A note from the director

We will long remember the fourth annual Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest, July 18-20, 2008 in Grapevine, Texas. Our barbecue, Texas-tinged boot-scootin’ country music and salty-smart keynote address by Bob Shacochis Friday night kicked off the conference in Southwest style.

Our Friday night opening events included recognition of 10 conference scholarship winners and the unveiling of MAYBORN magazine and the second Mayborn literary journal: Ten Spurs. We are grateful to our sponsors for making possible the scholarships and new publications: The Dallas Morning News, the Sid W. Richardson Foundation, Hearst Corporation, Barbara Colegrove and scholarship contributors from the March fundraiser with Hampton Sides.

Saturday night and Sunday afternoon keynote speakers N. Scott Momaday (House Made of Dawn) and Candice Millard (River of Doubt) held their packed audiences spellbound, while a host of other distinguished writers, publishers, literary agents and other journalists kept our attendees in rapt attention for a total of 13 hours of workshops and lectures.

Winners of the essay and book contract awards were announced at the Saturday night Literary Lights Awards dinner. Thanks to the Belo Corporation, The Dallas Morning News, Village Voice Media, Ricco Family Partnerships and the Hearst Corporation, a total of $15,000 in prizes were awarded to winners of the top six essays in two categories: first-person and research-and-reporting-based. The awards include $3,000 for the first-place book manuscript published by UNT Press and the Mayborn.

By all accounts, our fourth conference succeeded in inspiring high-level discussions of the narrative craft and helping our writers get published in books, magazines, newspapers and the Web. Writers and editors working for The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, Village Voice Media and scores of smaller papers around the country came to this year’s conference to learn invaluable lessons about storytelling and publishing. Educators, magazine and news companies sent their writers and support our goal because they appreciate this commitment. They understand that we must find a way to appeal to young readers — all readers — who need to read well-crafted stories about businesses, politics, education, healthcare and human dramas that affect all of us and so much more at local, regional and national levels. International stories are important, too, because they impact local reality. Educators, magazine editors, news and book publishers and newspaper editors know that if their students, journalists/writers write compelling stories about business, politics, science, technology, the environment, religion and a host of other topics, readers will pick up their essays, books, newspapers and magazines and read those stories.

Ron Powers, author of Flags of our Fathers, expressed the Mayborn’s mission in his introduction to the second Mayborn literary journal, Ten Spurs: “Like the essays and narratives herein, Mayborn recognizes, first, that Americans are not being told vital truths from information sources that over most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had asked for and earned their trust—often legitimately so—and second, that ‘truth’ and ‘information’ are hardly dry, tabular qualities. That, in fact, ‘truth’ and ‘information’ hold immeasurable aesthetic power, and were once upon a time the main building blocks of fiction.”

Congratulations students, presenters, award winners, conference organizers, supporters and friends of the Mayborn and of the University of North Texas for the outstanding 2008 Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest.
At a time when many wonder whether print journalism has seen its last hurrah, the Mayborn’s impassioned tribe of journalists and authors, educators and students, mechanics and carpenters, gathered in Grapevine, TX this summer to demonstrate their fervent devotion to the cause.

For three days, the Mayborn tribe bantered about subjects seldom addressed at other writers’ conferences: about the unfortunate trend in contemporary nonfiction that carries as its trademark or badge of honor the impulse to tell us much more than we need to know; about how to harness the precision, emotion and power of poetry in our nonfiction writing; about using narrative techniques to reveal the structures and strains of real life; about how to reconcile our own creative conviction with the realities of publishing; about the two-step dance that writers and editors have to learn to perfect; and about how to use immersion reportage to create more intimate, honest and powerful stories. It’s this kind of high-level discussion that has, in just four years, made the Mayborn Conference “one of the most vital gatherings of writers in America,” says David Granger, editor of Esquire Magazine.

But not every writer in America has heard about the Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest. Bob Shacochis, an acclaimed literary journalist and National Book Award winner, came to this year’s Mayborn Conference with low expectations. He considered Dallas a “literary wasteland…a venue championing a seemingly aggressive disregard for fine books, writing and the writing life.” But after spending three days listening to lectures and panel discussions and hanging out with the Mayborn tribe, Bob was hooked. “Now, thanks and ever thanks to the Mayborn tribe of storytellers, I have to think of Dallas as a preferred destination, a center of literary gravity, perhaps the very heart of the universe these days for nonfiction writers in America.”

