

# CHICAGO LITERARY HALL OF FAME INDUCTION CEREMONY CLASS OF 2020



LISEL  
MUELLER

ERA BELL  
THOMPSON



THURSDAY MAY 19, 2022  
7 PM EDT

THE POETRY FOUNDATION  
61 W. SUPERIOR STREET  
CHICAGO IL 60654



HARRY  
MARK  
PETRAKIS



# TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

Ydalmi V. Noriega	Welcome to Poetry Foundation
Donald G. Evans	About the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame
Maria A. Karamitsos	Presenting for Harry Mark Petrakis
John Petrakis	Accepting on Behalf of the Petrakis Family
Elizabeth Metzger Sampson	Presenting for Lisel Mueller
Marty McConnell	Reading from Lisel Mueller
Lucy Mueller	Accepting on Behalf of the Mueller Family
Beverly A. Cook	Presenting for Era Bell Thompson
Raquel Flores-Clemons	Accepting on Behalf of the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection
Donald G. Evans	Good Night and Thank You

## THE CHICAGO LITERARY HALL OF FAME'S MISSION



The Chicago Literary Hall of Fame (CLHOF) honors, celebrates, preserves, and promotes the development of Chicago's great literary heritage--past, present, and future. We celebrate authors whose words have best captured the essence of our city; writers whose Chicago roots enabled them to create narrative worlds far beyond our boundaries; people who've built and maintained a supportive infrastructure; people who've played instrumental parts in enabling great artists to thrive. People who have made this city a better place in which to live. We walk and mark Chicago's spectacular literary trails.

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# OUR HOST: THE POETRY FOUNDATION

The Poetry Foundation works to create and encourage a vigorous presence for poetry through *Poetry* magazine, free public programming offered in our building in Chicago, programs created with partners throughout the United States and abroad, and a website that hosts more than three million visits each month. The Foundation increasingly supports programs that intertwine poetry and other art forms: music, dance, theater, and visual arts.

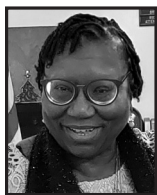


Founded in Chicago by Harriet Monroe in 1912, *Poetry* is the oldest monthly devoted to verse in the English-speaking world. The work of Chicago poets such as Margaret Burroughs, Carl Sandburg, Ed Roberson, Nate Marshall, Eve L. Ewing, Kevin Coval, and Fatimah Asghar has been published in *Poetry*. Harriet Monroe's "Open Door" policy, set forth in volume 1 of the magazine, lives on in the Foundation's mission and programming.

From readings and lectures (both in person and online), to book launches and exhibits, to the publication of important poets, the Foundation is committed to the poetry of Chicago and communities that make that poetry possible. Learn more about its programming at [PoetryFoundation.org](http://PoetryFoundation.org)



# PARTICIPANTS



**Beverly A. Cook** was born in California but raised and educated in Illinois. She received her BA in History and English from the University of Illinois Chicago. She received her MALS from Rosary College (now Dominican University) in 1986. That same year she started working for the Chicago Public Library in the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American Literature and History. She grew up in Bronzeville near the George Cleveland Hall Branch. While she has moved around through the CPL system, she came back to her first love, Harsh Research Collection, in 2005. She has served as chair of the African-American and Native American Heritage Committee at the Chicago Public Library as well as on committees at the Midwest Archives Conference and the Society of American Archivists. Her articles on Era Bell Thompson, Charlemae Hill Rollins, and others have been published by Indiana University Press, Gale Research, and in *Black Women: An Historical Encyclopedia*. The Era Bell Thompson collection was the first that came into Harsh back in 1986. Her collection is now published and available on the Chicago Public Library website for the world to view.



**Donald G. Evans** is the author of three books, most recently the story collection *An Off-White Christmas*, and founding executive director of the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame. He is the co-editor, along with the late Robin Metz, of a Chicago poetry anthology to be released early this summer.



**Raquel Flores-Clemons** is head of the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection at the Chicago Public Library, which is the largest African-American history and literature collection in the Midwest. She also serves as vice-chairperson for the Black Metropolis Research Consortium. An advocate for equity and access, Raquel maintains a deep commitment to capturing historical narratives of communities of color and is passionate about ensuring that historical gaps are filled by documenting and amplifying the often underrepresented historical narratives and contributions of BIPOC communities to better support efforts to create a more equitable society. Raquel received her Master of Library and Information Science with Special Collections certification from the iSchool at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She also has studied at Howard University and received her Bachelor in Liberal Arts and Sciences from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.



**Maria A. Karamitsos** has been a positive voice in Greek media since 2002. She was the founder, publisher, & editor of *WindyCity Greek* magazine. For 10 years, she served as the associate editor & senior writer for *The Greek Star* newspaper. Her work has been published in *GreekCircle* magazine, *The National Herald*, *GreekReporter*, *Harlots' Sauce Radio*, *Women.Who.Write.*, *NEO* magazine, *KPHTH* magazine, *Xpat Athens*, and more. Maria has contributed to three books: *Greektown Chicago: Its History, Its Recipes*; *The Chicago Area Ethnic Handbook*; and the inaugural *Voices of Hellenism Literary Journal*. She's just completed *Finding Eleftheria*, her first novel.



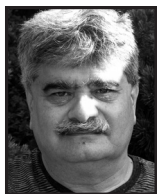
**Marty McConnell** is a poet, educator, and healer based in Chicago. She is the author of *when they say you can't go home again, what they mean is you were never there*, winner of the 2017 Michael Waters Poetry Prize. McConnell's first full-length poetry collection, *wine for a shotgun*, received the Silver Medal in the Independent Publisher Book Awards, and was a finalist for both the Audre Lorde Award and a Lambda Literary Award. YesYes Books recently reissued McConnell's first non-fiction book, *Gathering Voices: Creating a Community-Based Poetry Workshop*. She is the co-creator and co-editor of *underbelly*, a website focused on the art and magic of poetry revision. An MFA graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, McConnell's work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Best American Poetry*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Gulf Coast*, and *Indiana Review*.



**Lucy Mueller** lives on Chicago's Northwest Side in the Avondale neighborhood. She is a registered nurse and has spent most of her career working with seniors. She looks forward to retiring next year and devoting more time to her passions which include photography, hypnosis and road trips through small-town America.



**Ydalmi V. Noriega**, a writer and arts administrator, serves as vice-president of programs and engagement at the Poetry Foundation, overseeing live programming and organizational partnerships in Chicago and beyond.

