

Neal Barrett, Jr.

November 3, 1929 – January 12, 2014

By Joe Lansdale

It's impossible for me to say all I want to say about Neal Barrett, Jr. in this brief space, but I will say this first. I loved him like a family member. We knew each other close to 40 years. I met him at a convention in Houston, Texas in the late 70s. I went there specifically to see him. I was a fan. There were other Texas writers there, younger ones, and they weren't interested in giving me the time of day. I told Neal I badly wanted to be a writer. He said, "Have you written anything." I had, and I told him, to which he replied. "Then keep writing. You're already a writer." That validation was important to me and I've never forgotten it. We began seeing each other more regularly, and did many events together, burned up the telephone lines for years, and when the FAX machine became popular, this became his weapon of choice. He once played a joke on me. He knew how much I loved Indian food, sent me a fax with a smudge on it that read: INDIAN FOOD. Sniff here. About five minutes later I got a phone call. He said, "Did you sniff?" "Yes," I said. "Damn you."

He was a great writer and never received the attention he deserved, and I won't kid you, I'm bothered by that. *The Hereafter Gang* and *Interstate Dreams* and *Through Darkest America* are great novels, and I'm not the only one that thinks *The Hereafter Gang* is one of The Great American novels. I proclaim that without hesitation. Neal was funny, and satirical, and he was very much a natural talent. He was oddly wise and simultaneously naïve. He was one of life's innocents in many ways. He used to drive me crazy with his incredible gullibility, and then he would turn around and say something so insightful I was amazed.

Neal was a very good friend. He was Unca Neal to my daughter, Kasey and son Keith. He and Kasey especially had a strong relationship, and I know she feels as sad today as I do. My kids have never known a time when Neal wasn't part of our family. It hurts.

But I have my memories of him to sustain me. And his personal stories. Like the story he told me about when he was little, and how he actually got a rabid dog for Christmas. He had to take painful shots, but his telling of the dog under the Christmas tree, and how it attacked him, was both sad and hysterical when he told it.

I was with him when he lost his car at AggieCon and couldn't find it until the convention was over and everyone had driven away. Also, it seemed as if ever time we got together something went wrong. There was always some kind of catastrophe. I can still hear him: "Joe. What are we going to do? This is a real mess." But it was always fun, always turned out well, and gave us something to talk about, and talk about it we did.

We visited, we wrote together, we quarreled from time to time, but we always thought of ourselves as brothers. Last time I saw him was at his home in Austin, and he looked very ill. When I was leaving, it was all I could do to hold it together. I was only leaving because I could tell he was tired and didn't want to tell me he was. As I started to leave, I hugged him and he

hugged me, and he said, "I love you." I told him the same. I'm so glad I did. Not long after he became very sick, went to the hospital, and then to assisted living. Last time I called him he was in pain, but he was still making plans to write stories. He was always optimistic. I never talked to him again. Shortly after that he became too ill, and then, the other day he was lost to us.

I wish I believed in an afterlife, a place for good people to go. I like to think if there were such a thing it would be like in his book, *The Hereafter Gang*. Now there was a cool place to hang out. Please let him be there. He deserves it.

Bye my brother. I miss you.



Paul Boller

December 31, 1916 – March 16, 2014

By Judy Alter

Paul Boller was an internationally recognized authority on the American presidency, but he was so much more than that. He was a kind, compassionate man who was a born story-teller and a scholar with a lively eye for the humor in life, history, and politics. One year during the presidency of George H. W. Bush, Paul, a dedicated liberal, kept attendants at the TIL banquet in gales of laughter as he illustrated "Bushspeak" from the podium. Books such as *Presidential Anecdotes*, *Presidential Wives*, *Presidential Campaigns*, and others artfully blend solid scholarship with fascinating anecdote. In the classroom, he was known for his knowledge and the wit with which he kept students of all ages fascinated.

