

# Rosellen Brown

The Chicago Literary Hall of Fame presents the 2016 Fuller Award for Lifetime Achievement.

**October 6**  
7:00 to 9:00 p.m.  
Poetry Foundation,  
61 W. Superior St.  
Reception to follow.  
Free and open to  
the public.



## **Chayeh & Asher**

**Excerpted from a Novel-in-Progress Set in Late  
19th-Century Chicago**

*By Rosellen Brown*

*What she had not foreseen was that this first glimpse of Chicago, bursting on all her senses, a riot of color and shape and movement, would nearly drive her baby brother mad with excitement. Given his voracious nature, there were simply too many things to be seen, counted, ordered, remembered. Asher began to count. That was the only way to hold still the streets, contain them in his mind.*

*The farm was all blank space, the prairie beyond nothing but distant green and hazy horizon; in town those separate little houses and their fences and timid rows of tulips were frail as paper. Here, everything was fierce, even the air was a different color. The shadows were dark, thick, deep – solid. You could almost pick them up. Beside the stony buildings, the tops of the horses' heads looked warm and breakable.*

*Thousands of everything! He would die of it, fall into exhaustion keeping up. Thirty-four shops with signs even before they turned a single corner. Fourteen full stops. Trees here and there, but spindly and parched. Were there any trees as glad to be here as he? He couldn't wait to tell Chayeh he was never leaving. He dangled his arm over the side to feel the rush and the wind pickled his fingers.*

## **Rosellen Brown**

**R**osellen Brown was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to an American-born father and a Russian immigrant mother. She earned her BA from Barnard College and attended Brandeis University, where she met her future husband, Marvin Hoffman. The couple joined the Civil Rights movement, working at Tougaloo College near Jackson, Mississippi. While Hoffman continued a career in education, founding the North Kenwood/Oakland Charter School in Chicago, Brown turned to writing full-time. Her first book was the poetry collection *Some Deaths in the Delta* (1970); other collections include *Cora Fry* (1977) and *Cora Fry's Pillow Book* (1994). Brown is the author of the short story collection *Street Games* (1974) and many novels, including *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1976); *Tender Mercies* (1978); *Civil Wars* (1984); *Before and After* (1992), which has been translated into 23 languages and made into a film starring Meryl Streep and Liam Neeson; and *Half a Heart* (2000). Donna Seaman has described Brown's oeuvre as "dramatic, psychologically authentic, and politically daring books [that] reveal her willingness, or compulsion, to confront complex and volatile issues" including "class, gender, geography, and age." *A Rosellen Brown Reader* (1992) included previously uncollected stories, poems, and essays.

Brown's many honors and awards include fellowships from the Guggenheim and Ingram Merrill Foundations, the Bunting Institute, the Howard Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.



She is the recipient of awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Janet Kafka Prize, and a residency at Mishkenot Sha'ananim, a guesthouse for writers and artists in Jerusalem. Brown has taught at various institutions, including the University of Houston, the University of Michigan, and Northwestern University. She led the Spoleto Writers' Workshop in Italy for many years and teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Accolades for Brown's work have been as varied as they are numerous. She's been praised by virtually every major print medium in the country, including *San Francisco Chronicle*, *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Boston Globe*, *Newsweek* and *New Republic*. In addition, major authors including Cynthia Ozick, Alice Munroe, Margaret Atwood, Tillie Olsen, Annie Dillard and Joyce Carol Oates, have written flattering commentary about Brown's literary accomplishments. John Updike selected Brown's "How to Win" as one of *The Best Short Stories of the Century*, a crowning achievement after O. Henry Prize Stories, Best American Short Stories and Pushcart Prizes recognized a host of other Brown stories.



Brown has lived in Chicago the past 21 years. She and Hoffman have been married 53 years, and have two daughters and a granddaughter.

Large parts of this biography were republished from the Poetry Foundation website: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/rosellen-brown> 

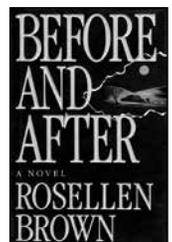
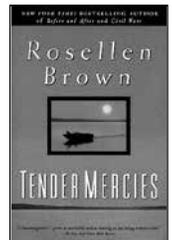
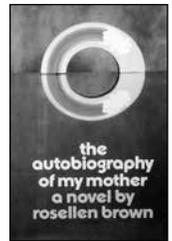
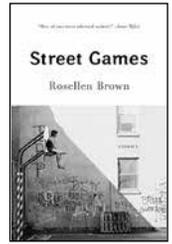
Our heartfelt gratitude and congratulations for one of Chicago's finest writers.



To find out more about the Chicago Writers Association and to join our growing ranks, visit [www.chicagowrites.org](http://www.chicagowrites.org)

## Bibliography

- ***Some Deaths in the Delta & other poems* (1970):** Poems that refract two landscapes inner and outer, Mississippi in the inflamed '60s and the urban blight of Brooklyn, "a bill of damages, a totaling-up of the incalculable petty costs of living in perpetual opposition."
- ***Street Games (stories)* (1974):** Neighbors on a block in gentrifying Brooklyn—Anglo, Puerto Rican, African-American, male, female, parent, child, speaking in a variety of moods and styles.
- ***The Autobiography of My Mother* (1976):** Two generations of women locked in combat over a child, shadowed by two histories, their own and the twentieth century's.
- ***Cora Fry* (1977):** Fragments of the consciousness of small-town New Hampshire lifer Cora Fry can be read as one long poem.
- ***Tender Mercies* (1978):** A story that questions the nature of accident, of love, of commitment.
- ***Before and After* (1992):** A boy, his parents and their town deal with an awful crime that calls into question parents' responsibility for their children's actions, and tests everything that binds a family and a community.
- ***A Rosellen Brown Reader: Selected Poetry and Prose* (1992):** A miscellany in a series by writers associated with the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. Previously uncollected stories, poems, essays and an interview.
- ***Civil Wars* (1994):** Years after their involvement in the Civil Rights movement, a family has to find a new footing and take in two children raised with dramatically different values.
- ***Cora Fry's Pillow Book* (1994):** Two books, the original Cora Fry and a sequel published 18 years later, in which a woman in small-town New Hampshire speaks, with New England wryness and understated eloquence, about everything



from her garden to her lonely marriage, the aging of her parents, her love for the only town she has known.

- **Half a Heart (2000):** A mother and daughter lose and find each other across a tangle of complications, racial, class-bound, and finally primal as they seek to regain a relationship that was stolen from them. ✍



## What is the Fuller Award?

By Valya Dudycz Lupescu

“The Fuller” is awarded by the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame to a Chicago author who has made an outstanding lifetime contribution to literature. The first three Fuller Awards were presented to Gene Wolfe (2012), Harry Mark Petrakis (2014) and Haki Madhubuti (2015).

### The Fuller Legacy: A Quick Look at a Literary Pioneer

The award was inspired by the literary contribution of Henry Blake Fuller, one of Chicago's earliest novelists and author of *The Cliff-Dwellers* and *With the Procession*. Both novels use the rapidly developing city of Chicago as their setting and are considered by many to be the earliest examples of American realism.



Theodore Dreiser called *With the Procession* the first piece of American realism that he had encountered and considered it the best of the school, even during the days of his own prominence.

There are additional layers of meaning to the word “fuller.”

A fuller is also a tool used to form metal when it's hot, an important part of building and a nice metaphor for Chicago, home to the “First

“Rosellen Brown's fiction and poems give us marvelous and profound insight into human beings—not only as imagined presences on the page, generally, but also as characters whose lives unfold in deep relation to others, who live through time, enlarged or defeated by their choices and the choices of those to whom they are linked. She writes of their links to a wide range of others—from lovers and spouses, and immediate and extended family, to friends, neighbors, communities, cities, states and ultimately the nation, with its contradictions and paradoxes, its glories and miseries, its sometimes heroic everyday life and its admirable visionaries and tireless idealists, as well as its ugliness of behavior. On such great canvases, Rosellen paints richly imagined characters, including Cora Fry, the resonant voice of her poems. The particular feeling-tone of Rosellen's work as she imagines life and death, love and suffering and civil strife, is a unique and beautiful homage to both individuality and community, and to what sorts of things make life worth living. In every book, she asks serious questions—about what we are, what we do and don't do, shouldn't have done and should have done, how we live with the after-effects of our choices or what befalls us. I'll stand back a little further: to me it seems that most of even the best novelists—I mean writers of genuinely remarkable books—do not achieve what we can honestly call—without the hype that is now the air we must breathe in America—a masterpiece. Rosellen Brown's novel *Civil Wars* is in my opinion one of the masterpieces of contemporary fiction. Last, I want to say that not only artistically but also personally Rosellen is a true citizen—there's no higher rank than this, I believe, in a nation that is still arguing and fighting with itself, living and dying, to be ruled democratically by the best of its people. Working so often with others, Rosellen has always had a thoroughgoing engagement in good and great causes. For me, it's an honor to be able to honor her.”