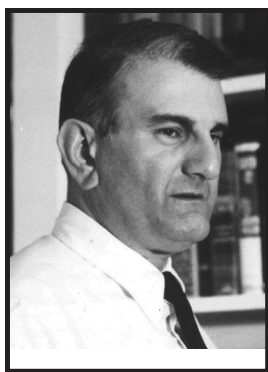


**John Petrakis** teaches screenwriting at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Chicago. He was a professional film critic for over 25 years, including long stints at the *Chicago Tribune* and *The Christian Century* magazine. John lives in West Ridge with his wife, Carolyn. Their son, Lucas, also lives in Chicago.



**Elizabeth Metzger Sampson** is a poet, essayist, and frequent collaborator with visual artists. She is the executive director of the Chicago Poetry Center, which organizes local roving readings and hires poets as teaching artists for poetry residencies in Chicago public schools. She has twice been named to *Newcity's* "Lit 50: Who Really Books in Chicago." She previously founded and edited *Dear*

*Navigator*, an electronic experimental literary magazine for the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's MFA in Writing program. Publications include interviews, essays, and poems in *Adroit Journal*, *Temporary Art Review*, and *Hypertext Magazine*. Her collaborative visual and written work has been shown at venues in and around Chicago, and in Neuss, Germany, and Cairo, Egypt.



# HARRY MARK PETRAKIS

**Greek-American Novelist,  
Short Story Writer, and Memoirist**

**(June 5, 1923 – February 2, 2021)**

By Donald G. Evans

*It's a very tenuous profession, a profession where you love what you do and can only see yourself doing it—so damn the consequences.*

Chicago's Greek Town treated Harry Mark Petrakis like a celebrity. He often tromped Halsted Street between Jackson and Randolph Streets, stopping at this and that kafenio to drink coffee with the old men congregated there. Always, he'd end up at the old Diana's grocery, where movie posters and stills from the 1969 Hollywood adaptation of Petrakis's novel, *The Dream of Kings*, peppered the walls. The Kogiones brothers would foist meals on Petrakis—wouldn't take no for an answer, even when he'd already dined elsewhere in the neighborhood.

"He was their chronicler, he was the one who understood the world they operated in," said Harry's middle son, John. "He thrived on that group, that neighborhood, those people. What [William] Saroyan was to the Armenians, my dad was to the Greeks. Chicago was a very rich place for him to draw on."

Even before the big-time Hollywood film crew descended upon Greek Town to get its establishing shots on Halsted Street, including at Diana's, Petrakis's work permeated the consciousness of that community and well beyond. Starting with his first story publication in 1956, Petrakis explored the inner lives of people crowded into small apartments above storefronts, the backs of restaurants, side street taverns, and churches. He found humanity in warehouse, bakery, dock and rail yard workers. He understood the importance of family and ethnic identity to the American Dream. By the time of his death in 2021, Petrakis had left 11 novels, six short story collections, five memoirs, and three other non-fictional books built around his passion for community.

"He knew he wanted to be a writer from when he was a kid," said John Petrakis. "There was never anything else he wanted to do. He had dozens of other jobs, he wrote about those other jobs, but writing was just essential to him. It validated who he was."

Born in St. Louis, Petrakis moved to Chicago when he was just a toddler. His father, Mark, a priest, emigrated from Crete to Price, Utah to minister to miners, then was transferred to St. Louis. He moved his family to Chicago when he was called upon

to lead Saints Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Church, then at 61st Street and Michigan Avenue. Soon after, the church built a new home at 73rd and Stony Island.

Petrakis attended Koraes Elementary School, which was part of Saints Constantine & Helen. There, he starred in class productions of Greek tragedies and built the foundation for his own creations. He realized he was a storyteller. As a grade school kid, he met Diana Perparos, whose father John owned several Hyde Park dry cleaning and shoe repair stores. He courted Diana until, in their teen years, they became a couple. Petrakis graduated from A.O. Sexton Elementary School (6020 S. Langley Ave), where he'd spent his final two grade school years.

High school was a short story. Though Petrakis read voraciously, a habit he'd formed during a bed-ridden year battling tuberculosis, he quickly abandoned his formal education. He started at Englewood High School, but lasted just a year and a half. He skipped school more and more until he stopped going altogether. Petrakis's father then sent him to Urbana to live with brother Mike, a student at the University of Illinois, and continue his education. Petrakis only pretended to go to the Urbana high school, opting instead to hide out at one of Illinois's many campus libraries. He lasted just two weeks at St. Procopius, a Catholic institution in Lisle. Petrakis wrote in *Song of My Life: A Memoir*, "Lest any aspiring writer use my meager academic resume to justify their own indolence and downgrade the value of education, let me warn them that the course of my life has been a bewildering series of incongruous events. There is no lesson to be learned besides the one that an outcome often depends on the vagaries of chance."

Petrakis did not stray far from his childhood neighborhood in the first half of his life. He and Diana lived in a series of South Side apartments, and from 1950-56 stayed with Harry's parents at 7601 S. Ridgeland. After a hiatus in Pittsburgh to work as a speech writer for U.S. Steel, Petrakis and family moved into a soon-to-be demolished house at 2766 E. 75th Street, right by Rainbow Beach. It was a dilapidated structure—literally condemned—that retained traces of its former elegant self, including stained glass windows and brass doorknobs. When the wrecking ball came for that house, the Petrakis family sidled just a bit west in the South Shore neighborhood, to 2463 E. 74th Place. This house, in which the Petrakis family lived from around 1960-67, was tiny; with three young boys plus Harry's mom Stella, quarters were tight. Still, Harry carved out a writing studio for himself in the attic. This house, just east of Jeffery, was where Harry started to gain traction as an important author.

His debut novel, *Lion at My Heart* (1959) came out just before the Petrakis family took up residence on 74th Place, but the novels *The Odyssey of Kostas Volakis* (1963) and *A Dream of Kings* (1966), as well as the short story collection *Pericles on 31st Street* (1965) were largely produced there.

“He was very much the writer all the time, very much the artist all the time,” said John. “He was a very warm and loving father, but the work was terribly important to him. He was always putting himself in the best position to keep working.”

Petrakis’s deep affection for Chicago’s Greek population naturally stemmed from his own ancestry. That connection proved inspirational to Petrakis’s personal life and critical to his fiction and non-fiction work. Always meticulous and precise in detailing his characters and settings, Petrakis increased his understanding of his Greek roots through a dozen trips to his homeland, not only Crete but throughout the country. In *A Dream of Kings*, Matsoukas embodies the entwinement of Chicago and Greece. While Matsoukas hungrily participates and loves his Halsted Street life, he becomes obsessed with the idea that only a return to his homeland will cure his terminally ill young son Stavros.

