

PRINTERS ROW LIT FEST - SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7TH, 2025

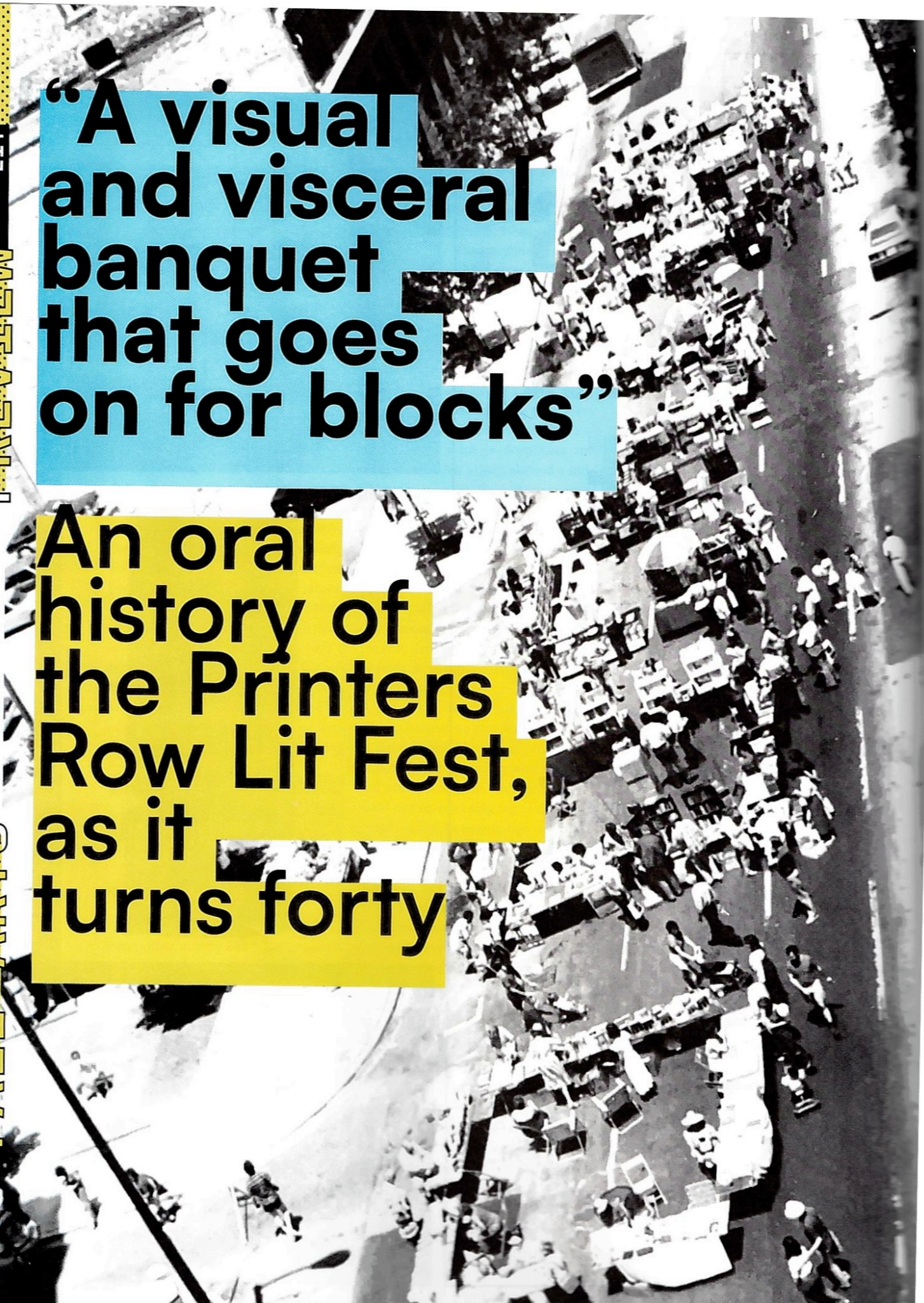
Center Stage (On S. Dearborn St. in Printers Row Park between Polk and Harrison Streets, West Side of Dearborn)	North Stage (On S. Dearborn St., just south of Ida B. Wells Dr.)	Joseph & Bessie Feinberg Foundation Stage (On W. Polk St., just east of Clark St.)	Plymouth Court Stage (On W. Polk St., at Plymouth Ct.)	Grace Place Stage (2nd floor) (637 S. Dearborn St.)	Born Again Consignment Parlor Loft (703 S. Dearborn St.)
<p>10 a.m. Children's Program (Ages 3-5) <i>Mermaids Are the Worst!</i> Draw-Along with Alex Willan</p> <p>10:30 a.m. Children's Program (Ages 6-11) <i>Seeds of Change / Semillas de cambio</i> Bilingual Reading and Discussion Join Jen Cullerton Johnson for a lively, bilingual storyline featuring the biography of environmental hero Wangari Maathai</p> <p>11 a.m. Children's Program (Ages 3-7) Join Jacob Grant for a storyline and draw-along featuring <i>Umami</i>, the story of a hungry penguin</p> <p>11:30 a.m. Chicago Multicultural Dance Center presents Hipler NEXT</p> <p>12 p.m. Perennial Theatre Chicago presents <i>Bread and Salt</i> Experience the poetry and music of Carl Sandburg, set against the backdrop of early 20th-century Chicago Carl Sandburg: Gerald H. Bailey Young Sandburg: John S. Green Voices: Molly Burns, Brigid Duffy, Suzanne Petri, and Alma Washington Director: Robert Breuler Adaptor: Charles Gerace</p> <p>1 p.m. Jane Hamilton, <i>The Phoebe Variations</i> in conversation with Donald G. Evans, Chicago Literary Hall of Fame</p> <p>2 p.m. Sex in the Second City featuring Natalie Caña, <i>Sleeping with the Frenemy</i>, Adrienne Gunn, <i>Fan Favorite</i>, and Danielle Jackson, <i>Accidentally in Love</i> in conversation with Alicia Ross</p> <p>3 p.m. Renée Rosen, <i>Let's Call Her Barbie</i> in conversation with Mary Webber O'Malley</p> <p>4 p.m. Nuevos Caminos del Ensayo en Español (New Paths to the Essay in Spanish) featuring Marco Escalante, <i>Malabarismos del tedió</i>, Julio Rangel, <i>El blues de la línea roja</i>, and Margarita Saona, <i>De monstruos y cyborgs</i> in conversation with Fernando Olszanski Presented by Contratiempo (Program will be conducted in Spanish)</p> <p>5 p.m. A Legacy of Dissent: Chicago Writers on the Revolutionary Power of Sinéad O'Connor featuring Martha Bayne, Gina Frangello, and Zoe Zolbrod in conversation with Britt Julious, <i>Chicago Tribune</i></p>	<p>10 a.m. New Mysteries featuring Allison Epstein, <i>Fagin the Thief: A Novel</i>, Sandra Jackson-Opoku, <i>Savvy Summers and the Sweet Potato Crimes: A Mystery</i>, and Joseph Worthen, <i>All Trap No Bail</i> in conversation with Tim Chapman</p> <p>11 a.m. Navigating Impossible Love: Two New Romantases featuring J.R. Dawson, <i>The Lighthouse at the Edge of the World</i> and Rilla D. Woods, <i>The Edge of Yesterday</i> in conversation with LaTanya Lane</p> <p>12 p.m. Printers Row Lit Fest Poetry Hour featuring Angélique Zobitz, <i>Seraphim</i>, Angelica Julia Dávila, <i>Bilingual Bitch</i>, Thea Goodman, <i>The Invented Mother</i>, Ignatius Valentine Aloysius, <i>Salt Pruning</i> and Viola Lee Co-emceed by Faylita Hicks and Dipika Mukherjee</p> <p>1 p.m. Elise Paschen, <i>Blood Wolf Moon</i> and Ruben Quesada, <i>Brutal Companion</i> in conversation with Faisal Mohyuddin</p> <p>2 p.m. Pessoa's Multiplicity of Identities in Poetry featuring Susan Baller-Shepard, Sophia Kartsonis PhD, and Amy Yee, <i>Chicago Sun-Times</i></p> <p>3 p.m. Exploring the Generational Tapestry of Bronzeville and the Rich Cultural Heritage of Chicago's South Side featuring Nora Brooks Blakely, Veronica (Vee) Harrison, and Bernard Turner in conversation with Pemon Rami</p> <p>4 p.m. Lonnae O'Neal, <i>Bibb Country: Unearthing My Family Secrets of Land, Legacy and Lettuce</i> in conversation with Alison Cuddy</p> <p>5 p.m. Women on the Verge featuring Janice Deal, <i>The Blue Door</i> and Erica Stern, <i>Frontier: A Memoir and a Ghost Story</i> in conversation with Lynn Sloan</p>	<p>10 a.m. At the Crossroads of Journalism and AI featuring Attorney Matt Topic in conversation with Melissa Bell, CEO of