

## Biblio File

In May, **Jonathan Eig** won the Pulitzer Prize for his book, *King: A Life*. Jonathan presented a Midland Authors program on the book on Sept 12. ... **Ted Anton** writes



Jonathan Eig

to say, "I have retired from DePaul University and moved to Iowa City. My chapter, 'The American Essay and (Social) Science,' is out in the new *Cambridge History of the American Essay*."

... **Craig Sautter** tells Biblio File, "One of my short stories, 'The Graduate Library,' was published in May in a literary magazine, *Deep Overstock*. The theme of the magazine this time is 'The Classics.' One editor wrote that the story 'makes the search for classics and devotion to reading feel more alive. It's the perfect addition to the classics issue.' I had another short story accepted for May by *Valiant Scribe*. 'Ventriloquist' is about an exhausted Mexican priest assisting migrants who are south of the border headed north. Also, my (40-page) account of the last Chicago Democratic Convention, 1996, is available at *Presidential Convention Books*. And another short story, 'Buried Alive,' was published in the winter 2023-24 issue of *The Evening Universe*." ... Midland Authors Board Member **Marlene Targ Brill**'s book, *Jane Addams: The Most Dangerous Woman in America* (See *Literary Latest*, Page 8), was selected as a Junior Library Guild book. Marlene held a book launch at Max & Benny's deli on June 24. She tells Biblio File, "It was fun. About 80 people came to eat and hear about Jane Addams. The support was wonderful, as many from my high school came in addition to friends who brought friends. A lot of folks just wanted to know more about Jane." ... At a Hazard Mitigation and Disaster Recovery Planning Division

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## Honoring talented authors and their 'wonderful books'



SALLY REED PHOTO



THOMAS FRISBIE PHOTO

**LEFT:** Poetry Award honoree Taylor Byas (left) and Alberta Johnson enjoy the nice weather on the Cliff Dwellers club's terrace before the start of 2024 Midland Authors book awards. **ABOVE:** Program Emcee Justin Kaufmann.

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

The Midland Authors has given out book awards on an annual basis since 1957. Commenting on that achievement, 2024 Book Awards Emcee **Justin Kaufmann** of *Axios* said, "How about that? That's quite an accomplishment."

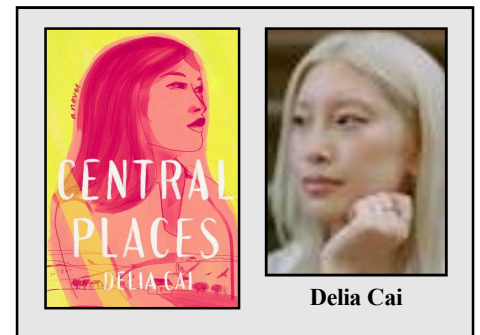
"This organization seeks to highlight talented authors and their wonderful books," Kaufmann said.

The ceremony was held on May 21 at the Cliff Dwellers club in Chicago.

Before the book awards were presented, the Midland Authors gave a Board of Directors Award for Distinguished Services to former Midland Authors President **Robert Loerzel**, whom Kaufmann said is "a longtime and special member."

Former President **Jim Schwab** said, "There are few people in this organization who are more omnipresent when you really need help."

The winner of the Adult Fiction category



ry was *Central Places* by **Delia Cai**. (Ballantine).

Judge **Rita Woods** said many of the

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April 9 baseball program  
touches all bases  
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*Final Chapters*  
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Adult Fiction books submitted were “just stellar.”

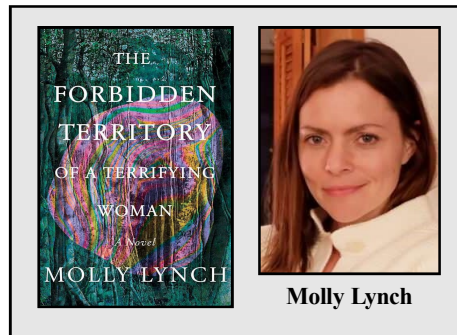
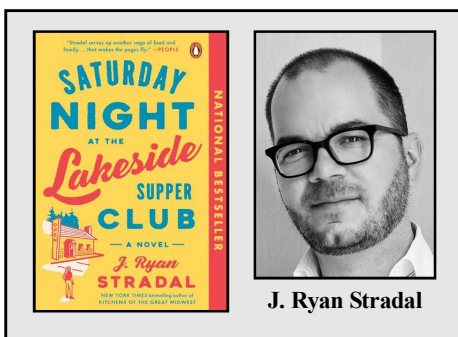
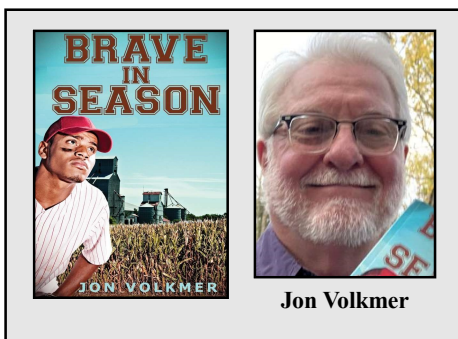
Of *Central Places*, Woods said, “The beauty of this book for myself and the other judges was that Delia managed to weave into the surface of what could have been a very simple story some very complex issues.”

Cai said, “It’s one thing to write a novel about growing up in central Illinois for your friends to talk about. ... It means so much to me that *Central Places* can find the recognition and audience for the people who it is really for.”

At that point, Kaufmann – remarking on the more than 80 books entered just in the Adult Fiction category – said, “Eighty books! Let me give you a talk show hack. One longtime talk show host in Chicago, when interviewing authors, I heard, [reads] first the intro, then reads the last chapter, and then picks a random chapter in the middle, so that in the middle of the interview [the host] can go, ‘I want to take us to Chapter 12.’”

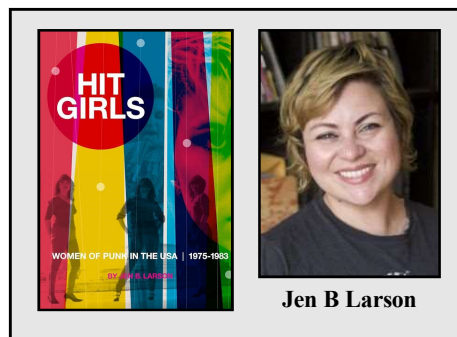
The honorees were *Brave in Season* by **Jon Volkmer** (Milford House); *Saturday Night at the Lakeside Supper Club* by **J. Ryan Stradal** (Pamela Dorman Books), and *The Forbidden Territory of a Terrifying Woman* by **Molly Lynch** (Catapult).

The other judges for Adult Fiction were **Andrew Graff** and **Wendy Schuchart**.



The winner of the Richard Frisbie Award for Adult Nonfiction was *Hit Girls: Women of Punk in the USA, 1975-1983* by **Jen B. Larson** (Feral House).

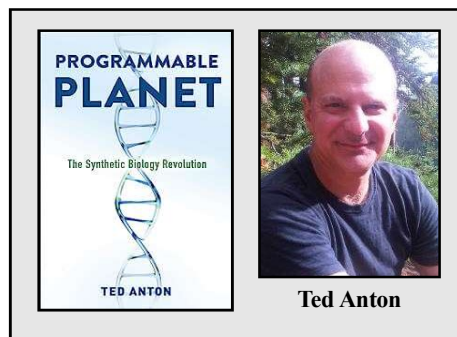
Larson said, “This book started on Tumblr. It was kind of a hobby among my



friends and me. Somehow it turned into a book project. ... I saw myself in a lot of the women I wrote about.”

The honorees were: *Programmable Planet: The Synthetic Biology Revolution* by **Ted Anton** (Columbia University Press); *Murder Ballads Old & New: A Dark and Bloody Record* by **Steven L. Jones** (Feral House), and *How to Taste Coffee: Develop Your Sensory Skills and Get the Most Out of Every Cup* by **Jessica Easto** (Agate).

Of *Programmable Planet*, Judge **Gerard Plecki** said Anton “had the courage to put forth an agenda where we exist in a world where artificial intelligence actually is beneficial. ... It was shockingly well done.”



Plecki called *How to Taste Coffee* “a wonderful book.” He said *Murder Ballads* “is tremendously well-researched.”

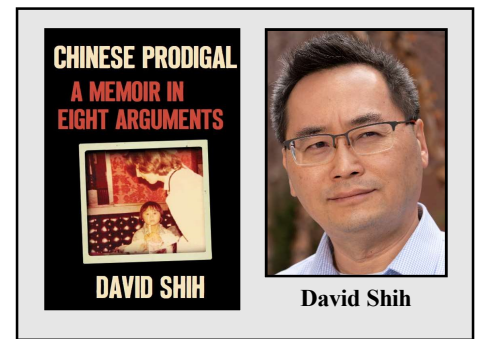
The other judges for Adult Nonfiction were **James Nowlan** and **Kathleen Hale**.

The winner of the Bernard J. Brommel Award for Biography & Memoir was



*Chinese Prodigal: A Memoir in Eight Arguments* by **David Shih** (Atlantic Monthly Press).

Judge Robert Remer said, “Biography and memoir require excellent writing, critical thinking and lasting takeaways for the reader beyond the basic facts of the



subject or the writer’s life.”

