him failed—while local law enforcement officials proved either unable or unwilling to protect Williams’s life on either occasion. Second, the reaction to this lynching by members of the American press, especially nationally syndicated journalist Westbrook Pegler, demonstrated a growing unwillingness on the part of the American public to continue in their role as silent witnesses to brutality.

The brutal reality of deadly violence against African Americans stains Florida history, as it does that of other southern states. In 2015, the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Ala., documented nearly 4,000 victims of racial-terror lynchings in the South from 1877 to 1950. *Democracy Abroad, Lynching at Home* analyzes four examples of such violence during 1940s Florida.

“Winning this recognition was very gratifying professionally, but more importantly it is a small step toward the broader acknowledgement of the victims of lynching violence in Florida during this era,” Hobbs told FORUM.

“These families and communities no longer have to carry the burden of silence. The recounting of these stories is a form of communal justice, and while a poor substitute for legal remedies, it’s a positive step. I’m glad it has been positively received,” she said.

The author of several books, Hobbs graduated from Florida A&M University and earned a history Ph.D. from Florida State University. She teaches at Florida Memorial University in Miami Gardens, where she serves as interim chair of the department of social sciences and as university historian.
Celebrate a Century
2016 marks the National Parks Centennial – a perfect opportunity to explore the National Parks of St. John’s County.
Fort Matanzas | Castillo de San Marcos

CULTURE AROUND EVERY CORNER.
ST. AUGUSTINE | PONTE VEDRA | FLORIDA’S HISTORIC COAST

• Visual Arts
• Music
• Performance
• Festivals
• Film
• Literature
• Living History
• And More

For a detailed calendar of events and more, visit historiccoastculture.com
intric Ellis, newly arrived, pushes his size 8 boot into the spongy ground and feels the subtle give of the earth run through the ball of his foot, up his leg, and settle in his camouflaged hip. Green grass in Afghanistan, he thinks, water somewhere. He smells damp soil and grass, unexpected but familiar—Little League center field, Kristen in a California meadow—and attempts to make this thick-bladed greenery stick alongside the everywhere, suck-you-dry desert he had imagined.

“Eyes open, everyone,” Big Dax says.

Although Wintric knows today is a low-risk humanitarian mission, the words slide him back into his default, visceral nervousness: Bombs, somewhere, everywhere. Already he has been told that roadside means nothing in this country. Big Dax and Torres have shared stories with him—everything from far afield livestock to massive diesel trucks igniting the barely buried hell, not to mention the bombs strapped to men, women, children, dogs. Bombs the size of tennis balls, soccer balls, tackling dummies. Under the rising sun Wintric replays the refrain repeated among his platoon for each of his eight days in country: Don’t go looking for a fair fight.

Wintric watches the relaxed movements of the most experienced soldiers and he feels his body breathe. He pulls out his knife and crouches in the valley amid a mist of gnats. He plunges the blade into the soil and levers up a clump of grass. Silently he rises and collects his first sample of war in a plastic bag that he fists into a cargo pocket.

Nearby a group of mangy goats bleat in a grove of white-blossomed almond trees, their shepherd talking with the interpreter. For the first time since Wintric arrived the wind doesn’t howl, and he wonders if any kind of omen awaits in the warming air, but he pushes the thought from his mind when he can’t think of a single positive forecast.
Randy scowled at Crecie. “You gonna work cotton? For them?”
“’Ain’t that what I say? I ain’t picky like some people.” Her tone was surly.
“No need for that kinda talk; I’ll find suitable work soon.”
“Work is work.”
“Slaving in cotton ain’t; not when freedom staring you dead in the face. But you can’t see that.”
“Oh, I see it, alright; but ’til I get some land to go with it, freedom ain’t nothing I got a taste fo’.”
Randy sighed. “Uh-huh. So how you plan on getting land?”
“I ain’t thought that far yet; Massa Lincoln gwine see to it. We just got to be patient, wait and see.”
“Patient? Didn’t you hear what I told them—300 years is a long time to be waiting and seeing.”
“Humph!” she said, turning toward the cabbage-laden workbench. “I got chow-chow to fix.”

Randy struggled to remain calm, but weeks of tolerating her rude behavior had come to a head. He grabbed her arm and swung her around, facing him.
“I got something to say to you, Crecie, and you better listen good.”
She jerked away from his grasp and darted behind the rickety workbench, creating a barrier between them. “Don’t be putting yo’ hand on me!”

“Just be still and hear me out. The only thing we got in this world is our labor. And that’s what the white folks want, what they need. As long as we give ’em what they need, they ain’t got a reason to give us what we need—land.”

She ignored him and began arranging the cabbage in a row. After lining them up just so, she looked at him, challenging. “How you know what white folks want? Nobody know what they gwine do ’til they do it. But for some reason I just believe, in they own time, they gwine do right by we.”

**Gracie L. Chandler**
*Silver Medal, General Fiction*

Though their freedom seemed sweet, new challenges awaited former slaves liberated by federal armies during the Civil War. Among them: navigating military authority.

Through one meek woman named Crecie, *Free to Be* reflects the trials and the bumpy rise to self-determination a newly freed people experienced. The story takes place on a South Carolina Atlantic Ocean enclave, one of the sea islands.

“It was a labor of love,” Chandler said at this year’s book-awards banquet. “I discovered so much about American history, not just one segment of the population.”

Florida Book Awards co-founder Wayne Weigand remarked about Chandler’s book: “It goes down as smoothly as a drink of chamomile tea.”

Chandler was born in the historic slave community of Hog Hammock on one of Georgia’s sea islands—Sapelo. A graduate of Florida A&M University, she later earned a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of Northern Colorado, in Greeley, Co. After teaching in Miami for many years, she moved to Jacksonville, where she lives with her husband, Tommy Chandler.
Near the end of the hallway, Norman Laney turned right abruptly and entered the office of his colleague Elizabeth Elder. She had not so much an office as a sanctuary in which fluorescent lights had been banished and a large Oriental rug completely covered the linoleum floor…

Mr. Laney plopped down in his chair and simultaneously produced an apple. As he bit savagely into it, he looked more horse than human, with his lips peeled back to reveal a formidable row of large, bared teeth. Juice from the fruit flew as far as Elizabeth Elder’s desk. It was clear that the apple was not only a mid-morning snack, but also an object on which he could inflict his vengeance. Elizabeth Elder remained unflinching, and waited patiently for Norman Laney to speak his mind, her steady, piercing gaze trained intently on him above her reading glasses.