WBEZ</p> <p>11 a.m. The Fight Against Banned Books featuring Samira Ahmed, <i>The Singular Life of Aria Patel</i>, Tasslyn Magnusson with Pen America, Danielle Moore with Semicolon Books, Donna Seaman with <i>Booklist</i>, and Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias in conversation with Natalie Y. Moore</p> <p>12 p.m. Steppenwolf for Young Adults: Adaptations and Original Works Performed by Steppenwolf's Young Adult Council featuring Abigail Burke, Miles Chong, Meital Hallpern, Damarion Jackson, Sky Rune, Karen Jessica Dorado, Soren Jimmie Williams, and Jiayang Wu Emcee: Ensemble member Cliff Chamberlain</p> <p>1 p.m. House Music: Its Influence on Culture and the Continuation of Its Legacy featuring Marguerite L. Harrold, <i>Chicago House Music: Culture and Community</i>, Brad Walrond, <i>Every Where Alien</i>, Khari B. <i>PERMISSION: The Debauchery Book</i> in conversation with Edward Kelsey Moore. Presented by the Guild Literary Complex</p> <p>2 p.m. Ghosts, Hollywood Starlets, and Unresolved Grief featuring Peter Orner, <i>The Gossip Columnist's Daughter</i> and Cynthia Pelayo, <i>Vanishing Daughters</i> in conversation with Miles Harvey</p> <p>3 p.m. Have you been told, "Don't go to Chicago's South Side"? Join artist Tonika Johnson and sociologist Dr. Maria Krysan, coauthors of <i>Don't Go</i>, for a conversation on how fear-based warnings became modern-day redlining—and how we can unlearn the narratives that uphold segregation</p> <p>4 p.m. Spaces of Wonder: Chicago's World Fair and the Fine Arts Building featuring Lindsay Fullerton, <i>Ephemeral City: A People's History of Chicago's Century of Progress World's Fair</i> and Keir Graff, <i>Fine Arts Building: Music, Magic, and Murder!</i> in conversation with Michele Morano</p> <p>5 p.m. Dr. Richard Burt, <i>Kill Switch: The History of How Viruses Shaped Humanity and Led to COVID-19</i> and former U.S. Representative and Senator from Illinois Mark Kirk in conversation with Kevin Davis</p>	<p>10 a.m. Identity, Connection, and the American Dream: Two New Short Story Collections featuring Annel López, <i>I'll Give You a Reason: Stories</i> and Juan Carlos Reyes, <i>Three Alarm Fire: Stories</i> in conversation with Michael Zapala</p> <p>11 a.m. Fighting for Survival and Humanity in Flooded and Wired Worlds: Two New Dystopian/Post-Apocalyptic Sci-Fi Novels featuring Eiren Catfall, <i>All the Water in the World</i> and Scott Kenemore, <i>Edge of the Wire</i> in conversation with Juan Martinez</p> <p>12 p.m. Lost and Found: Belonging, Eventually featuring Christina G. Clancy, <i>The Snowbirds</i> and Sonali Dev, <i>There's Something About Mira</i> in conversation with Rachel Swearingen</p> <p>1 p.m. Jane S. Smith, <i>A Blacklist Education: American History, a Family Mystery, and a Teacher Under Fire</i> in conversation with Elizabeth Taylor</p> <p>2 p.m. Pulitzer Prize-winner Kathleen DuVal, <i>Native Nations: A Millennium in North America</i> in conversation with Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, Northwestern University School of Education and Social Policy</p> <p>3 p.m. The Next Draft: Five Novelists on Revision, Discovery, and the Journey to Publication featuring Rowan Beard, <i>The Divorcées</i>, Blair Hurley, <i>Minor Prophets</i>, Daria Lavelle, <i>Aftertaste</i>, Ananda Lima, and A. D. Nauman, <i>Down the Steep</i></p> <p>4 p.m. Ashlee Piper, <i>No New Things: A Radically Simple 30-Day Guide to Saving Money, the Planet, and Your Sanity</i> in conversation with Stephanie Douglass</p> <p>5 p.m. Elizabeth Earley, <i>Little Deaths All in a Row: Essays on Sex and Death</i> in conversation with Karen Hawkins, Founder, Publisher and Rebel in Chief of <i>Rebellious Magazine</i></p>	<p>11 a.m. Dr. Pamela Ayo Yelunde, <i>Deeply Beloved: Prince, Spirituality, and This Thing Called Life</i> in conversation with The Rev. Amity Carrubba</p>	<p>Do Not Submit Open Mic Storytelling 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Theme: Butterfly Effect 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. Theme: Wild Card 3 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. Theme: Gut Feeling Storytellers & spectators of all ages welcome!</p>