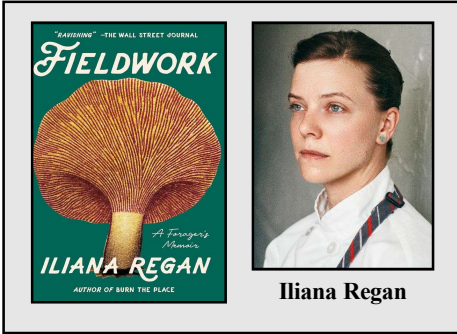
The honorees were *Eliza Scidmore: The Trailblazing Journalist Behind Washington’s Cherry Trees* by **Diana P. Parsell** (Oxford University Press) and *Fieldwork: A Forager’s Memoir* by **Iliana Regan** (Agate).

Of *Fieldwork*, judge **Donna Urbikas** said, “Lessons of every kind form a network of connections.”

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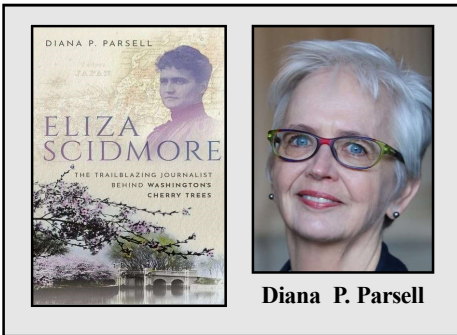
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Iliana Regan

Eliza Scidmore, Remer said, “was a most engaging read and a great history lesson about the times.”

The winning book, *Chinese Prodigal*, Remer said, is “incredibly incisive and robust. ... The judges were very moved by this book.”



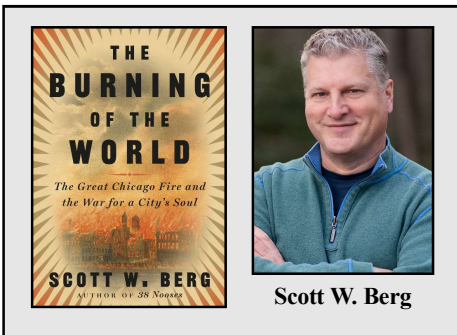
Diana P. Parsell

Shih said, “I started writing *Chinese Prodigal* to deal with the fact that I wasn’t with [my father] in Texas when he died [five years ago]. Each chapter in its own way tries to answer the question of my assimilation. ... I wanted the story of an Asian-American life to be told.”

The other judge for Biography & Memoir was **Hugh Eakin**.

The winner of the history award was *The Burning of the World: The Great Chicago Fire and the War for a City’s Soul* by **Scott W. Berg** (Pantheon Books).

The honorees were *Indigenous Missourians: Ancient Societies to the*



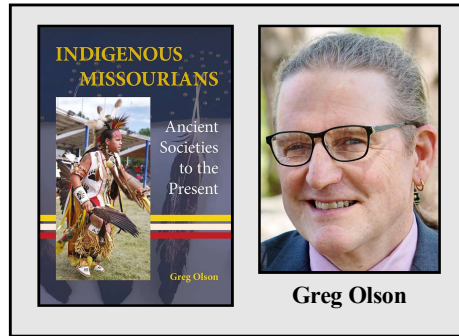
Scott W. Berg

Present by **Greg Olson** (University of Missouri Press); *Country and Midwestern: Chicago in the History of Country Music and the Folk Revival* by **Mark Guarino** (University of Chicago Press), and *Without Warning: The Tornado of Udall, Kansas* by Jim Minick (University of Nebraska Press).

Judge **Greg Borzo** said *Indigenous Missourians* “is a very readable book. It covers 12,000 years. ... This is a great book.”

*Without Warning*, Borzo said, “is a thoroughly researched and engaging book.”

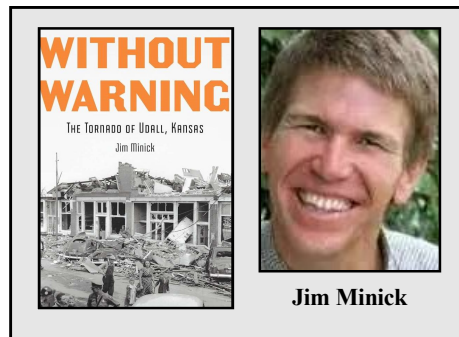
*Country and Midwestern* “makes the point that Chicago was at the center of the



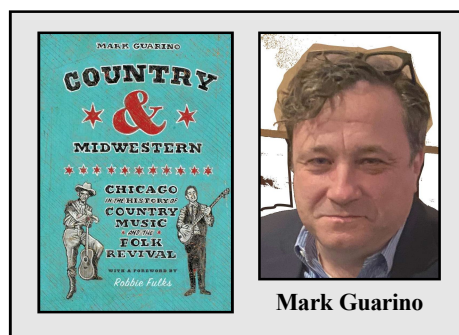
Greg Olson

development of country and western music,” Borzo said.

Of *The Burning of the World*, Borzo said, “[This book] talks about the renovation of Chicago – politically, socially and



Jim Minick



Mark Guarino

economically. The story of establishment vs. the working class.”

Berg said, “Three decades of research went into this book.”

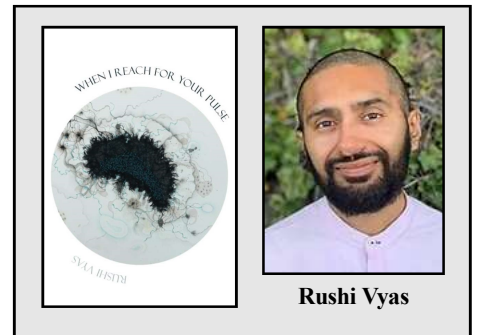
Berg added, “One of the things I love about the list of honorees and winners here is how it draws from all areas of the publishing spectrum. That is really, really rare. ... I’ve been at events like this ... where it’s almost all big publishing, where it’s all small presses. We’ve got wonderful university presses represented here. We’ve got fantastic small press like Red Hen and Soft Skull ... and of course we have some big publishers as well. I think that fits in very well with the ethos of this society.”

The other judges for History were **Joe Gustaitis** and **David Witter**.

The Poetry Award winner was *Trace* by **Brenda Cárdenas** (Red Hen Press).

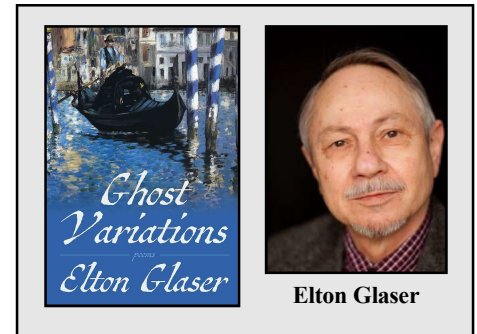
The honorees were *I Done Clicked My Heels Three Times* by **Taylor Byas** (Soft Skull Press); *Ghost Variations* by **Elton Glaser** (University of Pittsburgh Press), and *When I Reach For Your Pulse* by **Rushi Vyas** (Four Way Books).

Plecki said *When I Reach For Your Pulse* “is a sobering account, not just of what existence means in 2024, but also what it has always meant through the decades.”



Rushi Vyas

After reading a poem in *Ghost Variations*, Plecki said, “This is D.H. Lawrence coming to visit us again.”



Elton Glaser

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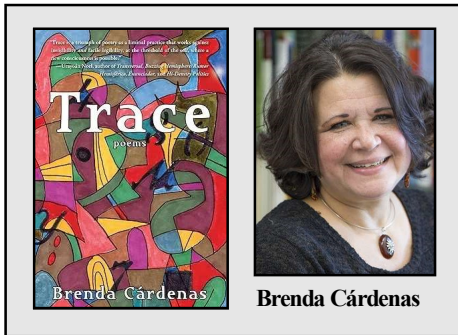
Much of *I Done Clicked My Heels Three Times* “touched my soul,” Plecki said.

Of *Trace*, Plecki said, “When I read some of the poems in this book, I was



brought to tears.”

Cárdenas said *Trace* “explores issues of displacement, limitality and mutability. The poems attempt to transgress illusory borders between land, languages, humans



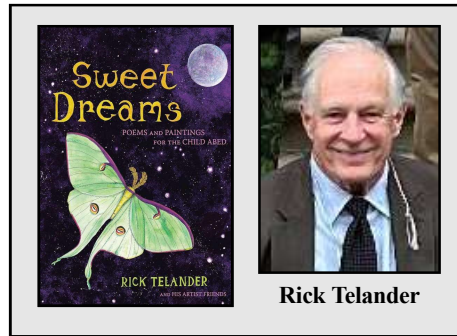
and the rest of the natural world between waking and dreaming and the living and the dead.”

The judges for Poetry were **Sun Yung Shin**, **Nandi Comer** and **Emilio DeGrazia**.

The Children’s Fiction winner was *Maddie’s Ghost* by **Carol Fisher Saller** (Duckweed Books).

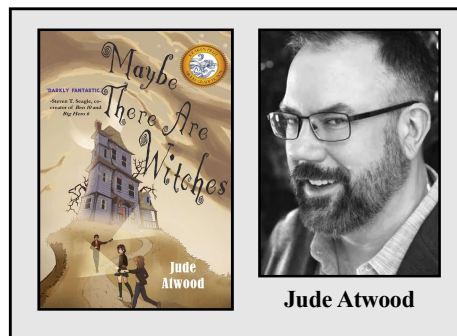
The honorees were *Mèo and Bé* by **Doan Phuong Nguyen** (Lee & Low Books); *Sweet Dreams: Poems and Paintings for the Child Abed* by **Rick Telander** (Skyhorse Publishing), and *Maybe There Are Witches* by **Jude Atwood** (Fitzroy Books).