She was quite well aware that Norman’s atrocious eating habits and table manners were deliberately exaggerated to help him separate his friends from his enemies. Those in Mountain Brook who accepted him, loved him and believed in him were invariably inclined to overlook his grossness. Those who disliked him, distrusted him, feared him and generally believed he had no business being accepted in Mountain Brook society often betrayed their true feelings when forced to witness Norman’s gluttony…

“So he finally killed her,” he said, taking another savage bite of the apple. “I wouldn’t talk like that outside this office,” Elizabeth Elder warned him. “Well that’s what I’m saying to everybody I know,” he replied, with another defiant bite. “He killed her,” he said, through a mouthful of apple. “I wouldn’t be surprised if she killed herself.”

“Same thing. Living with him was murder. Or suicide. Whatever you want to call it. But he’s the one who killed her.”
Books for Fall

**FLORIDA HUMANITIES FORUM**
Universe Press of Florida
800.226.3822 | www.upf.com
Available wherever books are sold

- **WHITE SAND BLACK BEACH**
  The story of Miami’s Historic Virginia Key Beach Park
  Hardcover $29.95

- **Remembering Florida Springs**
  Stories of great American writers and artists in Key West
  Paper $19.95

- **Shrimp Country**
  A bounty of flavors from the Gulf to the Atlantic
  Hardcover $26.95

- **Mile Marker Zero**
  5,000 miles of past, present, and future in a road trip to explore it all
  Hardcover $24.95

- **The Seminole Wars**
  The longest and most costly Indian wars in American history
  Paper $19.95

- **Florida’s Minority Trailblazers**
  Personal interviews with trailblazing political leaders
  Hardcover $75.00 | DEC

- **Women Who Fought for Florida’s Environment**
  Women who fought for Florida’s environment
  Paper $21.95 | OCT

- **Sea Level Rise in Florida**
  The science behind the data and how we can plan ahead
  Hardcover $34.95 | OCT

- **Travel on the St. Johns River**
  See La Florida through the eyes of the Bartram explorers
  Hardcover $29.95 | DEC

- **Dive into the Colorful Past of Florida’s Natural Wonders**
  A bounty of flavors from the Gulf to the Atlantic
  Hardcover $26.95

- **Women Who Fought for Florida’s Environment**
  Women who fought for Florida’s environment
  Paper $21.95 | OCT
In 1820, John Keats lamented in his narrative poem “Lamia” how little science leaves to the imagination. The scientist’s cold philosophy and dull catalog, the English poet wrote, might as well “unweave a rainbow.” The mystery of the rainbow—viewed by many throughout the world as a passageway between heaven and Earth—was dashed, Keats charged, when Isaac Newton explained the optical truth: Rainbows are the refraction of sunlight through raindrops.

Yet Newton was anything but unimaginative. To conceive of gravity, he had to imagine Earth pulling an apple from a tree, pulling the very moon into our orbit. It takes such an eye to picture Earth’s first rains—the greatest storms of all time. So much of the young planet was destroyed during the Hadean [Eon] that scientists have scant physical evidence to suggest exactly when the earliest rains began, what they looked like, and how long they poured.

The best clues to the first rains lie in Western Australia’s Jack Hills. Deep in the craggy orange sandstone there, geologists have dug up tiny grains of zircon that clock in as the oldest terrestrial material found on Earth to date. Nature’s trustiest timepiece—the radioactive element uranium—dates the tiny zircons back 4.2 billion years. By then, their chemistry suggests, primeval rains had begun to fall and pool on the Earth’s crust. Those earliest lagoons likely boiled away repeatedly in the Hadean’s grand finale, called the Late Heavy Meteorite Bombardment, which also cratered our moon.

Only when the meteor storms let up could the great rains let loose. By this time, scientists infer, baby Earth was swaddled in vaporous clouds. So many volatiles had built up in the atmosphere, they moiled the sky thicker than a Newfoundland sea fog, blacker than a line of tornadoes on the Great Plains.

Still, Earth’s charred surface likely remained so hot that the rains fell only partway to the ground, evaporating again and again...
In the first months of the Civil War, patriotic war meetings were a staple in both the Union and the Confederacy. In the days after the fall of Fort Sumter, communities across the North held remarkably similar enthusiastic meetings. Local political leaders and newspaper editors would denounce the southern attack on federal property and call on young men to step forward and avenge the assault on the nation. Uniformed veterans or members of the militia would second the martial call…. An observer who stumbled upon any of these gatherings would have come away with a very clear sense of what the nation’s patriotic citizens should do, at least in those first days of the war. Only a few months before, many northern voices had called for caution and compromise, but once the shooting started the weight of public opinion tilted dramatically toward unreflective military fervor. In fact, the war enthusiasm in those heady first days after Fort Sumter was so great that available regiments filled in many communities before all the eager young men could get into uniform.

As the Union first mobilized for war, northern newspapers and journals muted any impulse toward humor in the face of war fervor. But before long, the silly and overblown targets proved too delicious for some satirists, while a few other pundits saw a bigger—and less appealing—picture. In May, the New York–based humor journal *Vanity Fair* ran a short piece titled “The Flag Mania,” in which an “Enthusiastic Patriot” accosts a man on Broadway, demanding to know if the stranger had “the Star Spangled Banner on [his] person.” When the man admits that he does not happen to be carrying a flag with him, the Enthusiastic Patriot stabs the unfortunate man and “walks quietly away,” leaving it to the local police to remove the corpse.
Rightists believed that Communists were at the center of the problems that they perceived, but they saw the threats as wider. Particularly troubling for the right was what they saw as moral decay, the growing secularism in America, continued rapid growth in the power of government, and the ascendancy of political, scientific, and educational elites. No longer were the traditional elites—local clergy and other community patriarchs—in control. All of these changes contributed to what rightists saw as a marked decline in American values. They feared that if such deterioration continued, the United States would come to resemble the Soviet Union. In their search for simple explanations for the many, mostly undesirable changes, they attached themselves to the idea of “conspiracy.” They believed that not only Communists but also the government, scientific elites, progressive educators, African American leaders, Jews, and other groups were part of a broad conspiracy to undermine American politics, economics, society, and culture.

To counter the attack, rightists joined in a struggle to educate the upcoming generation in a manner reminiscent of the way they remembered their own upbringing. As the world around them changed during the decades following World War II, they increasingly stressed the need for a solid grounding in Christianity, as they understood it, and placed a great emphasis on what they considered the strong traditions that had held American society together and made it great. Rightists focused considerable attention on using public schools to teach the younger generation the “American Way.” The future of the nation would lie in the hands of the youth, and the right wing, especially its women, sought to ensure that the baby boom generation would later lead the country in the proper direction.

From the 1950s through the mid-1970s, the years during which the baby boom generation was growing up, the right encountered a variety of social and political issues that stirred them to action. Some were carryovers from the Roosevelt era, but others were quite new.
**Patricia Gussin**  
*Gold Medal, Popular Fiction*

Patricia Gussin is a family physician who is married to Robert Gussin, also a physician—and now both have made the transition from careers in medicine and medical research to a new life of books and wine. The couple owns two vineyards in New Zealand, and they co-wrote a book about making life changes.