NEAR SOUTH PLANNING BOARD'S PRINTERS ROW LIT FEST 2025 40th Anniversary



“A visual and visceral banquet that goes on for blocks”

An oral history of the Printers Row Lit Fest, as it turns forty



Bette Cerf Hill



The Printers Row Book Fair was but a one-year-old just learning to walk when we started Newcity in 1986. Since our ambition then was merely to be a neighborhood newspaper, the fledgling event was one of the biggest stories in our small “town.” We covered it accordingly, assembling a multi-page guide to the budding fair. And we always had a booth to give out our little local publication.

Over time, we both grew up. I got involved in programming, producing an emerging writers panel each year, and we were inspired to launch the Lit 50, which would lead to other such lists and shape the identity of this publication. For a while, we also produced a well-attended party during the event for both writers and booksellers.

We’ve both hit middle age now, and it’s a great time to take a look at how our neighborhood fair grew to become the preeminent literary festival in the Midwest.

— Brian Hiegelke

PART 1.

The Eighties

A New Cultural Gathering For a New Neighborhood

By the mid-eighties architects Larry Booth and Harry Weese’s initiative to transform the vacant publishing houses of Printers Row into a residential district had started to take shape. One ambitious cultural producer, Bette Cerf Hill, found herself right at the heart of it, running what was later called the Near South Planning Board, mostly funded by real estate developers looking to bring attention to the new neighborhood. In the summer of 1985, they launched the Printers Row Book Fair.

