Texas Institute of Letters Memorials
2020

Bill Wittliff
1940-2019

Bill Wittliff's career was too various, and his influence too widespread and powerful, to be corralled into any one category. He was a scattershot genius: filmmaker, photographer, storyteller, impresario of statues and public monuments, water dowser, publisher; also collector of books, paintings, sculptures, arrowheads, spear points, incised deer antlers, prehistoric mammoth teeth, and of various mystical power emblems—a coin from a sunken 16th century Spanish treasure ship, a *milagro* of the Mexican folk healer Don Pedrito Jaramillo—that he habitually wore on a chain around his neck.

He was born in Taft, a cotton hamlet near Corpus Christi, on January 21, 1940. His parents divorced shortly after he was born, and he and his brother Jim were left in the care of their mother, the small-town telephone operator immortalized by Sissy Spacek in the 1981 movie that was made from Wittliff's screenplay *Raggedy Man*. He grew up enthralled by the tales of buried treasure and ancient Texas mysteries he heard from local storytellers. One of those stories, "The Wild Woman of the Navidad," haunted him all his life and served as part of the imaginative underpinning for *The Papa Stories*, a cycle of three novels he published when he was in his seventies.
He graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in 1963, after managing to drop out of four other schools during his freshman year alone. His major was journalism, a profession for which he was markedly unsuitable, both because he was more raconteur than reporter, and because he refused to learn to type. But he was still drawn to the written word and—increasingly—to the published word. He and Sally began Encino Press, the influential publisher of books related to Texas and the Southwest whose volumes (including an essay collection by Larry McMurtry, *In A Narrow Grave*) are still much sought after by discerning book lovers.

Then there was screenwriting and filmmaking. He first made his name with 1979's *The Black Stallion*, for which he wrote the shooting script. After that he was an A-list Hollywood screenwriter, though without the Hollywood part. He remained resolutely in place in Austin, resolutely himself, as he wrote screenplays for *Honeysuckle Rose, Raggedy Man, Barbarosa, Red Headed Stranger* (which he also directed), *Legends of the Fall, The Perfect Storm, A Night in Old Mexico* and many others.

In the late 1980's, he took on the massive task of adapting Larry McMurtry's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Lonesome Dove* as a television miniseries. Wittliff was the project's executive producer, sole screenwriter, and guardian angel. There were multiple ways it could have gone wrong, but Wittliff kept the epic trail drive story on course, refusing to cut corners or tamper with the integrity of

McMurtry's novel. "The thing I keep preaching to everybody," he said, "is that *Lonesome Dove* is the star. If we take care of *Lonesome Dove*, it'll take care of us."

He kept his part of that bargain, and *Lonesome Dove*, starring Robert Duvall and Tommy Lee Jones in forever-iconic roles as Gus McRae and Woodrow Call, remains in the opinion of many viewers the best western ever made.

On the set, Wittliff took a series of black and white photographs, some of which were *Lonesome Dove* character portraits, others action scenes of cattle drives and Indian battles. The images, published in *A Book of Photographs from Lonesome Dove*, are a thrilling mash-up of past and present, of authenticity and artifice. And last October saw the publication of *SunriseSunset*, a collection of the long-exposure photos—"solargraphs"-- that Wittliff took at his beloved Plum Creek Property southeast of Austin.

The Spanish title of Bill Wittliff's 2006 book of pinhole photographs, *La Vida Brinca,* translates to "life jumps." That phrase became his all-purpose personal motto. To Wittliff, *La Vida Brinca* meant that unpredictability and surprise—of both the welcome and grievous variety-- were not just givens of human existence but drivers of human wonder and creativity.

Life jumped when the boy who had heard a small-town hardware dealer tell him about The Wild Woman of the Navidad encountered the same story in written-down form in a book by J. Frank Dobie. It was a teenage epiphany—the first time he realized that his own home ground was worthy of inclusion in print. Life jumped again in the 1980's, when Wittliff—by now a Texas institution himself—stumbled upon an estate sale of Dobie's archival materials. Bill and Sally bought it all, and it became the nucleus for the Wittliff Collections at Texas State University.

For all his achievements in film and photography, it may be the Wittliff Collections that will stand as his most resonant legacy. Wittliff wanted the Collections to be exactly the opposite of a stuffy archive. He wanted it to be a place of inspiration, where young writers and photographers and musicians could study the early breakthroughs or false starts of artists like Cormac McCarthy, Sandra Cisneros, Keith Carter, Kate Breakey, Willie Nelson, or Jerry Jeff Walker.

The Wittliff Collections is a seamless continuation of the inspiration that Wittliff supplied during his lifetime to generations of fellow writers and filmmakers and photographers. During the many years he was at work in his headquarters on Baylor Street, there was always a procession of movie stars and literary and music legends, but also countless creative aspirants with no reputation. It didn't matter to Bill if you were famous or unknown. If you were serious about your craft, he was serious about you, and would be your friend for life.

Bill was also serious about the Texas Institute of Letters. He was inducted into the TIL in 1965. Among his fellow new members were John Graves, Tom Lea, and T. R. Fehrenbach. The next year, he was asked to join the council, and in 1975 and 1976 he served as president. He loved the camaraderie of our organization and he loved its legacy and mission. He was particularly proud of the TIL's custody of Paisano and the way the fellowship had either sparked or sustained the careers of so many Texas writers.

Bill and Sally were married for 56 years. They met after he saw a picture of a "Bluebonnet Belle" named Sally Bowers in the pages of the 1960 University of Texas yearbook and told a friend

“That’s the girl I’m going to marry.” It was another *La Vida Brinca* moment— the best jump of his life.

Bill Wittliff was a father figure to many, but a father in full to his two children. Along with Sally, he is survived by his son Reid Wittliff, his wife Susan, and their children Sloan and Leigh; by his daughter Allison Andrews, her husband James, and her children Tegan Spencer and Wade Spencer; and by his brother and sister-in-law Jim and Mitzi Wittliff.

One of the gifts he left to them and to all his many friends is the suspicion that he isn’t all that far away from what he called “the spinning globe.” It seems obvious now that in his later photographic work—those pinhole camera images of half-glimpsed forms and ghostly tracings of the sun’s procession across the sky—he was trying to tell us something. He always believed that there was a permeable border between the familiar and the ungraspable, between things visible and things withheld. In *The Papa Stories* he wrote about the “shimmery people”, those who had passed away but lingered to watch over the confused inhabitants of mortal earth. It’s not hard to imagine him now as one of them, still alive somehow at the mysterious border between Texas and the Great Beyond.

---Stephen Harrigan

Wendell Mayo
1953 – 2019

After reading Jack London in the eighth grade, Wendell Mayo wrote a story from the point of view of a wolf-dog, an effort that so impressed his teacher she sent it to *Highlights* magazine. With the ensuing, first-ever, professional rejection letter they returned, Wendell was hooked on the writing of short fiction. He would become over the course of his career an oft-published, award-winning master of that genre.

