becoming a literary light

THE MAYBORN LITERARY NONFICTION WRITERS CONFERENCE OF THE SOUTHWEST UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS™

July 27-29, 2007
Hilton DFW Lakes • Grapevine, Texas

Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference 2007 Report
I am pleased to report that the third annual Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest, sponsored by the Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism, was a tremendous success. Two weeks before the conference started, we had sold out. New incentives to encourage participation this year included expanding the scholarships to more students and adding journalists and educators to the list, which provided the impetus for a capacity participation in our workshops and events. We had participants involved in the conference from Hawaii to Maine and for the first time, BookTV contacted us with a request to broadcast the Saturday night keynote speech from Ms. Joyce Carol Oates. The exchange at the end, which included comments from Nan Talese of Nan Talese/Doubleday, was picked up on YouTube and led to more than 450,000 cyber hits, allowing publicity for our conference to benefit quite unexpectedly from viral marketing. The conference was covered in Texas Monthly, Atlantic Monthly, Time and other publications.

Of course, the conference purpose continues to be reinforced by all of our speakers and workshop leaders and emphasized from the awarding of a nonfiction book contract as well as $12,000 in prizes to recognize unpublished essays and manuscripts that exemplify the highest qualities of nonfiction writing.

The conference is open to anyone — journalists, students, readers and the general public — interested in hearing from and speaking to some of the nation’s most acclaimed writers and editors working in this genre. The conference brings together some of the nation’s top literary nonfiction writers and editors who are current and former journalists and who have learned how to transcend the traditional boundaries of journalism while upholding its highest standards for fairness and accuracy.

The climate of uncertainty that seems to bedevil the newspaper industry is understandable as new generations of readers and information consumers are finding innovative ways of gathering, expressing and engaging content. Still, the Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism is convinced that if we continue teaching and promoting the highest standards of journalism excellence and ethics while educating writers in the art of telling compelling stories, writers will find their audiences and remain ever relevant in the ongoing evolution of cross-platform information delivery channels. We are grateful to those who share our vision, such as the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, for keeping the fires of journalism excellence glowing brightly into the future.
Like everyone who attends the Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest, I think of myself as a storyteller. And when I tell a story, I’m drawn to images that evoke the deepest meaning – the existential and emotional truth of the story.

For me, if there’s one image that defines what the Mayborn Conference story is about it’s Craig Hanley, seated outside the ballroom of the Hilton Hotel, surrounded by our confreres requesting his signature on his debut literary nonfiction book, “William & Rosalie.” Directly across from Craig sat Joyce Carol Oates, a literary legend who had just delivered a keynote speech titled “Turning Nonfiction Into Art.” Joyce was also surrounded by a swarm of our confreres and speakers seeking her signature on “On Boxing” and some of her other widely acclaimed books and novels.

Hearing Craig, once a struggling carpenter, chatting about his new book and his new life as a writer, was enough to make a grizzly old journalist like me choke up. I set my copy of “William & Rosalie” on his table, asked him to autograph it, and left without saying another word. I didn’t want the throng gathered around Craig to see that the Mayborn’s writer in residence had become a sniveling, teary-eyed mess. I fled for the nearest exit sign. When I returned, I picked up “William & Rosalie,” opened the cover and read, “George, you changed my life for the better with this break… Thanks Brother.”

Holding Craig’s autographed book in hand, I looked across the hall at Ms. Oates, one of the most prolific, versatile and distinguished writers of the last century. I thought of her literary pedigree, her unparalleled literary achievements. When she received the Chicago Tribune Literary Prize for Lifetime Achievement last year, the Tribune’s cultural critic wrote that Joyce “chronicles the breath of the American experience as no other author ever has, striking every important national touchstone – social justice, sports, race, gender, terrorism – but not as broad categories, not as labels, but through stories about people – people and the places in which they thrive or falter, dream or don’t dream, live and die.”

And then I looked back at Craig, looked at the cover of “William & Rosalie” – his narrative of the Polish newlyweds enduring the Holocaust by refusing to allow evil to destroy their dignity, their spirit and their love for each other. In that instant, I realized that Craig and Joyce had become kindred spirits – practitioners of literary art, storytellers of the highest order. And now, through the power of their stories, “an unexpected intimacy” was born. Joyce and Craig are no longer strangers. They share the same creed, the same prayer, the same incantation – “to transcend the merely finite and ephemeral, to participate in something mysterious and communal called ‘culture.’”