Patricia Gussin’s professional expertise helped her write *After the Fall*, a bio-medical thriller in which a researcher clashes with a Food and Drug Administration employee about the future of a groundbreaking new drug.

“Finally I feel that my transition from medicine to books is taking hold,” Gussin said in her newsletter earlier this year.

*After the Fall*’s protagonist is familiar to Gussin’s readers. It is the fourth about Laura Nelson, now 48 years old, whose career and life Gussin has portrayed since Nelson was a 23-year-old medical student who became a surgeon.

The Gussins split their time among Long Boat Key, New Zealand, and East Hampton, N.Y.

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**Marti Green**  
*Silver Medal, Popular Fiction*

As a child, Marti Green started out with Bobbsey Twins and Nancy Drew books, progressing as an adult reader to the novels of John Grisham and Scott Turow.

She got hooked on legal thrillers, creating Ivy League lawyer Dani Trumboll, who is devoted both to seeking justice for the wrongly convicted and to her family (husband and son).

*The Price of Justice* is the third of the Innocent Prisoners project series. In it, a former Ivy League student is under a death sentence for murder and rape.

A Hofstra law school graduate, Green practiced as a corporate attorney. “After I retired from law, I decided to see if I had it in me to write a novel,” Green said in a website interview. “I started out with the barest idea of a plot and then was amazed at how the characters took on a life of their own.”

An outdoorswoman, Green has twice hiked 200 miles across England and has climbed all 35 mountains in the Catskills that are over 3,500 feet. She lives in The Villages community.

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**Bruce Thomason**  
*Bronze Medal, Popular Fiction*

Bruce Thomason portrays strong female characters in his work, relying on his wife Jackie for help in giving them depth. “Whenever I have a female character say something, she looks at it very closely,” Thomason told FORUM.

Thomason’s 45-year career in law enforcement brings further verisimilitude. For 21 of those years, he served as police chief in Jacksonville Beach. “One of the most rewarding eras was the time I spent as a detective, gathering clues trying to figure out the who, what, where, when, why, and how of crimes,” Thomason says on his website.

*Perception of Power* is the third installment in Thomason’s series about Det. Clay Randall. It pits the detective against a powerful United States senator, who blames Randall for his daughter’s death in a traffic accident. The book took five years to write, Thomason said. Wife Jackie, in her role as content editor, said she probably read the novel seven times.

“That can generate a lot of discussion when we have a difference of opinion,” she told the Florida Times-Union. The couple lives in Jacksonville Beach, where Thomason was elected to the city council after retiring as police chief.
Orlando veterans to tell their personal stories on stage

Four veterans and a Gold Star mother will share their compelling stories of life and the military on stage this fall in Telling: Orlando. Their performances are scheduled for Sept. 30 and Oct. 1 at 7 p.m., and Oct. 2 at 3 p.m. in the John and Rita Lowndes Shakespeare Center in Orlando. Their dramatic presentations—scripted using their own words from in-depth interviews—are followed by question-answer sessions with the audience.

We are sponsoring Telling: Orlando in partnership with The Telling Project, a national initiative started in 2008 to help bridge the communication gap between today’s veterans and an American society in which less than 1 percent of the population has served in uniform over the past dozen years of war. This program is designed to deepen community understanding about what veterans have gone through and the issues they face when transitioning back into civilian life. In 2015, we sponsored Telling Project performances of veterans in the Tampa Bay area and Pensacola. More details at FloridaHumanities.org/veterans.

We are grateful for the generous donation of $2,500 from United Arts of Central Florida to help support this project.

Take our cultural walking tours in six Florida communities

As you stroll through six distinctive historical communities around Florida, you can listen to authentic stories of the people who lived there long ago. It’s all done with a click on your mobile phone or other device. “Florida Stories,” our free walking-tour APP, can take you on a journey to the past in St. Augustine and Tampa’s Ybor City. And this fall, we are launching historical walking tours for the communities of Bartow, Lake Wales, Pensacola, and DeLand.

All of these cultural adventures offer lively, colorful, real stories about the history of these communities—presented to you in the voice of Florida-based actor Chaz Mena. More information at FloridaStories.org.

Engaging Speakers, Compelling Topics, Thought-Provoking Discussions

Watch for our new Florida Humanities Speaker Series starting this fall at 10 locations around the state. These fascinating programs feature expert presenters on a wide range of colorful topics related to Florida’s history, culture, and people. Each of our community-based partners hosting this Series will showcase a minimum of four speakers over the next year.

Our Series partners include: Amelia Island Museum of History, Fernandina Beach; The Emerson Center, Vero Beach; Florida Historic Capitol Museum, Tallahassee; Friends of Highlands Hammock State Park, Sebring; Friends of the Sarasota County History Center, Sarasota; Lady Lake Historical Society, Lady Lake; Marco Island Historical Society, Marco Island; Nova Southeastern University–Alvin Sherman Library, Fort Lauderdale; Ormond Beach Historical Society, Ormond Beach; and St. Petersburg Museum of History, St. Petersburg.

For complete up-to-date listings of the scheduled speakers and their topics, go to our online Events Calendar at FloridaHumanities.org/events.

‘Waterways’ exhibit travels the state

Our Florida tour of the Smithsonian traveling exhibit “Waterways” continues to make its way around the state in 2016-2017. A critical resource, water plays a practical and inspirational role in our communities, as well as shaping Florida’s landscape. In tandem with the exhibit, host communities sponsor special events featuring local artists, historians, and other presenters who underscore the importance water has on our culture.

The “Waterways” exhibit is scheduled Sept. 3–Oct. 22 in the Curtiss Mansion Museum, Miami Springs; Oct. 29–Dec. 10 in the Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel; Dec. 17–Jan. 28 in the Okeechobee County Historic Courthouse, Okeechobee; and Feb. 4–March 18 in the Sulphur Spring Museum and Heritage Center, Tampa. For local events related to this exhibit, go to FloridaHumanities.org/events.
Major NEH grant to fund teacher workshops on Zora

The Florida Humanities Council has received a major competitive grant of $170,500 from the National Endowment for the Humanities to host more than 70 teachers from around the state and nation next summer at workshops exploring the life and work of Florida literary great Zora Neale Hurston. Our two weeklong workshops, titled “Jump at the Sun: Zora Neale Hurston and her Eatonville Roots,” will be held in Hurston’s hometown of Eatonville, the oldest incorporated African-American municipality in the country, 10 miles north of Orlando.

K-12 teachers will be invited to apply. For more information, go to FloridaHumanities.org.