WBEZ investigative reporter Dan Mihalopoulos began reading Petrakis as a teen. “I guess the thing that impressed me the most was that someone had written, in English, about our unique little sub-culture,” he said. “It struck me that he really told a good story, and he infused his tales with a sense of the Greek-American love for not only food, faith and family but also politics and other human intrigue. He didn’t sanitize this world, either, by the way. His work resonated with me because I saw myself as both fully an American of Chicago and fully immersed in my ancestral culture.”

Though Petrakis never graduated high school, he later was awarded six honorary doctorates and taught at several universities, including as the McGuffey Visiting Lecturer at Ohio University and the Nikos Kazantzakis Chair in Modern Greek Studies at San Francisco State University. A gifted orator, Petrakis also earned a substantial living on the lecture circuit, often speaking without notes, or telling his powerful stories from memory.

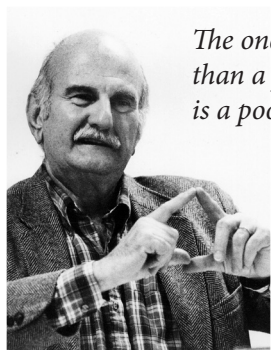
His many awards included the “Atlantic First” Award (1957), a Benjamin Franklin Citation (1957), a Friends of American Writers Award (1964), a Friends of Literature Award (1964), a Society of Midland Authors Award (1964), an O. Henry Award (1966), a Carl Sandburg Award (1983), a Gabby Award for Arts & Culture (2009), and the Pancretan Association’s Nikos Kazantzakis Award for the Arts (2013). Petrakis was twice a finalist for the National Book Award in Fiction (1966 and 1967), and a Writer-in-Residence at both the Chicago Public Library (1976-77) and Chicago Board of Education (1978). He was given the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame’s Fuller Award for lifetime achievement in 2014.

“The remarkable genius of [Harry] Mark Petrakis is deeply rooted in the soil of two disparate worlds--the cultural iconography of Greece, its rich heritage and traditions, and the Greco-American immigrant experience of Chicago told in his delightful prose--a collection of rich anecdotes through the lens of personal nostalgia of a vanished time and place,” wrote prolific author and Chicago historian Richard Lind-

berg. "Mark was a brilliant and engaging storyteller who spiced his oft-told tales shared with readers and listeners through humor, irony, mirth and sentiment. I will always remember him as one of the icons of Chicago's last literary renaissance."

In 1968, after two years in Northridge, California, Petrakis moved his family to Chesterton, Indiana, about 50 miles southeast of the Chicago border, and he lived there his remaining days. As he had in Chicago, Petrakis maintained a custom-built writing studio—this one above his garage. Not only did it provide Petrakis quiet and solitude, it afforded him views of Chicago across Lake Michigan, including some sunsets in which the city's entire skyline silhouetted against the sky. Chicago persisted as the base of his fictional world and he continued to make frequent trips there, for his research, for dinners or shows or the symphony with Diana, for literary engagements, or just to catch up with old and new Greek friends.

"Up until just a few months before he died, he was working on a new novel," said John. "He so desperately wanted to keep living. His body was shutting down, he couldn't eat anymore. Eventually he had to let go, but he didn't want to go. He wanted to keep writing. He loved being a writer. He loved going to writer conferences. He loved working with young writers. He loved it all."



*The one thing worse  
than a poor young writer  
is a poor old writer.*



*I resist the appellation ethnic writer. Bellow was Jewish, Faulkner Southern, but that is just a beginning. I grew up in that kind of cloistered Greek community. That was what I knew. But at a certain point you cross a threshold, your characters are not Polish or Jewish or Greek, they're human. You use that which is identifiable to you, and then you move on.*

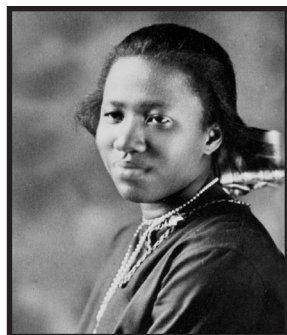
# ERA BELL THOMPSON

**Pioneering Author and Journalist**

**(August 10, 1905 - December 30, 1986)**

by Donald G. Evans

*There was a certain amount of pride placed upon the doubtful distinction of being an “only Negro,” the thing I came to Chicago to escape.*



To have seen Era Bell Thompson around the offices at Johnson Publishing Company, you wouldn't have known she was a big deal. She had her own office, sure, but her constant good cheer, encouragement and humor belied the fact that the granddaughter of former slaves had clawed her way improbably to the elevated status of renowned international journalist. After John H. Johnson hired Thompson as an associate editor of its *Negro Digest*, she worked as a co-managing editor and visionary for JPC's leading magazine, *Ebony*, from 1951-64. Thompson continued to work for *Ebony* as an international editor from 1964 until her death in 1986.

"She was never one to complain or talk about 'I had a hard time,'" said John Woodford, a staff writer and editor when he worked at JPC in 1965 and then again from 1969 to the late 70s. "She was always extremely positive. She was one to overcome any obstacles and celebrate her abilities to do it. She knew she could write really well, she was a great reporter, and found a place to use her talents."

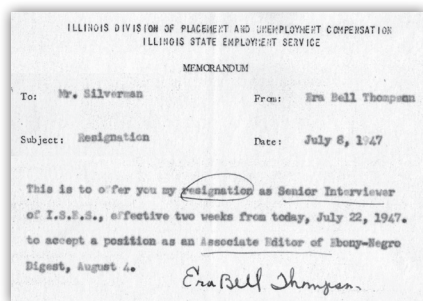
Despite all appearances, Thompson was a big deal, more so during Woodford's second tour, when Johnson Publishing Company had moved north from its converted funeral parlor offices on South Michigan Avenue to its impressive new building in the Loop. In a career that included more than 40 bylined articles and travel to 124 countries on six continents, publication of a memoir and book-length study of Africa, and important interviews with the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr., Thompson quietly sat among the upper echelons of American journalists.

Thompson was 27 years old when she traveled across the Plains and the upper Midwest to witness The Century of Progress in Chicago. This was 1933, the country just barely on the mend from the deepest, most troubling years of the Great Depression. Thompson had been raised first in Des Moines, Iowa, then, Bismarck, Mandan, and Grand Forks, North Dakota, where her father was a farmer, shop keeper and government messenger. After high school, Thompson had seen for the first time a Black newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*, and soon became a correspondent (she contributed to the "Lights and Shadows" column under the pseudonym Dakota Dick, a cowboy from the Wild West). She'd distinguished herself as a writer for the University of North Dakota campus newspaper and as a college track star. She'd

finished her degree at Morningside College (Sioux City, IA), after being forced to leave the University of North Dakota due to illness. The youngest of Stewart and Mary Thompson's four children and the only girl, Thompson had previously visited Chicago several times. Now, armed with a Bachelor of Arts degree and a few contacts, and with no surviving parents to whom to return, she stayed.