I believe that everyone who comes to the Mayborn Conference shares this yearning: journalists, academics, authors, educators, lawyers, housewives, and all the rest. We are all members of the same tribe, all working as one to create a culture of storytelling in the Southwest. There’s an energy, enthusiasm and camaraderie among our tribal gathering that’s palpable from the moment we assemble at the Austin Ranch on Friday night to celebrate the arrival of our confreres and presenters until the last session on Sunday afternoon.

Thanks to all our confreres and presenters, our mission to create a culture of storytelling in the Southwest is gathering momentum. We now have an ever-growing, ever-evolving community of writers who believe in what we’re doing, and who possess an unflinching faith in the narrative craft. And that is why I believe our tribe of storytellers will endure and flourish until kingdom come.
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Conference Overview

The Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest, presented by the University of North Texas Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism, provides a forum for journalists, writers, readers, students, educators and the general public to listen to, be inspired by and discuss literary nonfiction in all its forms with some of the most talented in the genre. The Mayborn Graduate Institute’s primary goal for the conference is to provide an annual educational event in the growing discipline of narrative journalism that will attract writers, educators, journalism students and working journalism professionals for the exchange of ideas and self-examination. The conference emphasizes that journalism excellence includes fostering a culture of factual storytelling rooted in ethical practices.

The conference took place July 27-29 at the Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Conference Center in Grapevine, Texas. In addition to bringing some of the most renowned literary nonfiction names to North Texas (three-time Pulitzer Prize nominee Joyce Carol Oates is pictured above right with UNT President Gretchen Bataille), the conference provided workshops and a writing contest for aspiring writers who attended the conference.
A total of 316 people attended the conference.

The Mayborn conference workshops were sold out as early as July 6, 2007, with a waiting list of 20 individuals.

A preliminary survey was conducted at registration. Results indicated that 60.9 percent of the registrants were made aware of the conference through word-of-mouth.

Anecdotal accounts suggested that publicity in Editor & Publisher was effective.

“The Mayborn is flat-out great. George Getschow has put together a conference that is fast becoming the must-attend event of the year for writers of nonfiction on any level, but especially for those who passionately love what they do, hear the music in it and believe it makes a difference in the national conversation. The give-and-take that occurs ...after the sessions wrap up each day is as sophisticated, instructive and inspiring as those that take place across a podium during the day. To hear Sports Illustrated’s Bill Nack recite entire the ‘Love Song for J. Alfred Prufrock’ ...is, alone, worth the price of admission. To hear the ethereal Joyce Carol Oates talk about interviewing Mike Tyson as part of a personal quest to understand her late father by writing a book about boxing is simply priceless.”

Rob Kaiser
“The Mayborn Literary Non-Fiction Writers Conference is a singularly stimulating, informative, and welcoming event. In the brief space of my visit, I attended sessions, participated in lively—at times quite dramatic—exchanges, and became acquainted with some remarkable people. Not least, I have come away with a considerable reading list of books written by Conference participants, who must be among the most talented writers in the ‘creative nonfiction’ world. I felt that my own presentation was taken very seriously, greeted with intelligence and enthusiasm, and provoked excellent questions. Though I have not seen the session on C-Span, I’ve been astounded by the number of people who have written to me saying that they’d seen it and found it a positive experience.”

Joyce Carol Oates
“If a meteorite as big as a washing machine dropped from the sky on July 28 and landed on the Dallas-Fort Worth Hilton, it would have devastated literary nonfiction the way that plane crash with Buddy Holly and Richie Valens devastated rock ‘n’ roll. There was so much talent on hand that weekend that even the old pros were sitting in the audience taking notes on each other’s talks. This is just plain the best nonfiction writing conference I’ve ever been to. It’s small enough and friendly enough that everyone gets to spend face time with whomever they want to, and it’s big enough that all the subgenres are covered: memoir, crime, sports, science. Mayborn rules!”

Jeremy Swanson
The Dallas Morning News
Speaker in 2005, 2007
Each year, The Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference holds a writing contest. Entries may be submitted in one of two categories: Article/Essay and Book Manuscript. A provisional publishing contract with UNT Press and the Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism is awarded to the writer of the best manuscript.

In 2007, the conference doubled the awards with six cash prizes totaling $12,000 in two categories: First-person Essays and Reporting-based Essays. The top six were awarded prize money, and four runners-up received honorable mention. The essays from all 10 winners will be published in the 2008 edition of *Ten Spurs*, the literary journal jointly published by Hearst Newspapers and the Mayborn Institute.