Born in Corpus Christi, Texas, the son of Anglo and Latino parents, Wendell moved first to Pennsylvania, then Cleveland, Ohio, following the career appointments of his father, a University of Texas trained NASA atomic physicist. Convinced at first he also needed a STEM profession, Wendell studied chemical engineering, then worked for a decade in that field, continuing all the while, however, to write stories, including on lunch breaks. "I didn't like myself in that job very much," he admitted, but the wages did allow him to collect a nest egg that would eventually keep him, his wife, and two children fed as he pursued full time both an MFA and PhD in fiction writing. "I timed it perfectly. The day I graduated, I had literally nothing left in my bank account." Wendell went on to a career in academia and to publish over a hundred stories in journals and magazines, a bit fewer than half of which appear in his five (soon to be six) award-winning collections. He once told me he'd written a story in an hour that had quickly been accepted for publication, but, on the other hand, another had taken ten years to "get right."

South Texas is probably best represented in his work by the first collection, *Centaur of the North,* winner of the Premio Aztlán in 1996, a book that led scholar Theresa Delgadillo to list him alongside Pat Mora, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and Tomás Rivera as practitioners of an important body of Texas exile literature. Because he came from a literally "nuclear" family, or perhaps because he hailed from a border region, Wendell's works commonly framed the world as a zone of juxtaposition and fusion, with many of his stories overshadowed by the lingering threat of conflict, including global conflict. They also managed to be, as Saikat Majumdar put it, "disastrously funny." *B. Horror and Other Stories* featured characters enamored of monsters in cheap B-rated horror films, such as Godzilla, the archetype of fear of nuclear proliferation. His most recent book, *Survival House* took up the legacy of lingering Cold-War dread set in an absurdist yet shockingly familiar American heartland where small town festivals celebrate radioactive weapons testing, and a Soviet-themed bar opens for business in Whitehouse, Ohio.

Wendell's wife, Debbie, a Lithuanian-American, encouraged him to take advantage of an opportunity to teach English in Vilnius in 1993, and the experience introduced a new dimension to his body of work. Aided by a Fulbright fellowship, he returned many times over the following years, resulting both in the novel-in-stories, *In Lithuanian Wood*, called "a powerful merging of history and folklore with everyday life" by the *Los Angeles Times*, and the collection *The Cucumber King of Kėdainiai*, lauded by Anthony Doerr as "a significant, exceptional, ravishing book." Both contribute to our understanding of the lingering effects of the fall of the Berlin Wall, but also celebrate art's irrepressible power, even in the most repressive of regimes. Wendell once told an interviewer, "I feel like part of my soul is in Lithuania."

A professor of fiction writing for many years in the BFA and MFA programs at Bowling Green State University, in 2017 that institution's Jerome Library created "The Wendell Mayo Collection" as a student resource, and the fact that it required three catalogue areas—stories of US

Latinas/os, stories of US contemporary and popular culture, and stories of Post-Soviet Lithuania and Eastern Europe—demonstrates his far-reaching interests and influence. That influence always extended to Texas. I first met Wendell over twenty years ago when he inaugurated a reading series at Houston Community College, doing his bit to get it started by forgoing the fee. And, though living in Ohio, in recent years he presented thirty-five times in Texas-based venues and workshops, including at the University of Houston, the Dallas Public Library, Gemini Ink and Nuestra Palabra to name only a few. In 2014, in Conroe, Texas, he sat down for an interview with the staff of Lone Star College's campus literary magazine (of miniscule circulation) and did what he did so well: transferred writerly wisdom to students.

> "When I started writing stories about Lithuania I had no idea how many Lithuanian-Americans there are. Now they buy my books. Don't try to chase waves. Write about something you are interested in and let the waves come to you."
>
> "Writing is hard; you have to go deep. I use the goose bump test. Watery eyes are optional, but goose bumps on the back of the neck mean the story is done."
>
> "If it isn't provocative it isn't literature. If it doesn't make you think in a new way, it isn't literature."

Wendell was proud of his 2019 induction into the TIL, and that injuries resulting from a fall kept him from attending the banquet in McAllen was a great disappointment. "Heck, in January I had my plane ticket and hotel reservation. I've paid dues. I even got a sixteen-dollar haircut day before yesterday!" Though not present, he was introduced with acclaim at both the inductee reception and the following day's new member reading. He passed away peacefully nine days after the banquet.

In addition to his legacy of awards (Fulbright, NEA, state fellowships, residencies at the MacDowell and Yaddo) and his legacy of publications, at least as important is the influence he's had for many years on students, colleagues and friends. And then there's that eighth-grade teacher who sent the wolf-dog story to *Highlights.* Browsing Facebook one Christmas, Wendell came across her and re-established contact. "She had no idea I'd become a professional writer. She bought my last book and introduced her book club to my writing."

Here's hoping even more shall be so introduced. *Atsisveikinimas*, Wendell. International treasure. Lone Star icon.

---Cliff Hudder

William Seale
1939-2019

William Seale told me he felt most alive and best as a citizen of the United States when he was researching and writing. His 30 published books sparkle with wit and engage readers with anecdotes of the characters he wrote about. He was a first-rate historian who loved to include in his books quirky details and unusual tales that some might label *gossip*, though I have never found him to be unfair or unkind in his vivid descriptions of people he knew personally or of historical personages he came to know through his meticulous research.

He published his first book, the now classic *Texas Riverman* (University of Texas Press, 1966) when he was 27 years old. William had found a trunk full of letters, photographs, and documents in the attic of the dog-trot house he inherited with Ant Hill Farm, which William's great-great grandfather established in 1848 in Jasper County. "The book was remarkably easy to write," William told me. "Nearly everything I needed was in that old trunk."

While he was mostly pleased with his first book, he confessed to being irked by the press for getting the wrong riverboat in the cover. "I've been irritated by that cover," William said, "for over forty years." He talked about the cover during the time I was working on publishing the second edition of the book (Ink Brush Press, 2009). William provided me with the historically accurate image of the steamboat, the Laura, pushing logs down the Neches River to the sawmills in Beaumont.

The anecdotes William Seale shared with me in our frequent and long discussions were such excellent sources for my short story and novel writing that I often took notes on what he said. The last such anecdote he told me before he died was about William Seale himself. It concerned, he said, events "when I was four or maybe five years old."

I had intended to work these events into a short story, though now it seems strangely proper to share them here.

During the early 1940s, William and his parents lived in Beaumont, Texas, in an older home located in a once elegant part of the city. For a period of time William's parents traveled about the country, leaving their child in the care of their long-time housekeeper, Miss Etta. William loved the days with the housekeeper, especially Saturdays when she took him on walks, ones she instructed William to keep a secret from his parents.

Miss Etta dressed him in an elegant little boy's sailor suit, one sewn with special pockets for their rounds in what she called "parlors," and she prepared him by having him practice dramatic recitations of the Lord's Prayer and various Bible verses. William told me that he much liked how Saturday mornings began because Miss Etta filled the house with wonderful odors of her fresh-made fried pies—usually apple, but sometimes cherry. When she began wrapping them and putting them into a large paper bag, she always told him, "It's time. You get dressed, now." And he dashed into his room to put on clothes Miss Etta made for him: blue shorts, a shirt with the emblem of an anchor, and a white sailor hat. Before they left, Miss Etta always pressed a wine cork over the sharp end of an icepick and tucked it somewhere into the top of her blouse.