Opinions? Suggestions?
Tell us what you think about FORUM

Please take a few minutes to share your thoughts about FORUM magazine. We would love to get your feedback. Take our online FORUM survey at FloridaHumanities.org.

A Special Offer for Florida Humanities Council members

For a limited time, all new and renewing members at the $125 level and higher can choose to receive a great premium.

The Forgotten Coast: Florida Wildlife Corridor
Glades to Gulf Expedition
Mallory Lykes Dimmit, Joseph M. Guthrie and Carlton Ward Jr.
Softcover, 250 pages
LINC Press, 2015

Just use the form and return envelope inside the magazine centerfold to make your contribution today.

For more information visit www.floridahumanities.org/membership

Leaving a Legacy

Through a planned gift, you can ensure that the Florida Humanities Council continues to rejuvenate Florida educators, connect families with reading programs, support vital cultural institutions, and encourage community conversations about pressing issues.

Contact Brenda Clark at 727-873-2009 or bclark@flahum.org.
Nic Stoltzfus
Gold Medal, Visual Arts

During a year teaching English in Japan, Nic Stoltzfus read Anne Morrow Lindbergh’s *Gift from the Sea*, in which Lindbergh’s sojourn on a Florida island changed her life. Stoltzfus, who lives in Blountstown, was intrigued. He returned to Florida and helped produce a nature documentary for his father Elam Stoltzfus’s media company.

The video focuses on a chain of lakes along a 30-mile coastal environment between Destin and Panama City. Nic Stoltzfus wrote the documentary and compiled the companion book: *Coastal Dune Lakes: Jewels of Florida’s Emerald Coast*. Its 132 pages showcase 15 coastal dune lakes along the Gulf of Mexico in Northwest Florida.

“I love Florida, I was born and raised in Florida, but I kind of got tired of it, and after graduation I thought, I don’t know if I want to stay here or not,” Stoltzfus told the *Tallahassee Democrat*. “[Florida is] a bit much sometimes. But when I came back and started working on the documentary, I saw that there’s a real need to tell these stories about the environment and Florida, and to let other Floridians know what’s out there.”
Robert L. Crawford  
*Silver Medal, Visual Arts*

*Ticks and Politics in South Florida: The Fourth Seminole War and the Photographs of Roy Komarek* describes in images and text the battle to eradicate cattle fever ticks in South Florida, and in particular on the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation.

It documents the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s war against the tick, a disease carrier that tore through the Southeastern cattle industry during the first half of the 20th century. The struggle caused inter-governmental strife in Washington, D.C., as various agencies held different viewpoints.

Caught in the middle was biologist Roy Komarek, who was testing for the ticks on the reservation. He also was an accomplished photographer, and this book’s photos document both the tick campaign and Seminole culture of the 1940s.

“This book has a great story to tell and the black-and-white photos are interesting both historically and aesthetically,” said the Florida book Awards judging panel.

Crawford, a former staff ornithologist at Tall Timbers Research Station in Tallahassee, was co-author of *The Legacy of a Red Hills Hunting Plantation*, which won a medal in the 2012 Book Awards. He lives in Thomasville, Ga.

Andrés Pi Andreu  
*Gold Medal, Spanish Language*

Andrés Pi Andreu is known for his prize-winning children’s literature, although *274* offers more than entertainment for kids. It recounts one day in the life of a teenager—this particular day coming 274 days after his migration from Havana to Tampa.

Andreu told FORUM he chose the number 274 because it is “about nine months after he arrived, which is more or less the time that takes for immigrants to realize completely their new situation, and it is also a wink to the birth of a new persona, nine months for a baby to be born.”

The story tells of the memories and experiences a boy named Telencio contemplates after migrating from Havana to Miami. It mixes new love, a deranged psychologist, and nostalgia. It follows a structure typical of other Andreu stories: a young person’s imagination at work to help him or her understand new life situations.

Andreu has a rich imagination of his own. “Stories just float in my head like Cheerios in milk. I grab them and write them the same way you take one of those little lifesavers and put it in your mouth,” he said. Andreu lives in Miami.
It’s a Seashell Day tells a deceptively simple story about a boy and his mom collecting seashells. But counting and science are featured, and the boy learns to identify 10 shells. Illustrated by Elliot Kreloff, the book can help adults keep their whelks, limpets, and moon snails straight, too.

Ochiltree has been writing since she was a child. She still writes something every day: a journal entry, a poem verse, maybe a few paragraphs of a current story she might be crafting.

“My parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, sisters, baby brother, and pets listened to my stories and poems with a lot of enthusiasm…and patience. I loved the sight and sound of words. I write for kids because I want to share that love,” she said on her website.

Lane Frederickson does not have a website promoting her work. Instead, her blog called “RhymeWeaver” provides tips for budding poets and teachers, and she believes her approach is unique.

“This site breaks down rhyme and meter in a way that makes it easy to understand in a short period of time,” Fredrickson told the Palm Beach Post. “But more importantly, I can tell you the rules, not the myths that get passed around the water coolers.”

Written in rhyme, Monster Trouble! is instructive—and it lives up to its title. Winifred Schnitzel puts up with growling, slimy monsters creeping around her room every night. She thinks they are cute, but they keep her awake until she discovers a foolproof method to chase them away.

The author says she used to be afraid of monsters, but now fears only alligators. She lives in South Florida (where there are plenty of ‘gators) with her husband and two children.

Illustrator Michael Robertson does not currently own a pet but says he hopes to adopt a monster one day.

Christina Diaz Gonzalez
Bronze Medal, Children’s Literature

A graduate of Florida State University’s College of Law, Gonzalez practiced for several years before reconnecting with her passion.

“I realized (with the help of my two brilliant sons who were now starting to read) that my true passion was not writing legal memoranda, but writing books for children, teens, and adults,” Gonzalez says on her website.

A novel for middle-school youngsters, Moving Target starts with a boring day in Rome. Then Cassie Arroyo’s life gets hectic. A mysterious secret society pursues the high school freshman, and she learns that an ancient bloodline makes her a special person who can wield the fabled Spear of Destiny. Oh, and someone tries to kill her father. A sequel titled Return Fire is due out in the fall of 2016. It is Gonzalez’s fourth book.

“This book was chosen for its intriguing ability to capture the reader and entertain until the last word is read…a cliff-hanging success,” said the book-award judges.

Gonzalez lives in Coral Gables with her family.
Spinning Yarn:
Storytelling Through Southern Art
September 16-January 14, 2017

Explore the power of visual storytelling with 40 works of art created by 20 contemporary, self-taught and traditional artists living and working in the South, where sense of place and cultural diversity allows a rich variety of art to adapt, grow and flourish. The South is acclaimed for its literary and oral traditions, but the sharing of stories is not exclusive to the written and spoken word. The featured artists share their innovative spirit and cultural experiences as their literary and lingual counterparts do with words. They exemplify the ability to “spin a yarn” through their art. Crealdé invites you to this two-venue exhibition at the Main Campus Gallery and the Hannibal Square Heritage Center — both located in culturally rich Winter Park, Florida.