Of *Maybe There Are Witches*, judge **W. Nikola-Lisa** said, “Mr. Atwood’s descriptive flowing language continues to keep the reader engaged. ... It’s a page turner. Lovely book.”



*Mèo and Bé*, he said, “tells the reader the value of friendship, compassion ... I find this incredibly engaging in terms of an insider’s view into a culture.”

Before discussing *Maddie’s Ghost*



Nikola-Lisa read a note from Midland Authors Member **Elizabeth Fama**, commending the Children’s Fiction judges. The note said, in part, “It was wonderful

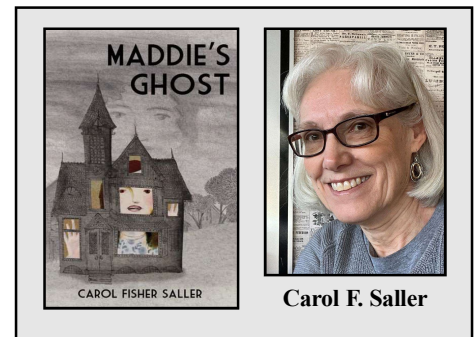


that they carefully read an indie-published book, and *Maddie’s Ghost* is a truly worthy lovely novel.”

Detailing the difficulties of getting attention for indie-published books, Saller said, “This award gives a book a chance to be seen, and that is really all a writer can ask.”

The other judges for Children’s Fiction were **Laura Hirshfield** and **Sandra Renner**.

The winner of the Children’s Reading Round Table Award for Children’s

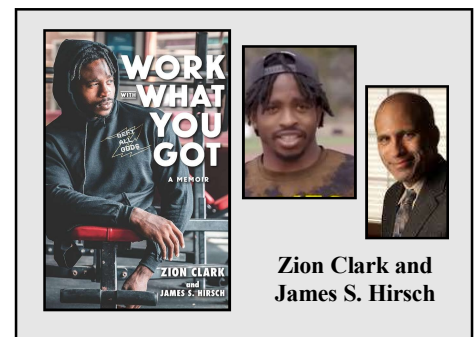


Nonfiction was *Work With What You Got: A Memoir* by **Zion Clark** and **James S. Hirsch** (Candlewick).

The honorees were *How to Spacewalk: Step-By-Step With Shuttle Astronauts* by **Kathryn Sullivan** and **Michael J. Rosen** (MIT Kids Press); *Virginia Wouldn’t Slow Down! The Unstoppable Dr. Apgar and Her Life-Saving Invention* by **Carrie Pearson** (Norton Young Readers), and *Restoring Prairie, Woods, and Pond: How a Small Trail Can Make a Big Difference* by **Laurie Lawlor** (Holiday House).

Judge **Marlene Targ Brill** said “*Virginia Wouldn’t Slow Down!* “is a spirited story. It is well-written, well-researched.”

*How to Spacewalk*, Brill said, is “writ-



ten in a way that is matter-of-fact. This book could literally be the very first step on many astronauts’ first space walks.”

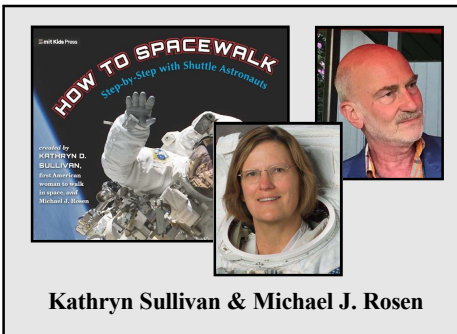


Of *Restoring Prairie, Woods, and Pond*, Brill said, “I thought it was almost suspenseful. It was researched very well and

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**Kathryn Sullivan & Michael J. Rosen**

had good organization to show kids what they can do.

*Work With What You Got*, Brill said, “was really special. It was well-written, touching and highly motivational.”

The other judges for Children’s



**Laurie Lawlor**

Nonfiction were **Jingmai O’Connor** and **Jill Esbaum**.

**Note:** This was the third year that Plecki coordinated the book awards competition and the banquet and gave the opening remarks and closing remarks.

Also, Midland Authors members who attended the annual meeting elected officers and board members for the coming fiscal year. The new officeholders are:

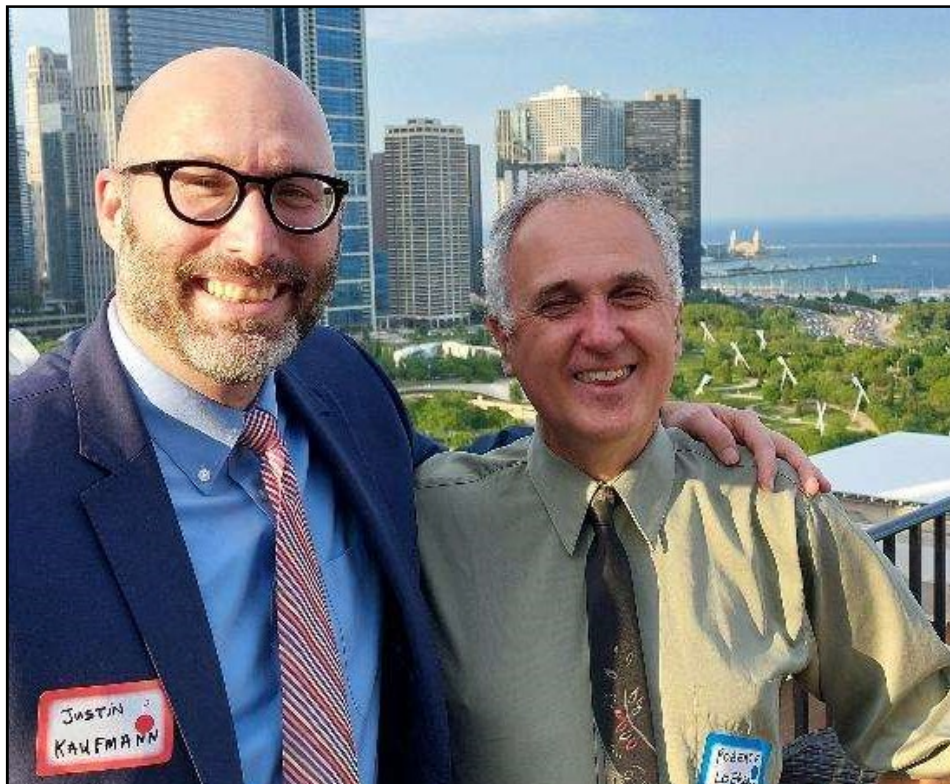
- President:** Gerard Plecki
- Vice President:** Walter Podrazik
- Treasurer:** Greg Borzo
- Recording Secretary:** Jim Schwab
- Corresponding Secretary:** Jon Lauck
- Membership Secretary:** Thomas Frisbie
- Board Members:**
  - Marlene Targ Brill
  - Christopher Lynch
  - Dominic Pacyga

Semifinalists for the book awards, announced on April 5, were:

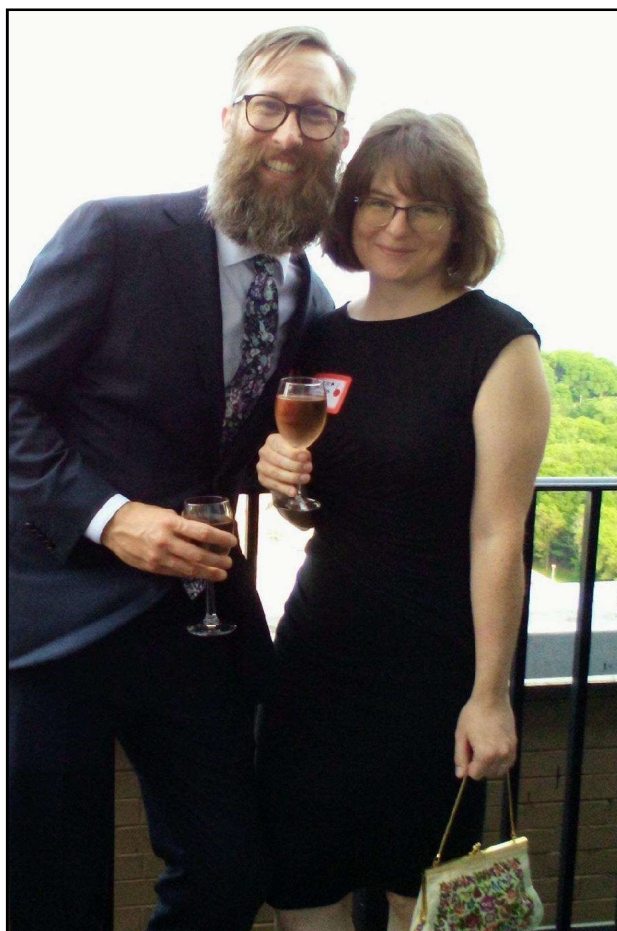
**Adult Fiction**

*The Midwife’s Touch* by **Sue Harrison** (Shanty Cove Books); *Strange Attractors*:

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**ABOVE: Book Awards Emcee Justin Kaufmann and former President Robert Loerzel enjoy the pleasant weather on the Cliff Dwellers terrace before the start of the 2024 book awards program. LEFT: Richard Frisbie Award for Adult Nonfiction honoree Jessica Easto with her husband, Andreas Willhoff.**