Perhaps this explains why Bob and a number of our writers who lectured at this year’s conference are planning to return next summer to listen to other writers talk about our narrative craft. Candice Millard, for example, is a best-selling author and long-time writer for National Geographic. But after sitting through the conference, our Sunday keynote speaker says she “couldn’t believe how much I learned about writing in that one weekend…I got much more out of the conference than I could have hoped to contribute.”

Cathy Medwick, a contributing editor at O, the Oprah Magazine, shares Candice’s enthusiasm for the conference. “You’ve created something wonderful, and from the point of view of a diehard writer and editor, indispensible.”

Creating a writers’ conference now considered “indispensible” by the nation’s literary elite is no small achievement. But what matters to me most is what the conference has done for once-obscure writers like Peggy Heinkel-Wolfe, a journalist for the Denton Record-Chronicle who won her first book contract through the Mayborn Conference, or Craig Hanley, a struggling carpenter who won our second book contract, or Vance Gonzales, a Mayborn graduate student who won this year’s second-place prize (and $2,000 in cash) for his narrative about the struggles of a minor league baseball player to reach the Big Leagues.

For me, the most memorable moment of the conference was watching Peggy Heinkel-Wolfe stand at the same podium as our “Literary Lights” keynote speaker, N. Scott Momaday, a Pulitzer Prize winner and the present Poet Laureate of Oklahoma. Peggy spoke metaphorically, and bravely, about growing “new skin” as a writer, replacing layers she felt burned off the moment she was informed of her husband’s recent death from a motorcycle accident.

Choking back tears, she told the Mayborn tribe that the conference and the publication of her new book, See Sam Run, has rekindled her love of writing and her belief in the power of our narrative craft to change lives, to give meaning and purpose to them, even in the midst of tragedy. Peggy’s powerful testimony brought the tribe to their feet, their applause sounding like thunder inside the cavernous ballroom. And it reminded me that our mission to inspire writers to reach new heights in journalism and create a culture of storytelling in the Southwest matters more than I had ever imagined it might.
The Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest marks the fourth year where our literary tribe of aspiring and accomplished writers from around the country gather for lectures, workshops, panel discussions, and an award presentation at the Saturday night Literary Lights Gala. This year, distinguished guests included N. Scott Momaday, the poet of Oklahoma, Bob Shacochis, a National Book Award winner, and other friends of the Mayborn family.

The conference’s Friday night keynote speaker Bob Shacochis packed the ballroom and kept the audience amused. Ten writers were recognized at the Saturday Literary Lights Dinner and received awards for their articles and essays and three for their book manuscripts. The evening featured American-Indian dancers and keynote speaker N. Scott Momaday. His melodious voice captivated the crowd as he told a Native American story about the creation of a writer.

Candice Millard shared the rules for writing nonfiction. David Petersen, senior editor for Henry and Holt Company, offered tips on capturing the attention of a book editor.

“Thanks for inviting me to the Mayborn Conference. I had an incredible time… I was deeply honored to be included among such an accomplished and talented group of writers. I couldn’t believe how much I learned about writing in that one weekend. I was also extremely impressed with the organization of the conference, which was absolutely seamless, and the writers and aspiring writers who not only attended the talks but enthusiastically participated in the discussions and added valuable insight. I got much more out of the conference than I could have hoped to contribute. Many thanks, and warmest wishes.”

~ Candice Millard, author, River of Doubt
“As a longtime journalist but a first-time author, it was an honor to be invited to the Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference this year. The speakers list of journalists and authors-most of whom, I learned, can hold their liquor- was impressive, but I expected that. What I wasn’t prepared for was the quality of the people who attended. The aspiring writers who buttonholed me were passionate, down to earth and hungry to learn the power and grace of words. They humbled me because I used to come to these sorts of conferences as a young journalist. Now I’m one of the lucky ones who gets paid to witness human affairs and explain them to a larger audience. The Mayborn Writers Conference is dedicated to helping us all get better at this, the telling of a thing, and we are grateful to you.”