—Reginald Gibbons

“In her novels and short stories, Rosellen Brown communicates intensely emotional, often harrowing experiences with such cool, enviable restraint, as well as stunning linguistic virtuosity. Her work intimately explores and illuminates the experience of being a parent, a lover, a spouse, a child, never backing off from how it feels to be plagued by contradictory impulses and emotions. There's no one better than she is.”

—Christine Sneed

Chicago School” of architecture that rose up from the ashes of the Chicago Fire of 1871. Between 1872 and 1879, more than ten thousand construction permits were issued. Chicago emerged as a resilient city that took risks and made bold decisions—using iron and steel to frame its buildings, giving rise to the world’s first skyscraper. The fuller was one such tool that made it happen, a symbol of possibility and perseverance.



Inspired by the sleek lines and art deco style of Chicago sculptor John Bradley Storrs, whose sculpture Ceres is on top of the Board of Trade building, the award statue for the Fuller was based on Hephaestus, the Greek god of the blacksmith’s fire and patron of all craftsmen. According to legend, Hephaestus was the only god who worked, and he was honored for having taught mankind that work is noble and one should excel at their craft. The patron of artists and craftsmen, he seemed a fitting symbol to capture the spirit of excellence embodied by the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame’s Fuller Award. ✍️

“ I often describe Rosellen Brown as a genius masquerading as an ordinary woman. Enscorced in her trim form and pouring from that delightfully unaffected manner is an expansive imagination—one that has parachuted her readers into the psyches of an autistic kindergartener, a biracial teenager, a middle-aged woman navigating the buying rituals of Victoria’s Secret, a father torn between love and the truth, and a steely New England housewife reflecting on marriage and loss. “All I want from you is some concentration,” one of her characters says in *Tender Mercies*. Rosellen observes this world with a mystic’s concentration. Those of us who know her work understand a little more of what it means to be human and alive. ”

—Judith Valente

## Tonight’s Program

- Donald G. Evans ..... Emcee
- Stephen Young ..... Introducing the Poetry Foundation
- Leigh Bienen ..... Reading from *Street Games*
- Donna Seaman ..... *Rosellen’s Dedication to Literature*  
(with reading from *Cora Fry’s Pillow Book*)
- Judith Valente ..... *Rosellen as Literary Inspiration*  
(with reading from *Some Deaths in the Delta*)
- John Kersey ..... *Rosellen as Mentor*
- Bernardine Dohrn ..... *Civil Rights Activist Rosellen*  
(with reading from *Civil Rights*)
- Janet Burroway ..... *Rosellen as Friend*  
(with reading from 1981 Tom LeClair interview)
- Alex Kotlowitz ..... *Rosellen as Storyteller*
- Britney Lipton ..... *Rosellen the Professor*
- Arne Weingart ..... *Rosellen in Search of Character*  
(with reading of the poem “The New Man, the Last Leader”)
- Reginald Gibbons ..... *Rosellen: Artist and Citizen*
- Carol Anshaw ..... Reading from “How to Win”
- Marv Hoffman ..... Presenting the Fuller Award
- Rosellen Brown ..... Accepting the 2015 Fuller Award  
for Lifetime Achievement

“ I had the privilege to have Rosellen Brown as my professor a few times while at the Art Institute. I had been struggling to find my voice. Her guidance, piercing gaze, and strident nurturing pulled me out of my own head. I knew if Rosellen said it was good, then the work was good. I think of her often as I write, and especially as I edit. Even now, almost a decade later, I want to impress her. She is a total badass. ”

—Lindsay Hunter

## Our Host: The Poetry Foundation

P O E T R Y



FOUNDATION

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of Poetry magazine, is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. It exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience.

The Poetry Foundation works to raise poetry to a more visible and influential position in American culture. Rather than celebrating the status quo, the Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery, and encouraging new kinds of poetry. In the long term, the Foundation aspires to alter the perception that poetry is a marginal art, and to make it directly relevant to the American public.

Established in 2003 upon receipt of a major gift from philanthropist Ruth Lilly, the Poetry Foundation evolved from the Modern Poetry Association, which was founded in 1941 to support the publication of Poetry magazine. The gift from Ruth Lilly has allowed the Poetry Foundation to expand and enhance the presence of poetry in America and has established an endowment that will fund Poetry magazine in perpetuity. 



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## Participants



**Carol Anshaw** is the author of the novels *Carry the One*, *Lucky in the Corner*, *Seven Moves*, and *Aquamarine*. Her books have won the Carl Sandburg Award, the Ferro-Grumley Award, and the Society of Midland Authors Award. Her stories have appeared in *Tin House*, *Granta Online*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Best American Short Stories*. Anshaw is a past National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellow and recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship. She received the NBCC Citation for Excellence in Reviewing. She is also a painter.



**Leigh Bienen** is a senior lecturer at Northwestern University School of Law and a criminal defense attorney. A lifelong devotee of literature, writing, and the theater arts, she has published fiction and nonfiction in literary magazines and journals. A short play of hers was included in a festival of new plays at McCarter Theatre in Princeton. As a guest editor for a special issue on theater in *TriQuarterly* (134), she brought together articles

and commentary from theater artists including Frank Galati and Mary Zimmerman. Other theater commentary include a published interview with David Rabe and various reviews. In addition to her many published books and articles on the law, her recent literary publications include a short story collection, *The Left-Handed Marriage*, and *Florence Kelley and the Children: Factory Inspector in 1890s Chicago*. *Florence Kelley* was adapted as a three-person dramatic reading, which was presented at Hull House and other venues in Chicago.



**Janet Burroway** is the author of plays, poetry, essays, children's books, and eight novels, including *The Buzzards*, *Raw Silk*, *Opening Nights*, *Cutting Stone*, and *Bridge of Sand*. Her *Writing Fiction* (Ninth Edition) is the most widely used creative writing text in America, and her *Imaginative Writing* is in its fourth edition. Her children's book, *The Giant Jam Sandwich* has been translated into twenty languages and scored

for orchestra. Recent works include the plays *Sweepstakes*, *Medea With Child*, *Morality Play* (a musical), *Parts of Speech*, *Boomerang*,

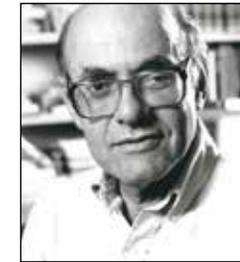
and *Headshots*, which have been read and performed in New York, London, San Francisco, Hollywood, and Chicago. Her memoir, *Losing Tim*, was published in 2014. She is Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor Emerita at the Florida State University and was chosen for the 2014 Lifetime Achievement in Writing Award by the Florida Humanities Council.



**Bernardine Dohrn**, activist, academic, and advocate for the rights of children and women is a retired associate clinical professor at Northwestern University School of Law, where she was also director of the Children and Family Justice Center for 23 years. Most recently, she wrote "The Surprising Role of the CRC in a Non-State Party" in *Litigating the Rights of the Child*; "Slowly Abolishing Solitary Confinement for Children," and "Children's Right to Counsel."



**Reginald Gibbons'** tenth book of poems, *Last Lake*, was recently published by the University of Chicago Press. He has also published fiction, translations, and criticism. He is Frances Hooper Professor of Arts and Letters at Northwestern University.



**Marvin Hoffman** is a long-time teacher and teacher educator. He has taught at grade levels from pre-K to graduate school in many parts of the country, including Vermont, New Hampshire, Texas, and Illinois. He recently retired from the University of Chicago, where he served as the founding director of its first charter school and one of the founders of the University's Urban Teacher Education Program. He has published five books as well as articles in numerous newspapers and magazines. He received a PhD in Clinical Psychology from Harvard University.



**John Kersey** received his MFAW from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he studied extensively with Rosellen Brown. His short stories and essays have appeared in *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, *Trop*, and *The Chicago Tribune*. He lives in Chicago with his wife and their three children.



**Alex Kotlowitz** is the award-winning author of three books, including the national bestseller *There Are No Children Here*. His work has appeared in numerous anthologies and publications, including *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine* and on public radio's *This American Life*. His documentary film work includes *The Interrupters*, for which he was awarded an Emmy, and an Independent Film Spirit Award.