# Awards Continued from Page 5

*The Ephrem Stories* by **Janice Deal** (New Door Books); *Land of Joys* by **Steve Wiegenstein** (Amphorae Publishing Group/Blank Slate Press); *Down the Steep* by A.D. Nauman (Regal House Publishing); *The Luck of the Fall* by **Jim Daniels** (Michigan State University Press); *I Have Some Questions for You* by Julia Falkner (Viking Books); *You Shall See the Beautiful Things* by Steve Amick (Acre Books), and *I Could Live Here Forever* by Hanna Halperin (Viking Books)

## Richard Frisbie Award for Adult Nonfiction

*Touch the Future: A Manifesto in Essays* by John Lee Clark (W.W. Norton); *Higher Power: An American Town's Story of Faith, Hope, and Nuclear Energy* by Casey Bukro (Agate); *Moby Dyke: An Obsessive Quest to Track Down the Last Remaining Lesbian Bars in America* by Krista Burton (Simon & Schuster); *How Not to Kill Yourself: A Portrait of the Suicidal Mind* by Clancy Martin (Pantheon); *Writer's Postcards* by **Dipika Mukherjee** (Penguin), and *Paper Valley: The Fight for the Fox River Cleanup* by P. David Allen II and Susan Campbell (Wayne State University Press).

## Bernard J. Brommel Award for Biography & Memoir

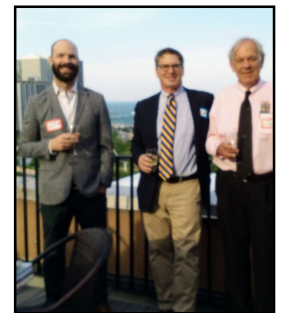
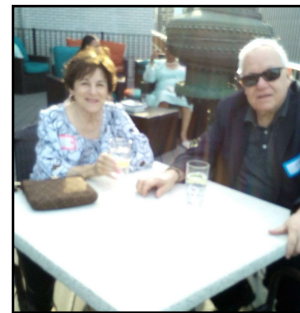
*Love and Industry: A Midwestern Workbook* by **Sonya Huber** (Belt); *Newspaperwoman of the Ozarks: The Life and Times of Lucile Morris Upton* by **Susan Croce Kelly** (University of Arkansas Press); *Bernardine's Shanghai Salon: The Story of the Doyenne of Old China* by **Susan Blumberg-Kason** (Post Hill), and *We Will be Free: The Life and Faith of Sojourner Truth* by Nancy Koester (William B. Erdmans)

## Children's Reading Roundtable Award for Children's Nonfiction

*Do Not Eat This Book: Fun With Jewish Foods & Festivals* by Beth Kander (Sleeping Bear Press); *What Music! The Fifty-Year Friendship Between Beethoven and Nannette Streicher, Who Built His Pianos* by **Laurie Lawlor** (Holiday House), and *Ted Kooser: More Than a Local Wonder* by Carla Keiner (University of Nebraska Press).

## Children's Fiction

*We, the Curious Ones* by Marion Dane



**TOP LEFT:** SMA President Gerard Plecki and Corresponding Secretary Jon Lauck; **TOP RIGHT:** Award winner David Shih; **BOTTOM LEFT:** Greg Borzo handling the check-in. **CENTER:** Cathy Gustaitis and Board Member Joseph Gustaitis. **CENTER RIGHT:** Charles Frisbie, John Kropf and Craig Sautter. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Jim Sikora and Program Chair Mary Wisniewski. (Photos on this and preceding page by Sally Reed and Walter Podrazik)

Bauer (Candlewick Press); *Stanley's Secret* by **John Sullivan** (Simon & Schuster), and *The Puppets of Spelhorst* by Kate DiCamillo (Candlewick Press).

## Poetry

*Tender Headed* by Olatunde Osinaike (Akashic Books); *Empire* by **James Armstrong** (Shipwreckt Books); *Breathing in Minneapolis* by Patrick Cabello Hansel (Finishing Line); *Continued Cases* by Richard Hague

(Dos Madres Press), and *Auction* by Quan Barry (University of Pittsburgh Press).

## History

*I Saw Death Coming: A History of Terror and Survival in the War Against Reconstruction* by Kidada E. Williams (Bloomsbury Publishing) and *Entangled Encounters at the National Zoo: Stories From the Animal Archive* by Daniel Vandersommers (University Press of Kansas).



# Sign up for Sept 7-8 Printers Row

The Printers Row Lit Fest, the Midwest's largest outdoor literary festival, is returning on Saturday, Sept. 7, and Sunday, Sept. 8 – and the Midland Authors will once again participate.

Both members and nonmembers will be able to showcase and sell books under a tent that we will rent at the festival, which takes place in the Printers Row area of the South Loop, primarily along Dearborn Street.

Midland Authors members can reserve half a table for a two-hour time slot. The cost is \$35 for most time slots – or just \$20 for the 4-6 p.m. time slots.

**SATURDAY,  
SEPT. 7**  
10 a.m.-noon  
noon-2 p.m.  
2-4 p.m.  
4-6 p.m.

**SUNDAY,  
SEPT. 8**  
10 a.m.-noon  
noon-2 p.m.  
2-4 p.m.  
4-6 p.m.

One table during the entire two days is \$345. A half a table during the entire two days is \$190. Members get a 10% discount on these last two categories.

This approach would give an author the best opportunity to sell a significant number of books.

Space is limited, so please respond ASAP.

If you'd like to participate, email Joe Gustaitis at [jagustaitis@yahoo.com](mailto:jagustaitis@yahoo.com) with your first and second preferences



The Midland Authors tent at Printers Row in 2023. (Photo by Carol Fisher Saller)

from these time slots.

We will confirm all time slots with authors and let them know about payment details.

Table preferences within the Midland Authors tent will be given on a first-come, first-served basis. Again, email Joe Gustaitis at [jagustaitis@yahoo.com](mailto:jagustaitis@yahoo.com).

Participants will be responsible for bringing their own books, selling them, collecting the money and taking away any unsold copies afterward. And they must remain at their table for the duration of their assigned time.

The Midland Authors has been at Printers Row since **Richard Lindberg** and **Carol Carlson** started the tradition in

2000, as, Lindberg said, “a means of showcasing and promoting the aims of the Society and the fine work of our author members for a nominal fee – far less than what individuals might otherwise pay were they to reserve a table on their own.”

Authors should prepare for gusts of wind and not be surprised if it rains. Authors can pay for their time slot by sending \$35 to our post office box at Society of Midland Authors, P.O. Box 10419, Chicago 60610. Or they can visit our website at [www.midlandauthors.org](http://www.midlandauthors.org) and pay via PayPal.

Authors who book a slot and don't show up still are required to pay.

## Biblio File

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reception in Minneapolis, the division officers announced **Jim Schwab** would receive the division's Jennifer Ellison Distinguished Service Award this year. It was presented May 5. ... **Dan Dinello's** essay “The Wretched of Palestine: Frantz Fanon Diagnosed the Pathology of Colonialism and Urged Revolutionary Humanism” was featured on the website Informed Comment. ... **Edward Gordon** reports that for the 80th D-Day anniversary Prometheus Books, an imprint of Rowman and Littlefield, has published a paperback edition of *Divided on D-Day*:

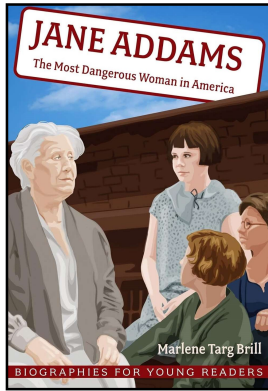
*How Leadership Failures Threatened the Normandy Invasion*. He is giving presentations based on his research at museums, libraries and book roundtables in commemoration of this historic event. ... **Gail Lukasic** was a panelist at the celebration of the 10th anniversary of “Finding Your Roots” held at WTTW-Chicago PBS. Brandis Friedman, co-host of “Chicago Tonight,” led the discussion about family history, race and identity. ... **Mark Guarino** wrote a story in the May 8 Chicago Sun-Times headlined “Chicago musicians praise Albin's ‘profound influence.’” The story also appeared on the WBEZ website. ... **Robert Loerzel** has been delving deep into the early years of

the Green Mill jazz club – and related things, such as the development of Chicago's Uptown neighborhood and the Prohibition Era – in a history that he's posting in chapters on his website, [robertloerzel.com](http://robertloerzel.com). He'll talk about some highlights of his findings in an Edgewater Historical Society event at 1 p.m. July 13, at the Chicago Public Library's Edgewater Branch Library, 6000 N. Broadway. One offshoot of this project is an article in Chicago magazine's June-July issue. It's about an incident that may have been Al Capone's first local arrest (down in south suburban Burnham) and Robert's search for clues. ... **Michael Loyd Gray's** forth-

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## Literary Latest



### JANE ADDAMS BIOGRAPHY

*Jane Addams: The Most Dangerous Woman In America*, **Marlene Targ Brill's** latest biography, presents a well-known figure in Chicago and world history. The book revisits the life of an outspoken activist for immigration, child welfare, worker rights, peace and the woman's vote at a time when women were told to work within the family confines. Her dogged advocacy butted heads with politicians, corporate leaders and three presidents, earning her the name "most dangerous woman in America."