~John Burnett, NPR national correspondent, author, Uncivilized Beasts and Shameless Hellions
2008 Conference Speakers

• N. Scott Momaday, 1969 Pulitzer Prize Winner
• Bob Shacochis, National Book Award Winner

• Candice Millard, River of Doubt
• John Burnett, NPR correspondent
• Stella Chavez, writer, The Dallas Morning News
• Susannah Charleson, The Scent of the Missing
• Pam Colloff, writer, Texas Monthly
• Lee Hancock, enterprise reporter, The Dallas Morning News
• Nick Heil, The Dark Summit
• Tim Madigan, writer, The Star-Telegram
• Cathleen Medwick, contributing editor at O, The Oprah Magazine
• Paul Meyer, writer, The Dallas Morning News
• Ben Montgomery, writer, St. Petersburg Times
• David Patterson, senior editor, Henry Holt & Co.
• Brian Sweany, articles editor, Texas Monthly
• Wright Thompson, ESPN.com
• Andy Van De Voorde, Village Voice Media
• Ken Wells, senior editor, Portfolio magazine
• Alexandra Wolfe, writer, Portfolio magazine

“I could be forgiven perhaps for once thinking of Dallas and its environs as a type of literary wasteland, a void that would suck you in on book tours and release your numb self after a twenty-four-hour taste of cruel uncaring oblivion, a venue championing a seemingly aggressive disregard for fine books, writing, and the writing life. But all that was before Mayborn existed—the most compelling, remarkable writers' conference I've attended in more than twenty years of writers' conferences around the nation. And now, thanks and ever thanks to the Mayborn tribe of storytellers, I have to think of Dallas as a preferred destination, a center of literary gravity, perhaps the very heart of the universe these days for nonfiction writers in America. On the shuttle bus back to the airport the day the conference ended, I listened to well-known east coast authors squirming in their seats with unexpected energy and inspiration, testifying to Mayborn's abundance of seductions, confessing they had simply planned to attend their own panels or lectures or readings and then slip away to their rooms to indulge in roomservice or get back to writing or catch up on sleep, all fantasies deferred to some other post-Mayborn time, since they instead found the conference's program, event after spellbinding event, to be irresistible, dawn to dusk and beyond. I never imagined, they said, when they weren’t shaking their heads with happy disbelief and saying, Wow. My contribution to the shameless rapture of the conversation was this: The narrative-obsessed motley crew at the University of North Texas responsible for the conference had skyrocketed to my A-list of great American educators. What, you haven’t been to Mayborn? is destined to be one of those slightly snobby, faux-sympathetic things writers say to one another. Poor you, and rightly so.”

~Bob Shacochis, author
The Immaculate Invasion
Past Speakers

- **Ken Wells**, senior editor, Portfolio Magazine, author Good Pirates
- **Susan Orlean**, The Orchid Thief and My Kind of Place
- **Norman Pearlstine**, contents editor, Bloomberg, author Off the Record
  - Paul Hendrickson, Sons of Mississippi
  - Hannibal Johnson, Black Wall Street
  - Alex Kotlowitz, Never a City So Real
  - Gary Lavergne, Bad Boy
- **Sonia Nazario**, Pulitzer Prize winner, writer, Los Angeles Times, author Enrique’s Journey
  - Deane Stillman, Twentynine Palms and Mustang
  - Doug Swanson, investigative journalist, The Dallas Morning News, author House of Corrections

- **Melissa Fay Greene**, Praying for Sheetrock and Last Man Out
- **Hampton Sides**, Ghost Soldiers and Blood and Thunder
  - **Gay Talese**, A Writer’s Life
- **H.W. Brands**, The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin
  - Kurt Eichenwald, Conspiracy of Fools
- **Michael Granberry**, narrative writer, The Dallas Morning News
  - Kevin Helliker, senior editor, The Wall Street Journal
  - Skip Hollandsworth, executive editor, Texas Monthly
  - Ron Powers, Flags of Our Fathers
- **Robert Rivard**, editor, San Antonio Express-News and author Trail of Feathers
  - Evan Smith, editor, Texas Monthly
  - Karen M. Thomas, writer, The Dallas Morning News

- **Joyce Carol Oates**, internationally-acclaimed author On Boxing
- **Mary Roach**, best-selling author, Spook: Science Tackles the Afterlife and Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers
- **Allison Hedge Coke**, author, Rock, Ghost, Willow, Deer: A Story of Survival
  - Burkhard Bilger, staff writer, The New Yorker
  - Carlton Stowers, writer, To the Last Breath, Careless Whispers
- **Erik Calonius**, writer, The Wanderer: The Last American Slave Ship and the Conspiracy that Set Its Sails
  - Kevin Fedarko, writer and former senior editor, Outside magazine
  - Jim Hornfischer, author The Last of the Tin Can Soldiers
  - Nan Talese, editor, Nan A. Talese/Doubleday
Every year the essential part of The Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference is the writing contest, where creativity is tested, reread and put under the magnifying glass of the panel judges. The writing contest consists of two categories: Nonfiction Manuscript and Article/Essay.