His journalism has been honored across three mediums, including two Peabody Awards, two Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, a Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, and the George Polk Award. He teaches nonfiction writing at Northwestern University.



**Britney Lipton** is a writer of poetry who has published work in a number of digital journals and has read at the Poetry Foundation of Chicago. She is a graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's MFA in Writing program. While at SAIC, she was managing editor of *Collected*, the graduate program's published journal. Her undergraduate degree is from Florida International University, where she majored in English Literature

and minored in Judaic Studies. She currently works for World Book, and in her spare time, volunteers with Stuart & Co. Gallery to help emerging and mid-career artists connect with the Chicago art scene.



**Donna Seaman** is Editor, Adult Books, *Booklist*, a member of the advisory council for the American Writers Museum, and a recipient of the James Friend Memorial Award for Literary Criticism and the Studs Terkel Humanities Service Award. Her author interviews are collected in *Writers on the Air: Conversations about Books*.



**Judith Valente** is an award-winning author, journalist, and poet. She has been an on-air correspondent for PBS-TV since 1998 and previously was a staff reporter for *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*. She is currently the senior correspondent and producer for WGLT Radio, the National Public Radio station in central

Illinois, where she resides. She writes a regular column from the Midwest for the national Catholic magazine, *America*. Her most recent books include *Atchison Blue*:

*A Search for Silence, a Spiritual Home, and a Living Faith*, which was selected as best spirituality book of 2014 by the Catholic Press Association and one of the three best spirituality books of the year by the Religion News Writers Association. She is also coauthor with Brother Paul Quenon of *The Art of Pausing: Meditations for the Overworked and Overwhelmed*. Ms. Valente is the author of the poetry chapbook, *Inventing An Alphabet*, selected by Mary Oliver for the 2004 Aldrich Poetry Prize. She is the author of the 2009 full-length collection *Discovering Moons*, and has won more than 20 awards for her work in both broadcast and print journalism. Her poems have appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *Rhino*, *Afterhours*, *Folio*, *Free Lunch* and *National Catholic Reporter*.



**Arne Weingart** was born and raised in Nashville, Tennessee, and now lives with his wife, Karen, in Chicago, where he is the principal of a graphic design firm. His journal publications include *ABZ*, *Arts & Letters*, *Beecher's Magazine*, *Coal Hill Review*, *Enizagam*, *the Georgetown Review*, *the Georgia Review*, *the Massachusetts Review*, *New Millennium Writings*, *Nimrod*, *Oberon*, *Passager*, *Plume*, *Poetry Daily*, *RHINO*, *Solstice*, *the Southeast Review*,

*Southern Poetry Review*, *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, and the *Spoon River Poetry Review*. Recent work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and his book, *Levitation for Agnostics*, was the winner of the 2014 New American Press Poetry Prize. ✍️

# A Tribute to Rosellen Brown

By Carla Barger

Rosellen Brown was my teacher and advisor while I was in the Master of Fine Arts in Writing program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I'm excited to have this opportunity to share my experience working with this incredible artist and remarkable person.

In 2003, I walked into the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in a fog of apprehension. A first-generation college student who was now a first-generation graduate student, I was intimidated. My first class was Rosellen's course Connections and Disconnections in Prose and Poetry. I'd also chosen her to be my advisor. This was not an accident; I had read *Cora Fry* as an undergrad. Cora Fry: a woman in a small town similar to mine, who felt some of the same things I felt. I knew I couldn't write like Rosellen Brown, but I hoped that one day I might.

On the first day of class, I was nervous to meet this writer who was able to see so deeply into and through her characters. I didn't know what kind of advisor or teacher Rosellen would be, but I knew that I had lofty ambitions for myself—I would be whipped into shape, no matter what I had to do. I did not want to be let off the hook easily. I would become a Writer.

In class, discussion was lively and challenging, and I suddenly found myself surrounded by people who were, I thought, much more talented and smarter than me. During my first semester, many of the notes I received from Rosellen said things like, "You're not focusing," and "You've missed the essence of this character."

I remember the sting of those notes and that nagging doubt—maybe I didn't deserve to be there—that always followed. But it didn't take long for me to realize how right she was and how insightful she had been in her approach to me. Would I have responded to softer criticism? Would my work have evolved that first year as much as it did? No. Her characters were not the only ones to benefit from her keen perceptiveness.

Rosellen was also quick to compliment a piece when it deserved it and was encouraging when I was on the right track. For our advising sessions, Rosellen



and I would meet in the school's building on Michigan Avenue. Side by side we sat on a sofa positioned in front of a bank of windows overlooking the Art Institute and the lake beyond. I remember these as times of generosity on her part, full of encouragement and guidance. Those sessions were not only useful to my growth as a writer,

but were also precious to me as a person. Having that quiet and focused time with someone I so admired, someone who embodied such grace and wisdom, was a privilege I never forgot.

But not only was Rosellen a great teacher of how to write, she was also a great teacher of how to live. In her class Writing the City, Rosellen forced us out of our comfortable worlds. One of our assignments was to visit the Cook County Criminal Court. Rosellen asked us to be brave, to explore a side of Chicago that most of us had been fortunate enough to never have seen. She forced us to confront our city in order that we may confront ourselves—as artists and as members of a community whose engagement, or lack of, matters. Some of my best grad school work was written for this class.

MFA programs are difficult in that one must endure two, sometimes more, years of constant criticism. It is even more difficult for those, like myself, who feel like interlopers. But amidst this bombardment of critiques and perceived attacks on your audacity to write in a world that does not want you to write, there are professors like Rosellen, honest yet tactful, critical yet generous. My respect for Rosellen, then and now, runs deep and wide, and what made Rosellen such an amazing teacher was that she respected me too. Even though I had not yet earned it, and even though I was not sure I deserved it, she spoke to me like I belonged, like I was already a writer, and that in turn helped me respect myself and my talent enough to actually become one.

I have no doubt that Rosellen's influence has played a role in the successes I've enjoyed since graduation. Rosellen saw the writer that I could be, that I so desperately wanted to be, and because of that insight she changed my life by giving me a chance. That confidence she helped me uncover, the critical evaluation skills she helped me develop, the writing talent she helped me hone have allowed me to enjoy positions at places like Harvard University and UC Berkeley. I am a successful freelance writer and editor—and human being—in no

small part because of what she taught me and how she taught me.

On May 5, 2006, just before I was to graduate, Rosellen sent me an email saying how proud she was of me, how far I'd come since we had begun working together. I printed that email years ago, and today I keep it in the top drawer of my desk. Whenever I doubt myself, I reread that email. I strive to live up to Rosellen's expectations of me, to repay her trust and confidence.



Sometimes that seems like a daunting job, sometimes I'm not sure I can cut it. But then I read the email again, and I am transported—there she is, sitting next to me on the sofa, copies and pen in hand, the view of the lake spread before us toward a beautiful if uncertain horizon—and I am able to move forward.

As I wrote this dedication, I again read that printed email. In the closing line Rosellen wrote to me, "You go, girl!" Now it's my turn. Rosellen, I am so honored to be able to contribute to this day where we recognize your profound contribution to Chicago Literature. You go, girl! Go and go and go.

*Carla Barger is a poet, writer, and editor. She holds an MFA in Writing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and her creative work has appeared in literary journals, photography books, gallery catalogs, and elsewhere. She freelances through her small business, Booklvy Word Studio. ✍*

## Rosellen Brown, Our Crown Jewel

By Aviva Kushner

When I was a child, and first falling in love with stories, I never imagined what a real writer actually looked like. In my mind, whoever wrote stories and novels was a creature from another world, a being with a name, maybe a throne and a scepter and a glittery crown, but certainly no earthly address. I never thought of writers as alive and present, people who answered phones and ate dessert with a fork and a laugh, and who offered tips on where to find a parking spot in Hyde Park.

One of the first writers I remember truly loving was Rosellen Brown. I checked out everything she wrote—plastic-covered hardbacks from The Finkelstein Memorial Library in Spring Valley, New York, which had no borrowing limit but did impose late fees. My siblings and I put our weekly borrowed books in huge garbage bags, which we dragged to



our parents' waiting station wagon. I never imagined that a day would come when I would actually meet Rosellen Brown, the writer whose books I had so enthusiastically schlepped, often checking them out multiple times to avoid fees.

I first encountered the real live Rosellen Brown about twenty years after I first started reading her. I had just moved to Chicago, and she was at a book party in a Rogers Park living room to celebrate Goldie Goldbloom's

first novel. I tried to maintain composure when she introduced herself, but in the years I have been lucky enough to get to know the real live Rosellen Brown, not just the name on the book, everything I observed that night has been true.