The two walked toward older shabby houses with William feeling grand in his blue suit and Miss Etta holding his hand while she carried the paper bag of pies. The parlors they visited were large rooms with comfortable but old chairs where the ladies, some in scant clothing, gathered

to buy Miss Etta's pies and to pat William on the head and cheeks, "always in nice enough ways," William said, "that I didn't like much, but it was okay because they told me how handsome and smart I was, and I knew they would soon start giving me dimes."

After Miss Etta was happy with her sales of fried pies, she told William to recite. The ladies gathered around him, and they clapped and cooed to him, and many pressed a dime into his hand. The dimes he stashed into pockets that Miss Etta had sewn into his sailor suit.

Then, hand-in-hand, he and Miss Etta walked to the next parlor for a repeat of dealing with ladies and his getting dimes.

"Why did she carry an icepick?" I asked.

He had asked Miss Etta the same question several times, and her answer always was "For safety." It was an answer he accepted but didn't understand until one Saturday, as the two walked between parlors, a scruffy man stopped them and demanded that Miss Etta give him her sack of pies and the money she took "from them women." She pulled the icepick from her blouse, jerked the cork from the end, and jabbed it toward the scruffy man.

"Miss Etta said something about sticking it in his ear," William told me. The man laughed in a nervous way, and he shambled away. They saw him a few more times on their Saturday outings, and Miss Etta always brandished her icepick. But he never again bothered them.

At my urging, William related more aspects of incidents with the pies and ladies, as well as other Miss Etta anecdotes, all told with the typical William Seale amused smile, as if he were sharing some delicious gossip. Those who have watched William interviewed for PBS shows about the White House will no doubt remember his almost mischievous grin when offering some gossipy stories about people who once lived or worked in the White House.

William Seale and I met only a bit over decade before his death, though in a short time we became running buddies, first through our love of writing and publishing, then through mutual delight with the wooded terrain and the wildness of deep East Texas forests. The two of us explored his 400+ acres of Ant Hill Farm, and on one of our many treks we managed to find the spring his grandfather told him about, something William had never before been able to locate in the dense thicket on Ant Hill. It turned out to be the start of a muddy little stream, a tad ugly, though we were delighted with it, and William's dogs promptly leaped into it to cool off on that hot July day. In the following years, I photographed much of Ant Hill, including some beaver ponds and spectacular trees, bushes, mushrooms, and a couple of cedar swamps. My wife Sherry and his Lucinda became fast friends and the hub of a small social set in Jasper.

William's illness and long, slow demise have been quite difficult for us all.

---Jerry Craven

For information about William Seale's writing, the places he lived and his university degrees, there is a fine and informative memorial online here:

https://www.whitehousehistory.org/william-seale-in-memoriam-1939-2019

Bob Compton
1927-2019

Bob Compton contributed his soul to the Texas Institute of Letters along with his mind, wit, grace, warmth and friendship. He was, in fact, about as close to being a Saint of TIL and Texas writers as there ever was--or may well ever be.

He cherished and cheered-on most everything there was about the written word and those who produced them.

I first met Bob in the summer of 1959 at The Dallas News. He was an assistant city editor and I was reporting for duty on the night rewrite desk to create obits and weather stories. I was nervous as hell and Bob was calm as heaven. ("Compton," the editor, would probably have cut that hell/heaven match on `too corny' grounds. So be it...) He greeted me with a graceful, quiet manner that made me believe this was a man who really cared that I was going to work this day on this particular newspaper.

And, from there, so it went for me and countless other wannabe reporters/writers upon arrival into the supporting, caring bosom of Bob Compton. That mentoring function expanded tremendously when he moved from the city desk to being the book editor of The News. The list of high-quality names of the Compton-beneficiaries in by-lines and on book jackets, playbills, etc. all over America is most impressive. And an essential part of his legacy.

Thus, even professionally, I saw Bob as a kind of ultimate family man even though he squired around many a bevy of Dallas women but never married any of them.

His family life was made of people like us-- my wife Kate (former TIL board member) and our three daughters, Jamie, Lucy and Amanda.

There is one small example that says it all.

Bob, single and thus technically-qualified as having no family, always did a real family thing. He volunteered to man the city desk on Christmas Eve. That led to my asking Bob to come by our house afterward to help find the proper screws and nails and band-aids and drinks and cusswords required to get presents Santa-ready under the tree. It was a custom that continued every Christmas Eve until we Lehrers moved to Washington in the early 70's.

Even with that separation we continued our mutual family connections and affections to the day he died. Among Bob's last acts was an exchange of letters and books between him and Jamie, now a mother of three and an executive of a leading off-Broadway theater company in New York. Bob was Jamie's Godfather.

Darwin (a former TIL president) and Phyllis Payne were also stead-fast members of our Bob-family group. Darwin and I had worked together as newspapermen and at KERA, the Dallas public television station. He and Phyllis stayed close and loving in Bob's final days. We Lehrers were far away physically but always together through the thoughtfulness of the Paynes.

We all amounted to only a small part of the world touched forever by having Bob Compton in it with us.

So, I do indeed believe it is completely justified to view him as the Saint Bob of TIL--and so much more. Although, again, I am also sure our cherished friend and mentor himself might cringe even at something more modest such as he was the ultimate prince of a very nice human being.

So be it, Bob...

---Jim Lehrer

Don Graham
1940-2019

Texas marked the passing this summer of one of her literary giants. *Texas Monthly* magazine, every large-market newspaper that still lowers itself to cover literature, and our most prolific web- and media platforms universally celebrated Don Graham's career in ways that document his profound influence on all things literary in the Southwest. Very early in his academic career, Don established himself as one of the pre-eminent critics that writers would want to impress, and so few of us ever did. And once he'd crested the pinnacle of his brand of academic ambitions, he focused on what more he could accomplish with his own writing about his ever-expanding area of interests and expertise.

My own journey allowed me to witness some of Don Graham's rise. For a middle-class, hick-hybrid undergraduate in the mid-1970s, the English Department at the University of Texas could be an intimidating place. While the faculty's educations and critical achievements came into sharp focus, often their bearing created the most unsettling impact. In Parlin Hall, the "Socratic method" sometimes did double-duty as a faculty dress code. We freshmen didn't know whether to learn from these curious, eccentric, passionate people, or run from them. Representing the most prestigious American universities, faculty of UT-Austin seemed supremely confident in who they were and what they knew—and most importantly, the importance of what they were offering to teach us. Because they looked wild as hell! Even among such an extraordinary array of characters, Don Graham stood out. Don didn't dress like an Austin academic; he dressed like a Houston golf pro. Which is to suggest that he had somehow learned to carry himself as a bit of both. He was, in every way, different from everyone around him. That never changed from the first time I encountered him, to the last.

Though I was a product of Don's department, I did not take any of his courses. We first interacted in the late-1990s. By then, Don's die seemed cast. His department had elevated him to the J. Frank Dobie Regents Professor of American and English Literature chair, picking up J. Frank's legacy and shepherding it through cultural and political upheaval that Dobie could not possibly have understood. Don had published his biography of Audie Murphy, *No Name on the Bullet; Cowboys and Cadillacs: How Hollywood Looks at Texas;* and a collection of articles, *Giant Country: Essays on Texas*. He was, by then, a regular contributor to *Texas Monthly*—and, for many of us, he, along with Sarah Bird and Kinky Friedman's contributions, were the first thing we turned to each month. He was on his way to think, write, create, earn, and win a *curriculum vitae* that, upon his death, unfurled to nearly 60 pages in length. He held much more than his own when walking down those marbled floors, among the giants of Parlin Hall.