Paul was born in upstate New York on December 31, 1916 and talked of growing up in Watertown. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Yale University and began graduate work there. During World War II he attended the Navy Language School in Colorado and learned Japanese. Stationed in Honolulu and Guam, he created leaflets in Japanese that were dropped from B-29s over that country, urging surrender and evacuation of cities that might be bomb targets. After the war, Paul completed work on his doctorate and taught at SMU, the University of Massachusetts, and the University of Texas at Austin.

He joined the faculty of TCU in 1976, holding the Lyndon B. Johnson Chair in United States history. He retired in 1983 to devote his life to scholarship and writing. His list of awards and fellowships is long, culminating in an honorary doctorate from Texas Wesleyan.

After retirement, Paul remained active in university life, visiting the campus often. His compassion for students and concern for advanced learning led him to generous donations of money and books to several institutions. Those who knew him recognized the importance of friends and students in his life.

Paul never married, but he was highly sociable and particularly loved the company of women. Always energetic, he was as lively as ever in his nineties, zipping around Fort Worth in a smart car, meeting friends for lunch, telling humorous stories, talking politics (he could charm staunch conservatives), and sharing his knowledge and wit with those around him. A small man, he was a giant among all of us, and he will be missed, his memory treasured.



L.D. Clark

October 22, 1922 – March 19, 2014

By Mark Busby

At some point in Terrence Malick's brilliant, enigmatic film *The Tree of Life* (2011) one of the main characters is walking along a sidewalk, and coming toward him is a man with a jauntily cocked hat, which he tips and then continues on. That was the distinguished Texas writer, L.D. Clark, who was approaching 90 when he signed on as an extra for the film. L.D. died March 19, 2014, in his hometown, Gainesville, Texas. He was typically open to new experiences, and being an extra in the movie filmed near his long-time home in Smithville was just part of his openness as was writing a children's book *The World According to Coho* (2009), even though he had no children or grandchildren.

L.D. grew up in the Cross Timbers area of Texas. It was a life close to the soil that instilled in him a love of fields and forest and streams and sky, along with the desire to recreate them through the magic of words. His education began in a one-room schoolhouse with a wood heater and water carried in from a spring in the woods. He graduated from Gainesville High School in 1940, just before World War II. He went through combat service during the war after enlisting in the Army Air Corps in 1942. He served in the Pacific as a gunner and weathercaster on B-24 bombers running search and destroy missions. After the war he went to Columbia University in New York City, where he completed a B.A., an M.A. and a Ph.D.

At Columbia he met the woman who became his wife and life partner. LaVerne Harrell Clark (1929-2008) was also a writer and TIL member. For many years L.D. and LaVerne served on the faculty and staff at the University of Arizona, and L.D. established his academic credentials with important publications on the British writer, D.H. Lawrence, including *Dark Night of the Body: D.H. Lawrence's The Plumed Serpent* (University of Texas Press, 1964).

Upon their retirement, the Clarks settled in LaVerne's family home in Smithville, where they both continued to publish fiction. LaVerne was a photographer, editor, and folklorist. Among her best-known books are *They Sang for Horses*, a non-fiction classic about Navajo and Apache lore and mythology, which won the University of Chicago Folklore Prize, and *Keepers Of The Earth*, winner of the 1998, best first novel award from Western Writers of America. Among L.D.'s over fifteen publications were *Lone Journey and Other Questing Stories* (2002), *A Charge*

of Angels (1987), and *The Fifth Wind* (1981). The closest book to his heart was no doubt *A Bright Tragic Thing* (1992), a fictional treatment of the “Great Hanging at Gainesville, Texas,” when forty-two suspected Unionists in Confederate Texas were hanged at Gainesville in October 1862. L.D.’s great grandfather, Nathaniel Clark, was one of the men accused of treason and hanged. Just a few months before L.D. died, he worked to get the Gainesville City Council to approve a monument in remembrance of those who were hanged.

The Clark legacy will continue. Based on the model of the Paisano fellowship at J. Frank Dobie’s house west of Austin, L.D. and LaVerne established a Literary Endowment at Texas State University, which will include a writers-in-residence program at their Smithville home, where the spirit of the writer in the jaunty hat will continue.