**Judging Process**

The Mayborn Conference received 95 essay submissions, which were blind reviewed. The five first-round judges divided them up, and winnowed them down to their top 10 picks. The top 10 picks were then sent to the second-round judges who decided which essays would receive the cash prizes. Judges for the essay contest included:

**First Round**

- **Bill Marvel**
  Freelance Writer
  UNT Adjunct Instructor

- **Dianne Solis**
  National Immigration Reporter
  *The Dallas Morning News*

- **Dave Tarrant**
  Page One Narrative Writer
  *The Dallas Morning News*

- **Beatriz Terrazas**
  Writing Coach
  Writer’s Garrett

- **Karen Thomas**
  Freelance Writer
  UNT Adjunct Instructor

Austin writer Donna Johnson earned the first place prize for literary excellence and a provisional publishing contract with the University of North Texas Press for her manuscript, “Holy Ghost Girl,” at UNT’s 2007 Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest.

“Holy Ghost Girl” details the story of the world’s largest gospel tent. Johnson describes it as a humorous look back at a period of American history that is fast disappearing from public memory.

“My stepfather was the last of the big-time tent revivalists,” Johnson said. “There’s a long, rich history there, but that period of history is passing from public consciousness, and I wanted to document what it actually felt like to be there. It’s a memoir. But it’s not about me; it’s about that time.”

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**Ellen Rossetti**

*UNT University Relations, Communications and Marketing*
The manuscript competition was judged similarly. The first-round judges chose the 20 best manuscripts for the workshops and the top six manuscripts for consideration by the second-round judges. The first-round judges felt seven submissions were worthy of consideration, and the second-round judges had two weeks to pick the top three. Considering their recommendations, Ron Chrisman, director of UNT Press, picked the manuscript that would receive the contract. Judges for the manuscript contest included:

First Round

Jim Donavan
Literary Agent
Jim Donavan Library

Kurt Eichenwald
Author and Staff Writer
Portfolio Magazine

Gregg Jones
Investigative Projects Team
The Dallas Morning News

Second Round

Tom Huang
Front Page Editor-Narratives
The Dallas Morning News

Mike Merschel
Book Editor
The Dallas Morning News

Ron Chrisman
Director
UNT Press

David Hale Smith
Literary Agent
Hornfischer Literary Management

Craig Hanley won the 2006 Manuscript Contest for his work, titled William & Rosalie: A Holocaust Testimony. It tells the true story of William and Rosalie Schiff, a young Jewish couple from Poland who were separated at the beginning of World War II.

The book tells the story of the horror they witnessed in concentration camps, their survival and the love that led them to each other at the war’s end.

The Schiffs, now in their 80s, currently live in Dallas and spend their time teaching others about the dangers of prejudice and hate.

The book is available from UNT Press and the UNT Bookstore on the University of North Texas campus in Denton, or it can be found at chain, independent and online bookstores.
“The Mayborn conference was awesome, better than any journalism conference I’ve attended. Perhaps because this was not journalism-centric but instead focused on the art of writing.”

--Tricia Schwennesen, San Antonio Express-News

“I was inspired to pursue more narrative writing, whether it’s in a daily or a longer-term piece. I think too often as newspapers reporters we’re afraid to take risks. Hearing from these writers about how they approach narrative writing helped me realize that there’s no danger in incorporating different narrative writing techniques -- dialogue, scene setting, foreshadowing -- in stories. If something doesn’t work, you can always go back to traditional newspaper writing. But if you don’t try, you’ll never know how much better your story could turn out.”

--Stella Chavez, The Dallas Morning News

“I’ve been to numerous conferences since deciding upon journalism early in my college years. Despite their good qualities, none was close to my experience last weekend in Grapevine. The Mayborn conference is unlike any other, with a lineup of literary stars and sessions that were both rich and illuminating. I hope to return next year--and the year after that, and the year after that...”

--Jamie Stockwell, San Antonio Express-News

“The conference, in my opinion, was excellent. It’s obvious that the organizers aim to put on a first-rate weekend, and I think that what makes the Mayborn conference an excellent resource for the Express-News is the unique experience it offers our writers and editors.

-- Josh Baugh, San Antonio Express-News

“The value of the day I spent there was hearing the invigorating stories about journalism at its highest form. The fact that the Mayborn presenters were talking about stories that have permanence -- stories that take weeks or months to report and shape and revise, but then have staying power long beyond the day’s headlines -- reminded me why it’s important to fight to keep such craftsmanship alive in the newspaper.”

-- Mike Merschel, book editor, The Dallas Morning News
The Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest would not be possible without the help of several generous sponsors. Each of the organizations on this page contributed to the conference, and Mayborn was pleased to welcome several new sponsors this year:

- **Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation.** Funding from the foundation helped to underwrite five full scholarships for journalists representing small to mid-sized newspapers. Approximately $2,545 was allocated to cover registration and two room nights at the Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Conference Center for five deserving journalists. In addition, this support helped underwrite conference speakers’ fees.