What impressed me most—in his host of accomplishments—was his humility. Like Don, I had been reared in cotton country. I had sat in the same congregation with the rich of the South, while I had also mixed with, and was related to, some of its poorest, most disfranchised subjects. When I got to know Don, I felt a kinship with him of having intimately known a world neither one of us could wait to leave behind. We didn't need that hoe anymore.

Don was a native Texan, but, to me at least, his accent was softer and more genteel than the Texas dialects. In life, he sounded *Southern*. He wore cowboy boots. He married beauty, charisma, and attitude. He worked like the low bidder. Carried himself like a trust fund baby. Spoke like an evangelist. Partied like a rapper. He reveled in people—no matter what he said later. He was a free-thinker, and free-speaker, who never lost his sense of wonder of the world or his passion for the people who dedicated their lives to describe it in print. Don also liked to have one hell of a good time.

Yes, he was a tough critic. I had a personal experience with Don's sense of duty. A teacher and mentor of mine (a colleague of Don's at U.T.) expressed sympathy that my novel had been reviewed in the local newspaper by Don. I explained that my publisher had actually suggested him to the book editor. "Why would you do that?" he asked. Because, I explained, we were operating under the mistaken impression that he might like it. "He gave you about a C+," my mentor said. That was a B- novel if there ever had been one, and we *both* knew it! But we had approached Dr. Graham on a professional basis, and he conducted himself precisely as professional critics do.

Don and I never talked about his review of my novel, or the novel itself, or anything about its writer, and some other novels that we'd published without Don's permission. We just went on down the road, and, by then, I'd learn to drive with far more care.

Which leads us to Don's place in Texas literature. For years, the litany of superlative adjectives heaped on Don Graham's reputation often contained the disparaging "curmudgeon." Don had begun his academic career at the University of Pennsylvania, where he said he worked with many Ivy League-educated professors. His department assigned him a course on western fiction, or western film, and, being Don Graham, he promptly demanded to know why. "Because you're a cowboy," they said. Had he been from Fort Worth, by God, he might have pulled it off. But he was from Collin County; and cotton country before that; and the University-Of-Pennsylvania-Department-Of-English had probably never seen a young professor with Don's culturally and economically challenged skill sets; and powerful, adaptive forces set to work. By the time I became Don's friend in the 1990s, I thought he was a cowboy, too.

In any case, Don inherited J. Frank Dobie's course, and, by virtue of his native intellect, his literary sophistication and stubborn will, promptly elevated the southwestern literature seminar to one of the English Department's most popular courses. Not too long ago, Don was selected by U.T.'s *Alcalde* magazine as one of the *Top Ten Professors* ever! When far too many of English Department's stalwart personalities elected to accept a "buy-out," I was interested to learn that Don had decided to bow his neck, and persevere. Knowing Don as I did, I had assumed that his authorial ambitions post-*Giant* would suffice for him. I asked him why he wouldn't take the money, and just write. "Because I love to teach," he said.

In that simple statement lies the reason why Don has inspired a generation of literary devotees. Over the years, I'd catch Don (always, ever present, with his beloved wife, Betsy Berry) holding court together at Scholtz' Beer Garten with half a dozen handsome young people. They were his and Betsy's students, only they looked as if they were celebrating someone's birthday than chatting about a George Perry Sessions novel. It always took me right back to my own time at the University, when it was too hot to stay inside, and the professors herded us to sit together under the live oaks on the South Mall. It was the first time I'd ever heard great poetry read aloud by someone who understood how powerful it was. Their passion carried me through, to date, four decades of aspiration. I'm still at it. So was Don, to the very end. He just did it with a lot more style.

Where Don sowed passion, he reaped joy. I always had the sense that even Don couldn't believe how miraculously a life of literature had unfolded for him. The undiscovered country attracted all of Don's native talents, and there was maybe a paycheck nearby, as well. Don possessed an unholy affinity for new places and the people who lived there. The wilder the world got, the more he seems to love it. He married a woman even more undaunted than he, and together they squeezed the sap out of every moment he spent on this earth. To me, he lived as large as he thought. It was impossible to intimidate Don, but we both enjoyed my attempts to try.

Don (and Betsy, always) lived for books, movies, food, friends, fashion, travel and blistering conversation about people, politics, art, and culture. He seemed to have a real fascination/tolerance for the rich, the powerful, the eccentric, and the creatives that sparked the achievements he admired most in humanity. Don and Betsy also spent a lot of time in pool halls—Don for the company they kept, Betsy for her superlative hustling skills. And, yes, it was in his nature to set the bar high for Texas writers—as he'd come of age (probably) being force-fed the regional inferiority complex that Katherine Anne Porter endured in her time, and Larry McMurtry in his, through the on-going debate of Cormac McCarthy's correct place in Texas letters, and the rising storm of increasingly diverse writers battling this very day for as much sun flashes through the fence that stands between us and posterity. Don had earned to right to declare, in public, who he thought deserved a ticket to the show. From the beginning, Don argued that Texas-based "content" was every bit as rich and viable as the elevated turf of New York or London literati. But on his back forty, he was ferocious in expecting Texas writers to *earn it*. If Don didn't believe your novel measured up to the best coming out of New York that season, he had the courage to say as much.

God bless him, he meant exactly that. Even a few beers into the debate, he remained unmoved. We should have started out with tequila.

A lot of writers didn't appreciate Don's candor. I wasn't at all pleased with my C+ novel. But I still knew enough about Don's life, career, and reputation that I wanted to be his friend. I desired to learn from him. To be accepted by him in ways my novels never would be. Over the years, I routinely asked him for reading and film suggestions, and, once I had my own opinions, I frequently measured them against Don's. And that's the moment in this journey where you learned of Don's extraordinary intellect. How extensively he understood, and was prepared to discuss almost anything. In that soft, southern voice, that covered you like a warm baby blanket while, in fact, Don was gutting you, or someone you loved, like a bait fish.

For the sake of Texas' long, sophisticated, and increasingly complex cultural traditions, I hope that the ideal candidate follows behind Don at U.T.'s Department of English, just as mysterious events unfolded to bring him in like a maverick steer through the gap in J. Frank Dobie's fence. Both academics were perfectly attuned for their respective time and place. Had they officed next door to one another, however, I believe that only one would had lived to that afternoon's office hours. Certainly, someone would've been bleeding by the cocktail hour.