Brill tells Literary Latest, "The story follows Addams from her first realization of the unfairness that limited the lives, livelihoods, and health of disadvantaged people in the late 1800s to her becoming one of the most beloved – and most disliked – women of her day. She worked to create a more peaceful, fair world for all people, no matter their race, color, nationality or gender. Along her journey, Addams co-founded Hull-House, the most celebrated settlement house in the United States and earned the first Nobel Peace Prize for an American woman. Publication comes at a time when most children's books about Jane Addams have gone out of print, such as those by SMA members **Judith and Dennis Fradin's** *Jane Addams: Champion of Democracy*. The two recent publications about

Addams are picture books, such as the one by SMA member **Suzanne Slade** *Dangerous Jane*. This new title for elementary and high school readers with interest for all ages includes updated information from family and friends, has the vantage point of history and delves into the breadth of Addams' accomplishments, including publication of 11 books and countless articles that earned her membership in the Midland Authors. A book about Jane Addams has been a career-long interest. At the time I first discovered all she did for our city and beyond, Addams was a popular subject for children's book authors. Now is time to revisit her remarkable, and sometimes difficult, life and all she accomplished."



### NEW HISTORICAL NOVEL

**Libby Fischer Hellmann** writes to say, "My new World War II historical novel, *Max's War: The Story of a Ritchie Boy*, came out as of April 9 in ebook, print and audiobook. Both a coming-of-age novel and an exploration of the little-known story of the Ritchie Boys, it spans the years 1933 through 1945, mostly in Europe. The Ritchie Boys were a group of 2,300 German Jewish young men who escaped Hitler's Germany, came to the U.S., and joined the U.S. Army to fight Nazis. It's based on substantial research, although it is fictionalized. The idea came from my late father-in-law's experience

in the war — he was with the OSS— and had remarkably similar responsibilities as the Ritchie Boys.

"Early reviews from PW and BookLife have been wonderful, and Barnes & Noble just announced it was one of the Nook Top Indie Favorites for spring."



### LATEST BOOK

**Martha Miller's** latest book *Torrid Summer* (Sapphire Press), came out June 1. In it, a woman from Illinois looks back on a summer she spent with her mother in Florida. Her mom had abandoned her when she was 10 years old, and she wants a second chance.

Miller tells Literary Latest: "I started *Torrid Summer* a few years ago. Then I had a fall and broke seven ribs. While I was in the hospital, I lost track of the story, and it was hard to get back to it. This book has the same main character as my last book, *Me Inside*. So, I put that character down in a Florida hurricane and a murder. I always mean to write a romance, but somehow when I start writing, somebody ends up dead. After being away, I found the book was slow going, then I picked up speed, and I finished it.

"A secondary character in the book is transgender (f to m). Thus, I needed to do a lot of research. I did interviews with a few transgender people, and I had two of

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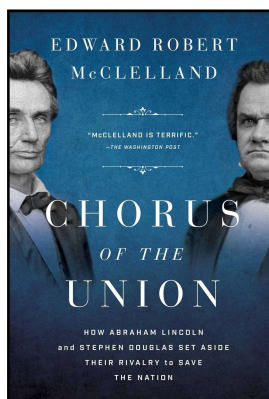


## Literary Latest

Continued from Page 6

them read the first draft. They commented and pointed out mistakes, ironically fixing my errors made it easier to write.”

“Despite her promise to do better the girl is left on her own much of the time. With the boy next door, she goes to the beach daily, and there she finds a bar called Magnolias, where she watches drag shows and learns about sexuality, transgendered love and murder. She also learns what happens when two people who should never fall in love – fall in love.



### ‘A MAN WHO NOBLY DISCARDED PARTY’

Here’s what **Edward Robert McClelland** tells Literary Latest about his new book, *Chorus of the Union: How Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas Set Aside Their Rivalry to Save the Nation* (Pegasus Books, June 4 2024):

“I started looking into Stephen Douglas’ record after Mike Madigan took down his statue outside the state Capitol and covered up his portrait in the state House chamber. He’s a controversial politician in our time, and he was a controversial politician in his time.

“What I discovered was that while Douglas was a white supremacist, he was also a sworn opponent of the Confederacy, perhaps more than any other Northern politician. Southerners had destroyed Douglas’ presidential candidacy because he refused to endorse a federal law to protect slavery in the territories. What impressed me most about Douglas was that once he realized he was

going to lose the election to Lincoln, he went South in an attempt to persuade the slave states to accept a Lincoln presidency. After Fort Sumter, he met with Lincoln to discuss war strategy.

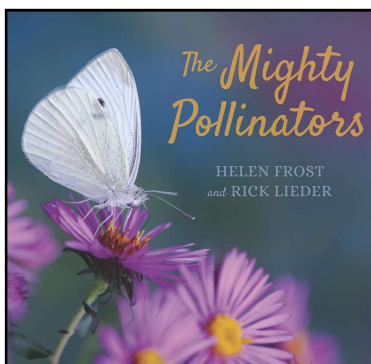
Lincoln had written a proclamation asking for 75,000 men to put down the rebellion. Douglas suggested he make it 200,000. “You do not know the dishonest motives of these men as well as I do.”

Douglas told a friend he had known Lincoln a long time, “longer than you or the country. He will come out well, and we will all get behind him.” Then he returned to Illinois to deliver his “Protect the Flag” speech, in which he urged his fellow Democrats not to allow the loss of an election “to convert you from patriots to traitors in your own land.”

“On Jan. 6, 2021, I published an essay in the Washington Post titled “Gracious Losers Protect Our Democracy.” I think the story of how Lincoln and Douglas ended their relationship as allies against the greatest threat our country has ever faced offers lessons for today’s fractured politics. When Douglas died, in June 1861, Secretary of War Simon Cameron eulogized him as ‘a man who nobly discarded party for country.’”



**Edward Robert McClelland**



### VERY SMALL AND VERY IMPORTANT

Helen Frost’s new book is *The Mighty Pollinators* (*Step Gently, Look Closely*) Candlewick (March 26, 2024).

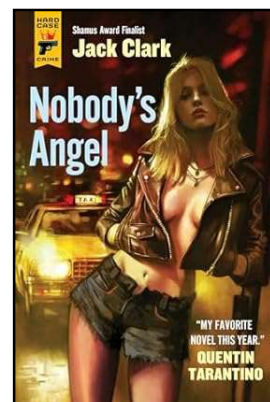
Frost tells Literary Latest, “Early in the

pandemic, I heard about a child who said, ‘We can’t go outside because of the Corona Pirates?’

“I thought about the fact that young children have no way of visualizing the smallest things, and I started talking with Rick Lieder, the photographer and collaborator of my Candlewick picture books, about how we might help bring some clarity to that. We started looking for things that are very small and also very important – like our young readers themselves – eventually settling on pollen as something which is almost, but not quite, invisible.

“I’m having a wonderful time sharing this book with children, and I appreciate your sharing it with your readers.”

Kirkus Reviews wrote, “A beautifully photographed, respectful tribute to pollinators.”



### NEW EDITION

Earlier this year, Literary License reported Hard Case Crime was bringing out a new edition of **Jack Clark’s** *Nobody’s Angel* after Quentin Tarantino last year said the book was his favorite novel of the year.

Now the book the Washington Post said “is just about perfect” is out (Hard Case Crime, Feb. 13, 2024) with a newly commissioned cover painting.

Tarantino said, “It’s a terrific story and character study of a cabbie in Chicago during a time when a serial killer is robbing and murdering cabbies. Kudos to Hard Case Crime for publishing Mr. Clark’s book.”

The Chicago Sun-Times called it, “Heartbreaking... captivating... each page turn feels like real, authentic Chicago.”

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# SMA baseball program hits homerun

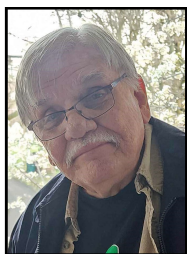
BY JUDITH HILTNER, THOM HENNINGER  
AND JIM WALKER

Of all the major sports, baseball has drawn the most interest from both writers and readers. The Society for American Baseball Research has nurtured many first-time baseball writers by giving them an opportunity to share their work.

On April 9, the Midland Authors held a forum titled “Booking Baseball: Writing About the National Pastime” at Turtle’s Bar & Grill, 238 W. 33rd St. in Chicago. The panelists were baseball authors **Thom Henninger**, **Stuart Shea**, **Judith Hiltner** and **James R. Walker**. The host was **Dominic Pacyga**.

Henninger wrote for STATS LLC (now STATS Perform) for nearly two decades, then served as editor of *Baseball Digest* magazine for 11 years before retiring in 2023. His work has also appeared in *ESPN Insider* and *Baseball America*. Henninger is the author of two books, *Tony Oliva: The Life and Times of a Minnesota Twins Legend* and *The Pride of Minnesota: The Twins in the Turbulent 1960s*.

Hiltner co-authored *Super Frustration Sunday: The Day Fantasy Baseball Died*, the first study to examine the rhetorical strategies of online fantasy baseball players. Her most recent book is *Red Barber: The Life and Legacy of a Broadcasting Legend* (with Walker).



**Dominic Pacyga**

Shea has authored several books on baseball, music and the city of Chicago. His best-known baseball works are *Wrigley Field* (University of Chicago Press), *Calling the Game* (Society for American Baseball Research) and *Ballparks* (Metro Press). He has covered games for MLB.com.