In her memoir, *American Daughter*, she recounts her entry to Chicago. "My eyes grew big and my heart pounded as the yellow cab weaved in and out of the maelstrom of traffic, turned into Michigan Avenue, and started south. A huge, double-deck bus staggered around a corner, top-heavy and clumsy. I saw a coloured man. Four men in a long black car shot past. Gangsters! They had to be gangsters, Chicago was full of them. A coloured woman, another coloured man. The crowds and the traffic slowly decreased. All around me now were black people, lots and lots of black people, so many black people I stared when I saw a white person."

She would eventually win a Newberry Library fellowship en route to publication of her memoir, an assistant editorship at *Ebony* in 1947, promotion to co-managing editor in 1951, and a whole string of successes thereafter. But all of that came many years after she first found boarding at the Young Women's Christian Association and settled for work as a house cleaner ("...it didn't help to tell people I was a college graduate.").



Thompson scrubbed floors, washed windows, ironed, did laundry, starched collars, styled little girls' hair and potty-trained little boys, cleaned, shined, and tended to various whims in various households. And this counted as the best Thompson could do after relentless, tireless pursuit of gainful employment.

By necessity more than choice, Thompson moved fairly frequently within the confines of Chicago's Black Belt. That first year, she lived at 56<sup>th</sup> and South Parkway then moved to Rhodes Avenue until 1935. She stayed with friends for a time at 5239 S. Michigan Ave.

For more than a decade, Thompson labored at temporary jobs while also training for more substantial work. She was a junior clerk for the Chicago Relief Administration, where she started and edited an interoffice newspaper, the *Giggle Sheet*. Took her civil service exams. Found work at the Illinois Occupational Survey. Then the Works Progress Administration. Did post-graduate studies at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism (1938-40). Was an interviewer with the U.S. and Illinois Employment Survey.

It was in 1945 that Thompson received the Newberry Library fellowship to write her memoir, *American Daughter*, which was released the following year. *American Daughter*, which in part told the story of her North Dakota childhood, caught the attention of JPC publisher John Johnson, who hired Thompson.

"I knew she had come from the Plains states, but she didn't talk much about her experiences in college, except to say that she was isolated from other black people growing up," said Woodford. "It wasn't until she came to Chicago that she had a Black community."

Tenacity and patience, along with a crisp, smart prose style distinguished Thompson as a reporter. Though she traveled as a writer to many foreign lands, she would not commit pen to paper until she'd thoroughly absorbed and learned the local customs and people--their lifestyles, social conventions, even food--a process that often took a full month and a hundred interviews. She based *Africa, Land of My Fathers* (1954) on her tour of 18 African countries.

Her reputation, based on her published work and public comments, was that of a broker for peace and harmony among all people, including men and women, as well as Black and white. This in a time of enormous division. In fact, she closed her memoir with the lines, "The chasm is growing narrower. When it does, my feet will rest on a united America." Though Thompson indeed saw the potential for racial and gender equality, she observed and understood society's injustices and spotlighted them, if sometimes subtly, in her articles.

In the *New York Times* obituary, Herbert Nipson, then executive editor of *Ebony*, said, "I worked with her for 30 years--she was an advocate of women's lib long before it became popular. She did stories in Africa, India, Australia, South America and various islands in the South Pacific."

To be sure, Thompson at times confronted racism and misogyny head on, with an erudition and thoughtfulness that demonstrated more than preached the validity of her views. Thompson's contribution to *Ebony's* special 1965 issue, "The White Problem in America," was an essay entitled, "Some of my best friends are white." In it, she writes, "With the new order of things, the majority race is finding it difficult to alter a life-time of thinking of the Negro as an inferior and start treating him as an equal; to stop confining analogues to one race and start comparing merit with merit. Willie Mays is the highest-paid baseball player in the major leagues, not the best 'Negro player.' Leontyne Price is a credit to the world of opera, not just 'to her race.' And between the butler and the ambassador, there are thousands of Negroes who will be tomorrow's neighbor, perhaps tomorrow's boss."

Evidence of the force and confidence with which Thompson advocated for herself as well as all women and Black people presented itself in her public life as well as

journalism work. She once wrote a complaint letter to the *Chicago Tribune* after she'd been excluded from a contributors' banquet. It said, "I am a respectable citizen, a member of the N.A.A.C.P., the Board of Directors of the Chicago Y.W.C.A. and am on a fellowship writing a book—trying to write a story without malice and without bitterness. Sometimes the writing is very hard."

In 1957, Thompson spent a night in a South African jail in response to being told there were no hotel rooms for Blacks. Among her book credits, Thompson co-edited *White on Black* (1963). Many of her later essays criticized men's treatment of women. She often spoke to college and high school groups to encourage people, especially women, to go into journalism.

Thompson's writing subjects ranged from Edith Sampson to Adlai Stevenson to Joe Louis. Among her wide circle of friends were several she interviewed for print, such as Gwendolyn Brooks and Langston Hughes. Thompson established herself as an active and influential member of the community as she settled into a Chicago life that included a treacherous travel and work schedule. In her early Chicago years, Thompson served the YWCA as an editor, senior typist and junior clerk for short stretches; later she sat on its board of directors. She also maintained a close relationship with her local library, serving, for example, on committees in support of Charlemae Hill Rollins's and Vivian Harsh's literature forum.

Thompson lived in three primary residences in the last 45 years of her life. She lived at 6246 S. Parkway from January 1941 until November 1955; 3440 S. Cottage Grove (Lake Meadows) from November 1955 until June 1962; and finally at 2851 S. Martin Luther King Dr. (apartment 710 and then 1910) from September 1962 until her death in 1986. She stayed a short while with friends at 9225 S. Michigan when she was in transition between her last two apartments.

She decorated her homes with artifacts acquired during her travels, including African figurines and a zebra hide she'd had tanned, stretched and dried. Thompson maintained many friendships, often cultivated over a long time, both through social activities like dinner parties and robust correspondence. Thompson, due to her Johnson Publishing position, exerted a sphere of influence that included editors, journalists, politicians, scholars, artists, athletes, and all manner of celebrities.

"All her life, she wrote," said Beverly A. Cook, librarian and archivist of the Chicago Public Library's Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection. "That was her friend. She wrote in diaries like other little girls would play with their dolls or talk with their friends. It was a survival skill. She never stopped, not until the very end. She was constantly doodling and making notes."