Lillian Blades, AbundanScape, 2016, mixed media on panel, 48 x 64 in., photograph by Robert Witherspoon. Courtesy of the artist


Lonnie Holley. Do Not Write On This (detail), 2007, mixed media, 48 x 42 x 14 in., photograph by John Bentham

Gankhuyag Natsag, Jamsran, 2007, clay and papier-mâché, 30 x 18 x 15 in., photograph by Pat Jarrett. Courtesy of the Virginia Folklife Program

Annie Tolliver, Portrait of My Father, Mose, circa 1995, paint on panel, 21 x 7 in. Courtesy of Kristin and David Congdon

This project is supported by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts, the State of Florida Division of Cultural Affairs and by Orange County Government through the Arts & Cultural Affairs Program.

Crealdé School of Art
600 St. Andrews Blvd.
Winter Park, Florida
407.671.1886

Hannibal Square Heritage Center
642 W. New England Ave.
Winter Park, Florida
407.539.2680
Shaun David Hutchinson

Gold Medal, Young Adult Literature

Shaun David Hutchinson was asked in a Goodreads.com interview: “What’s the best thing about being a writer?” His answer: “Not having to wear pants to work.”

His whimsical persona notwithstanding, the author has faced major life challenges. He has blogged about struggling with depression, for example. “I don’t want pity, I don’t want solutions, I don’t want advice,” Hutchinson says in his blog. “I just want awareness. For me and for every other person who isn’t okay and is struggling where no one can see. So please be aware: Just because we’re smiling doesn’t mean everything is okay.”

The Five Stages of Andrew Brawley takes place in a hospital where the title character, Andrew, hides out in an unfinished wing after an accident kills his parents and sister.

“I’m not going to lie or try to sugarcoat it,” Hutchinson said. “(It) is the darkest book I’ve ever written, probably the darkest I’ll ever write. But it’s not about darkness. It’s about finding your way out of the dark.”

Hutchinson, who has written five books and works in information technology, lives in South Florida.

Patrick Kendrick

Silver Medal, Young Adult Literature

A retired firefighter, paramedic, and special operations technician, Kendrick won a Florida Book Awards medal in 2008 for Papa’s Problem, a take on Ernest Hemingway as a murder suspect.

“I like to work with incongruities,” Kendrick says on his website. “That is, I like to put someone, or something in situations where they would not normally be and see how they react to it. Sometimes it is one of my characters, sometimes my readers, and sometimes myself.”

In his new award-winning book, The Savants, a renowned behavioral scientist assembles an extraordinary collection of brilliant young people for a research project. Labeled “savants,” their lack of social skills makes interaction with others difficult. They must learn teamwork when a catastrophic event threatens to destroy the Eastern Seaboard and panic spreads across the nation.

A University of South Florida fine arts graduate, Kendrick wrote his first book at age 50 and started writing full-time when he retired at 60. He lives in West Palm Beach, and when he is not writing, spends as much time as possible in or on the ocean.

Gabriel Horn (White Deer of Autumn)

Bronze Medal, Young Adult Literature

Gabriel Horn has fought tirelessly for Native American causes for more than 40 years, particularly advocating academic respect for the history, literature, and philosophy of indigenous America. The professor emeritus at St. Petersburg College also is a staunch defender of the natural world, as reflected in his book Our Kinship With the Animals, featuring one of Horn’s heroes, world-renowned scientist, Jane Goodall.

In Motherless, for which he won this year’s award, a young Native-American girl approaches adolescence while struggling with her emerging identity, racism, and the brutal treatment of the natural world.

Horn is a member of the family of Princess Red Wing, Metacomet, and Nippawanock of the Narragansett Tribe/Wampanoag Nation. His Native American name translated to English is White Deer of Autumn.

“My body is White Deer, my spirit is White Deer,” Horn says on his website. “No matter where I found myself, or where I lived, I was Indian. No one could have taken that away. It was my heart.”

He and his life companion, Amy Krout-Horn, live in Pinellas County.
Barrier Islands of the Florida Gulf Coast Peninsula
All about the 30 barrier islands on our west coast
$18.95 • color photos • softcover

The Biohistory of Florida
Florida’s people, plants, and animals, prehistoric to present-day
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Brandi George
Gold Medal, Poetry

Brandi George says her muse lives close to home—as do her mentors. “Florida is really where I found my voice,” she said during her gold-medal acceptance remarks.

Her list of mentors reads like a who’s who of Florida writers. Among them is David Kirby, who won the 2016 Florida Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing. (See article about Kirby in this issue.)

In powerful, personal words, George’s Gog utters a prayer for dead birds, mourns cats, strips bare the meanness of violent fathers, and intimates the vulnerability of weaker creatures. George “conjures up a world of monsters who live down the street,” writes poet Barbara Hamby, who along with her husband Kirby, teaches creative writing at Florida State University, where George recently earned her Ph.D.

In her blog, George wrote, “I’d like to know how to transcend the past, how to tap into the part of the self that lies beyond a name, beyond our memories or experiences, that part of the self that seems to wink when you call out your own name saying: I am infinite; I am the air; I am the fire burning within the letters.”

Donald Morrill
Silver Medal, Poetry

Donald Morrill and his wife, writer Lisa Birnbaum, are both writing professors at the University of Tampa (UT). Such propinquity is inspiring, Morrill says; he calls Birnbaum his muse. “She’s the happy genius of our household and all I know about poetry,” Morrill said at the book-awards presentations.

Awaiting Your Impossibilities offers a contemplative look at life’s largest themes, love and death among them. It is Morrill’s third collection of poetry. He also has written four nonfiction books.

For many years, Morrill directed UT’s Writers at the University series. He also was a poetry editor of Tampa Review and The University of Tampa Press Poetry Series.

Morrill has taught at Jilin University in the People’s Republic of China and has been a Fulbright Scholar in American Literature at the University of Lodz in Poland. He is currently associate dean of Graduate and Continuing Studies at UT.
AWAITING YOUR IMPOSSIBILITIES

By Donald Morrill

NOW IS THE TAMPA OF ALL TAMPA

La vida with everyone in it, someone’s ninth town,
A thousandth home to luxuriant unpossession.

Of August noon casting down its powdery halo,
December light the thinnest pane of raw potato.

Week 35, Week 17, at the vanished timeshares,
Stadium-roars in a plastic cup, tingling the fingers.