Walker’s most recent books are *Center Field Shot: A History of Baseball on Television* (with Robert V. Bellamy); *Crack of the Bat: A History of Baseball on the Radio*, and *Red Barber: The Life and Legacy of a Broadcasting Legend* (with Hiltner), all published by the



**Baseball book buffs gather to listen to the panelists at the Midland Authors’ April 9 forum on baseball book writing. (Photo by Jim Walker)**

University of Nebraska Press.

The forum on researching, writing and publishing baseball books was a lively gathering, one in which panel members talked with each other as well as to their audience.

The first question – “Why do so many baseball books get published” – generated three very different theoretical explanations, all of them possibly true: the game’s reflection of American myths and ideals, the unique “writerly-ness” of this sport and the existence of a guaranteed market.

Other issues explored by the panel included the panel members’ processes for writing baseball books and the rewards and potential hazards of different methodologies for baseball research – from the lively but not always reliable personal interview to the deep dive into archives.

With so many competent baseball resources online, authors often find that the remembered moments from a player’s past do not hold up to scrutiny. Still, it is those personal memories that are some of the richest material an author can mine. The writer must find ways to maximize the benefits of human memory with the need for complete accuracy.

Baseball is so intertwined with American history that it has become the

focus of book writers far more frequently than other sports.

The game has experienced many distinct eras, and a growing interest in the Negro Leagues, Latin America’s winter leagues and women’s baseball also provide more storylines to pursue.

To reach players and other MLB-connected personnel, working with major-league clubs is often part of the equation. The demand from television and radio networks, newspapers and online publications may limit how helpful they can be, but in Henninger’s case working on two 1960s-era Minnesota Twins-connected books, the Twins were very helpful with photographs and had a media relations person in place for Twins alumni.

While interviewing active players is arranged strictly through MLB teams, locating former players can be done independently.

Years ago *Baseball America* published a useful book of MLB alumni addresses for autograph seekers. It’s outdated, but now online searches and former players’ websites can lead to interviews.

In interviewing former players, a key issue for Henninger was discovering that

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# ■ Homerun Continued from Page 10



**Bob Boone (left) and Richard Reeder attend the April 9 Midland Authors' forum titled "Booking Baseball: Writing About the National Pastime" at Turtle's Bar & Grill in Chicago. (Photos by Jim Walker)**

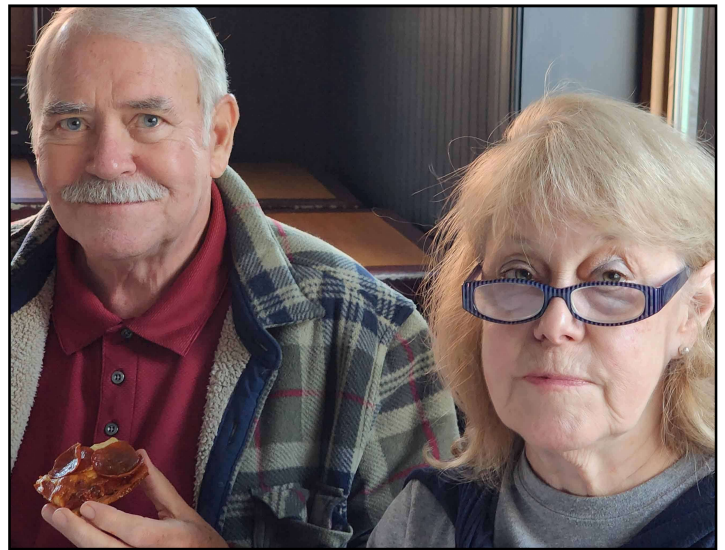
faulty memories sometimes compromised critical quotes about what happened on the field 50-plus years ago. Play-by-play information for American and National League games is now available online, going back decades, so fact-checking interview subjects will keep you accurate but can force a few difficult editing decisions.

For historical projects, gathering research materials and prepping an outline based on those materials go on for weeks before authors start writing. Online searches don't always provide dependable sources, but often provide unknown topics and storylines to pursue (and verify) through other sources.

The session ended with a refreshingly passionate debate about whether this committed and voluminous coverage of "the national pastime" will endure.



**Tim Nawrocki (left) and Mike Donohue.**



**Tim and Marge Fashing.**



**Grove Mower (center) and Stuart Shea (right) speak to an audience member.**



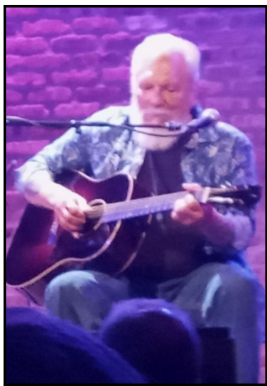
**Jim Garner (left) and Thom Henninger.**



## Biblio File

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coming novellas are *Donovan's Revolution* (Opelle Publications), *Night Hawks* (Type Eighteen Books) and *Busted Flat* (Blue Cedar Press). ... On May 3 at the City Winery in Chicago, SMA President **Gerry Plecki** met with singer/songwriter/guitarist **Jorma Kaukonen** after Jorma's acoustic performance with John Hurlbut on their "One More Lifetime" tour. Jorma, co-



founder of Jefferson Airplane and Hot Tuna, resides in Ohio. Gerry and Jorma discussed Gerry's next book, which documents often-overlooked agendas for social reform found in the songs of Chicago Blues and Rock musicians." Gerry also met with

and interviewed author, reporter and Midland Authors member **Rick Telander**. They discussed Rick's author-activism in getting copies of his book *Sweet Dreams* and other books into the hands of 30,000 children living at Ronald McDonald Houses throughout Louisiana. Rick's work was featured in the press, social media and various radio outlets. Also, a "Sweet Dreams" gallery showing/party hosted by Marya Veeck and Gerry will be held from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Sept. 6, 2024 at August House Studio, 2113 W. Roscoe Street, Chicago. The artists who created some of the 42 paintings for *Sweet Dreams* will be there and their work will be on display. Beer, wine and appetizers will be provided. ... **Connie Goddard** writes to say that she will appear at two upcoming conferences to discuss the topics connected to her forthcoming book, *Learning for Work: How Industrial Education Fostered Economic Opportunity* (University of Illinois Press,

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# The plays (are) the thing: Update on former SMA prez

**Joanne B. Koch**, past president of the Society of Midland Authors, has been very busy writing plays since she retired as professor emerita at National Louis University.

Joanne had two new musicals at Theater Wit in May. "Hearts in the Wood," a bluegrass musical with lively numbers by Jim Lucas, kicked off the Writers' Bloc Festival of New Plays on May 5. "Hearts" has had previous productions at Northeastern Illinois University where Jim Lucas was professor of music and at the Acorn Theater in Three Oaks, Michigan.

"Merry Widows, the Musical" featured songs by Grammy-nominated composer Ilya Levinson and lyrics by Francesca Peppiatt. Joanne co-authored the musical with Diane Dorsey and dedicates the work to her husband and frequent writing partner, broadcast journalist and author Lew Koch. The program was scheduled for May 19 at Theater Wit.

Through the founding of the Chicago Writers' Bloc play development group, Joanne has helped to bring more than 150 new plays to Chicago audiences and beyond. She herself has written or co-authored 18 musicals and plays, including "Soul Sisters" that has toured to 32 universities and communities across the country; "Sophie, Totie & Belle," which played off-Broadway

September). One is the Midwestern History Conference in Grand Rapids; the other, the Country Schools Association in Toledo. In the former, she'll be focusing on the Midwestern roots of the Progressive Era manual training and vocational education movements; in the latter, on the Arts and Crafts Movement, which was particularly strong in Chicago. ... **Keir Graff's** middle-grade mystery *Minerva Keen's Detective Club*, which he co-authored with James Patterson, was

and in 16 productions across the East Coast, and the Belle Barth musical that had sold-out performances in December at the Skokie Theater and plays next at the Hendersonville Theater in North Carolina.

She edited *Shared Stages*, the 10-play anthology that includes "Driving Miss Daisy" and "Fires in the Mirror."

Joanne is touring high schools and colleges with her play about unsung civil rights champion, Fred D. Gray. Students in National Louis University's undergraduate college cheered the February presentation of "Good Trouble: On Fred Gray Avenue," discovering that attorney Gray had represented young Martin Luther King Jr.

as well as Rosa Parks and the little-known teenager Claudette Colvin, during the year-long Montgomery Bus Boycott. Ten years later Gray sparred with Gov. George Wallace, helping to bring all but two of the 25,000 marchers safely from Selma to Montgomery. Fred D. Gray was responsible for many other civil rights victories, including the granting of reparations for the survivors of the tragic Tuskegee Syphilis (or "Bad Blood") study. In Koch's "Good Trouble" tour, Fred Gray is played by veteran of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival Wilson Cain III.

Richard Henzel, who hosted a previous Midland Authors Awards Banquet as Mark Twain, plays Gov. Wallace.

republished in paperback in May by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers with a new cover – and a new title, *The Poison Puzzle*. ... **Joe Gustaitis** writes to say, "I've been invited by the Chicago Art Deco Society to do another presentation (with musical accompaniment). This one will be at the Cliff Dwellers." ... **David L Harrison** reports, I've been pretty busy lately. I gave a poetry workshop to the St.