First of all, where she was and what she was doing. Rosellen—who all her friends call Posey—was there to support someone else. She had driven all the way from Hyde Park to the far north side to celebrate another writer, and, it must be said, a writer then starting out. Second, she was an incredibly deep and close listener. I watched her look straight into people's eyes, and hear them. It was very easy to get her engaged and commenting brilliantly about a subject, whether it was Chicago politics, novel structure, her daughter's latest writing project,

“In the work (and in the life) Rosellen has sought to understand and clarify what makes us who we are. And when we see ourselves reflected so faithfully in her pages, we are at once proud and ashamed – a condition in which she sees no apparent contradiction. We end up, most of all, being grateful.”

— Arne Weingart

or her son-in-law's work translating medieval poetry. And third: I could tell, from the way she listened, that she was a wonderful friend.

Since that night I have heard so many writers tell me how much Rosellen's support has meant to them. Charlie D'Ambrosio, the outstanding short-story writer and essayist, shared that Posey, who he never met, blurbed his first book, and that it meant so much to him. When I picked up Christine Sneed's latest novel, *Paris, He Said*, I was moved and delighted to see that Posey had written a blurb that put Christine's work in conversation with Henry James. Lynn Mooney and Sarah Hollenbeck, the owners of Women & Children First, who certainly see more literary behavior than most of us, told me that bad weather or good weather, Posey drives in to events to support local writers. She is *there*. She shows up. And of course, she often asks the first fabulous question.



I love watching writers take a minute to think about how to respond to Posey, who always seems to ask about the very essence of a book. There is always that pause, that *let me think about that*. And Marv, of course, is usually there too, often with another terrific question.

But that stuff is visible. Let me tell you about what is less visible. It's opening the door to the break room at Brooksdays, the Guild Complex's fabulous annual event celebrating the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks, and seeing Rosellen Brown in a hat with a visor, presiding over the fruit platters and cookies and drinks. I watched Posey add more cookies to the platter and wondered if the people milling in and out realized that the woman who has agreed to spend hours making sure there are refreshments is one of this country's most beloved and important writers. I had a similar thought this June, watching the teenagers who came to the Chicago Cultural Center this year for Brooksdays; I wondered if they knew who was reading the classic poem "Sadie and Maud," which tells the story of two lives in just twenty short lines.

Then there was "A Song in the Front Yard," where Gwendolyn Brooks writes:

I've stayed in the front yard all my life  
I want a peek at the back

Brooks is writing about a woman who wants to live a little, to take some risks. Rosellen Brown has always been brave, as a writer and a

thinker and a person; but most importantly, for decades, she has been—to borrow a bit from Brooks—in both the front yard and the back yard of the literary community. But what happens in the back yard is generosity.

It is rare to see a writer as distinguished as Rosellen say yes time and time again to the less-glamorous, often unpaid and unnamed work that makes a literary community live, the stuff that happens in the back yard, away from the streetlights. The years of dedicated service to The Guild Complex; the anonymous judging of contests and fellowships—yes of course, Rosellen agreed to anonymously judge the Whiting Award, yet another lifeline to young writers; and the writing of recommendations and blurbs that we all need and hate to ask for.

Then there is the quiet watching-over stuff, or maybe, it's best called reading. Not long ago, I got a note from Rosellen mentioning that she just read a Q & A I did with Christine Sneed. Yes, Rosellen Brown is reading about all of us, supporting terrific writers like Christine in more ways than one, and giving a boost to *The National Book Review*, edited by Chicago's own Elizabeth Taylor. The antidote to the worry that no one cares about stories, or their writers, or perhaps, at this political moment, human beings at all, is the thought of Posey, reading.

Let us celebrate Rosellen Brown, our Posey, who reigns in both our front yards and back yards, who is beautiful in visible and hidden ways. I can think of no one more worthy of this award than someone who has been my heroine in childhood and in adulthood, whose words have moved me on the page and in person, and who knows how to laugh, how to enjoy dessert, and also, in case you need to ask, where to park. ✍️

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# Rosellen Brown

**FOR** confronting major modern issues through her fiction, and for helping us unravel the subtleties of racism in ourselves and our times with her 1984 novel, "Civil Wars."

I met Rosellen Brown in 1978, when she and her family were living in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and I was a resident at the MacDowell Colony, struggling through the first draft of my first book. I already knew her work, having reviewed her second novel, *Tender Mercies* (Knopf/Ballantine), for this magazine. It was a terrifying story—a story about helplessness which, ironically, had given me a second wind at a moment of great frustration. Here was a writer who was pitilessly clear where someone else would have been sentimental, and generous where someone else would have been unforgiving. She understood that you cannot hope to grasp the full complexity of any subject, but that the struggle to do so is, as she put it recently, "the thing that keeps you honest, vital—and cunning."

Rosellen was then just beginning to think about the story that became *Civil Wars* (published last year by Knopf), in my opinion the best novel that has been written about the sixties, and a novel about integration as much in a poetic and psychological as in a political sense. I remember being immensely cheered by the fact that, having finished one intense book, she had the will and the appetite to start another one, very different in scale. Her attitude to her craft as much as her practice of it, suggested something very important to me: that writing means growing up, over and over, in different ways; that it means making the most intimate connections and the most difficult separations. "That is the challenge," Rosellen reflected, six years later, with *Civil Wars* behind her, as she casts around for something new. "Finding the courage not to repeat yourself. . . . More than that, finding the courage to disappoint the expectations of your public, which tend to be conservative in that respect. If you've done one thing well, people want you to do the same thing again. And encores are debilitating."

Rosellen Brown's challenge to her



readers is the same as her challenge to herself: not to take things for granted. She is, for that reason, particularly fascinated by the idea of the *aftermath*: how people respond to loss; how they behave, and eventually how they change when the "worst" happens. In *Tender Mercies*, the "worst" was a classic fantasy: a young woman becomes a quadriplegic in an accident for which her husband is responsible. In *Civil Wars*, a radical couple is forced to adopt two racist orphans—the children of a sister and brother-in-law. Jessie and Teddy Carl are living in on Mississippi 20 years after the civil rights movement. Their marriage and their ideals are already embattled when the children, O'Neill and Helen, arrive, and they are the last white family in an "integrated" (now black) Jackson neighborhood. Jessie, a Jew and a New Yorker—a red diaper baby—is ready to go. She is deeply ironic about her relationship to ideology. She has come to believe that everything boils down to "species." Teddy, the pariah of

(continued on page 114)

By Judith Thurman

# Brown

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 82

his deeply conservative Southern family, refuses to put his days as a hero and firebrand behind him. He cannot accept the value of the not revolutionary but still solid changes that have taken place since the sixties. Nor can he accept Jessie's longing for some comfort and security. And to him, his niece and nephew are simply the children of the enemy. Those two children, in turn, are living in a different sort of aftermath. They are forced, with their parents' death, to depend upon people and to follow principles they have been taught to abhor. *Civil Wars* is probably most moving at the moments when O'Neill and Helen begin to understand "that things are not so simple."

"Fiction," says Rosellen Brown, "always has an obligation to the other side, whatever it is. Finding an adequate angle of vision is the hardest thing about writing it. It's frightening to imagine the inner life of an 'enemy.' But what is more worthwhile?"

None of Rosellen Brown's fiction is explicitly autobiographical, except, as she puts it, "it is always an autobiography of my thoughts." But *Civil Wars* grew out of her own experiences as an activist in Mississippi, where she and her husband spent three years during the sixties. During those years, she felt a "revulsion" toward the Mississippi whites that it now "mortifies" her to recall. *Civil Wars*, she says, was inspired partly by "a sense of duty to redress the balance, to do a more complex kind of justice. It was extremely difficult, and I was always afraid that I would trivialize history by reducing it to a domestic level. But there are no politics in the abstract. It does come down to the details of individual lives. And in the back of my mind I kept referring to something Chekhov said. It went something like, 'Look how you live, my friends. What a pity.'"

The justice that Rosellen Brown succeeds so finely in doing is less that of Western law, and more like the African ideal of justice, which is never absolute; (continued on page 117)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 114

which is based on negotiation: hard-nosed bargaining on one hand; on the other, a sense that the thing of greatest importance to the community is to reconcile the injured and the injurers.