It seems almost too perfect that Don would pass from this wild but verdant pasture at the exact moment where we are on the cusp of social *crisis* (taking into account the Chinese character merging "danger" and "opportunity"). When we need Don Graham more than ever, he's not available. Who will lead us now? We don't know. We are waiting, yet again, for the English Department to tell us what to do. I hope Don's heir is a woman. I hope she's ethnic. I hope she's got deeper roots in Texas than Dobie and Graham combined. I hope she's bold and brilliant, and confident and creative, and has

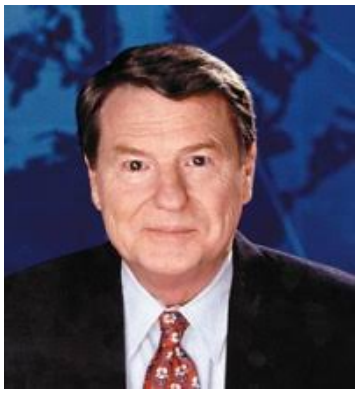
a creative output that makes Stephen King cringe. In any case, she's got to be extraordinary, by every measure, to make a dent in the monolith that Don built on the way to become the pre-eminent critic of life in past- and contemporary Texas. Because no one else understood us better. No one loved and respected Texas more, and knew enough to fear her at the same time. And nobody enjoyed more a lifetime romp celebrating all that he loved and cared about, with that blazing twinkle in his eye, as if even he couldn't possibly believe that he earned a living doing what he did. That's what I'll miss most about Don. That spark in his eye when he was eviscerating the ego (and the press release) of that touted new novelist breaking into the local scene.

Don wouldn't have it.

C+, my ass.

---David Marion Wilkinson
(With thanks to William J. Scheick and Tom Zigal)

Jim Lehrer
1934-2020



It's no surprise that the national media paid such extraordinary attention to the news that our fellow TIL member Jim Lehrer, 85, died on January 23, 2020. He went peacefully at his home in Washington, D.C., where he and his wife Kate, also a TIL member, had lived since the early 1970s.

Millions and millions of Americans had been viewing Jim nightly with great admiration for some four decades on PBS television, where his news programs, beginning at first in 1975 with Robert MacNeil, offered penetrating, extended, and well-mannered discussions of world and national news. It offered a stark contrast to the frantic evening news broadcasts still offered by network television in their 5:30 (CST) half-hour programs. In 1995, with MacNeil's retirement, Jim became the host solo in 1995 with a new name, "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer."

From 1988 through 2012 Jim became the choice to moderate some dozen presidential debates, thus gaining the popular title of dean of presidential moderators. One of the many books he wrote included an inside look about his experiences entitled *Tension City: Inside the Presidential Debates*, published in 2012. Over the years he won countless awards for his public television work, including numerous Emmys, a George Foster Peabody Award, and a National Humanities Medal. He and MacNeil were inducted into the Academy of Television Arts and Science Hall of Fame in 1999. And there were plenty of other significant honors, too countless to enumerate here.

More of such honors later, but Jim—James Charles—born in Kansas on May 19, 1934, acknowledged that he was a "print/word person at heart." While gaining national fame for his television work and aside from paying close attention to his wife Kate (a novelist, TIL member and former councilor), their three daughters Jamie, Lucy, and Amanda, six grandchildren, and a long list of friends—from 1988 to 2013 he must have spent almost every free moment in writing. Imaginative novels, serious works of non-fiction, memoirs, and plays seemed to flow effortlessly from his tireless mind and facile hand. In all, he published twenty-three books, and perhaps a couple more as well as three plays. The years between 1988 and 2013 were his most prolific, for twenty-one of those books appeared in twenty-five years.

Jim's membership in TIL came in 1972. It's likely that his friend A.C. Greene nominated him.

I was fortunate to be close to Jim and Kate during Jim's formative years in Dallas, 1959 to 1972, and continuing through the years when the couple returned regularly to Dallas to see old friends or attend special events. He and Kate were especially close to Bob Compton, long-time TIL stalwart and recording secretary. Bob died in April 2019 after a lengthy bout with cancer. The Lehrers made many visits to his hospice, one occurring just a few weeks before Bob's death when they, my wife Phyllis, and I arranged a festive party for his friends as he lay in his hospice bed, as good-humored as he always was.

Jim's first job in journalism was with the *Dallas Morning News* after he graduated with an associate degree from Victoria College in 1954 and a bachelor's degree in journalism in 1956 from the University of Missouri. I first met him in 1960 or 1961 when he stopped one day in Fort Worth's

police pressroom, where I was the *Press*' police reporter. As an everyday reader of the *News* I had paid attention to his frequent by-line stories with keen interest and admiration, especially his appealing "ledes" that went directly to the point and effortlessly led the reader into the details. We didn't talk at length that day, but I was impressed by his professional manner and glad at least to see what this fine writer Jim Lehrer looked like.

We became friends when I joined him as a fellow reporter at the *Dallas Times Herald* in mid-1963, where he had landed after quitting the *News* because it declined to print his story about right-wing activities in a civil defense organization that would have embarrassed the Dallas "establishment." The *Times Herald* hired him immediately, and when I arrived there not long afterwards we became kindred souls, immediately sharing our dedication to the journalism profession as an essential but largely unappreciated element in our democratic society. I remember Jim telling me his uncle's reaction when he had told him that he was into journalism. The uncle responded that it was "a good profession for a young man." Jim was convinced that journalism was far more than a profession just for young men. It was a profession demanding the highest standards and dedication, not one serving merely a starting point for young people. Though usually noted during his television career and at the end of his life for being a quiet, modest host for "NewsHour," at the *Times Herald* Jim was a lively conversationalist and center of attention as reporters' gathered for discussions on coffee breaks.

With the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, all reporters who helped cover it that day and those that followed grew closer together. It was a bond that existed for years and continues to exist among the few surviving reporters (who include TIL member Hugh Aynesworth and myself). Jim was at the police station that weekend, as I and so many others were. You might recognize him in a news film showing him among a crowd of reporters passing on the third-floor of the police station, where Oswald was interrogated a few doors from the press room.

Before the president's arrival that morning Jim, who covered the federal beat, asked a Secret Service man whether the top of the presidential limousine would be removed during the downtown ride toward the Trade Mart. The agent checked further, and then Jim heard him tell someone on the telephone, "Lose the bubble-top." Jim remembered for years that had the cover not been removed the assassination effort likely would have failed if even attempted. In 2013, the memory still disturbing, Jim wrote a novel named *Top Down: A Novel of the Kennedy Assassination.*

One mutual occurrence in these early years was each of our efforts to buy modest houses in the Northeast Dallas section. As it happened, we both were turned down for loans because as newspaper reporters we didn't qualify. Our salaries were too low. How infuriating that was for both of us, married men with the anticipation of growing families. We eventually managed to get loans for our houses not far from one another on the east side of town.

After this frustration, mindful still of the low salaries for newspaper journalists, Jim and I and a couple of other like-minded reporters decided to ask the American Newspaper Guild to try to form a union at the *Times Herald*. An out-of-town organizer came to investigate the possibility, and he told us that if we could get 70 percent of the paper's eligible journalists to sign cards requesting an election, the Guild would help launch the drive. We successfully achieved the 70 percent goal, and a lengthy campaign began. Management put on its own campaign, of course, issuing raises to many, and we lost the election.

With our wives we were members in Dallas of the First Community Church, a liberal-minded Congregational church just off Mockingbird Lane. A fellow member was the women's editor at the *Times Herald*, Vivian Anderson Castleberry, destined to be a national leader in the drive for women's equal rights and the maintenance of international peace. Years later, Jim, now nationally prominent, accepted an invitation to deliver the Sunday morning sermon at First Community, and it was a good one.