Bette Cerf Hill, (founder, Printers Row Book Fair): Chicago was the heart of the printing industry and its heart was clustered around

Dearborn Station, where the heavy paper was brought in and books were shipped out. Between 1886 and 1922 more than forty buildings were constructed in what is now The Printers Row Historic District. To honor that history, the Near South Planning Board created Printers Row Book Fair, now known as Printers Row Lit Fest.

Barbara Lynne (Co-founder): The idea for a book fair, and subsequently a lit fest, was Bette Hill’s. When in Paris, she saw the book-sellers along the Seine and thought that would be something we could do in Dearborn Station (which was a vacant wreck at that time). Bette always had a vision for something wonderful. My job was to make the

vision a reality. We were a good team. As the book fair grew each year, I spent most of my time on that and Bette focused on the authors, the number of which also grew each year. I rarely heard any of the authors speak as there was always some crisis on the street that kept me busy.

HILL: Bruce Sagan, who owned his own printing plant on the South Side, suggested we put up book stalls like they have in Paris, but this is Chicago and the outdoors is sometimes a thing. But a once-a-year book fair seemed possible. I told Barbara Lynne, my partner at the planning board, about this new idea and she broke into tears. She knew all the details would be up to her and they were.

We invited bookstore owners to a meeting to ask how and if it could be done. They offered help and Brad Jonas of Powell’s Bookstore became an early champion. He helped us lure pasty-faced bookstore owners to bring their precious books out into the sunshine. Or worse, they asked, “What if it rains?”

We offered plastic tarps and promised they would not be needed.

And they were not needed for the first several years, but then one day the sky did open, the clear plastic tarps were thrown over the

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books and everyone ran for shelter. We thought it was the worst thing that could happen. I remember watching, sadly, thinking it was the end. When the rain stopped, people came out of their shelters and quickly went back to where they had been, and began wiping away the rain drops to see the titles hiding safely beneath. Everything sprang back to life.

Lois Weisberg, fabled commissioner of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, offered encouragement and printed the first charming black-and-white posters while giving us our first program director, who enlisted the 1984-85 Northwestern Triquarterly authors to speak.

Barbara Lynne



Ellen Sandmeyer (co-founder, Sandmeyer's Bookstore): Seeing the many-block expanse of the lit fest these days, with tents and booths full of books, booksellers, authors and all kinds of literary action, it is hard to believe that it all began as a volunteer community effort. Powerhouse visionary Bette Cerf Hill had brought together an advisory committee of publishers, booksellers, writers and neighbors who worked for a year in advance of the one-day-long inaugural book fair. It was quite a feat bringing it to vibrant life.

My husband Ulrich and I had front-row seats, as it was to take place right in front of Sandmeyer's Bookstore on Dearborn Street. What I remember best of that first exciting morning that first year was that when all was ready to begin there proved to be no electricity available to power the sound system. In short order, Bette magicked up a very long, sturdy extension cord that we plugged in at the shop, ran out the front door, down the steps (carefully marked with caution tape), then around the corner to the stage so the show could go on. And what a show it has been from that moment on!

Hill: The first year we promised booksellers that we would take all the books inside on Saturday night and put them out again on Sunday morning. The workers at Sagan's

The Southtown Economist did the heavy lifting. The only tent we had was to house speakers. I remember a talk by sports announcer Jack Brickhouse, who had put together a book of funny letters from his fans. I remember being outside and seeing the tent lit from within and hearing the laughter of the audience echo down Dearborn Street. The exhausted, sunburned booksellers and neighbors and visitors all said they loved it.

Jack Scott (lute player): I started seeing signs for something called the Printers Row Book Fair. So I thought, what a great idea. It was all up and down Dearborn Street from the Dearborn Station to what is now called Ida B. Wells Drive. I loved it! There were book dealers from the Midwest and some from all around the country.

There was a mainstage for music, readings, and what-have-you. I got an introduction to Barbara Lynne, who was in charge of the whole operation. I explained that I played jazz on the flute and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century solo stuff on the lute. She thought the lute was a great idea. She put me on the mainstage as the first act in the morning both Saturday and Sunday. This continued without a break for well over the next twenty-five years, when Barbara Lynne retired. It was a good run.

PART 2.

The Nineties

The Book Fair Becomes an Institution

In just a few years, the Printers Row Book Fair established itself as a pillar of Chicago's literary community. By then a site just blocks away had been selected for the new main branch of the Chicago Public Library system, and a design competition was held for the commission. Mayor Harold Washington, an avid reader who had championed the project, passed away suddenly before construction got underway, and the new library was named in his honor.

Hill: A few years later, to give it a bit of class, and in honor of the new main library opening, we began to give the Harold Washington Literary Award. The winner is the keynote speaker at Printers Row Lit Fest. It started with Susan Sontag and has included Ralph Ellison, Margaret Atwood, Kurt Vonnegut and so many more.