My admiration for Rosellen Brown is such that I am always a little wary of overstating it, of throwing adjectives at her like handfuls of rice—dry and rather meaningless blessings. She is, to give that admiration more of a context, one of the writers who serve me as "listening presences," and for whom I write. They all have certain things in common. They tend to be both ironic and sincere. The irony makes them sensual, the sincerity conscientious. They have an ideal of difficulty, which takes different forms. In Rosellen's case, it is the difficulty of learning to tolerate ambivalence; to accept that the basic conflicts and tensions of life often cannot be resolved through simple action or desire or the invocation of principle. That is the great lesson—the "moral," if you like, of *Civil Wars*: that integration is always incomplete and imperfect, a compromise with loss.

There is always an emotional spin, a curve to Rosellen Brown's psychological insights. They don't fall where you expect them to. Her characters are, indeed, always sidestepping the expectations that the reader, or convention or even the novelist has for them. "Those expecta-

tations," she says, recalling a scene in her first novel, *The Autobiography of My Mother* (Ballantine), are like tombstones engraved 'Mother.' What presumption to bury someone in a single, externally determined role or attitude. Each one of our identities is so much more complex."

Rosellen is herself a mother, but with a lowercase "m." Her family life seems exceptionally calm and stable. "Yes, boring!" she says, cheerfully. "Exceptionally uninteresting! What did Flaubert say: 'Live like a bourgeois so you can write like a . . .'"

"Revolutionary?"

"No, it wasn't political."

"A god?"

"I don't think it was theological, either."

"But Flaubert would have envied you," I say. "You seem to be so comfortable *dans le vrai*."

At this point Rosellen tells me a story. In Houston, where she, her husband, Marvin Hoffman, and their two daughters now live, she is generally known as "Posey Hoffman." One of their neighbors asked Alana, their younger daughter, if her mother wrote under a pseudonym. "No," said Alana. "She lives under a pseudonym."

Judith Thurman is the author of *Isak Dinesen: The Life of a Storyteller* (St. Martin's Press) and is working on a documentary film on the poetry of Emily

## A White Author in a Black and Brown World

By Donald G. Evans

*I ask forgiveness of all the poor and pained,  
for my unbroken peace,*

*for my whole luck; that I am fair, but love  
all my unlovely friends.*

*That I am wily and wise enough to save  
myself from their bad ends.*

*That I have never had to swim but live  
a dry life on the sands,  
facing the tide. That I have peace enough  
to sit and watch their disappearing hands.*

—from Rosellen Brown's "Living in Opposition"

The Civil Rights Movement blazed, its intensity and hate and righteousness all around. Rosellen Brown's husband Marvin Hoffman, the now-distinguished childhood educator, was finishing up his PhD in psychology at Harvard University. Rosellen already had her MA from

Brandeis University. Two white, highly educated people, stuck in the middle of a Black-White standoff. Marv said to Rosellen, "When we have children, when they ask, 'What were you doing about this conflagration going on in the U.S.?', unlike people during the Holocaust who simply watched, we can say we did what we could do." They did not want to be the complacent voice of that poem.

Off they went, to Tougaloo College, ten miles north of Jackson, Mississippi, living on campus as part of a program that sent some of its former fellows to bolster the faculties and establish honors programs at traditionally Black southern



colleges. This was 1964, the year of the Mississippi Freedom Summer, though Rosellen and Marv experienced that only on the fringes.

“We wanted to do our bit, but we were not brave enough, frankly, to dare anything more dangerous,” Rosellen says.

But, limited or not, this was a time fraught with very real danger. Rosellen and Marv interviewed at Tougaloo just after the disappearance of three Congress of Racial Equality workers—two white New Yorkers and a local African-American whom white supremacists had targeted for their parts in the Civil Rights movement. Their burned-out station wagon stood as a symbol to the ferocity of the opposition, and the eventual discovery of the three young men’s bodies led to the term, “Mississippi Burning.”

“It was too dangerous to live off campus,” Rosellen says. “Local people hated anyone connected to the college. They chased us, they threw firebombs through the gate.”



Rosellen and Marv’s experiences were rich and important, albeit minor roles in a major movement, and when that period of their lives segued into another, Marv eventually going to work for the nation’s first anti-poverty program and Rosellen bunkering down to seriously launch her career as an author and to have the first of her two children, according to Rosellen, “We could at least give testimony that we’d been there, up close, doing our very little bit.”

For Rosellen, that testimony would be a life’s work.

“I’ve never done as much service to the world, to the community, as I think I should,” says Rosellen. “I feel like all I can do is write, that’s what I do best. As a human being, I’m in constant conflict about, ‘What am I doing that’s useful in the world?’ ”

Starting with *Some Deaths in the Delta*, a poetry collection that represented the start of her illustrious literary career, Rosellen gravitated to themes of race. In the title poem of that collection, Rosellen makes the somber connection between the oppressed and the ruling class, using a piercing image of fire and smoke as equal killers.

In her first book of fiction, *Street Games*, which takes place on the

fictional George Street in Brooklyn, Rosellen gives voice to Latinos and Blacks and Whites living in proximity, living together, trying to bridge their cultural chasms but also stealing from one another, and hating as much as loving. Critic John Freeman called it “An American Classic.”

In her famous story, “How to Win,” the six-year-old WASP son Christopher, whose ADHD-like disorder leads him to destructive behavior, gets grouped with the Latinos and Blacks, all of them, according to the school power brokers, unified by their threatening, doomed natures. The mother who narrates the story is at once horrified that her son would be so labeled, as if it is a curse, but also painfully aware of the path such destiny takes.



“When I wrote the first book of stories, I imagined the voices of a number of Latinos and one Black character,” says Rosellen. “This was the early 70’s. There was a great deal less controversy over what it meant to ‘appropriate’ other people’s voices. I don’t think I thought twice about it. That’s become a complicated question in the years since then.”

Gerda Stein, the heroine of Rosellen’s first novel, *The Autobiography of My Mother*, arises out of those Mississippi experiences. She writes about Gerda’s creation in the essay, “An Insider/Outsider in Mississippi”: “Years after we had left Mississippi, I had the only near-mystical experience of my writing career. I heard a voice—not a hallucination of a voice because I am too constrained by sanity for that, but a sort of echo of a familiar tonality, an accent I knew intimately.” Gerda defends minorities, in fact has a large reputation as a tireless defender of civil liberties, but her life as a mother is fraught with conflict.

In Rosellen’s stories, Whites act as accelerants and antidotes to problems. The confrontations are loud and up front, and often, as she says of her own experience, the good guys don’t always want the help of the other good guys. In *Civil Wars*—start with the title—a hardcore racist son-of-a-bitch dies and leaves his bigoted son and daughter in the care of a liberal brother with fading Civil Rights battle scars. The two budding racists—wealthy, white, judgmental,

dangerously ignorant, but also grieving the loss of their parents—are plopped down in an all-Black neighborhood that rather despises whatever symbol of solidarity the old activists planted their flag in, and become part of a family that not only abides by but identifies with liberal values. Here, too, the public and the personal are at war with each other.

In *Half a Heart*, Miriam, the well-heeled white matron of a vaguely guilt-inspiring gated life, confronts her past in the form of Veronica, the daughter she surrendered to her Black father and whose existence she kept secret nearly two decades. As in *Civil Wars*, and *Autobiography*, the country's history of racial inequality throws a shadow over the contemporary landscape.

"*Civil Wars* started with a very abstract idea about how children get their moral education," says Rosellen. "How do they figure out what matters between people and races? In *Half a Heart*, I tried to deal with the tensions that came with the growth of the Black Power Movement."



It's fitting that when Rosellen and Marv were in Mississippi, they lived right across the highway from the Illinois-Central Railroad, on which the "Chicken Bone Special" carried African-Americans to Chicago during the Great Migration. Rosellen now lives on Cornell Avenue, in Hyde Park, and again looks out her window to see the Illinois-Central, only, of course, at its terminus rather than point of origin.

Her poems, stories, novels and even essays do not seek a moral high ground, but rather explore the

possibilities, as well as barriers, of people coexisting. This ring of humanity begins with family, widens to neighbors and friends, and grows to society with a capital S, including systemic discrimination echoing back decades.

Of course, any white author hoping to write about minorities must tiptoe through the landmines of potential criticism. More so, that white

author, when attempting to create realistic portrayals, must win the confidence of her readers. Perhaps Rosellen's most remarkable gift, among many, is that her fictional worlds, and the characters therein—black, white and brown—act as individuals within their races, sometimes typically, often surprisingly. Prejudice of some sort is almost a given, but what happens when humans intersect is not. The reader is left with portrayals ugly and beautiful, redeeming and awful, and self-reflection that allows for the possibility that what we know is only what we think we know.