- **WRR Classical 101.1 Radio.** Linking with this organization allowed us to advertise to a well-educated, affluent audience through their Web site and their newsletter, Overture. The station manager, Greg Davis, emceed the Friday night opening dinner and the Saturday Literary Lights Awards Dinner. WRR 101.1 management indicated it may increase its sponsoring role for the 2008 conference.

- **The Writer’s Garrett.** Pre-conference writing seminars were offered to attendees. A writing coach for the Garrett, Beatriz Terrazas, volunteered with the judging of Article/Essay submissions and subsequent conference workshops.

- **Grapevine Convention and Visitors Bureau.** Grapevine recognized the conference with a gift of $1,000 for three years of loyalty by bringing the conference back to Grapevine. These funds sponsored a special VIP reception for our donors, sponsors, speakers and special guests.

- **D Magazine.** Publisher Wick Allison and D editors sponsored a kickoff reception at the Dallas Institute of the Arts the week prior to the conference. The magazine also publicized the conference on the D Web site and calendar of events.

- **Texas Monthly.** Two of the editors served as jurists and speakers at the conference. The magazine included the conference in its calendar of events and Web site.
“What Wimbledon is to the world of tennis, the Mayborn Writers Conference is to the world of narrative nonfiction. OK, George Getschow has swapped out the strawberries and pints of pale ale for Texas-style bar-b-que and beans, but the energy is the same, and so is the opportunity to rub elbows with the famous, the near-famous, and the soon-to-be famous. Where else will you find Joyce Carol Oates, floating through the crowd like a phantom, holding forth on Oprah and boxing; Burkhard Bilger, from the New Yorker, and Mary Roach, fresh from the morgue, swapping increasingly outlandish tales; Kevin Fedarko and Hampton Sides, dazzling a cluster of co-eds with their wit and rugged good looks; Nan Talese, sunglasses pushed up on her head like a tiara, making pronouncements about the glitterati literary scene, as though she were in Easthampton, New York, rather than Grapevine, Texas. Where else will you find a gaggle of local writers, offering their polished expertise to the wannabes; and the wannabes and students--unapologetic for leaving their spouses, sniveling kids, and cats and dogs behind for a few days--basking in the glow of pure literary delight. The Mayborn Conference is a great place to hear great speeches about writing and the writer world--but more than that, it’s three days of celebration and downright good fun.”

Erik Calonius

Each year, the Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest is strengthened by its growing reputation. Interest and participation in the conference increased this year among renowned writers and leaders in the journalism field. The program was also strengthened by the level of participation among the region’s journalists and educators. Because the conference fulfills an educational niche that is otherwise not available to many of the region’s working journalists, there continues to be a high interest among conference attendees and speakers.

Sponsors that provide resources also play a critical role in the success of the conference. Returning sponsors included:
- Sid W. Richardson Foundation
- Ricco Family Partners LTD
- Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Conference Center
- Grapevine Convention and Visitors Bureau
- The Dallas Morning News
- Hearst Corporation

The conference will be sustained by additional and continued sponsorships and grants, revenue generated from the sold-out conference and support from the University of North Texas Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism. Sponsors who already have indicated interest in continuing their sponsorship of the 2008 conference include:
- D Magazine
- Texas Monthly
- The Dallas Morning News
- WRR Classical 101.1 Radio

The next conference has been scheduled for July 18-20, 2008, at the Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Conference Center in Grapevine, Texas. Complete registration details will be posted on the Mayborn Web site at http://mayborninstitute.unt.edu.
Lectures

Workshops

Keynote speakers at dinner

Media Coverage

Newspaper Coverage (16 stories)
- The Dallas Morning News (9 stories)
- Denton Record-Chronicle (4 stories)
- Killeen Daily Herald
- Star-Telegram

Radio Coverage
- KERA-90.1

Television Coverage (4 stories)
- WFAA-Channel 8
- CW33 (2 stories)
- C-Span BookTV

Online Coverage
(Estimated at 200 news web sites worldwide)
- YouTube (Viewed 427,710 times as of Aug. 21, 2007)
- Time magazine
- Chicago Tribune
- Publishers Weekly
- BookTV
- Denton Connection magazine
- Dallas Observer
- WRR
- Dallas Morning News book blog (at least 6 stories)
- GuideLive (Dallas Morning News)
- D Magazine FrontBurner blog (at least 5 stories)
- Texas Monthly
- Pegasus News
- AP story about Nan Talese’s comments at conference appeared on 158 web sites across the world, including Fox News, CBS News, CNN, International Herald Tribune in France, etc.

For complete articles, please see https://osprey.unt.edu/newsclips/