Jason Pettus (founder, Chicago Center for Literature and Photography): Back in the 1990s, my friends and I were all a bunch of broke, snotty, perpetually drunk twentysomething poetry slammers, and the Printers Row Lit Fest officially wanted nothing to do with us. We therefore had to sneak into all the events, usually accomplished through the late Shappy Seasholtz, who at the time was the highly connected general manager of Quimby's Bookstore in the suddenly hot Wicker Park.

My fondest Printers Row memory from those years was Shappy somehow managing to get us backstage access to a big event going on sponsored by Granta (promoting one of their "Best of Young American Novelists" issues), and a bunch of other big names being in town for the fest and all of them sneaking into the backstage area too.

By the end of the night, I found myself quite drunk in a booth at a bar with Sherman Alexie, Maggie

Estep and Mark Leyner, the always boisterous Shappy being our filthy emcee, and I remember thinking, "I'm a real Chicago writer now."

"I found myself quite drunk in a booth at a bar with Sherman Alexie, Maggie Estep and Mark Leyner, the always boisterous Shappy being our filthy emcee, and I remember thinking, 'I'm a real Chicago writer now.'"

Doug Seibold (founder, Agate Publishing): I went to my first Printers Row Book Fair probably about 1988 or 1989, and I thought it was terrific. I was reviewing books for the Tribune then, also doing miscellaneous freelance writing assignments, also helping out with The Chicago Review, and then editing a trade magazine as my day job, but I was more than up for everything I could do to take part in Chicago's diffuse literary scene. What I remember most from that first event was the presence of many little magazines, which was very much the kind of publishing that interested me most at the time.

Then in 1991 I went to work for a small press based in River North, and we had a table at the 1992 show, and that was my first time staffing

the event. But that company was starting to fail; and I don't think we had a table at the next few shows, before I was laid off in the summer of ninety-four.

I spent the next several years trying to get my own company started, and I remember going to the show through the rest of the nineties, but it was always a mixed blessing, because while I always enjoyed the scene, I felt very self-conscious about my failure to launch my own company, year after year.

Vincent Francone (author): My first Printers Row was the one I worked while employed as a book clerk for the Aspidistra Bookshop, in 1996, a year after the heatwave that killed 739 people in Chicago. This wasn't that summer, but it was hot enough, especially when clad in black, as I perpetually was in my twenties.

Steamy and rising as the day changed from AM to PM, I began visibly sweating, wiping my brow with my sleeve. My boss decided that maybe a beer would help us all, so off I went to the convenience store on Harrison and Dearborn for the first of many six-packs. Drinking on the job was de rigeur for the Aspidistra, so why wouldn't we tip a few during Printers Row?

Sure, festival attendees offered sideways glances and, in the case of one professorial browser, outright judgment to the tune of "Bit early, no?" My boss appeared on the verge of admonishing the man when I did what I was hired to do—I stepped in and presented the friendly face of the bookshop. "Let me know if I can help you."

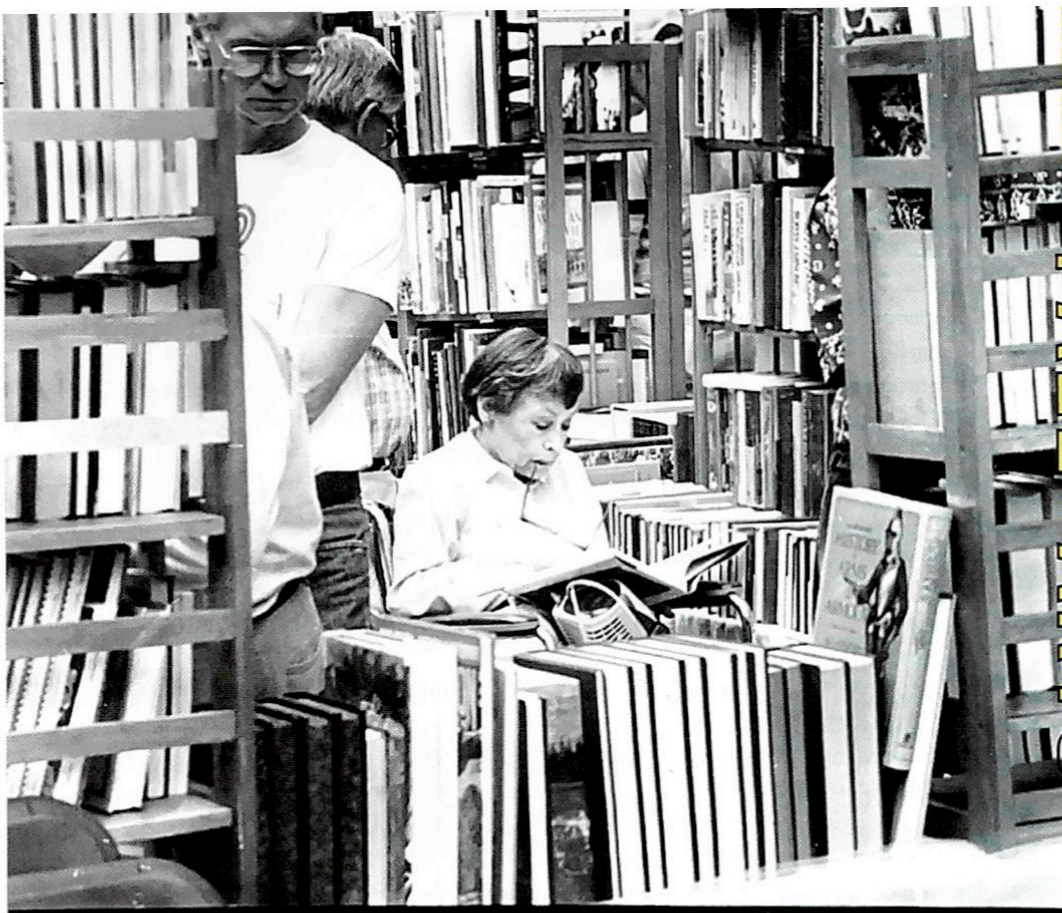
Professor Prig asked about the price of a book that was, of course, unmarked, and I deferred to the boss.