"I do not believe writers are the unacknowledged legislators of the world," Rosellen says. "I wrote about what was important to me. I wanted to get characters right for the sake of getting them right." 

## Special Thanks:

To Bob Boone for a generous donation that made this event possible. To Max McKenna and Lisa Wagner for all their hard work planning and promoting this ceremony. To all the sponsors listed throughout this booklet—fine independent entities, each and every one of them, that make Chicago a better place in which to live. To our talented videographer and photographer, Rana Segal and Charles Osgood, for capturing the best moments of this evening. To Hannah Jennings for her beautiful cover poster, and Jill Zylke for her artful program design. To Breaker Press, the best printing company I know. To Carolyn Saper for her proofreading and general support. To Barry Jung, an all-star volunteer whom quietly helps put together the puzzle. To every participant in tonight's program, as well as the contributors to the commemorative booklet. To Lucia's for their food, Argus Brewery for the beer, and Cream Wine Company for the wine. To our wonderful partner, the Guild Literary Complex, an organization that has been doing phenomenal work for more than a quarter of a century. And, of course, to our wonderful host, the Poetry Foundation, for letting this all happen in their lovely home with the help of their really smart staff, especially Steve Young and Chelsea Avery. 

# Rosellen Brown's Chicago

By Donald G. Evans

**O**n the first day of her Writing Chicago class at the School of the Art Institute, Rosellen Brown passes out L maps to her students and asks them to mark every place they've been in the city. She finds, commonly, that the students—some local kids, some from the suburbs, most from far-flung cities and towns throughout the country—do not range far from their home bases. Lincoln Park Zoo, Art Institute, Logan Square Farmer's Market, Millennium Park, like that. Meaning, many students never experience the breadth of Chicago—the West Side, the South Side, the nooks and crannies along the lake and to the north.

"I'm fascinated by the coming together of what is happening with where it is happening," says Rosellen. "Every interior, exterior, gathering place, and places where people go to be alone—they're all sociologically loaded. I can't imagine a disembodied story."

So the students, as they are reading Chicago's iconic writers like Richard Wright, Sandra Cisneros, Upton Sinclair, Studs Terkel, and Stuart Dybek, travel about: to the Graceland Cemetery, Cook County Jail, the Garfield Park Conservatory, Englewood's Dream Café and so forth.



"They're astonished by the city's diversity, much of which they wouldn't have come up against had they not traveled around," says Rosellen. "I think they come away with a heightened sense that you really cannot stereotype people. They learn, the way Studs did, that people are surprising. Chicago is a rough and tumble, unpretentious city. There are things they might not have perceived had they not gotten off the Blue Line."

Rosellen, of course, is not asking her students to do more than she's willing to do.

She came to Chicago 21 years ago, a lifetime's worth of travel experience already in her past, having left Philadelphia as a baby

to live in places as diverse as Massachusetts, New York, Texas, Mississippi, New Hampshire, and California. She'd written about a lot of those places, including a linked story collection set on a single

fictional block in Brooklyn and a poetry collection anchored in Oxford, New Hampshire, a stand-in for a town called Orford.

Chicago was supposed to be a respite, a sabbatical, a place remote enough from Houston, where Rosellen'd been teaching the past decade, to dodge students seeking wisdom imparted at the cost of her own writing. The year expired, but it wasn't a good time for her husband, Marvin Hoffman, to leave. Their stuff—cats, furniture, piano, all—stayed in Houston; Rosellen and Marv in Chicago. More time passed, and now the University of Chicago wanted to start the North Kenwood/Oakland Charter School, and plans were already in the works for Marv to co-found the Urban Teacher Education program. The University of Chicago was where Marv needed to be.

A well-traveled woman like Rosellen, already with stakes planted and pulled up all over the country, needed to be convinced that Chicago was not just a place but *the* place, some beckoning beyond mere rationalization or whim. Her brother and sister-in-law, Ralph and Rona Brown, were here, which was one of the initial attractions. She had her students. And...the lake.



Rosellen says she has a "deep connection" to Lake Michigan, listening to podcasts on her daily walks along the shore, observing the changing seasons, watching people.

"When we decided to stay in Chicago it was on one condition—that we always live within sight of this kaleidoscope endlessly shaken, endlessly incomprehensible. Our inland sea is the only coast I need," she concluded her essay included in Teri Boyd's *City 2000* book.

While Chicago grew from green to yellow to orange to brown, and back again—and again—Rosellen taught; helped out with organizations such as the Neighborhood Writing Alliance, the Guild Literary Complex and Crossroads Fund; embedded herself in Hyde Park and the University of Chicago's diverse offerings; and formed various communities amongst distinct groups of friends, such as "the writer gals," her Jewish friends, and SAIC colleagues.

Now, Rosellen has spent longer in Chicago than anywhere else, and has gained expertise beyond the average resident, even of the lifelong variety.

"She is certainly interested in every aspect of this city that she chose

after living in many—many!—others,” says author Janet Burroway, who first met Rosellen at college in New York almost 60 years ago. “History, culture, politics, geography—all. She always knows what’s going on in theatre, museums, Hyde Park local machinations, schools.”

Hyde Park is Rosellen’s neighborhood, starting out in a sublet Mies van der Rohe building eight floors up on South Shore Drive, before moving to their own 16th floor apartment on Cornell Avenue, from where the sun can be seen rising and setting, causing, still, a kind of euphoria. “We’re forever shouting to each other, ‘Come look!’”

But Rosellen’s tentacles reach all those corners of Chicago she forces her students to probe. Take, for example, her writing group, which includes Chicago luminaries like Burroway, Sharon Solwitz, Sandy Wisenberg, Peggy Shinner, Tsivia Cohen, Maggie Kast, and Garnett Kilberg-Cohen. Not only does Rosellen travel to Wrigleyville, Bucktown and downtown for the critique sessions, she also routinely supports their publication events.

“She’s out exerting herself,” says Sharon, who met Rosellen 30 years ago at a literary prize ceremony in Tulsa. “She’s a binder of communities: she connects people and she comes to everything—she comes to more literary events than anybody I know. She’ll come to your reading, when you’re not expecting somebody with her cache and responsibilities to be there. Posey comes because reading, writing, and people fascinate her.”



But never has Rosellen published a significant literary work set in contemporary Chicago, a place she says she “loves for so many reasons.” Maybe that’s because she worries that she doesn’t know it intimately, like so many of her friends who grew up here.

“I came to it too late, missed so much,” she says. “I still feel like it’s not my city completely.”

While she has not yet published a book set in Chicago, she’s working on it. And working on it. In fact, she started an historical novel two decades ago and her white whale has led her to immerse herself not in the city present but in the city past.

Her novel-in-progress is set in late 19th-century Chicago, around the time of the Columbian Exposition. In a kind of reinvention of Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, a young Jewish immigrant and her genius little brother journey from their Wisconsin home to Chicago. This is a time of Jane Addams and Carrie Watson, H.H. Holmes and Daniel

Burnham, “Hinky Dink” Kenna and Clarence Darrow. Rosellen calls it “a Cinderella story, of sorts” that deals with Chicago poverty, anarchists, and an act of terrorism.

“The city now is incredibly quiet compared to the late 19th century,” she says. Her research has led her to a significant pile of 19th-century literature. “Chicago was overflowing with boaters and bicyclists, restaurants, hotels. Compared to that, now we’re a somnolent small town.”

Rosellen started the novel early in her time in Chicago. On a sunrise walk past the Museum of Science and Industry, she realized the landscape had changed. “Besides the museum building, all that’s left of that extraordinary moment are one or two bridges, a few streetlights,” she says. “The fact is, we’re here and we’re gone. So my novel began as a kind of elegy to the past and the fleeting present.”

## The Seventh Induction Class

*By Donald G. Evans*

Each year for the past six years, the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame has selected a new class of six writers—through a rigorous process that includes ten unique nominators and five unique selectors. Again, this year, we’ve determined a new class, and like the previous ones the writers are varied and deserving.

Each year for the past six years, the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame has inducted these writers at an end-of-the-year ceremony. It’s always been an extraordinary event, most notable for the inclusion of living descendants to accept the awards on behalf of their literary ancestors. The evenings have included dramatic readings, music, and incredible presentations about each writer’s life work. While each one has been different, they’ve all been quite memorable, special.

This year, for a variety of reasons, we’ve decided to cancel the Nov. 19 induction ceremony at Roosevelt University in favor of individual inductions throughout 2017.