As a *Times Herald* reporter Jim began quietly working on his first novel, *Viva Max!*, the wild and improbable story of a Mexican general who attempts to retake the Alamo. Then came big news in 1966. It was to be published by Duel, Sloan and Pearce. A reporter's dream come true! And a New York publisher! With its appearance, a series of celebratory parties ensued, sometimes accompanied by a lively Mexican band. Soon came further news. *Viva Max!* was to be produced as a movie featuring an all-star cast with famous actors including Peter Ustinov, Pamela Tiffin, Jonathan Winters, John Astin, Harry Morgan, and Keenan Wynn. The parties continued and the movie opened in 1969.

The success of *Viva Max!* and the money from the movie prompted Jim, now city editor of the *Times Herald*, announcing that he now would stay home and write novels. But shortly afterwards, a call came from KERA-TV that Ford Foundation money was available for a five-night television news program and Jim accepted the offer to head it. The plan was to create a news program with new, even revolutionary dimensions for in-depth coverage of local events. Professional journalists would report and discuss the news instead of leaving it to television news "readers." Jim formed a team of outstanding reporters for a program called "Newsroom" that appeared five nights a week. Its cast of reporters and commentators included A.C. Greene and Bill Porterfield, both already TIL members, and me, a future TIL member. There was diversity on the staff as well, including three women, two black men, a couple of beginners, and an intern. Prominent visiting guests frequently appeared, ranging from George H.W. Bush to Buckminster Fuller to I. M. Pei and Imogene Coca. Somehow, it all came together, and after overcoming criticism as being just a bunch of hippies and a few straights, the city's leading liberals and intellectuals championed the show.

"Newsroom" provided the kind of news and analysis that was not offered by commercial news programs. It became so successful that Jim was lured away in 1972 to Washington. The rest, as we have seen, was history!

Jim's second book, *We Were Dreamers* (one of my favorites) was published in 1975, nine years after *Viva Max*! In this memoir Jim described family days when his parents, joined by their young children, Jim and his older brother, sought in the late 1940s to make their dream of owning a small bus company in Kansas come true. With just three unpredictable buses, they experienced heart-wrenching events as reality and hardships came their way, finally spoiling their dreams.

Throughout his life Jim, who never got over his fascination with buses, would be asked to perform his "bus call" routine. Always obliging, he would mimic the voice of a bus station announcer calling out the cities where the soon-to-depart bus would make routine stops. You would have to have been there, and many TIL members may have been. A short video on the PBS obituary for Jim showed him using this always delightful act. To the end of his life he would collect bus memorabilia, going so far as to purchase his own 1946 Fixible Clipper bus, which he kept at his and Kate's farm in West Virginia. See his book, *A Bus of My Own*, 1992.

Here's the incredible list of Jim's twenty-three books with publication dates:

Viva Max! (1966), *We Were Dreamers* (1973*), Kick the Can* (1988)*, Crown Oklahoma* (1989)*, The Sooner Spy* (1990), *Lost and Found* (1991), *A Bus of My Own* (1992), *Short List* (1992), *Blue Hearts* (1993), *Fine Lines* (1994), *The Special Prisoner* (1995), *Purple Dots* (1998), *The White Widow* (2000), *No Certain Rest* (2002), *Flying Cro*ws (2004), *The Franklin Affair* (2005), *The Phony Marine* (2006), *Eureka* (2007), *Mack to the Rescue* (2008), *Oh, Johnny* (2009), *Super* (2011), *Tension City: Inside the Presidential Debates* (2012), and *Top Down: A Novel of the Kennedy Assassination*, 2013).

And then, of course, there were his plays: "Chili Queen" (1986), "Church Key Charlie Blue" (1988), "The Will and Bart Show" (1992), and "Bell" (2013).

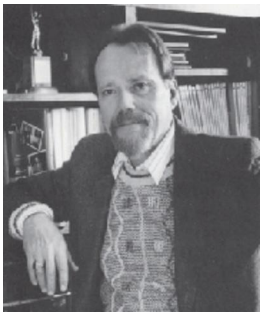
Meanwhile, Kate, a former teacher and an accomplished novelist herself, published four of her own novels, *Best Intention* (1987), *When They Took Away the Man in the Moon* (1993)*, Out of Eden* (1996), and *Confessions of a Bigamist* (2004). In 2003 she became a TIL member, soon serving as councilor.

Kate and Jim were among our 26 TIL members and spouses who went to Cuba, May 24-June 1, 2013. With our announced purpose of staying in Hemingway's favorite Ambos Mundos hotel, eating and drinking in Hem's customary bars, and seeing his lovely home, the Lehrers readily signed up as did so many of our brave TIL members. (See pictures of our journey at https://tilincuba.shutterfly.com Click on "pictures and videos.") As usual, our days were enlivened when Jim and Bob Flynn, both ex-Marines, joshed one another about their military exploits.

More recently, in 2018, at Jim's suggestion, a few friends formed a small group to go to the Dallas area where the utopian community of La Reunion existed in the 1850s. We were inspired by the late Dallas architect James Pratt in a just-published book entitled *Sabotaged*. Both Jim and I had read the advance manuscript and praised the book with blurbs appearing on the dust jacket. (I suspect that Jim might have had in mind a novel about a utopian community.) I knew the site and led our two-car caravan there, stopping en route at the unmarked and abandoned Clyde Barrow family home/filling station in West Dallas, where our imaginations ran wild. Besides Jim and Kate, our group included Bob Compton, Gail and Bob Thomas, Steve and Lori Blow, Allison Smith, Phyllis and me. Three of that group, Jim, Bob Compton, and Bob Thomas now are deceased.

---Darwin Payne

Bill Sloan
1935-2019



Bill Sloan, award-winning Texas journalist, author, and military historian, died peacefully on Sunday afternoon, November 10, 2019, at his Dallas home at age 84.

While I was senior editor at Taylor Publishing here in Dallas, I worked with Bill on a book about the Kennedy assassination entitled *JFK—Breaking the Silence*, which was published in 1993. That same year, when I left Taylor to start my own literary agency, Bill was the first author I called to ask if I could represent him. He became a very good friend, and I treasured the regular Tex-Mex lunches we'd have at Desperados, around the corner from my office, during which we'd talk about everything from the Dallas Cowboys and Texas Rangers to all kinds of writing and books. He was always soft-spoken, kind, and self-effacing, and a joy to work with. As a longtime newspaperman, he took pride in delivering clean copy, on time, and was always open to anything that would improve the product, ego be damned.

I sold several books for him over the years, all to major New York publishers. Then, around 2000, he told me he wanted to write about three very different youths from Kerrville, Texas, who all died in World War I. We tried to sell that book, but couldn't—most of the editors recognized that there was a lack of sources on what happened to the men once they left Texas. I told Bill that a World War II story would be easier to research, since many veterans of that conflict were still alive, and easier to sell, since it's the war that Americans always want to read about. As a young boy growing up in Dallas during World War II, Bill had revered the men who fought in that conflict, so he warmed to the idea. He soon came up with a doozy—and when that book, *Given Up for Dead: America's Heroic Stand at Wake Island*, was published, it received rave reviews for the research and storytelling, and sold well.