T.R. Fehrenbach

January 12, 1925 – December 1, 2013

By Jay Brandon

T.R. Fehrenbach, author of the definitive history of Texas for now and probably for decades to come, died in San Antonio on December 1, 2013. He began the story of Texas with the words, “In the beginning, before any people, was the land...” The second publisher of the book, John Radziewicz, said, “I can think of only two books that have dared to start out with the words, ‘In the beginning...’ and the other book is T. R. Fehrenbach’s *Lone Star*.”

Theodore Reed Fehrenbach, Jr., was born in San Benito in 1925. Skipping a couple of grades in school, he began attending Princeton University at the age of 16. His studies there were interrupted by serving in the Army in World War II, but he returned to graduate from Princeton magna cum laude in 1947. He returned to military service in the Korean War, which led to his writing probably his second best known historical work, *This Kind of War*. The book is still taught at West Point and other military schools, because it recognized a new kind of insurgent war that would dominate the rest of the twentieth century (and, sadly, part of the twenty-first, so far).

In between and after wars he sold insurance, wrote science fiction, and contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Saturday Evening Post*. But *Lone Star: A History of Texas* and the *Texans*, published in 1968, secured his reputation as the preeminent Texas historian. It is a sweeping history, the story of the “Anglo-Celts,” who conquered not only Texas, in his view, but much of the western world. He did not nigger on details. “I don’t believe in social science or all those tables and statistics,” Fehrenbach told *Texas Monthly* in 1998. “All the great historians have been great writers. But most of the new ones write small things.”

Fehrenbach also wrote a history of Mexico, *Fire and Blood*, as well as books about Swiss banks, Comanches, and FDR. He was for twenty years director of the Texas Historical Commission. He also wrote for thirty years a Sunday column in the *San Antonio Express-News*, which had a very loyal following, and which he ended only a few months before his death. The last words of his last column were, “The column that received the greatest response was about my cat, George, and the finest-crafted columns usually go out in the trash on Monday morning.” That will not be the case with his best works, which will endure.



Jean Flynn

September 17, 1934 – July 7, 2013

By Fran Vick

Jean Flynn is beautiful, smart, funny, and absolutely the best friend anyone could have. I am using the present tense because she is still with me. I hear her voice, her laughter, her funny comments to and about Bob and her concern for me and for all of her friends.

If you were one of those who weren't lucky enough to have known her, Jean was all about love and compassion and learning, because she grew up in hard times, as she remembers in these words from her essay, “Sharecropper's Daughter”:

When you are a poor farmer's child in Northwest Texas, you do not grow up dreaming of becoming a writer, or a teacher, or a librarian with a Master's Degree. You dream of owning your own farm or ranch with a two-storied house and a white picket fence. Or you fantasize about beating the pants off the boys pulling bolls or chopping cotton with you. My experience on the farm also taught me to accept people, regardless of race, as human beings. We worked in the cotton fields with African Americans and Hispanics. We all struggled to survive.

I dreamed and I fantasized but I never expected to achieve the things I have in my lifetime. I have experienced immeasurable joy and unmitigated tragedy and have come out a stronger woman because of the experiences. My story is not unique among women my age. We all grew up in turbulent times, but unfortunately, some women never get beyond the pain or are too complacent to try anything new. I did take risks and profited by it. After nine years, a marriage, and two children I finished my BA degree at Baylor University and taught English for thirteen years. It was as an elementary school librarian that I began to write biographies for young readers. My first book was Jim Bowie: A Texas Legend and my most recent and tenth book is the biography, Henry B. Gonzalez: A Rebel with a Cause.

It was Jean and Bob's good fortune—and ours, too—that they met, fell in love and married. They are a couple who really are “made for each other.” Bob was her equal in wit, and humanness and keen observance. One can't think of one without the other.