Six writers in one evening has always meant that precious little time could be devoted to any single inductee. We want to be more expansive, more thorough, do each writer justice. We are now in the process of planning unique induction ceremonies for the Class of 2016: **Margaret Ayer-Barnes, Fanny Butcher, Roger Ebert, Eugene Field, Fenton Johnson and Ring Lardner.**

Once we have details, including dates and venues, we’ll share them with you.

### Rosellen Brown: Woman of Words

“During our student years at Barnard College, I knew Rosellen only by her words. And what powerful words they were, simple, sonorous, wry and direct, revealing the light and darkness of the world around her. Fifty years later, at the Atlantic Center for the Arts in New Smyrna Beach, Florida, I finally met Rosellen face to face. She served as the Master Writer for eight associate writers (I felt honored to be one of them) during a three-week residency. A devoted teacher and guide, she listened intently to our words and shared her wisdom and expertise in an informal and often humorous way.

She knew well the answer to the question she poses in *Cora Fry*:

“Which last longer, words,  
words in her bent head,  
or the clean spaces

between one perfect  
dusting and the next?”

— Lenore Roland

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“Cora Fry is a New England wife, mother and teller of tales, true and imagined. My dear friend and director Pamela Messoro introduced me to both Cora and Rosellen in 1979; Pamela had a hunch that *Cora Fry* might work as a one-woman show adapted to the stage. I performed our adaptation in her living room for her husband, Marvin, and two young daughters! We proceeded to perform *Cora Fry* in Rhode Island, New York City, and St. Peter's at Citicorp. I always carried Cora in my heart.

In the 1990's Rosellen revisited Cora and the inhabitants of this small New Hampshire village, Oxford, in a sequel, *Cora Fry's Pillow Book*. Cora is older and life is changing quickly, something we can all relate to! Inspired to approach this beautifully-written work once again, my director and collaborator, Ludovica Villar-Hauser and I presented two performances at TheatreLab in Manhattan. How thrilling it is for me to revisit a role I played as a young woman and how poignant that I know the older Cora now as intimately as the younger one. I have always loved Cora Fry.

It does not surprise me that Rosellen Brown is the 2016 recipient of the CLHOF Fuller Award for her remarkable career. Her exquisite words take us places we long to revisit. Congratulations Rosellen!!!”

— Paula Ewin

### Chicago Book Expo congratulates Rosellen Brown



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## 1001 Donors In Chicago

The Chicago Literary Hall of Fame has survived seven years on very little money, while offering nearly all of our programming for free. In that time, the CLHOF has inducted six classes of writers, for a total of 36 inductees (soon to be 42); presented four Fuller Awards for lifetime achievement; sponsored or co-sponsored three youth literary contests that included cash prizes, publications and public recognition; catalogued data about our city's great literary heritage and writers; participated in many of our region's most distinguished festivals, such as the Carl Sandburg Festival of the Mind, the AWP's annual conference, Printer's Row Lit Fest, SSML's annual conference, BrooksDay, Evanston Literary Festival and Chicago Book Expo; run a Chicago Books Club; and produced unique events and discussions centered upon our inductees. We've partnered with many of our city's finest cultural institutions, including Newberry Library, DuSable Museum of African American History, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, Poetry Foundation, Chicago Cultural Center, Segundo Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center, Chicago Public Library, Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park, Oracle Theatre, Cliff Dwellers, Court Theatre and so on.

As an organization, we've done a lot with a little, but frankly as the years have gone on it's become clear that it's much too little. People say, "You have to ask," and undoubtedly those people know what they're talking about. We've done precious little asking and as a result our organization moves slowly and less efficiently than it might otherwise. Our big, spectacular plans have been scaled down.

So now we're asking.

We've started a donation drive called 1001 Donors in Chicago. The idea is for us to collect a significant number of modest donations, and in the process also corral testimonials to the work we've done. Please consider supporting what we do.

We're asking specifically for:

1. A donation: Ten dollars would help, and obviously twenty dollars would help twice as much. A thousand dollars? —Man! We will use this money to help build a new website next year (we've also been awarded an Illinois Humanities Council grant to complete this project). The website will include our Literary Map of Chicago, author profiles, book summaries, a video library, and much more related to Chicago's literary life, past and present. We'll expand our tradition of encouraging young writers through

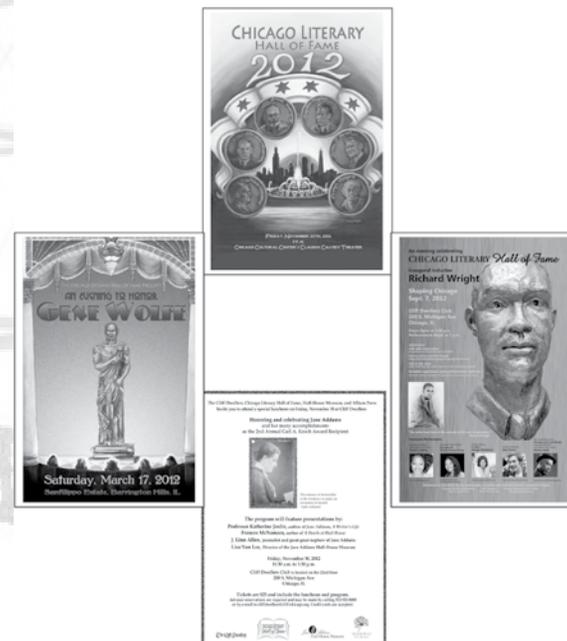
the creation and delivery of a workshop series. We will also use this money to build a more solid organizational foundation, including but not limited to an improved communications process designed to promote our own and other Chicago literary events. Our goal is to raise \$50,000, and at an average of \$50 per donor...right: we need 1001 of you.

2. A short testimonial (25-50 words): We'd like you to articulate a positive experience you've had with the CLHOF or a statement of the importance of the work we do. We'll use these testimonials as part of a slideshow, which in turn will be used to show how fantastic we are, which in turn will be used to draw people to our website, which in turn will be used to get more donations, which brings us full circle to No. 1:

Chicago Literary Hall of Fame  
641 W. Lake St., Suite #200  
Chicago, IL 60661

Send testimonials to:  
[dgevans@chicagoliteraryhof.org](mailto:dgevans@chicagoliteraryhof.org)

Or use paypal donate  
button found on:  
[www.chicagoliteraryhof.org](http://www.chicagoliteraryhof.org)



“Writers are and hope to be remembered for their writings, and so they are. A few of our number, such as the present honoree, are also respected and beloved teachers, mentors, and exemplars of the profession—whatever that means for our motley and diverse and rebellious group. Certainly Rosellen Brown is among that number. But we do all want to be remembered for our writing, for that is what we writers believe is long lasting, and reflective of our best, most true and faithful efforts. These first few opening lines from her story collection *Street Games* [Basement, *Paco*, *Dreaming*] immediately signal that we are in the hands and imagination of a master:

*They are all asleep: Isabel, and Paco and Luz, and Faye, Junior, Tracy and Nando, her sister Cherry's daughter; Yvonne; also Chico, father of the last three. Plus two dogs, whose sides rise and fall luxuriously where they lie on their sides, looking shot down in their tracks. Do the fish sleep at the top of the water? (About once a week, Junior tries to surprise them asleep but he bring along an army of feet and unstoppable mouths in his wake.)*

*Ines is awake. She is wearing a blue duster and fancy slippers with a pompom on top but she is working at her noon pace, rolling the dough, turning the meat and olives and peppers for the pastilles, getting the paper ready to dress them in. It is one-thirty. An hour ago she turned down the radio experimentally, then craned her neck toward the middle room where her husband sleeps, and Nando and, tonight, Yvonne in blankets on the floor and—one bed snapped and whined—clicked it off. She is humming. The fluorescent ring makes a dim insect sound.”*

— Leigh Bienen

## The Guild Literary Complex



The Guild Literary Complex is a 501c3 nonprofit bringing together the varied voices of Chicago and the world through innovative and integrative programming highlighting the intersections of marginality, the power of community, the impact of arts and activism, with a mission of social justice and literary

arts. We are your on-going curated literary festival serving Chicago's 50 wards since 1989. Working in collaboration with the City of Chicago and organizations like the Poetry Foundation, The Museum of Contemporary Art, The Art Institute of Chicago, The Chicago Literary Hall of Fame, The Southeast Asian Center, Brooks Permissions, Third World Press, Sonos de Mexico and many others, the Guild Literary Complex creates dynamic programming highlighting our varied and robust literary community speaking from and highlighting voices in the margins.