That success led to several other World War II books, and even one on the Korean War. Bill's passion lay in capturing the stories of veterans whose battlefield sacrifices had gone untold in the annals of American history. His book, *The Ultimate Battle Okinawa 1945 –The Last Epic Struggle of World War II*, was described in this way: "With the same 'grunt's-eye-view' narrative style that distinguished his *Brotherhood of Heroes* (on the Battle of Peleliu), Bill Sloan presents a gripping and uniquely personal saga of heroism and sacrifice…"

His last book, *Their Backs Against the Sea: The Battle of Saipan and the Largest Banzai Attack of World War II*, was published in 2017. Bill dedicated this book to his friend and fellow author, the late Floyd Wood, who had suggested the idea for his first military history, *Given Up for Dead*.
Born William Evered Sloan III on September 8, 1935, at the old St. Paul Hospital in Dallas, Bill's writing career spanned more than six decades, including three stints at the *Dallas Times Herald* when only two were officially allowed. Over his long and distinguished career, Bill received a string of awards, including a 1971 Sweepstakes Winner Award from the Associated Press (AP) Managing Editors Association and a Pulitzer Prize nomination for a series of stories, *Five Dark Days in Dallas*, on the murder of three Dallas County sheriff's deputies in the Trinity River Bottoms, written with fellow staffer Ron Calhoun, and the 2012 Army Historical Foundation Distinguished Writing Award for his military history, *Undefeated: America's Heroic Fight for Bataan and Corregidor*. He was the author of 16 books on a range of topics, including World War II and the Korean War, the Kennedy Assassination, and the tabloid industry. His book *I Watched a Wild Hog Eat My Baby* was based on his

colorful experiences in the tabloid industry, during which time he served as the editor of the *National Enquirer*, the *National Tattler*, and the *Star*. He was also the author of several novels.

Bill was a graduate of North Texas State College, now the University of North Texas, where he studied journalism under the legendary C. E. "Pop" Shuford, served as the editor of *The Campus Chat* newspaper and the *Avesta* literary magazine, and earned recognition as the Outstanding Journalism Graduate in 1957. Among the contributors to campus publications during Bill's tenure as editor was the legendary Texas writer and his friend, Larry McMurtry.

After graduation from North Texas, Bill began his journalism career as a reporter/editor at *The Texas Mesquiter*, which later became the *Mesquite News*, now the oldest operating newspaper in Texas. He went on to work at newspapers in Colorado City, Lubbock, Kerrville, and Marshall prior to landing a job as a copy editor at the *Dallas Times Herald*. In that position, he played a major role in the historic coverage of the Kennedy assassination—he was on the city desk on November 22, 1963, when it occurred at 12:30 pm, and spent the next few hours rewriting copy as it came in. His first book, *Tear Gas and Hungry Dogs*, a novel about racial issues in a small Texas town, also was published during that time.

After leaving the *Times Herald* in 1975, Bill became editor of *Country Rambler*, a national magazine focused on country music, and began a successful independent journalism career. The upstairs of his 1926 bungalow became his office as he focused first on corporate histories and later military histories and contributed to publications produced by the national offices of the Boy Scouts of America and the American Heart Association. The idea of working from home was so novel that he and his wife, Lana, also a journalist, were featured in an article in the *Dallas Morning News*, "The Alternative: Work at Home," in 1980.

--James Donovan

Lonn Taylor
1940-2019

(This article originally appeared in *Texas Monthly* and is used by permission from the author.)

https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-culture/farewell-rambling-boy-historian-lonn-taylor/

"What is this word, 'backstory'?" Lonn Taylor asked a few years back, while I was visiting his wife Dedie and him at their place in Fort Davis. The word clearly irritated him. "There's the story, and that's it," he said. "'Backstory' is redundant."

It's the story behind the story, I gently argued, foolishly parrying with a serious man of letters. Lonn was unmoved, so I let it go. I shouldn't have even tried. Lonn, who passed away late in the evening of June 26 in Fort Davis at the age of 79, knew of what he spoke. Lonn was a storyteller.

I was an avid reader of his "Rambling Boy" column in the *Big Bend Sentinel*, Marfa's weekly newspaper, and a close listener whenever I happened to tune in on Fridays to KRTS-FM, Marfa Public Radio, when he read his column on air. Somewhere along the way, we became friends.

Back in 2009, I sought him out for advice. I was applying to curate a high school football exhibit at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, and I knew Lonn had experience writing for museum exhibits. He invited my wife and me to Fort Davis. Over a weekend there, I learned what to say and not to say, how to write flat and neutral—not too wordy, leaving out opinion, getting straight to the point. We talked a lot about how to sell a museum on an exhibit, which is what I was trying to do, even though I'd never curated one. At one point, while talking about the culture of football in Texas—meaning the band, cheerleaders, mums, and the rest—he suggested that my proposal make the case that in Texas, high school football is more than just the game. I got the gig, no doubt because I had learned from the best. The 2011 exhibit was titled "Texas High School Football: More Than the Game."

Dedie and Lonn hosted a Far West Texas literary salon in their home in the shadow of Sleeping Lion Mountain. Visiting friends and strangers alike—many of them writers—mingled with interesting locals. "Lonn and Dedie's home is one of my favorite places. It's like another world—walking through the double doors, the rooms full of books, each with a theme," says Elise Pepple, general manager of Marfa Public Radio. "We were sitting on the porch, and this stranger showed up—a writer. She was visiting the area, and it turns out she had written a book about how to live a meaningful life. This is what could happen at the Taylor home. It was fable-like—a stranger walks in the door with words to say about the meaning of life. And it was fabulous. We talked about everything under the sun. Lonn and Dedie can expound on anything. That night it was monasteries in Kentucky and palm reading. This conversation was bread. I sat on that porch and was fed. This is what spending time with Lonn was like."

Out in public, you *heard* Lonn before you saw him. He possessed the Texan-most voice I ever encountered—loud, booming, and distinct. It carried a ways, but it was also softened by the kind of cultivated drawl you wish you'd grown up with. It carried an intellectual heft easily mistaken for garrulous or jolly, offering hints of having come from a cultured Texas family. The voice was often accompanied by a laugh so hearty and physical and full-bodied you couldn't help but laugh too, even if you didn't know what he was laughing about.

Lonn grew up in the Philippines, where his father was a federal highway engineer, but returned with his parents and grandmother to their native Fort Worth and graduated from Paschal High School. He was an only child who had "a happy and secure childhood surrounded by books," as he told Kay Ellington of Lone Star Literary Life last year. He determined to become a writer in grade school, although he turned out to be a late bloomer.

He graduated from Texas Christian University in 1961 and spent a year at New York University as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow. But a summer trip to Austin in 1962 got his head spinning. He dropped out of school and fell in with a bohemian crowd, including his next-door neighbor, a wild folk singer from Port Arthur named Janis Joplin. "I fooled around in Austin for nearly ten years after graduating from college, writing speeches for politicians and sending articles to the *Texas Observer* and the *Village Voice*," he told Ellington.