The manuscript winner lands a UNT Press Book Contract. The top 10 essays are then entered in Ten Spurs, the literary journal published by both Hearst Newspapers and the Mayborn School of Journalism.

Selection Process for Articles/Essays

All submissions were blind reviewed. The Mayborn Conference received 71 submissions of personal essays and research-and-reporting-based narratives. Our five, first-round judges divided the submissions. Each judge then had to select the best 10. The goal was to come out with the best 50 submissions for the workshop. The judges did this by using a system that ranked each piece on a scale of one to 10.

After the five judges selected their best 10 -- 50 in total -- they then swapped each other’s 10 best selections. All five judges had to agree on the 50 pieces accepted into the workshop. After the 50 pieces were selected, the judges then had to winnow those down to the 10 “best of the best” that would be published in Ten Spurs.

Each first-round jurist selected the top five picks out of the pile of 10 by once again ranking each piece -- personal essay and research-and-reporting based narratives on a one to 10 scale. Then they switched their top five picks -- 25 in all -- with each other.

The top 10 picks of the first-round judges were sent to the second-round judges to determine the six winners of the cash prizes: first place, second place and third place in both the research-and-reporting based category and in the personal essay category.

The second-round judges selected their top six choices independently. They conducted a telephone conference to discuss their picks and to reach an agreement on the six winners of the cash awards.
Selection Process for Manuscripts

All submissions were blind reviewed. Four authors and agents served as our first-round book manuscript judges. Their job was to select the 20 best manuscripts for the workshops, and then the top five or six manuscripts for consideration by our second-round jurists.

The three manuscript jurists evaluated the quality of the idea, the storytelling skills of the writer, the commercial potential of the project, and whether the writer had devised a structure (or narrative arc) and demonstrated the know-how to sustain a full-length book project. The four jurists, without consulting each other, chose six manuscripts out of the 20 to advance to the second round.

The judges had two weeks to select their top three picks. The jurists on the second-round panel were required to send their evaluations to Ron Chrisman, director of UNT Press. Shortly thereafter, the jurists and Chrisman conducted a conference call to discuss the evaluations. The judges determined the winner of the $3,000 cash prize and the book that will be published by UNT Press and the Mayborn Graduate School of Journalism.

First Round
- Kurt Eichenwald, author
- Dianne Solis, national immigration reporter
- Dan Malone, writing instructor
- Beatriz Terrrazas, freelance writer
- Karen Thomas, freelance writer

Second Round
- Skip Hollandsworth, executive editor, Texas Monthly
- Maud Beelman, editor, investigative projects team
- Brian Sweany, articles editor
- Mike Merschel, book editor

First Round
- Carlton Stowers, author
- Gregg Jones, author and member
- Investigative Projects Team
- Dan Malone, writing instructor
- The Dallas Morning News
- Doug Swanson, author and member
- Investigative Projects Team
- The Dallas Morning News

Second Round
- Ron Chrisman, director, UNT Press
- David Hale Smith, literary agent
- Jim Hornfischer, literary agent
- Mike Donovan

Article/Essay Judges

First Round
- Kurt Eichenwald, author
- Dianne Solis
- national immigration reporter
- The Dallas Morning News
- Dan Malone, writing instructor
- Tarleton State University
- Beatriz Terrrazas, freelance writer
- and writing coach, Writer’s Garrett
- Karen Thomas, freelance writer

Second Round
- Skip Hollandsworth
- executive editor, Texas Monthly
- Maud Beelman, editor
- investigative projects team
- The Dallas Morning News
- Brian Sweany, articles editor
- Texas Monthly
- Mike Merschel, book editor
- The Dallas Morning News

Manuscript Judges
Writing Contest Winners

Nonfiction Manuscript

Dr. Dan Burns (right), Village Voice Media, First Place Award of $3,000 for “Wonderful Son”

Si Dunn (middle), Mayborn, Second Place Award for “Dark Signals”

Noor Elashi (middle), Mayborn, Third Place Award for “Displaced”

Research-and-Reporting Based Essay

David Cicoletti (right) Dallas Morning News, First Place Award of $3,000 for “Standing at Crossroads Lumber”

Vance Gonzales (right), Hearst Newspapers, Second Place Award of $2,000 for “A Wrinkled Suit”

Denise Short (right), Ann Ricco, Third Place Award of $1,000 for “Horseplay”

Personal Essay

Victor Epstein (right), Dallas Morning News, First Place Award of $3,000 for “Lady in the Hall”

Aimee Berger (right), Hearst Newspapers, Second Place Award of $2,000 for “Family Stories”

Kay Hubbard (right), Ann Ricco, Third Place Award of $1,000 for “Through the Glass, Darkly”
"I wanted to thank you all for inviting me to present at the Mayborn Conference this year. It was truly an honor and a pleasure to participate in an event that brings together some of the most talented writers from around the country. Needless to say it is an intimidating bunch. But that is a good thing. This was my third conference and as in those previous occasions, I came away inspired to do good work. One of the best things about the conference is that it introduces us to writers with varying degrees of experience and whose work appear in different formats. I wish you much success as you plan future events."