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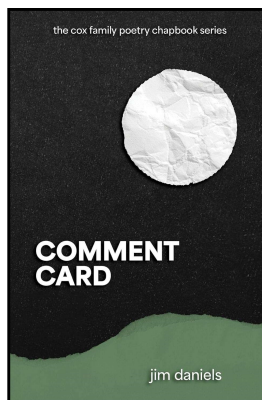
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Louis Writers Guild, paired with “Aunt” Norma Champion for a program in Marshfield, read poems in a Springfield park as part of a Missouri Humanities program, visited two schools, was interviewed on a TV station in St. Louis and two radio stations in Springfield and read an original poem as a featured part of Drury University’s 2024 commencement. The event took place in the O’Reilly Family Event Center, which holds 3,160. Not every seat was filled but I’d guess there were 2,300 at least. ... **Cynthia Clampitt** wrote “Distinctly Taiwanese: Finding the Food of Formosa in Chicago” for Newcity (Chicago) on April 16. ... For the third year in a row, **Linda Nemeć Foster’s** work was selected as a top 10 winner in an international competition sponsored by an organization in Ireland, the Fish Anthology. In the first two years, she placed in the flash fiction category (in 2022, winning second prize). This year, she was honored for a poem selected for recognition and publication from over 2,160 submissions. Billy Collins was the final judge. The editor intimated that this “three peat” was a record. The anthology will be launched during a reading and awards ceremony at the West Cork Literary Festival in July. ... The Newberry Library’s 2024 Pattis Family Foundation Chicago Book Award short-listed *The Burning of the World: The Great Chicago Fire and the War for a City’s Soul* by **Scott Berg**; *Country and Midwestern: Chicago in the History of Country Music and the Folk Revival* by **Mark Guarino**; *I Done Clicked My Heels Three Times* by **Taylor Byas**, and *I’ll Take Everything You Have* by **James Klise**. ... **Carol Felsenthal** wrote “Michigan Avenue, once a picture-perfect postcard, is now a depressing mess” for the May 31 Chicago Sun-Times. ... **Richard Lindberg** has sent his latest manuscript off to his publisher. It will be his 21st book. The working title is *Citadels of Sin: Chicago Vice Under the Gaslight, a History of Chicago’s Red Light Levees of the Late Gilded Age and Early 20th Century, and the History of Segregated Vice Districts of That Time*. ... On June 19, **Margot**

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## Literary Latest

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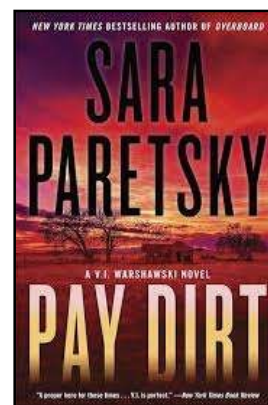
### ‘A RANGE OF EVENTS’

**Jim Daniels’s** latest book is *Comment Card*, Carnegie Mellon University Press (February 23, 2024).

Daniels tells Literary Latest, “*Comment Card* emerged out of a range of events connected by the idea of physical and emotional transitions – a series of arrivals and departures – moving, aging, birth, death.

“I was trying to focus on juxtapositions, searching for equilibrium between the sublime and the mundane. In the book, a man watches young lovers kiss while poisoned ants rain down on his porch. A Christmas tree-needle collection shows up alongside Jimmy Durante. The litter of a three-hole punch trails behind a daughter leaving for college. Tamarinds meet the International Space Station. A crushed snail evokes the Holy Trinity. I guess these poems, on a basic level, are wondering, how did we get here, and, by the way, where are we?”

**McMahon** read at Orion Magazine’s Eco-writing gathering in Rhinebeck, N.Y. Margot’s upcoming book is *The Ring of Fire: Friends, Reefs, and Bouncing Back*. ... **David Witter** writes to say, “I did a couple of book signings for *Amazing Chicago* at Barbara’s Bookstore at Macy’s on State Street [in Chicago] on June 1 and on June 15 at Barbara’s in the [Chicago area] Yorktown Mall.” ... **Libby Fischer Hellman** joined **Rick Kogan** to talk on



### TROUBLE FINDS V.I.

**Sara Paretsky’s** new V.I. Warshawski novel is *Pay Dirt* (William Morrow, April 16, 2024).

From the publisher: “[F]riends send V. I. Warshawski to Kansas for a weekend of college basketball where Angela, one of her protégées, is playing. And that’s where trouble finds V.I.

“Sabrina, one of Angela’s roommates, disappears, and V.I. agrees to try to find her.

“Finding a missing person in a city where she doesn’t have her trusted contacts is hard, but not as hard as the brutally negative reaction to the detective from some of the locals. When V.I. finds Sabrina close to death in a remote house, she lands herself in the FBI’s crosshairs and faces a violent online backlash. The men running the county’s opioid distribution are also not happy.

“Discovering a dead body in the same house a few days later, V.I. is pitched headlong into a local land-use battle with roots going back to the Civil War. She finds that today’s combatants are just as willing as opponents in the 1860s to kill to settle their differences.”

**WGN** (Chicago) about her latest book, *Max’s War* (See Literary Latest, Page 8). ... On June 1, the School Library Journal called **Anne Bausum’s** *The Bard and the Book: How the First Folio Saved the Plays of William Shakespeare from Oblivion* (see Literary Latest, April 2024) a “craftily written behind-the-scenes look [that] is the perfect introduction to both the author and his writings. ... This is a

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## New Members

**John Sullivan** is the author of *Kitten and the Night Watchman* (Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster), his debut picture book; *Stanley's Secret* (Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster, 2023), and *Ethan and the Strays*, (2023).

He received the Ezra Jack Keats Award and Margaret Wise Brown Prize for *Kitten and the Night Watchman*, which also was named a best book of the year by the Boston Globe, Kirkus Reviews, Publishers Weekly and BookPage.

He is a graduate of the University of Illinois at Chicago.

He was nominated by **Esther Hershenthorn**.

**Michael Loyd Gray's** novels include *The Armageddon Two-Step* (Redbat Books, 2019), *The Canary* (Bottom Dog Press 2013) and others. He has also written many stories in literary magazines.



**Michael Loyd Gray**

Wisconsin and Texas

He was nominated by **Stuart Dybek**.

**Agata Szczeszak-Brewer** is professor of English and John P. Collett Chair in Rhetoric at Wabash College, where she



**Agata Szczeszak-Brewer**

teaches courses on South African Literature, Irish literature, James Joyce, 20th century British and Irish Literature and Postcolonial Theory, among others. She has published two books: *Empire and Pilgrimage in Conrad and Joyce* (University Press of Florida, 2010) and *Critical Approaches to Joseph Conrad* (University of South Carolina Press, 2015). Her current book project is

a comparative study of Irish and South African literatures.

She was nominated by **Melissa Fraterrigo**.

**Harry Pinkus** is the author of the crime thrillers *The Kingmaker's Redemption* (BQB Publishing, 2021), *Human Collateral* (BQB Publishing, 2022) and *Justified Malice* (BQB Publishing, 2023).



**Harry Pinkus**

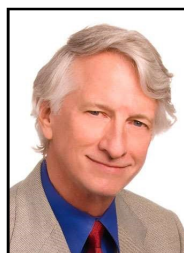
Pinkus studied journalism and wrote for the campus newspaper at University of Wisconsin.

He was nominated by **Patricia Skalka**.

**Michael Beyer** is the co-author of *Pencils Down: Career Journeys of Educators who left the Profession*, and *What We Can Learn From the Crises in Education* (Erie Publishing, 2023)

He was born in Woodstock, Illinois. He is a former principal and now a consultant. He was nominated by **Joseph Gustaitis**.

**Michael S. Lewis** is the author of *The Ball's in Your Court* (Four Colour Print Group); *Getting Wiser: 101 Essential Life Lessons and Inspirational Stories* (Munn Avenue Press, 2022); *Seeing More Colors*, and *Invitation to Joy*.



**Michael S. Lewis**

He was nominated by **Gerry Plecki**.

**Kolin Jordan** is a co-founder of, editor of and translator for 7Vientos Press.

He also a writer of short stories and the author of *Feeling Less Wrong*, which was accepted for a 2020 publication by Curbside Splendor before Curbside went out of business.

He was nominated by **Gerry Plecki**.



**Kolin Jordan**

**Melissa Grunow** is

the author of *I Don't Belong Here: Essays*, (New Meridian Arts Press, 2018) and *Realizing River City: A Memoir*



**Melissa Grunow**

(Tumbleweed Books, 2016). Her work has appeared in Creative Nonfiction, River Teeth, The Nervous Breakdown, Two Hawks Quarterly, New Plains Review and Blue Lyra Review, among many others.

She has an MFA in creative nonfiction with distinction from National University. She was nominated by **Dick Simpson**.

**Megy Karydes** is the author of *50 Ways to More Calm, Less Stress: Scientifically Proven*

*Ways to Relieve Anxiety and Boost Your Mental Health Using Your Five Senses* (Sourcebooks, Dec. 26, 2023).

Her work has appeared in USA Today, the Atlantic, Eating Well, National Geographic, Midwest Living and more.

She was nominated by **Mary Wisniewski**.

**Jacob Pomrenke** is editor of *Scandal on the South Side: The 1919 Chicago White Sox* (SABR, 2015) and co-editor of *Joe Jackson vs.*

*Chicago American League Baseball Club: Never-Before-Seen Trial Transcript* (Eckhartz Press, 2023).

