

## Elroy Bode

By Marcia Hatfield Daudistel

I first met Elroy when I went to work at Texas Western Press. He had already published four books there. I edited his last two books at the Press, *Commonplace Mysteries* and *Home Country*. That was the easiest gig I ever had. I was overwhelmed at actually editing his work. I would make a couple of feeble suggestions, Elroy would say “I don't think so” and I would say “Okay, then.”

A lot has been said about categorizing Elroy's writing and the best description would be word sketches. They are inimitable. Elroy's work was my reward for wading through dry scholarly work. I could pick up one of his books and be immediately transported.

When I was working on my first book as a writer, *Literary El Paso*, and was writing Elroy's short biography to introduce his work, he spoke of receiving early rejection slips for his submissions, but came to this decision: “I would never again write anything the way I thought I was ‘supposed to.’ I would never write in order to make money and I would only write about those things that I cared about. If I never got published, fine, I would write strictly for me about those moments of intensity that would not let me alone — that seemed to be the very stuff of my life.”

The kindest and gentlest man I ever knew had a clear, unwavering vision of his work and was my mentor and first reader.

Geographically isolated from the rest of Texas, El Pasoans may not know that in the rest of Texas, Elroy was a celebrity. At several book signings I had in Austin and San Antonio, I was asked many times if I knew Elroy. I asked him if he knew he was a literary rock star.

When he was honored at the Texas Institute of Letters meeting here in El Paso last spring, the contemporary giants of Texas literature were star struck to meet him and counted that as one of the highlights of the banquet.

Deceptively simple, his writing is very powerful. His lasting legacy is that he made us look. To slow down and really see the everyday things and people around us that filled him with wonder; to live fully in our surroundings.

I was driving from Albuquerque home to El Paso when I heard from Bobby Byrd that Elroy was gone. I had to pull over in Socorro and have a good cry in the parking lot of McDonalds. It was impossible to believe he was gone.

He has left a hole in our hearts and lives. If Elroy can see us now, he would say “that's very nice, very nice, now get on with it.” We'll try, my dear friend, we'll try.

## Audrey Slate

By Katherine Hester

I first became acquainted with Audrey Slate in 1999, when, as then-director of the Paisano program, she called me to share the great good news that I'd been awarded a Paisano fellowship for later that year. By then, Audrey was in her 70s and I was a homesick expat Texan in my 30s. Meeting her in the last quarter of her life as I did, there's a lot I can't know or share about her life. But one thing I'd put money on: the notion of a memorial of this sort would have made her, first, quite uncomfortable, and then, button-busting proud.

When I arrived in Austin to begin that fellowship, I met Audrey at her little office on the enclosed back porch of the Dobie House on Waller Creek, where she handed over my permit for the keys to the ranch and sent me off on my adventure. What I had yet to figure out was that as far as Audrey was concerned, from the moment the Paisano judges had awarded me a fellowship, I had become one of a very special elect.

To Audrey, once you were a fellow, it didn't matter where you had published before you arrived at the ranch, or what books you might write after you left it. You didn't have to prove any Texan or writerly chops to her. You already had them. Whether we were hippies or taxi drivers, academics or writers with national reputations, swaggering cowboys or snake phobics, from the moment Audrey met us all, she was in —and would forever remain in — our corner. If we wanted to be sociable, she might drive out to Paisano with sandwiches from Thundercloud Subs and have lunch with us. If we wanted solitude, she'd do what she needed to keep things running for us, but stay pretty much hands-off. She might be hoping we wouldn't burn down the house, but graciously, she kept this fear to herself.

As Michael Adams, Paisano's current director, put it in remarks he prepared for the fellows' reunion held out the ranch in 2007, not only did Audrey maintain the ranch and coordinate the application process, she also served as a "counselor, advisor, alarm service, security blanket, and keeper of secrets" for fellows for over 33 years — quite a tall order if you sit back and think about writers and the needs they can manage to come up with.

When Audrey began "taking care" of Paisano and its writer-inhabitants in 1974, there had only been 13 fellows. A woman had not yet received a fellowship, in part because of concern over whether the ranch might prove too wild and woolly for the female sex. By the time she retired in 2007, the ranch had served as a hospitable temporary home for 79 more writers — 28 women and 51 men. If you are one of those 79, you may rest assured that Audrey knew of, recorded, and took joy in your successes once you moved away from Paisano and back into the wider world.

When Audrey retired, she started writing a book she hoped might someday serve as a definitive history of Paisano. One of her biggest worries as she worked was that Paisano fellows kept on garnering accolades she didn't know about —*and she didn't have them in her book*. Her record wasn't complete.

Around that same time, I said to her, "you know, Audrey, what *I'd* really like to know about is what it was like for you to be director of the program, especially back at the beginning." She recoiled — if you can sense *recoil* through the phone line — as if I were one of Paisano's famous snakes. If there was a spotlight to be trained anywhere, in Audrey's mind it always belonged on the writers and the ranch itself.

When I sat down to write this, I sifted through correspondence I'd had with Audrey over the past 17 or so years, hoping to dig up an anecdote that would weave a good story about her. What I came up with: Xeroxes of articles about Paisano and its fellows, carefully annotated in her handwriting; programs from the TIL meetings she attended up until 2014 or so that she'd saved for me; emails that were evidence of her great pride in her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. And always, always, coming through so loudly and so clearly, her great engagement with and great devotion to the writers of this state.

## Bill Crider

In an interview with Bill Crider at his Alvin, Texas home; Lee Goldberg (TV writer, novelist, and Brash Books publisher and raconteur) jokingly said that he arrived in his press's small plane, Bill Crider then discussed his latest cross-genre mystery/westerns published with Brash Books as well as an unpublished novel and abandoned sequels. At the conclusion of the promotional piece, Crider says, "Now get that corporate jet off my driveway." Such was the gentle, good-natured humor of Bill Crider.

Bill Crider passed from cancer at his home in Alvin on February 12, 2018.

When *Too Late to Die* (Crider's first *Dan Rhodes Mystery*) won the 1987 Anthony Award for Best First Novel. Crider was off and writing. Crider wrote the popular *Sheriff Dan Rhodes Mystery Series* from 1986 to 2017. He then started the *Carl Burns Mystery Series*, the *Truman Smith Mystery Series*, and the *Sally Good Mystery Series*. He co-wrote the *Stanley Waters Series* and the *Stone: M.I.A. Hunter Series*. He wrote four stand-alone mystery and suspense novels and collaborated on spy fiction. He wrote horror novels as Jack MacLane. In the nineties, he wrote Westerns and young adult novels. He even published a short story collection. Bill obviously stayed busy.

His unassuming obituary from Scott's funeral home mentions his B.A. in English from the University of Texas at Austin (1963), his M.A. from North Texas State University (1967), and his Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin (1972). And from his obituary, we learn that Bill met the love of his life on a blind date and married her in 1965. And we learn that he taught English at Howard Payne University and then became the Chair of the Division of English and Fine Arts at Alvin Community College. The obit goes on to mention that he was a prolific writer. The obit matches Crider's gentle and sly wit and modesty.

When Crider left academe in 2002 to pursue his writing, students at Alvin College lost but readers gained. Crider continued to write, to entertain other writers, to work on other writing projects both for himself and others through December of 2017. Sadly, his wife, Judy, died in 2014.

Bill Crider's two children will miss him. Fellow writers will miss him. Readers too will miss him, but we have his many, many books.