~Stella M. Chavez, writer
The Dallas Morning News
"The art and practice of narrative non-fiction writing in American newspapers is under assault. This is partly because of the economic turbulence affecting publishers, and partly thanks to the usual idiocy in an industry that too often prefers bland normalcy to anything that might get a rise out of people. As a result, it was both inspiring and reassuring to attend the Mayborn Conference. Bite-size blogs and truncated story treatments may be the overall trend these days, but the wise observer knows that thoughtful storytelling will trump them in the end by providing the substance and sustenance that readers crave. To witness a gathering of people dedicated to the proposition that the reader “gets it” was, in all honesty, a bit of a relief. The Mayborn matters. And I’m glad it’s in your capable hands. I’ll come down and drink—and talk writing—with you guys anytime."

~ Andy Van De Voorde, executive associate editor, Village Voice Media

"I just wanted to drop a brief note to all of you to let you know that the conference was terrific, and how grateful I was to be invited and pleased I am that I was able to attend. The caliber of attendee was so high, with such a fine and diverse gamut of writers at various stages in their careers; the speakers were so well-chosen and worth listening to; and the entire weekend was run so gracefully and with such hospitality. (I know this took a lot of work!) Expect that I will be telling some potentially appropriate writers whom I happen to be editing that they should consider trying to finagle an invitation to attend and address a future convention. In fact, I have already told a few! A chance to address such a large crowd of deeply interested fellow writers, and to mingle in such pleasant company, should be seized upon....Will be talking up the Mayborn conference among others too, over the course of the next year, you may also expect."

~ David R. Patterson, senior editor, Henry Holt and Company

"It was truly a pleasure—a world-class conference with speakers who had a lot to say, and said it in the most interesting ways imaginable. I loved the atmosphere, casual and professional, and the way each speaker brought his or her unique experience to the table. You’ve created something wonderful and (from the point of view of a diehard nonfiction writer and editor) indispensable. Thanks again for inviting me."

~ Cathy Medwick, contributing editor at O, the Oprah Magazine

"I’d like to thank you once again for inviting me and my colleague Pamela Colloff to participate in this year’s Mayborn Conference. The community of writers and editors that you have assembled is truly remarkable, and they inspired me to do my best work at TEXAS MONTHLY. Mitch was exactly right when told me afterward, "It’s almost like a religious experience.” Outstanding conferences like the Mayborn are so important to those of us who love great writing, and Texas is fortunate to have this jewel."

~ Brian D. Sweany, articles editor, Texas Monthly
Workshops

Lectures

Bookstore

Media Coverage

Print Media

Texas Monthly
D Magazine
The Dallas Morning News
Denton Record-Chronicle
Dallas Observer
Fort Worth Star-Telegram
Pegasus News
North Texas Daily

Radio Coverage

KERA 90.1

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Bob Rivard  San Antonio Express-News
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Sue Smith  The Dallas Morning News
Gay Talese  Author
Fran Vick  Author
Ken Wells  Conde Nast Portfolio

Conference Committee

Mitch Land  Director, Mayborn Graduate School of Journalism
Chair, Department of Journalism
George Getschow  Writer in Residence, Mayborn Graduate School of Journalism
Nancy Eanes  Conference Manager
Brandee Harrawood  Assistant Conference Manager
Ellen Rossetti  Public Information Officer,
University Relations, Communications and Marketing
Stan Walker  Development Director, UNT College of Arts and Sciences
Brittany Stroud  Mayborn Graduate Assistant
Sarah Whyman  Conference Assistant, Photographer
Barbara Seljak  Mayborn Graduate Assistant
Andrew Bayarena  Student Worker
Jonathan Reynolds  Photographer
Save the Date!

The 2009 Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest will be held on

July 24-26, 2009

at DFW Hilton Lakes Executive Conference Center in Grapevine, Texas.

Anselm Kiefer, German, born 1945
Book with Wings, 1992-94,
Lead, tin, and steel
74 3/4 x 208 5/8 x 43 3/8 in.

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