"Ten."

"Would you take six?"

The answer: a definitive "No."

The Professor commented on the lackluster quality of our stock. He didn't know that we'd sold a lot of books that day, great ones, poetry and art books and history tomes flying from the tent, rare books going to the collectors, well-worn paperbacks to the students. One of us was supposed to drive back to the store and haul fresh stock back to the festival, but that plan had gone to the dogs. The Profes-



sor couldn't know that, but my boss made sure to tell him, "I've read more books than you've touched!" "Wow," said the Prof, "I didn't know Louis L'Amour wrote that many."

I waited for the boss to yell something truly rude, as I'd witnessed him do many times before. But he smiled and said, "I gotta admit, that was a good one." Where the hell was I? What had I stumbled onto? A place where bickering took such literate form, where sweltering heat and beer mixed with erudite barbs and bookish obsession. Goddamn, I was in heaven and hell simultaneously!

Inferno eclipsed Paradise soon enough. The sun grew in intensity and the alcohol fogged my head as the boss reminded me about sales tax I'd not been applying.

"Oh yeah. Of course," I said just as a line of buyers approached presenting books, wallets, and the task of calculating and adding 6.25 percent to each purchase. I did my best, fudged a few averages, erred mostly on the side of overcharging, argued with one savvy woman who proved better at doing math in her head, and told the boss to keep my wages for the day to make up the difference. I'd been more than compensated.

PART 3.

The 2000s

The Chicago Tribune Era Begins

In the early 2000s, the internet had not yet fundamentally disrupted the newspaper business, and the Tribune was in search of opportunities for expansion beyond the printed page. While it made big bets on various digital undertakings, it also purchased Printers Row Book Fair from the Near South Planning Board, the organization that had founded it since inception, soon renaming it Printers Row Lit Fest.

Owen Youngman (the Chicago Tribune's vice president of development when the newspaper bought the Printers Row Book Fair): For many years, the Chicago Tribune had not only the ambition, but also the money, to try to reach nearly anyone in the city and suburbs who could read. The year 2002 was particularly busy: Between August and November, we bought Chicago magazine,

launched the daily tabloid RedEye, and acquired the Printers Row Book Fair.

It was a time, not so long after the first dot-com bubble had burst, when it made a lot of sense to pursue all kinds of different readers, and of course the ad revenue that generally came with them. Chicago magazine targeted affluent suburbanites who regretted having left Lincoln Park for Naperville; RedEye was for young urban commuters who wanted to get the day's news in the time it took to ride the El from Belmont to Fullerton; and the book fair was for people who really, really, *really* liked to read. Maybe books could be our gateway drug?

We called it a "literacy strategy," as we also were giving a fair amount of money to literacy programs through our philanthropic arms to help even more people read. The Near South Planning Board was

Perennial, a Lyric

Visualize this: You are part of a large live weekend audience. You know why. It's the commensurability of human participants & scores of bound physical objects engaged in something so natural as a wonderful weekend trance. It makes you happy, you feel the lilt of creativity's infinitude & you can't keep your hands to yourself. Your store-window eyes, heh! In the context of worldviews, you reason, PRLF brings new meaning to the phrase *the great outdoors*, because something miraculous is happening here—the forests have come to you, and now you choose to get lost in them, one way or another. Such a convenience!

Congratulations, PRLF! You want to say out loud. You'll be heard by everyone but so be it. Way since before Covid happened, years before that, you've been coming to Printers Row Lit Fest as an observer & listener, a buyer of books. You're awed, impressed by each event, its myriad hosts & authors, which draws the city to it with ease & depth.

Curiosity is a sensible hallucination made real. What cognitive joy!

Why, it seems that almost everyone is talking about this. You wonder what experts might say about PRLF's predilection for large audiences, which is exactly the reason why humanity has no trouble making a beeline for it in early September. So many tents with clear signs. Event stages. Vitality's echoes. Tired feet. The mind can go numb if you let it. You're pretty sure PRLF has a few distinct anthropomorphic opinions of its own regarding these annual literary gatherings. Just keep your senses open!