Morningside College gave Thompson an honorary doctorate degree in 1965 and its Distinguished Alumni Award in 1974. The University of North Dakota awarded

Thompson an honorary doctorate degree in 1969 and ten years later renamed its Black Cultural Center in her honor. In 1976, the state gave Thompson its most prestigious honor, the Theodore Roosevelt Rough Rider Award. The Society of Midland Authors bestowed upon Thompson its Patron of Saints Award (1968). She was among 50 black women included in "Women in Courage," a touring photography exhibit that showed during Black History Month at the Chicago Public Library's Cultural Center in February 1986.

Thompson donated part of her massive collection of papers and ephemera to the Chicago Public Library in 1984, and the rest upon her death. The Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature holds the Era Bell Thompson Papers, 108 boxes taking up almost 100 linear feet that provides primary evidence of Thompson's personal and professional life. The Harsh archivists continue to process the vast materials, including manuscripts, correspondence, and Johnson Publishing records and photographs.

"She was like the Grand Old Editor," Woodford said. "She was always praising people for doing a good job. She worked mainly on her own things. Being a Black journalist, she had so many battles to fight... just getting credentials, to insist upon being respected. She had a lot of verve. She was a very hard-working, imaginative reporter, very thorough; also, she was a really strong, vivid writer. By being such an excellent journalist, she gave luster to and enabled those that came after."



*Chicago was a city of splendor and squalor, excitement and disappointment. Grimy apartment buildings hugged the streets, elevated trains looked down upon the back-door poverty, rain-drenched and wretched. I saw city slums, black slums, black poverty, and black prosperity side by side, for the streets of the Black Belt were dotted with Negro business houses, from imposing banks to greasy lunch counters, and in between were the white-owned food stores, foul with the smell of rotting vegetables and live poultry; white-owned clothing stores displaying cheap, gaudy merchandise, inviting credit.*

*Every night, somewhere there were concerts and classes, clubs and lectures, always some place to go that cost money, so my funds dwindled rapidly, and with them some of the glitter and glamor of Chicago.*



# LISEL MUELLER

**Pulitzer Prize and  
National Book Award-Winning Poet**

**(February 8, 1924 - February 21, 2020)**

by Donald G. Evans



*Poems seem to strike me like lightning, or rather the idea for a poem. And I never know where they come from and I never know when they come. It's always a matter of something connecting with something else. You know, seeing something, hearing something that at another time would not have meant anything, it would have just been a mundane experience. But for some reason or another at that particular moment I see it as something new, I see it as connecting with something else and therefore making a new idea, a new way of seeing it, a new perception.*

When poet Linda Nemec Foster established the Lisel Mueller Scholarship in 2000, her intent was not only to support writers who showed promise, but to enable parents balancing childcare with the hard, solitary work required to create art. Foster knew Mueller first as a mentor then a friend, starting at Goddard College's low residency MFA program. Foster's friendship with Mueller deepened over the years and the two remained close the remainder of Mueller's life. The MFA program started by Ellen Bryant Voigt in 1976 moved from Goddard to Warren Wilson in 1981.

"I was so impressed with how Lisel was able to write her poetry, have two daughters, a husband, and a life," Foster said. "The Lisel Mueller Scholarship in her honor is given to a writer who has small children, to give them a boost, including financial assistance for childcare. Its intent is practical. Lisel was everything I would want a mother and poet to be."

The brilliant poetry that would eventually define Lisel Mueller's legacy did not enter her story until around 1953, when at the age of 29 her mother's death provided the "emotional catalyst" for her to begin serious writing. It would be another dozen years, 1965, until Mueller, then 41 years old, published her first poetry collection. That foreshadowed three-and-a-half decades as one of America's finest and most important poets.

Mueller was born Elisabeth Neumann in Hamburg, Germany. In the summer of 1939, just before Hitler's invasion of Poland ignited World War II, Lisel, then 15, fled Germany with her family. They took refuge in the American Midwest. Her father, Fritz Neumann, a political dissident, had already left Germany and secured a professorship at Evansville College (now Evansville University). Lisel soon enrolled as an undergraduate at Evansville College, where she read the poetry of John Keats and also met classmate Paul Mueller. The two married in 1943. After receiving a

bachelor's degree in sociology the next year, Mueller and her husband did graduate work at Indiana University. Their post-graduate employment, he as editor for legal publisher Commerce Clearing House, she as a social worker and librarian, took them to the Chicago area. Mueller, in those early days, also reviewed poetry for the *Chicago Daily News* and later *Poetry* magazine. They lived their first decade in Evanston, some of that time on Crain Street, before moving in 1959 to a Lake Forest home. There, they would reside the next four decades until poor health required their move to senior living facilities.

"I think having come to the U.S. as a young woman, from the horrors of World War II, in Germany especially, she had a way of looking at American life that most American born poets don't," said poet Reginald Gibbons. "She had as a backdrop the worse circumstances that human beings could create. She was not a tragic poet at all. But underneath it all there was that basement of memories and knowledge of cataclysm."

Mueller's work, often in short, lyrical form, is imbued with a sense of history, as well as the folk and fairy tales she studied as a graduate student. In a Dec. 4, 1993 article called "Bringing It All Together" Mueller told the *Chicago Tribune's* Karen DeBrulye Cruze, "I write a lot of poems that have tension between what is going on now in society and what has always been there. My poems are much concerned with history. The message is obvious. My family went through terrible times. In Europe no one has had a private life not affected by history. I'm constantly aware of how privileged we (Americans) are."

Though the Muellers had a Lake Forest address, they were almost equally close to Libertyville and Vernon Hills. Their North Shore home, just 35 miles northwest of Chicago, was much more rural than suburban. Their subdivision, called Forest Haven, was located off Bradley Road in an unincorporated area. Her address was 1590 Longwood Rd. for those many years, though the houses in the subdivision, including hers, later got renumbered. Her youngest daughter Jenny recalls that during her childhood Lisel did not have a dedicated writing space, though at one point she worked in the basement and eventually converted a second-floor room to her studio. Mueller famously spoke about the moo of her neighbor's Holstein cows serving as a kind of alarm clock.

When Mueller moved to this one-acre lot abutting a sprawling 200-acre estate her "consciousness changed." The setting included woodland in the back, a swimming pond, a vacant lot, a gentleman farmer who raised thoroughbred horses and even camels, a spectacular display of flora, and a large variety of wildlife like frogs and salamanders. She told Folio Press, "...after 40 years in this house I know what time of day it is by the way the light slants. I am intimately familiar with the names and habits of the wildflowers and the birds that live in our hawthorns and aspens. We all live together, in the world and in my poems."