Now Mandarin faces in bedded pansies,
Night gods twisting in the frangipani.

Traffic still knotting hours after
Good news suddenly slows one driver.

A sparking rabbit rounds the dog track,
Past the propeller works and yachts on blocks.

Waters so soft you can’t shave close! Pink lightning!
In Council Chambers the motion still carrying.

Tampa of clacking pennants and spouses twined like driftwood.
Tampa the vast gut touched like a faraway wound.

Of graffiti scored on sea grape leaves,
Divining lap dancers silvered with fatigue.

*Future Nails*    *All Day Nails*    *Eternal Nails*,
Searing beach sand squeaking beneath the heels.

Tampa so alive no one can serve it truth,
Shade offering itself like contraband fruit.

Those first books buried in the wilderness,
Stilled bombers at the base, quartered Percocets.

Back and forth beneath table-top glass,
A tabby passes its paw, peering through, entranced.

Jonathan Fink
Bronze Medal, Poetry

Jonathan Fink’s debut collection contains
an unusual and powerful retelling of an
American tragedy: the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911. The poem traces life and
death before and during the conflagration
while raising both intimacy and horror; Fink’s
words make the reader feel the awful heat, the
terror of the victims, and the anguish of those
who watched, helped, or tried
to help but couldn’t.

Bruce Smith, a National
Book Award finalist in 2011,
said, “Fink weeps for those who
have yet to be wept for.”

Thematically, the whole
of *The Crossing* collection
addresses struggle as it is
reflected in physical labor,
desire, suffering, and the soul’s journey past
and present. It took Fink six years to complete
the book.

“In all cases, I was inspired to write these
poems not because I knew what I wanted
to say about the subjects, but because I felt
compelled to explore and investigate the
complicated material through poetry,” Fink
told *Poets and Writers* magazine.

Fink is professor and director of creative
writing at the University of West Florida in
Pensacola, where he also edits *Panhandler*
magazine and Panhandler Books.

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Africa is not only part of Florida’s soul; it is part of our soil as well. Hundreds of millions of years ago, as the massive supercontinents finished their elaborate slam dance of cracking apart, crashing together, and ripping apart again, the section destined to become North America tore off a chunk of Northwest Africa and dragged it along as it floated slowly west. Over the following millennia that African fragment, known today as the Florida Tectonic platform, gathered enough silt, clay, and sand to rise from the ocean as Florida and the Bahamas.

It was, perhaps, inevitable that this peninsula became such a fertile ground for poems by Africans who first arrived with the earliest European voyages and later as slaves escaping British plantations. Those early poems by Florida’s Africans were the spirituals and folk songs created as part of a community effort that transcended individual and physical boundaries, blending European and African melodies and songs in versions that blacks and whites took with them as they crossed, voluntarily and involuntarily, colony, territorial, and state lines.

While that work only survived as an oral tradition, it deeply influenced later poets like the legendary Langston Hughes (1902–1967). Perhaps inspired by the anthropological work of his early collaborator, Eatonville’s Zora Neale Hurston, Hughes added to the folk tradition his love of the rhythms of jazz and blues for his “Florida Road Workers” (1931):

Hey, Buddy!
Look at me!

I’m makin’ a road
For the cars to fly by on,
Makin’ a road
Through the palmetto thicket
For light and civilization
To travel on.

I’m makin’ a road
For the rich to sweep over
In their big cars
And leave me standin’ here.

Paving the literary road that Hughes and Hurston traveled were four remarkable African Americans, two born during slavery and two immediately after. Three were native Floridians who found fame (and some fortune) in New York; the fourth never set foot in either the Sunshine State or the Big Apple and found a little fame but not much fortune. He did, however, write Florida’s first epic poem.

Timothy Thomas Fortune, born in Marianna in 1856, attended Jacksonville’s famous Stanton School before moving steadily North, first to Howard University in Washington, D.C., and then to New York City where he became editor of the country’s most influential black newspaper, The New York Age, and an advisor and ghostwriter for Booker T. Washington.
Fortune was already well known for his editorials, articles, and books on economics, education, and civil rights when, in 1905, he published *Dreams of Life*, a collection of the poems he had written “for my own amusement and pleasure.” He noted that they all reflected his childhood memories of Florida, “a veritable storehouse of priceless treasure to the literary antiquary.”

> When the hills of the North are shrouded in snow,  
> When the winds of winter their fiercest do blow—  
> Then take me again to the clime of my birth,  
> Dear Florida—dearest to me on the earth.

At their best, his poems become simpler, more direct reflections on the abuse of power that his editorials regularly documented. In the title poem of his collection he questions the motives of those, like Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon, who seek power over others: “Did God make Might the test of Right/Or man—blind leader of the blind!” The striking ambiguity of these two lines shows Fortune’s insight and talent. Is “man” an object or a subject? Is the poet suggesting that God chose us to set standards or that we have usurped that power?

> The very title *Dreams of Life* reflects the way the pragmatic turn-of-the-century publisher and crusader for civil rights recognizes the innocent idealism of his youthful longing for the state of nature John Locke described in his two treatises on government:

> There were no kings of men till men  
> Made kings of men, and of all the earth;  
> There were no privileged classes when  
> First Nature, man and beasts had birth.

While poetry seems to have been a diversion for Fortune, it was Albery Allson Whitman’s passion. Born a slave in Kentucky in 1851, Whitman was a manual laborer before becoming the financial agent for Ohio’s Wilberforce University and an A.M.E. pastor. Whatever else he did, he read and wrote faithfully; his seven books of poetry show a paradoxical combination of his uncompromising spirit and his fascination with classic British poets. He also passed his love of performing on to his four daughters who, as the Whitman Sisters, became the longest running and highest paid comedy and dance act in Black Vaudeville.

In his most famous work, an epic poem about the Seminoles of Florida, published in 1884 as *The Rape of Florida* and later that year as *Twasinta’s Revenge*, Whitman creates a fictional hero, Atlassa, to retell the story of the Second Seminole War and the removal of the Seminoles from an Edenic, multi-racial home that sounds much like Timothy Thomas Fortune’s dream of man’s original natural state.

> If e’er the muse of history sits to write,  
> And Florida appears upon her page  
> This nation’s crimes will blush with noonday light...

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From the dedication on, Whitman makes his sympathies clear. He admits to being born in bondage, but asserts emphatically that, because slavery is for him a mental rather than physical condition, “I never was a slave.” And he offers no apologies for taking an aggressive tone, dismissing self-pity as “the language of imbecility and cowardice,” and announcing, “The time has come for all ‘Uncle Toms’ and ‘Topsies’ to die.”