You're an experimental writer, a novelist & poet. You want to be somebody. Doesn't everyone? Where do you find inspiration? Yes, you're quite happy to be here & you want to say that you too are well-trained to occupy any creative perch, voice, & point of view. *I'm a big fan*, you say of PRLF. Go ahead, let that settle in for a minute. What you are saying is that you're a big fan, literally, under a grand tent on Dearborn Street. In a different tent maybe. There could be more fans. You're being fictional. You're Speculative. Delirious. It depends on the weather. Things can get hot in Chicago & they do. It can rain. If you spot a camera crew walking around, then you know we're good. There's plenty of water to drink backstage, on-stage, off-stage. Laying sideways in your bag of books & bookmarks. You're different, you'll take an espresso anytime. Bump into someone you know.

Be quiet, an author is reading! These things happen every year. Literature appeals to the rationalism of enterprise. Maybe you'll sign some books, sell them. Thank your readers.

You can think of so many keywords to describe how you feel about PRLF, now that you're a panelist, a reader, quasi-modo literary toro. What are your pronouns again? *Congratulations!* You say once more. It's 2025. Listen. Let me be clear. Those books don't lie. *Are your ears ringing with your favorable critiques, PRLF?* Deservedly so. Turning forty is a fine reason to celebrate. Hey, what will you do? You want human agency. You'll follow the trance.

— Ignatius Valentine Aloysius

the kind of nonprofit that shared many of our goals, and we heard through the grapevine that they might be open to a conversation about the book fair. "This is part of an ongoing effort by the Tribune to support reading, writing and literature," I told Ron Grossman—still writing for the Tribune today!—when he called me for a quote about the purchase.

Donna Seaman (Booklist editor-in-chief and author): What to ask a panel of brilliant and original writers for whom English was a second language? Aleksandar Hemon was a fairly new author then, I think this was in 2002, and he arrived fresh from a soccer pitch. Chitra Divakaruni was poised, warm, and thoughtful. Ib-tisam Barakat was keen, enthused, and gracious. I invited them each to talk about a word in their first language that did not have an equivalent in English. Their responses were startling, poignant, passionate and redolent of loss and longing.

Jerry Brennan (founder, Tortoise Books): As a book person who lived in the South Loop, I loved Lit Fest long before I had any notion of being a publisher. (When my ex-fiancée and I were planning our wedding in 2005, I nixed her first proposed wedding date because it was the same weekend as Lit Fest. This wasn't the reason we didn't get married, but I know for a fact it didn't help, either.) My neighborhood friends and I would wander the tents for hours, accumulating bags of books and then comparing purchases at sidewalk tables in front of Kasey's or Gourmand. I bought some fantastic books—many that entertained, and one or two that changed my life.

Seibold: By 2002, I'd resolved to bootstrap Agate out of my basement. We were too broke to take part those next few years—and didn't really have enough books to justify taking part, frankly—until 2005, when we got a table on the east side of Dearborn about a hundred yards north of Polk, where we displayed our little array of releases, which probably amounted to fewer than ten at that point.

But that started our streak of appearing every year for the next four-



teen years. We eventually moved into a tent on Dearborn, where first we occupied two tables, or one side, but eventually four tables, or half the tent, about two spots north of Polk, for the better part of a decade.

Youngman: Our revenue goals meant we needed to do things differently. We brought on a title sponsor, Target, for the 2003 edition of the event, and lined up a number of other advertisers. We expanded into indoor venues in the neighborhood, like the Harold Washington Library. We charged admission to high-profile events. And for branding purposes we “Tribune-ized” the event with dozens of writers and editors (and vice presidents) appearing on panels, as moderators, and even as featured authors. To their credit, people like Bette Cerf Hill and Bonnie Sanchez-Carlson gave us space to do things differently, even as we invaded their neighborhood and reimagined their event as a revenue generator as well as a readers’ paradise.

The title sponsorship went away after only a year, but to me it was equally important that we formally link up with the Chicago Public Library as a lead partner, not lead sponsor. That happened through the good offices of Commissioner Mary Dempsey starting with the twentieth book fair in 2004. Before

long we had moved the Tribune Literary Awards into the events, renamed it the Lit Fest, and further broadened the kind of advertisers we went after. (As it turned out, bringing in revenue was always harder than asking literary editor Liz Taylor to bring in great authors.)

Elizabeth Taylor (Literary Editor at Large, Chicago Tribune): A simple enough maneuver: Collect two legendary writers for lunch. Anticipate martinis. A bright, cloudless June afternoon in June. Printers Row Lit Fest would kick off the next day.

The walk south on Dearborn was more treacherous and nerve-wracking than driving on Chicago streets and dodging potholes at rush hour. With past Harold Washington Literary Award winner Studs Terkel at one side and then-current Harold Washington Literary Award winner Margaret Atwood on the other, each gripped my arm for balance.