It's no wonder that her poems teem with images of the natural world and what she called "the indifference of nature" in the face of human suffering.

The Mueller house boasted an extensive library, especially poetry books, not just in a dedicated room but in the dining room, living room, bedrooms—all over the house. "My mom and dad were both big readers," said oldest daughter Lucy. "Somebody once came to the house and said, 'You better get rid of all those dust catchers.' That's what they called the books. We used to laugh about that all the time." There were plenty of excursions to Chicago, especially for cultural experiences like the Field Museum, Lincoln Park Zoo, Steppenwolf Theater and the Shedd Aquarium. The family often visited Evanston, where close family members on both sides lived. But the Lake Forest home was largely the setting in which Mueller thrived as an artist.

"It really is amazing how she just embraced the world," said Foster, who has now published 12 poetry books of her own, including *The Blue Divide* (2021), which is dedicated to Mueller. "If she heard something or read something that struck her, then she would begin to process. Classical music, modern music, classical art, contemporary art, politics, history...she would write from those interests, from her wide knowledge and her wide reading."

Foster counts as one of many poets that Mueller taught, not only at the Goddard and Warren Wilson low residency programs but also some at Elmhurst College and the University of Chicago. Ed Roberson, now a celebrated poet, was another. He'd published two books of poetry before hopping a bus to Goddard, where Mueller accepted him as a mentee. In addition to the time spent on campus, Mueller later helped Roberson through frequent critiques and advice over the phone and through the mail. "Lisel, she is one of the folks who kept me writing," said Roberson. "She hit me at a crucial time in my writing—it was my third book, *Lucid Interval*. That was the book, I just let loose. Lisel talked me through that thing. It was kind of a bad time in my life, I had gotten a divorce and lost custody of my daughter. She got back to me every time I sent her something. She'd say, 'I don't understand exactly what's happening, but go on. Try this, do this.' I was writing all this wild off-the-wall stuff, that's when my real writing started. That whole year, we'd go on, and she helped get me through that whole book."

Mueller was also an institution builder. She was one of the founders of the Chicago Poetry Center and an important early advocate of the Ragdale residency program.

The Poetry Center, of course, regularly brought Mueller to Chicago proper, as did other appearances and leisurely visits to the Art Institute, which features in several of her poems. She'd gotten to know Chicago intimately as a case worker in her post-graduate years, as well as her work for the *Chicago Daily News*. "For many years, she traveled through Chicago meeting her clients," Foster said. "She knew the

streets of Chicago like the back of her hand. She was like a roadmap before GPS. When we'd be traveling into the city, she would know the area, the neighborhood, street names—she still remembered this gridwork of streets in Chicago."

Mueller's poems generally are not place specific, though some, like her famous poem, "When I Am Asked" certainly locates in her Forest Haven backyard; others clearly take place in Chicago, like the prose poem "Triage." The latter poem includes the lines, "Walking past a stand of tall, still healthy elms along/Chicago's lakefront, I think of what Brecht said." In "Identical Twins," the narrator studies her own face in the window of a subway.

"She wrote constantly of the role of history in her life and times, and also drew from her immediate surroundings," said daughter Jenny, author of the poetry collections *Bonneville* and *State Park*. "I do recognize the world of her poems and know that was the world I grew up in. She wrote a great deal about her family. Towards the end of his life my grandfather was too ill to live with his wife in Germany and came to live with us."

Starting in 1965 with her debut collection *Dependencies* and through the 1996 Pulitzer Prize-winning compendium, *Alive Together: New and Selected Poems*, Mueller published nine volumes of poetry as well as two books of translation. Among those titles was the National Book Award-winning *The Need to Hold Still* (1980). Mueller's first major award came a decade after her first publication, when at the age of 57 she won the Lamont Poetry Prize for *The Private Life* (1975). Mueller would go on to capture a Carl Sandburg Award (1990), a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship (1990), a Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize (2002), and an Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany (2019). In 1981, during the Carter administration, she attended an evening of poetry at the White House.

The Pulitzer jury wrote that *Alive Together* was "a testament that invites readers to share her vision of experiences we all have in common: sorrow, tenderness, desire, the revelations of art, and mortality — 'the hard, dry smack of death against the glass.'"

Former *Poetry* magazine editor Don Share said in an interview that Mueller was "everything a poet could aspire to be: She hit all the right notes, and did so with grace, heart and wit. American poetry today focuses on such matters as privilege, the drama of everyday life, nature and also war, and she helped create the language in which we write and think about these important subjects."

The MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College awards its Lisel Mueller Scholarship annually, a perpetual reminder of the poet's lasting legacy.

*I think that's what poetry is really all about. It is about what cannot be apprehended as well as what can be apprehended. And I like the interplay and the tension between those two things.*



*I am always haunted by the sense that I could have been someone else, there but for the grace of God go I, that kind of thing, and that's a reason I chose as my title poem, or as a title for the book, the poem "Alive Together," which is in the book and was written quite a few years ago, and which is a kind of catalogue of all the people I was thinking of who I might have been at various times in history, and the miracle and the accident that it is that any of us are who we are.*



# THE SELECTION PROCESS

By Donald G. Evans

Founding Executive Director, Chicago Literary Hall of Fame

The Chicago Literary Hall of Fame's approach to identifying and selecting worthy candidates for induction is and always has been a thoughtful, rigorous, and highly competitive process. Our philosophy is to let as many informed, passionate people as possible decide. More than 150 individuals were directly involved in the nomination and selection of the 11 CLHOF classes. These nominators and selectors possess outstanding reputations in our cultural community, and almost all prove insightful about the relative merits of writers under consideration. Librarians, historians, scholars, educators, fine artists, social activists, business people, and of course many authors have participated. These are the people running our local reading series and museums and arts organizations; writing book reviews and author profiles and literary commentary; teaching creative writing and literacy and the arts throughout our school systems; overseeing our journals, newspapers, and magazines; and authoring our finest plays, short stories and novels.

The ceremonies to officially induct new classes happen in the calendar year following selection. The rare exception is this year—2022—in which the class of 2020 ceremony was held over one year due to the public health crisis.