Using Native Americans to make his point about the persistence of racism in the United States, he regularly returns to an argument from natural law about the universality of moral principles: “Man hath of justice and right a cause/Prior to all that has e’er contravened.” In Whitman’s universe, the true tempter is Mammon, so that humans can only realize the lives they deserve by freeing society from “those who buy and sell.”

In contrast with that mercantile world is the generosity of the Seminoles towards blacks escaping slavery, a militant tough love intended to rekindle manhood:

The poorest black that came upon their shore
To them was brother—their own flesh and blood,—
They fought his wretched manhood to restore,—
They sound his hidings in the swampy wood,
And brought him forth—in arms before him stood—
The citizens of God and Sovran earth,—
They shot straightforward looks with flame imbued,
Till in him manhood sprang, a noble birth,
And warrior-armed he rose to all that manhood’s worth.

A kinder, gentler leader than Osceola, “the hidden terror of the hammock” who “[s]at gloomily and nursed a bitter hate,” Atlassa finally leads his people into the Western Indian Territory, a “land of free limb and free thought.”

Like Fortune and Whitman, who embraced the formalism of traditional British poetry, a Jacksonville native, James Weldon Johnson, began his literary career in 1899 by using a very traditional form to write a song for his students at the school Timothy Thomas Fortune had attended in Jacksonville, the Stanton School. His younger brother Rosamond set the words to music so it could be performed the following year on Abraham Lincoln’s birthday in honor of a visit by Booker T. Washington.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” slowly became a national phenomenon and would be named by the NAACP as the “Negro National Anthem,” included as an authorized hymn in the Episcopal hymnal, and read during the benediction at President Barack Obama’s first inauguration:

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise,
High as the list’ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.
Their success encouraged the brothers to move to New York, where they teamed up with Bob Cole and started exploring the world of folk and popular songs. Blending jazz and ragtime, they had a number of successes, the most enduring of which has been “Didn’t He Ramble” (1902), which became a staple of New Orleans jazz funerals and a standard recorded over the years by everyone from Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong to Harry Connick Jr. and Dr. John:

This black sheep was a terror, oh!
and such a ram was he
That every copper knew by heart
his rambling pedigree.

Perhaps because they were new to New York’s music scene, the three men published the song under the pseudonym Wil Handy. Within a decade that decision would prove a bit confusing once the brilliant W.C. Handy began transforming popular music when he introducing the 12-bar blues for his “Memphis Blues” (1912), “St. Louis Blues” (1914), and “Beale Street Blues” (1916).

The Johnson-Cole team remained active for a number of years, writing musicals and operettas for Broadway, before Rosamond branched out into vaudeville and musicals, eventually working as a musical educator and director. James, a lawyer, became a diplomat before serving as a field secretary for the NAACP and eventually becoming its first African-American Executive Secretary. The brothers remained close, publishing together *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* in 1925.

James Weldon Johnson’s fascination with the history and culture of African Americans helped him become a leading intellectual force in the Harlem Renaissance and led to his decision to recreate the sermons he had heard as a youth in Jacksonville in *God’s Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (1927). For Johnson, it was through those black Southern preachers “that the people of diverse languages and customs who were brought here from diverse parts of Africa and thrown into slavery were given their first sense of unity and solidarity.”

His goal was to capture the preachers’ voices, their language (“saturated with the sublime phraseology of the Hebrew prophets and steeped in the idioms of King James English”), and their sense of a “personal and anthropomorphic God.” As shown in the opening and closing sections of his first verse sermon, “The Creation,” he realized that goal vividly:

And God stepped out on space,
And He looked around and said,
“I’m lonely —
I’ll make me a world.”

After five days of creation, still lonely,

This Great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneed down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till He shaped it in His own image;
Then into it He blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.

Just as geologists have taught us that Florida was once part of the African continent and Africa itself once part of the supercontinent Pangaea, these four extraordinary men have shown not only their own people but all of us the profound and fundamental connections we all share. Their sense of justice, beauty, and history continue to remind us how much more unites us than divides us.

MAURICE J. O’SULLIVAN, an award-winning teacher, writer, and filmmaker, is professor of English and Kenneth Curry Chair of Literature at Rollins College in Winter Park.
IN 1977, YBOR CITY was in steep decline. Few of the original inhabitants of this once-vibrant ethnic community remained. Seventh Avenue was a shadow of the thriving commercial center of years past—and ghost-like at night. But to a young historian, this weathered and wearied enclave was a dreamland.

It was different from any immigrant community I had ever seen. Or smelled. The aromas of fresh Cuban bread emerging from La Segunda Bakery mingled with those of the shredded, savory flank steak called ropa vieja (translation: “old clothes”) served at the Alvarez Café and the “burnt” scent of dark coffee beans emanating from roasters at the La Naviera Mill. Add to that the fragrant, musty smell of tobacco leaf that wafted through the remaining cigar factories, mixed with the staccato sounds of Spanish and Italian, and you have a very special place.

Despite the obvious economic decline, many buildings lining the brick streets of this historic area just northeast of downtown Tampa remained visually stunning. I returned again and again to gasp at the monumental scale and grandeur of the immigrant ethnic society buildings so lovingly erected by the Cuban, Italian, and Spanish residents who established this community beginning in 1886. Monuments to immigrants, these structures suggested the grandeur they once evoked: three- and four-stories tall with opulent theaters and elegant dance floors, marble stairs and cast-iron balustrades.

I couldn’t wait to find out more about the people who built them and who lived in the small wooden cottages nestled throughout the neighboring streets. I wanted to know their stories. Many of the immigrants and their elderly children were still alive, I learned. In a race against time,
In 1909, the reformer Lewis Hine brought his camera to Tampa to document child labor. His photographs of two young women working at an Ybor City factory scandalized Americans and resulted in national child labor legislation.

I tracked hundreds down, traveling to their homes and tape-recording their memories. I also found some playing dominoes and sipping café carajillo or café corretto (coffee with brandy) in the arabesque-tiled cantinas of the still-active ethnic society buildings.

As the tapes rolled, tales of struggle and heroism poured forth and patterns and themes emerged. I met an exotic cast of characters that only a novelist could imagine—boliteros (numbers runners), los lectores (those who read books aloud to workers in the many cigar factories), and cafeteros (those who supplied workers with fortifying cups of Cuban coffee). I even met what were called stripper women, las despalilladoras, who stripped the tobacco leaves from the stems!

Some of these people stay deep in my memory—like José Vega Díaz. In 1980, my colleague and fellow historian George Pozzetta and I met this 94-year-old cigar maker who had arrived in Ybor City in 1897. Millions of cigars—Tampa Nuggets, Hav-A-Tampas, Tampa Girls, and many more once-famous brands—ensured prosperity. A Tampa-made cigar became a proper status symbol for the era’s growing middle classes.