He is the director of editorial content for the Society for American Baseball Research. His writing appears regularly at SABR.org, the Baseball Hall of Fame, and elsewhere.

He was nominated by **James Walker**.

**Cliff Ratza** grew up in Chicago. He was nominated by **David Witter**, who wrote, "Cliff Ratza is a writer and



**Megy Karydes**



**Jacob Pomrenke**

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## New Members

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Cliff Ratza

“He has combined his literary and mathematics skills into writing the 10-part,

scholar, holding master’s degrees in mathematics, physics and secondary education and has taught at colleges and universities around the Chicago area.

“He has combined his literary and mathe-

matics skills into writing the 10-part,

‘Lightning Brain Series.’ Like many of the more renowned authors, in this genre he uses an imaginary, futuristic world to address current issues, including what Ratza describes as a ‘Trump-like’ dictatorial leader, societies’ focus on youth and disdain for the elderly, and the ongoing environmental destruction.

“Yahoo Business recently reported that Ratza is in negotiations with Metro Films to turn his books into motion pictures.”

**Kenneth Linde** is the self-published author of nine books.



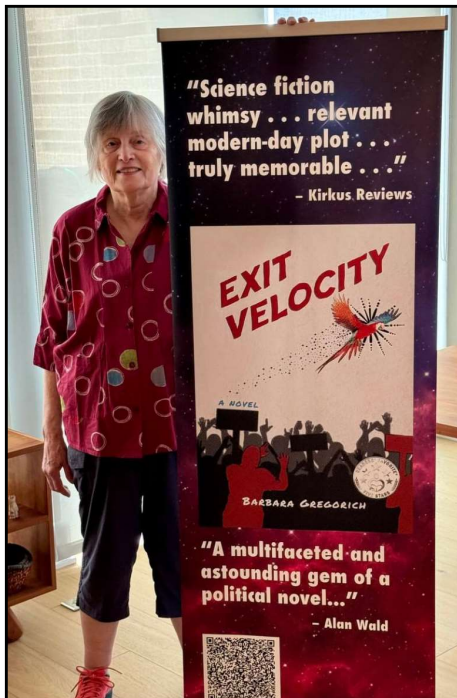
Kenneth Linde

He was nominated by **Sharon Woodhouse**, who wrote this of Linde’s novel *Waldwick*: “It is an ambitious, epic novel of Cornish immigrants to the Mineral Point, Wisconsin, area (like his own ancestors) over several decades that looks at American and personal values against the detailed backdrop of Wisconsin and American history (pre- and post-Civil War).”

## Biblio File

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sharply funny, delightful must-have for every library shelf.” ... In March, the National Book Foundation awarded one of its “5 Under 35” honors to 2023 Midland Authors Adult Fiction honoree **Antonia Angress** as one of “five debut



**Barbara Gregorich** exhibits the retractable floor banner she will use to help sell her new novel, *Exit Velocity* (See Literary Latest, April 2024), at the July 13-14 Columbus [Ohio] Book Festival. (Photo by Phil Passsen)

fiction writers whose work promises to leave a lasting impression on the literary landscape.” ... **Eldon Ham** wrote “What the great Willie Mays lived to see” for the June 21 Chicago Sun-Times. ... In June, **J. Ryan Stradal** helped headline a fundraiser the Friends of the Willmar Library. ... In April, **Jim Daniels** contributed a poem to the first issue of the resurrected Pittsburgh poetry magazine yawp. ... In May, the University of Kansas Medical Center clinics received copies of **Karla Clark’s** *You Be Mommy*. ... On May 24, **Kim Scipes** wrote “U.S. Labor Today and the Way Forward” for CounterPunch. ... In April, **Michael Cicchini** did a Q&A with the Kenosha County Eye about his article “The Preliminary-Hearing Swindle: A Crime Against Procedure,” which was accepted for publication by the Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review. ... On June 21, **Paul Lisnek** wrote “Paul Lisnek on summer violence in Chicago, Don Tracy’s resignation, the Biden-Trump debate & more” for WGN (Chicago). ... On April 24, the New York Sun reviewed **Ray Boomhower’s** *The Ultimate Protest: Malcolm W. Browne, Thich Quang Duc, and the News Photograph That Stunned the World* (See Literary Latest, March 2024). ... On May 6, **Margaret McMullan** wrote “Reconstructing Erna” for The Bulwark. Margaret says the article “is also getting translated into Hungarian. The story just kept growing the more I researched. And I keep hearing from readers: ‘This should be a movie.’” ... **Sally Howell** was scheduled to present a May 2 lecture titled “Understanding the

History of the Muslim American Community in Detroit.” ... **Taylor Pensoneau** presented “Inside Revelations of the High and Mighty,” an inside look at governors of Illinois over the past half-century, on June 12 at the Carlinville (Illinois) Public Library. Taylor tells Biblio File, “The turnout was big, and it was a lot of fun.” ... On May 16, **Timothy Gilfoyle** talked about the 20th anniversary of Chicago’s Millennium Park on WBEZ radio. ... In March, “Say Her Name” by **Zetta Elliott** was included in the NEA’s “Great Poetry to Read Aloud.”

## Literary License

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## Final Chapters

### *Harriette Gillem Robinet* 1931-2024

After a successful career as a microbiologist, **Harriette Gillem Robinet** of Oak Park became a widely admired author of historical novels for readers ages 9-14 and other books, all the while maintaining a strong commitment to civil rights.

Among her 12 works were *Missing from Haymarket Square*, which was set during a struggle for fair labor practices in 1886 Chicago, and *Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule*, about a 12-year-old orphaned slave who leaves South Carolina in search of a Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction.

Ms. Robinet died on May 17. She was 92.

Ms. Robinet was a longtime member and benefactor of the Midland Authors. She won the Midland Authors' 1998 Children's Fiction Award for *The Twins: The Pirates and the Battle of New Orleans* (Atheneum Books, 1997), and she was a judge for the organization's book awards in 2012.

Among her other awards were the Carl Sandburg Award, the Scott O'Dell Award for children's historical fiction, the Jane Addams Award, the Friends of American Writers Award and the Chicago Literature Hall of Fame's Fuller Award. Her book *Walking to the Bus Rider Blues* was nominated for an Edgar Award by Mystery Writers of America.

She was also a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, Sisters in Crime, Mystery Writers of America and the National Writers Union.

"To me, Harriette turned writing for children on its head," said Midland Authors Board Member **Marlene Targ Brill**, also an author of children's books. "She took what used to be common sub-

jects for teaching history and wrote about characters from a Black perspective. They made you – and any reader – think and see the commonality in all of us. Her early books covered another much-neglected topic: disabilities.

"She and her husband, Mac, were early civil rights activists, joining a group to challenge redlining and desegregate housing on the North Shore. They were quiet but resolute people who changed lives.

"My general memories of Harriette were that she was shrewd/smart, quiet but determined, welcoming, and always had this great smile."

Children's book author **Patricia K. Kummer** said, "Through 14 years of taking part in the Maria Saucedo Scholastic



**Harriette Gillem Robinet**

Academy Young Authors' Conference, I got to know Harriette. She and I and other children's authors, including Marlene Targ Brill, presented panel discussions and met with groups of young authors.

"Harriette was a lovely and gracious and modest woman with a warm smile and a twinkle in her eyes. Harriette didn't mention hardships and heartaches of the past nor did she even hint about her academic degrees and accomplishments in the sciences. To those of us in the writing community, she was an author of wonderful historical fiction for young people. Of

course throughout her life, she was so much more."

Ms. Robinet's first two books, *Jay and the Marigold* and *Ride the Red Cycle*, were about children with disabilities.

Her other books were: *Children of the Fire*; *Washington City Is Burning*; *Twelve Travelers, Twenty Horses*; *If You Please, President Lincoln!*, and *Mississippi Chariot*, all historical fiction books with African-American children and adults during important times in U.S. history.

Ms. Robinet believed that without knowing history, people can have no perspective on life today.

"How can we know where we're going, or appreciate where we are today, if we don't know where we're coming from?" she wrote.

Because African Americans have often been left out of history, she tried to "have both European and African American characters in stories, to have no villains but the systems, and to thrill as well as uplift her readers," she wrote.

"Literature illuminates life but doesn't hit you over the head with it," Ms. Robinet told the Chicago Sun-Times in 2003. "It lifts it and hands it to you subtly in a beautiful, haunting manner that you remember 10 years later ... I think that's good literature."

Ms. Robinet and her husband of 64 years, McLouis "Mac" Robinet helped integrate Oak Park. They had six children. They also led marches in support of fair housing.

Ms. Robinet was born in Washington, D.C., attended the College of New Rochelle in New York and received M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in microbiology from the Catholic University of America.

After graduating, Ms. Robinet worked as a bacteriologist at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center and at other hospitals. She also was a biology instructor at Xavier University of Louisiana.

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## Literary Largess

Dues cover mailings and other organizational expenses, but the Midland Authors always needs additional money for programs such as the awards at the

annual May book awards banquet. Thanks to **Lynn Voedisch, Anne & Edward Burke, Dick Simpson & Margaret England, Thomas & Dorothea Frisbie, Donna Urbikas, Jamila Ra, Greg Borzo, Jim & Jean Schwab, Susan**

**Croce Kelly & Joel Kirkpatrick, Grove Mower, Connie Goddard, Marlene Targ Brill, W. Nikola-Lisa and Michael Ebner**, who made recent contributions.

Additional contributions are always welcome.