In Austin, Lonn lived in a big two-story house at Rio Grande and 28th streets when H.H. "Pancho" Howze met him in 1964. "He was a serious guy," says Howze, now a writer for the *Fayette County News*. "He didn't smoke dope. He was living in this house full of bohemians. He was the most bohemian of them all, but he wasn't a trendy bohemian. His intelligence was of another order. He had an incredible memory for people and dates."

Lonn's schooling and interest in all things Texan led to a job at the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio, writing exhibit proposals for the upcoming HemisFair in 1968. His big break came two years later, when he was hired as curator of the then-new Winedale Historical Center in Round Top, which is associated with the University of Texas at Austin. The project was endowed by Houston philanthropist Ima Hogg, who informed Lonn he'd write a book about Texas furniture from the nineteenth century as part of his position. *Texas Furniture: The Cabinetmakers and Their Work, 1840-1880,* by Lonn Taylor with David Warren, was published by University of Texas Press in 1975.

In 1977, he became curator of history at the Dallas Historical Society. He jointly directed a series of events at Fair Park's Hall of State called the Cowboy Heritage Festival with future official Texas state historian Light Cummins, who suggested inviting El Paso artist Tom Lea to speak. "I asked if he knew how we might manage to invite Mr. Lea. Lonn simply picked up the telephone and called the famous artist at his home. Mr. Lea said he would come because Lonn had asked him. He told Lonn it was the first time he'd been back to the Hall of State since he had painted its iconic mural forty-three years earlier, in 1936," Cummins says. "Lonn and I escorted Tom Lea during his visit to Dallas. We had a memorable day largely due to Lonn's expansive and gracious personality."

After two years at the Dallas Historical Society, Lonn moved on to become curator and deputy director of the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe for four years. His research on the purposeful remaking of Santa Fe from a red brick commercial district to the adobe (and faux adobe) place it

became ruffled more than a few feathers. As much as he and Dedie loved spending time in New Mexico in their later years, he once tried to dissuade a friend from moving there by protesting, "Why? It's not even a real state!"

He found his place at the Smithsonian, hired as a historian at the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. During this period, he met and married Dedie, and published two books, including *The Star-Spangled Banner: The Flag That Inspired the National Anthem*, which coincided with the restoration of the historic Old Glory flag.

After his retirement from the Smithsonian after almost two decades, and Dedie's retirement as a senior editor of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the couple moved to Fort Davis in 2002, following several extended visits to Far West Texas. Lonn dove into writing books, as well as reading them, and together they explored the towns of the Trans-Pecos and Big Bend, becoming local celebrities in the process. Lonn was the history guy who knew Texas and Texans like no one else, and he and Dedie were fixtures at every literary and cultural event worth staging in the region, the laugh and the voice typically presaging their presence. His book *Marfa for the Perplexed*, released last year, was the first hardcover book published by the Marfa Book Company.

Lonn was part of the Hot Dog Club at the Stone Village Market in Fort Davis, which convened at noon on Saturdays when hot dogs were discounted, just as he'd been a porch sitter 45 years ago in Round Top, listening to old German farmers lapse into their native tongue while telling their own stories. "For a couple of years he was just a figment of my imagination, someone I listened to on the radio," says David Dickson of Denison. "Meeting him at the Hot Dog Club was huge for me. I have never been one to fawn over celebrities. But meeting Lonn Taylor was as close to being starstruck as I've ever known."

Cummins remembers observing Lonn's star power at a book signing honoring Nadine Eckhardt at Scholz Garten in Austin. "Walking from the side street into the backyard entrance of Scholz's, I encountered my friend Patrick Cox standing nearby. As he and I visited, I looked across the courtyard to where a large group of people were gathered around a table. Standing around on three sides of the very crowded area, they were all looking down, engaged with the person seated there, but who was obscured from my view. After a bit, I broke off from Patrick, pointed to the knot of people at that table, and said I better go get my book signed by Nadine. 'Wait,' Patrick said, pointing to the back doors, 'Nadine is signing inside. Over there is where Lonn Taylor is sitting.' Lonn was holding court, surrounded by a cross-section of well-known political leaders, famous attorneys, and prize-winning authors, all of whom were hanging on every word he said. Only Lonn could go to a book signing and draw a bigger crowd than the author being feted."

Lonn was always encouraging. Before my high school football exhibit at the Bullock opened, he wrote me, "I can tell you that there are few experiences more satisfying than the opening of an exhibit that one has curated. It is even better than publishing a book because you get to watch people going through the exhibit." I know now exactly what he meant.

On my recommendation, he once spent a Sunday morning in San Antonio hearing accordionist Santiago Jimenez Jr. perform in a *carniceria* and ended up breaking down the music and the scene in his "Rambling Boy" column with a keen descriptive eye before going on to explain the deep history of Texan-Mexican music to readers:

"One of the guitar players was a big, hulking man wearing charro pants with silver conchos down the side of the legs, a white shirt and a black vest, and the other was a skinny fellow with a straw cowboy hat, a sport shirt, and blue jeans. Jimenez, who is 72 years old and was named a National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellow in 2000 for his contributions to traditional Tex-Mex conjunto music, was wearing a blue sport shirt and a pair of khaki pants and played a button accordion for 3 hours, singing along with the music. Occasionally he would be joined in a duet by the owner of the restaurant, Luis Almanza, a gentleman a few years older than Jimenez who approached the mic with a shuffling dance step. There were some pretty tough customers in the audience, including a six foot tall woman who weighed over 300 pounds and had a glittering tiara in her hair, which was jet black down to her neck, and purple the rest of the way to her waist. She was at a table with two equally large women. Across the room was a barrel-chested man with a completely shaved head wearing a black tank top with a Mexican flag on it, black shorts and a fresh surgical dressing that covered most of his right arm. But everyone in the room was all smiles while Jimenez was playing."

He was also the father figure of Marfa Public Radio. "He took great interest in each individual on our team," Pepple says. "Last winter, Sally [Beauvais] and I traveled to his home in Fort Davis to record a special episode of the 'Rambling Boy.' Before Sally could interview Lonn, he turned to her and in his characteristic drawl said, 'Now Sally, tell me about you.'"

His last book*, Turning the Pages of Texas*, from TCU Press, was his guide to Texas books and writers, as told by the "Rambling Boy." One of his last columns eulogized Bill Wittliff, whom he described as "one of the most talented and creative people I've ever known." It wasn't just the novels, movies, photography, and *Lonesome Dove*. Lonn praised Wittliff as the only person he knew who'd graduated from the University of Texas School of Journalism without taking a typing course, observing that whenever Wittliff entered the journalism department building, he wore his arm in a sling.

That's what I used to call a backstory, until Lonn Taylor corrected me.

It's a story—no prefix required. Lonn had a bunch of stories and told them better than anyone.

Thankfully, more than a few remain in his ten books. As for that voice and that sonorous laugh, I recorded it and can play it back anytime I need. Plus Marfa Public Radio has his "Rambling Boy" segments archived. Still, I keep thinking about the note my wife Kris and I left for Lonn and Dedie when we visited Fort Davis in February, even though they were in Fort Worth at the Texas Philosophical Society annual meeting: "We had a great time staying at your place, but it's not the same without you."

---Joe Nick Patoski