So I am adding one bit that both of them wrote about their 40th anniversary “Enduring Love,” published in *Growing Up a Sullen Baptist and Other Lies*, that bears repeating. Jean writes:

We have been told numerous times that our marriage should have failed. We are opposites. We view things differently. Robert is a romantic. I am a realist. When two people are so different one always has to compromise. I compromised on a wedding anniversary trip. We gave ourselves a five week trip to Alaska for our fortieth wedding anniversary. I had envisioned wine by a campfire, the smells of food cooking, and sleeping bags zipped together under the stars. . . . It was late when we arrived at Happy Camp, an oxymoron if I have ever heard one. It was also snowing. We set up our tent. I took off my wet socks and suit and said, “I’m going to bed. Don’t blow the [bear] whistle. If a bear comes, let him have me.”. . . As I curled up in the sleeping bag, I silently prayed, “Lord, if you will just let me get dry and warm again, I promise to divorce Robert Flynn before our next anniversary.

Bob’s view:

For our fortieth anniversary, I wanted to do something romantic. Alaska! Lying beside a bubbling stream under a clear starry sky with wine in our hands, a campfire at our feet and miles of nothing in every direction. . . . We celebrated our anniversary at Happy Camp. There were no stars because it was snowing, no campfire because there was no wood, and no wine because Jean drank it the first night. I set up the tent, unrolled the sleeping bags on the snow and Jean crawled into one. . . . I heated chocolate on the Sterno and brought hot chocolate and M&Ms to bed. . . . I think we both agreed it was the best anniversary ever. We were both quiet for a while but I knew what Jean was thinking – where will we celebrate our forty-first anniversary? Botswana, I thought. Or maybe, Bangladesh.

Jean celebrated her 60th anniversary with her husband in Cuba with the TIL group last year. They tell me she was a trooper all the way.

Jean Flynn is one of the most marvelous and unforgettable women in my life. She will always be with me.



Lionel García

August 20, 1935 – July 8, 2013

By Nicolás Kanellos

Lionel García was a novelist who created some of the most memorable characters in Chicano literature in a style well steeped in the traditions of the Texas tall tale and of Mexican American folk narrative. Born in San Diego, Texas, on August 20, 1935, García grew up in an environment in which Mexican Americans were the majority population in his small town and

on the ranches where he worked and played. To make a living, García became a veterinarian, but he always practiced his first love: storytelling and writing. In 1983 he won the PEN Southwest Discovery Award for his novel in progress, *Leaving Home*, which was published in 1985. García went on to win the two other major awards for fiction in the Southwest: the Southwest Book Award of the Southwest Booksellers Association and the Texas Institute of Letters Award for Fiction for his 1989 novel *Hardscrub*.

Leaving Home and his novels, *A Shroud in the Family* (1987) and *To a Widow with Children* (1994), draw heavily on his family experiences and small-town background. Both are set in quaint villages very much like San Diego, Texas, where he grew up, and follow the antics of children similar to the friends and family members who surrounded him as a child—they reappear again in his collection of autobiographical stories, *I Can Hear the Cowbells Ring* (1994). His prize-winning novel *Hardscrub* (1989) is a departure from his former works, a realistically drawn chronicle of the life of an Anglo child in an abusive family relationship. In 2001, García continued with his autobiographical stories in the collection *The Day They Took My Uncle*. During a decade-long hiatus from novel-writing, García explored playwriting and poetry, winning the *Texas Review* Poetry Prize in 2003. García published his first collection of poetry, *Brush Country*, in 2004, exploring death in the hard-scrabble existence of southeast Texas.

Lionel García was a Texas original, an accomplished writer who gave voice to a marginalized people. Perhaps that is one of the reasons he was overlooked by the commercial publishing establishment. He nevertheless was a subtle satirist who crafted his characters and stories with warmth and respect for the art, and was more productive than many a full-time creative writer. His alma mater, Texas A & M has collected his papers in its Cushing Library, which organized an homage and exhibit a few years ago.



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