From 2010-2015, our nominators were asked to write a ballot consisting of six unique writers. Basically: who and why. Some nominators wrote at length, some were brief. That process resulted in a fairly large list of Chicago writers to be considered for Chicago Literary Hall of Fame induction. At first, the candidates (many of them, anyway) seemed obvious, and of the 27 writers nominated in the inaugural year just four have yet to be selected: Oscar Brown Jr., Edgar Rice Burroughs, John Callaway, and Norman Maclean. Each year, though, new candidates emerge with at least some support. Writers you'd expect, like Hamlin Garland and Carol Shields. Writers you need to google, like Iceberg Slim and Bette Howland. Writers known best in other fields, like Steve Goodman and John Hughes. Writers recently passed, like Lisel Mueller and "Hache" Carrillo. Even writers for unknown reasons long out of the public consciousness, like Viola Spolin and Meyer Levin.

The list of candidates awaiting consideration stands at nearly one hundred.

Five years ago, we tweaked the process, so that nominators would supply just one well-defended candidate--the single literary figure whom they felt definitely belonged. We then collated those ten nominees, along with the defense statements, and sent to the selection committee, who debated the merits and ultimately chose

new classes of six inductees. We reduced class size from six to three inductees in 2017. Then in 2019, for the first time, one of our Fuller Award recipients, Gene Wolfe, passed. The Fuller is the honor we give to Chicago's greatest living writers. The CLHOF board of directors made the decision to automatically induct Gene Wolfe and other Fuller Award honorees subsequent to their passing.

That is why Harry Mark Petrakis is part of the current induction class.

It's been the case since the inception of this process that while selectors have the final say, nominators hold incredible sway over the process. The late, great Penelope Niven took her job as nominator seriously—she wrote an eloquent, almost airtight, defense of Thornton Wilder, saying that of all the places he lived he was happiest and most productive in Chicago. It was in large part due to Penny's passionate support that Wilder was selected. George Saunders made an eloquent case as to why Steve Goodman's brand of writing ranked as literary, and though Goodman has yet to win induction his candidacy continues to be taken seriously. In short, the nomination and selection process are equally significant, and the work of one is reliant on the work of the other.

Last year, we opened up the nomination process to the general public. We have a lot of faith in our audience, and already the new open call has resulted in responses from some of our most esteemed literary figures, such as Stuart Dybek and Haki Madhubuti.

Specifically, we ask you to nominate a single candidate and then write at least a couple of sentences in support of their selection. Answer the question, "Why this author?" keeping in mind the simple, three-pronged criteria: 1. Dead, 2. Chicago, 3. Literary. This should be the one writer you think absolutely belongs in the next Chicago Literary Hall of Fame class. The selection committee will use this nomination (along with outstanding nominations) as the basis for their deliberations.

To participate in this process, please send your single candidate and a supporting statement to Don Evans ([dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org](mailto:dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org)).

# THE CHICAGO LITERARY HALL OF FAME

Robert Sengstacke Abbott (2017)

Jane Addams (2012)

Nelson Algren (2010)

Margaret Anderson (2014)

Sherwood Anderson (2012)

Rane Arroyo (2015)

Margaret Ayer Barnes (2016)

L. Frank Baum (2013)

Saul Bellow (2010)

Marita Bonner (2017)

Gwendolyn Brooks (2010)

Frank London Brown (2019)

Margaret T. Burroughs (2015)

Fanny Butcher (2016)

Cyrus Colter (2011)

Carlos A. Cortéz (2019)

Frank Marshall Davis (2018)

Floyd Dell (2015)

Theodore Dreiser (2011)

Roger Ebert (2016)

James T. Farrell (2012)

Edna Ferber (2013)

Eugene Field (2016)

Leon Forrest (2013)

Jeannette Howard Foster (2019)

Henry Blake Fuller (2017)

Sam Greenlee (2018)

Lorraine Hansberry (2010)

Alice Judson Ryerson Hayes (2015)

Ben Hecht (2013)

Ernest Hemingway (2012)

David Hernandez (2014)

Langston Hughes (2012)

Fenton Johnson (2016)

John H. Johnson (2013)

Ring Lardner (2016)

Edgar Lee Masters (2014)

Harriet Monroe (2011)

Willard Motley (2014)

Lisel Mueller (2020)

Harry Mark Petrakis (2020)

Salima Rivera (2018)

Carolyn Rodgers (2012)

Mike Royko (2011)

Carl Sandburg (2011)

Shel Silverstein (2014)

Upton Sinclair (2015)

Studs Terkel (2010)

Era Bell Thompson (2020)

Margaret Walker (2014)

Theodore Ward (2015)

Ida B. Wells (2011)

Thornton Wilder (2013)

Gene Wolfe (2019)

Richard Wright (2010)

*In celebration of the legacy of Lisel Mueller—  
an extraordinary life, a brilliant poet, a cherished friend.*



*Linda Nemec Foster  
Dr. Tony Foster*

**Amber Necklace from Gdansk**

for Lisel Mueller

I don't want the luxury of diamond, luster  
of pearl, nor the predictable news of my birth-  
stone: emerald, green symbol of love  
and success. No sapphires either--no matter  
what the ancient Persians said about the blue gem  
being responsible for the sky and the ocean.  
No jade stone of heaven or picture jasper cave.  
I don't want gold or silver, marcasite's northern France.

Give me the prehistoric past that washed ashore  
after a storm on the Baltic coast. Fossilized  
pine resin that's trapped ancient air. Tears  
of the sun that smell like honey, three  
strands of the past braided around my neck.  
White amber of memory, gold amber of song, dark amber of regret.

Linda Nemec Foster

This poem was previously published in *Poet Lore* and was included in the book, *Amber Necklace from Gdansk* (Louisiana State University Press, 2001) by Linda Nemec Foster. Copyright by Linda Nemec Foster.

## SPECIAL THANKS

It's impossible to express in clear terms how important a few individuals were to making this evening a success. Barry Jung applied his keen editorial talents to proofing this entire program--we left a lot of mistakes in the old drafts because of his excellent work. Dmitry Samarov created the excellent cover art. Jeff Waggoner designed this beautiful program. Rich Kono made the great slideshow. Breaker Press did a superb job printing these limited edition booklets. The outstanding poet Linda Nemec Foster and her husband Dr. Anthony Foster generously sponsored this evening, the kind of contribution that allows this modest organization to do grand things on behalf of our beloved authors. Tonight's speakers and family representatives sacrificed time and thought into making sure their presentations did justice to the legacies of the new inductees. Many of our board and associate board members helped behind the scenes. The Poetry Foundation staff, led by Ydalmi Noriega and Noa/h Fields, worked diligently to ensure that tonight's experience was first class. Finally, to all that attended the program this evening--this ceremony is only as fine as the people who care about it.