To grade, de-stem, bunch, and fashion the tobacco leaf into puro Habana cigars, thousands of immigrants from Cuba, Spain, and Italy—“Latins” in the local vernacular—created an ethnic oasis in the Deep South, an industrial community in an agrarian state. Over 100 factories solidified Tampa’s reputation as “Cigar City.” Alas, only a handful of them still stand.

The cigar factories were home to genuine celebrities and heroes, known as los lectores or “readers.” The practice of reading aloud to cigar workers began in Cuba and followed the migration routes of tabaqueros across the Straits of Florida. A distinct culture surrounded them. The fiercely independent cigar makers, not the factory owners, controlled the process. Workers hired lectores to read literature to them while they worked. Some readers sat on chairs, while others preferred elegant pulpits called tribunas. Workers secured the right to select the novels that were to be read to them. In a celebrated incident, two workers began quarreling over whether the Victor Hugo novel Ninety-three offended the sensibilities of the women workers. The argument spilled outside where a duel was held, resulting in a tragedy that the French author surely would have approved.

Tampa’s prosperity largely depended upon the skills of these 10,000 cigar makers. The immigrant

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laborers were anything but passive, either about their working conditions or political issues; indeed, Ybor City was a hotbed of radical ideas. Angelo Massari recounted how as a young man in Sicily, he became radicalized confronting a conservative Roman Catholic Church and a repressive state. “When in 1902 I landed in Tampa, I found myself in a world of radicals for which I was prepared,” he recalled. In Ybor City, anarchists and trade unionists, socialists and communists, battled for primacy.

Massari had left the impoverished Sicily because it was said that young men there had only three options: rebellion, stagnation, or emigration. He’d heard that in Tampa, “there is no shortage of anything.” Even coffee, someone told him, “they make in a big pot.” Massari emigrated and became a prosperous banker!

Consider the inspiring story of Jose Yglesias, arguably Tampa’s greatest native-born writer. Yglesias’s family came from Galicia, a poor region in Spain. Tales from there and Ybor City enrich his writing. His stories colorfully reflect the political passion of the cigar workers. “People date their lives from various strikes in Tampa,” he recollected. In 1902, his uncle, a reader in a cigar factory, was kidnapped by vigilantes determined to bludgeon the labor movement. When he returned, cigar makers held a one-day strike in tribute.

Latinos may not have won many strikes, but they left a stirring cultural legacy. “Those cigar makers knew how to organize more than trade unions,” asserted Yglesias. Nothing speaks more eloquently of their immigrant resolve and dreams than their mutual-aid societies. Rarely in America have immigrants erected ethnic society buildings on such a scale and with such noble purposes as in Ybor City. These were monuments to immigrant dreams: El Centro Asturiano, El Centro Español, El Círculo Cubano, L’Unione Italiana, and La Unión Martí-Maceo seemed more like cathedrals to the working classes than ethnic clubhouses.

Each of the societies erected impressive theaters, where performances in Spanish and Italian languages occurred weekly. “When great international performers like opera virtuoso Caruso came to Tampa,” remarked Yglesias, “it was cigar makers who booked them, not the Americanos.”

The societies also established modern hospitals and medical clinics to provide collective health care. The Cuban, Spanish, and Italian mutual aid societies hired physicians to work at the clubs, clinics, and hospitals.

But for all of the charm of the material culture of Ybor City—the wrought-iron balconies, the wooden cigar makers’ cottages, and the palatial theaters—it was the survivors’ stories that I treasure and remember most fondly. The story told by Manuel Alfonso illustrates the ethnic and racial fluidity within Ybor City. An Afro-Cuban, Alfonso maintained that respect, above all, mattered among neighbors. “We used to get along good,” he remembered. “When my grandmommy died in 1923,” he reminisced, “she was buried on Noche Buena—Christmas Eve—which in Cuban homes always had a big celebration. The only black family on that block was my family, [yet] nobody on that block celebrated Noche Buena out of respect for her.”

History is never static. The original Ybor City characterized by scarcity gave way to the prosperous community of the...
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1920s. The Great Depression followed, walloping the cigar industries, and in a cruel symmetry, machines replaced hand rollers while radios replaced the readers’ voices.

World War II emptied Ybor City of young men, who wanted to prove to Uncle Sam that they were more American than Americanos. When G.I. José and Giuseppina came home, they wanted little to do with aging wooden casitas (small houses) or a cigar industry that had cratered. By the 1950s, African Americans constituted a majority of Ybor’s residents. Third-generation businesses closed. The Columbia Restaurant, a landmark Spanish restaurant that dates from 1905, and Ybor Square, small shops and antique dealers inside the original V.M. Ybor factory, stood as sentinels on opposite ends of the enclave.

The 1960s shook Ybor City to and from its foundations. Interstate 4 dissected the enclave and in a classic case of intended and unintended consequences, the Great Society’s efforts at social engineering failed miserably when urban renewal simply leveled hundreds of homes and businesses, leaving vacant blocks or new buildings thatjarred the senses.

In the 1980s and ’90s, young Tampeños found Ybor City a hothouse for artists and studios and counter-culture bookstores. Guavaween, a raunchy Halloween parade down Seventh Avenue perfectly fit Ybor’s new sensibilities. The City of Tampa and developers built parking garages and a shopping complex, Centro Ybor, to boost the struggling enclave, hoping a festive marketplace would bring back crowds. Now, early in the 21st century, raucous bars, tattoo parlors, and musical venues define the newest iteration of Ybor City. The Church of Scientology moved into Ybor Square.

To be honest, I prefer the old Ybor City. I miss the elderly immigrants who quoted Victor Hugo and recounted the great strike of 1910. I miss the imperious Spanish waiters who had served patrons for decades at Spanish Park and Los Novedades, masters who effortlessly deboned a broiled pompano with only a knife and fork. Former Florida Gov. Bob Martinez once told me that his father worked as a waiter at the Columbia Restaurant and won a bet that he could take the food and drink orders for a party of 60 and never write anything down.

I mourn for an Ybor City that we lost long ago. So much of modern Florida is a recurring story of loss and lamentation: crystal springs despoiled by development, century-old orange groves replaced by condominiums, and kitschy tourist attractions taken over by mega theme parks. Florida is never static.

In 1980, Angelina Comescone, aghast at the current generation, recalled nostalgically, “In the evenings our parents would take us walking. We would sing as loud as we could, Italian, Spanish, and American songs.” She lamented, “Nobody walks anymore. Nobody sings anymore.”

And yet, as a historian, I know that every generation deserves its own music and its own Ybor City.

GARY R. MORMINO, scholar in residence at the Florida Humanities Council, co-authored The Immigrant World of Ybor City in 1987 with George Pozzetta. Mormino, a prolific writer of books and articles, was awarded the Florida Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing in 2015.
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