“I don't think I've worked on a piece of writing without at least once thinking of some bit of advice from Rosellen Brown's essay, "Don't Just Sit There: Writing as Polymorphous Perverse Pleasure." Steal. Invent. Ask questions. Move across genre. Leave behind other's expectations and focus on your own. Keep going at all costs. Her wisdom, flexibility and clarity serve as both comfort and challenge to me again and again.”

— Jac Jemc

“I’ve had the good fortune of being Rosellen Brown’s editor for three books, BEFORE AND AFTER, HALF A HEART, and CORA FRY’S PILLOW BOOK. I was introduced to Rosellen’s work through the manuscript submission of BEFORE AND AFTER and I remember very clearly being able to see her characters, physically, on a stage. A simple unit and that most basic of units—a family—and yet the way the story unfolded in Rosellen’s hands, the characters in that family existed in a completely different spatial relationship—reflecting changing emotional and psychological relationships—to one another by the end of her novel. “How interesting,” Rosellen said when I mentioned this to her, “because I originally thought of this story as a play.” At that moment I felt as if I had entered this remarkable author’s aesthetic space, and it’s telling that my initial response was to characters who were fully three-dimensional. That’s a testament to a very particular quality, and one that I think characterizes Rosellen herself: her empathy. Over the course of editing BEFORE AND AFTER we had numerous, long, involved and always enjoyable conversations about character, motivation, choice, and moral and ethical consequences. It was the kind of editorial relationship that an editor dreams of: active, engaged, with give-and-take and back-and-forth until we both felt that this was the best that this book possibly could be. And while I greatly enjoyed the publication experience of BEFORE AND AFTER—it was, after all, a major New York Times Bestseller—I was distinctly sad when the editing itself was wrapped up. It was like losing a friend, though of course our relationship continued, the books continued, and when we meet occasionally or talk on the phone today, it’s like resuming a conversation we have left off in mid-sentence. Engaged, interesting, empathetic, sensitive, funny, and not without a healthy dose of skepticism—that’s how I’d describe Rosellen as a person. And that’s also what makes her a great writer and such a good friend.”

— *John A. Glusman, Vice President & Editor-in-Chief,  
W.W. Norton & Company*

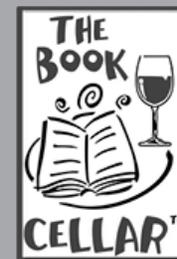
“When I think of Rosellen Brown, I think of music. The powerful symphonies that are her books. The joyous jazz of her teaching. And, at her core—such rich soul. I am deeply grateful to have studied with Rosellen at the Atlantic Center for the Arts. I am so happy that her work and her spirit—all of her generous songs—are being honored and celebrated. Brava!”

— *Christine Rhein*

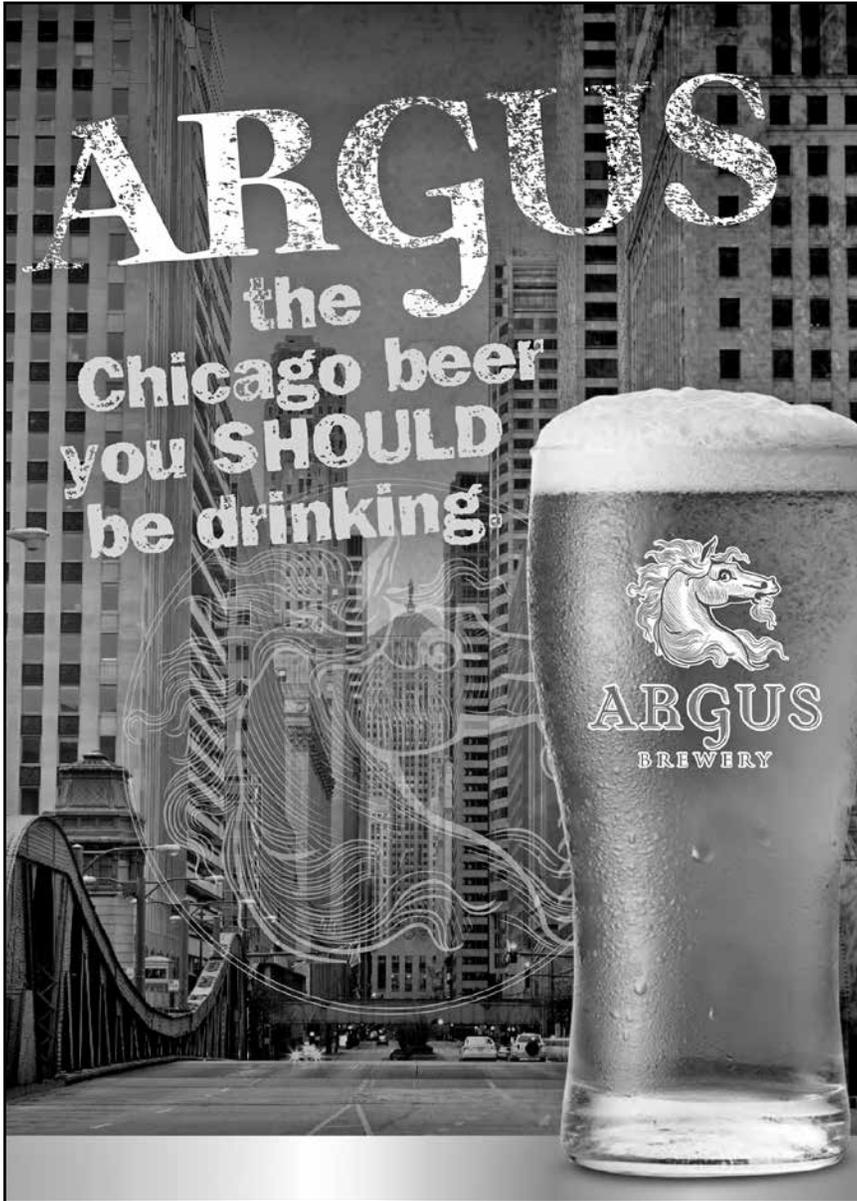
“Rosellen carries out her work in the world with such generosity and grace. I will never forget our time together at the Atlantic Center for the Arts in a life-changing workshop, “Many Ways to Tell a Story,” and her offering her time outside of class to bring me shopping for warm clothes, share long walks on the beach, and explore the African American cemetery. Most of all, I will never forget her unstinting kindness and support, which helped me believe in myself as a writer at a time when I felt lost and could not see a way forward.”

— *With profound gratitude, Nadine Pinede*

To Rosellen for  
her many  
contributions to  
Chicago’s literary  
community



4736-38 Lincoln Ave.  
in Chicago’s  
Lincoln Square

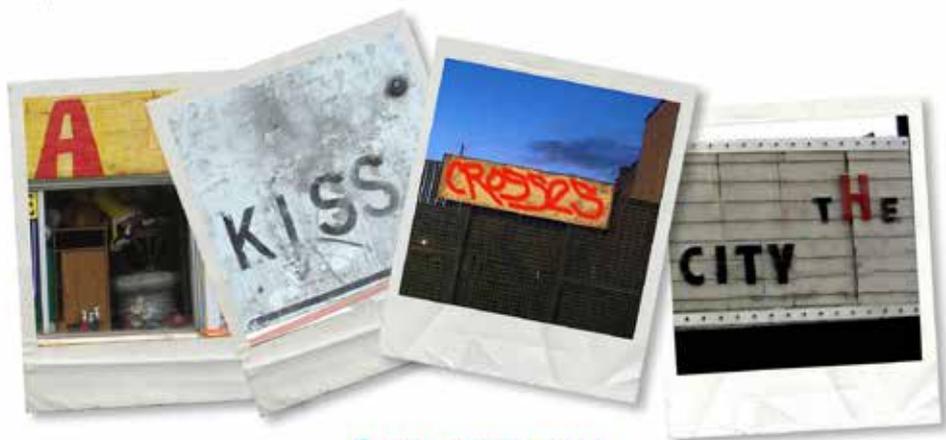


*Cover design by Hannah Jennings*

*Program Design by Jill Zylke*

# A Kiss Crosses The City

a salon with author Stuart Dybek and  
artist Mary Livoni



October 20th, 2016

Doors and bar open at 5:30 - dinner at 6:15

Program to follow at 7:30

Dinner & program \$35 per person

Payment only by credit card at the door

Reservations accepted only by e-mail until October 18  
[reservations@cliff-chicago.org](mailto:reservations@cliff-chicago.org)

We'd like to remind our guests that credit cards are the  
only form of payment accepted both at the door and at the bar.

Discount parking is available  
after 4 pm at the 17 East Adams - enter on Adams.  
Please ask for a coupon from the check in desk.

sponsored by

**Chicago Literary Hall of Fame**

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