## 2022 INDUCTION CEREMONY PARTNERS



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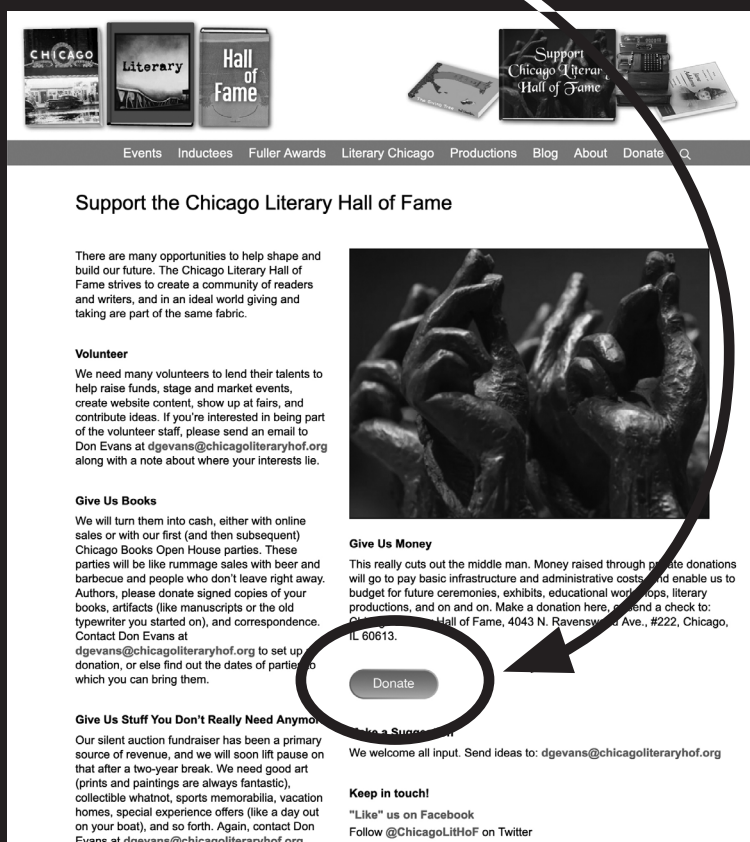


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DOROTHY DONNELLEY  
FOUNDATION

The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation and the Illinois Arts Council Association provide ongoing support.

# SUPPORT THE CHICAGO LITERARY HALL OF FAME

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CHICAGO Literary Hall of Fame

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## Support the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame

There are many opportunities to help shape and build our future. The Chicago Literary Hall of Fame strives to create a community of readers and writers, and in an ideal world giving and taking are part of the same fabric.

### Volunteer

We need many volunteers to lend their talents to help raise funds, stage and market events, create website content, show up at fairs, and contribute ideas. If you're interested in being part of the volunteer staff, please send an email to Don Evans at [dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org](mailto:dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org) along with a note about where your interests lie.

### Give Us Books

We will turn them into cash, either with online sales or with our first (and then subsequent) Chicago Books Open House parties. These parties will be like rummage sales with beer and barbecue and people who don't leave right away. Authors, please donate signed copies of your books, artifacts (like manuscripts or the old typewriter you started on), and correspondence. Contact Don Evans at [dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org](mailto:dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org) to set up a donation, or else find out the dates of parties to which you can bring them.

### Give Us Stuff You Don't Really Need Anymore

Our silent auction fundraiser has been a primary source of revenue, and we will soon lift pause on that after a two-year break. We need good art (prints and paintings are always fantastic), collectible whatnot, sports memorabilia, vacation homes, special experience offers (like a day out on your boat), and so forth. Again, contact Don Evans at [dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org](mailto:dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org).

### Give Us Money

This really cuts out the middle man. Money raised through private donations will go to pay basic infrastructure and administrative costs, and enable us to budget for future ceremonies, exhibits, educational workshops, literary productions, and on and on. Make a donation here, and send a check to: Chicago Literary Hall of Fame, 4043 N. Ravenswood Ave., #222, Chicago, IL 60613.

[Donate](#)

We welcome all input. Send ideas to: [dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org](mailto:dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org)

### Keep in touch!

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# 2022 EVENTS

**Official Launch:**  
***Wherever I'm At: An Anthology  
of Chicago Poetry***

**Monday, June 13  
7:00 p.m.**

Reva and David Logan Center for the  
Arts

Performance Penthouse  
The University of Chicago  
915 E. 60th Street, Chicago

More than 130 Chicago poets are  
included in the anthology, and many  
will be present to join in the release.

There will be a few short readings,  
music, and drinks.

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**If You Want Something  
Done Right....**

**Thursday, July 7  
7:00 - 8:00 p.m.**

via Zoom

Discussion about the state of the  
publishing industry.

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**Chicago's Poetic History**

**Tuesday, July 12  
6:00 p.m.**

Chicago History Museum  
1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago

A panel discussion that ties history  
and verse.

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**Free Youth Writing Workshop  
in Woodlawn**

**Wednesday, July 20  
4:00 - 6:00 p.m.**

First Presbyterian Church of Chicago  
6400 S. Kimbark Ave., Chicago

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**Free Youth Writing Workshop  
in Chinatown**

**Monday, July 25  
1:00 p.m.**

Chinese American Service League  
2141 S. Tan Ct., Chicago

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**Rick Kogan: Fuller Award for  
lifetime achievement**

**Wednesday, October 5  
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.**

Chopin Theater  
1543 W. Division Street, Chicago

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**Induction Ceremony  
(Class of 2021):**

**Carol Shields, Ethel Payne,  
and Ray Bradbury**

**Thursday, November 3  
6:30 p.m. - 7:45 p.m.**

City Lit Theater  
1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., Chicago

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For more information or to register for an event, please visit  
**[chicagoliteraryhof.org](http://chicagoliteraryhof.org)**

First Publication from the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame  
A New Anthology of Chicago Poetry  
Available to Pre-Order Now. Official Launch June 13.

## Wherever I'm At

An Anthology of Chicago Poetry



Edited by Donald G. Evans and Robin Metz  
with a Foreword by Carlo Rotella

Chicago's history vibrates through these pages. Chicago's culture. Chicago's beauty and its scars. Chicago's landmarks and joints. Chicago in all its glory, Chicago in all its sadness. In a word: life. Chicago life.

This is the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame's first major publication, a project done in collaboration with two of our city's finest publishers, After Hours Press and Third World Press.

These pages feature outstanding work produced by more than 160 poets and artists with a range of style and complexity that mirrors Chicago's varied and nuanced character. Every poet and artist boasts strong Chicago ties.

The free launch event is at the University of Chicago Logan Center, June 13; registration is required. See the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame website for more details: [chicagoliteraryhof.org](http://chicagoliteraryhof.org)



Use this link to pre-order your copy today!