We gingerly navigated a maze of electrical wires, ropes and hoses and cinderblocks and sandbags. Finally reaching the Prairie restaurant in what was once the Hotel Morton, we maintained our walking formation right into a curved booth. It had become clear that I was on duty as interpreter. She spoke rather softly with that Canadian lilt, and he had retained his

old radio voice. Both of them had a well-trained finger on the pulse of even the most remote regions of America, but now neither could hear one another so I did my best to sustain the pace, language and passion of their conversational volley.

They were old friends. In January 1976, when Mayor Richard J. Daley was alive and printing presses had not yet vanished from Printers Row, Margaret Atwood came to Chicago to talk with Studs for his radio show on WFMT. She was known as a poet and had published her first novel “Surfacing.” He had written “Division Street” and “Working.” He had not yet won the Pulitzer Prize, but provided this then-little-known poet and novelist with the imprimatur of his attention.

A few months after our lunch, Atwood’s essay “He Springs Eternal” appeared in *The New York Review of Books*. The first line: “If Studs Terkel were Japanese, he’d be a Sacred Treasure.”

As Studs was fond of saying, “Curiosity won’t kill this cat.”

Seibold: Each year one or two members of my growing staff would dedicate part of their weekends to staff the tent in shifts, but really, a big part of the experience was doing most of the load in and load out

with my family, which at the time included two kids in elementary and middle school. For about seven or eight years, it was mostly us four Seibolds selling our wares on the street every year. It was a lot of work, but it was also a fun thing for us to do all together.

We’d get up early to drive down to Polk Street for the load-in, set our boxes of books on the table tops, move the van, then get to work on our display. After selling all day, we’d repack the books, stack them on the table tops, and cover them with plastic tarp in the event of overnight rain. Sunday, we could get there a little later, but then we had the load out at the end of the day, which was always slower and entailed more traffic and frayed nerves in dealing with other eager-to-leave participants.

We’d buy the kids lunch and treats to fortify them through the effort, and then dinner in Printers Row on Saturday. I think they saw it as an adventure, and a way to help the still-fledgling company. We usually shared our tent with at least one other exhibitor, so they could see how we worked with our neighbors and check out what the other folks had for sale. They also got a feel for dealing with the public, and for seeing how their parents dealt with the various people who approached our display. When they were really young, before they could muster their own patter, we’d feed them prepared lines for discussing the books with passing browsers.

Bayo Ojikutu (author): It was a different End Times, twenty-odd years ago. I’d just seen, or was soon to see, Studs Terkel holding an impromptu audience there where Plymouth Court ends as it meets Polk. I took it that the little giant man was to be found on the festival program schedule. A lanyard decorated with Tribune Company markings bordered his name in quotation marks—“Studs”—draping crookedly over his open-collared shirt between what we used to call “sportscoat” lapels. There were checkers and colors stitched into the jacket, and the shirt. Perhaps a tie unraveled from the raconteur’s grizzled throat. Studs regaled those gathered outside the festival tent of Old Chicago, the American Cen-

above: Photo: Anne Yoder

—LIT EVENTS

**PRINTERS ROW LIT FEST
AT FORTY**

SEPTEMBER 6-7

Over four decades the literary festival has grown up with both the neighborhood, where its founding year saw the industrial printing houses still being turned over into residential lofts, and this very publication, which was started as a South Loop community newspaper a year after the festival's debut. After a tumultuous period—the festival returned to original ownership by the Tribune just one year before the onset of the pandemic—the festival has found its footing and entered a new era, celebrating this milestone year with essential Chicago writer Sandra Cisneros, who's also receiving the Harold Washington Literary Award.

THE SEASON OF PYNCHON

SEPTEMBER 26, OCTOBER 7

America's most reclusive literary giant finds himself at the center of two cultural moments in the autumn of his eighty-eighth year. On September 26, Paul Thomas Anderson's "One Battle After Another" will be released in theaters—based on Pynchon's 1990 novel, "Vineland," it stars Leonardo DiCaprio, with a reported budget ranging anywhere from \$140-\$175 million, depending on the source. Just eleven days later, the author releases his ninth novel, "Shadow Ticket." This being Pynchon, details are scarce, but the setting is Milwaukee in 1932, and the story begins with a private eye who sets out "locating and bringing back the heiress of a Wisconsin cheese fortune who's taken a mind to go wandering."

"AMERICAN PROPHETS"AMERICAN WRITERS MUSEUM
OPENS NOVEMBER 21

The American Writers Museum's series of author events exploring the connection between spirituality and craft leads into the opening of a new exhibition this November, which will examine "the profound ways literature reflects and influences our understanding of religion." The exhibition will gather artifacts from the worlds of American literature, film and music to show "the ever-evolving relationship between religion and American culture."

— TODD HIEGGELKE

tury passed by, the movement, struggle, Harold long gone, Lady Jane, Richard II, of the people themselves. He couldn't have been ninety, no, but he was: ninety-something by then, in fact. I had to keep it moving, as they say. Headed one way or the other. Studs graced this place for some years thereafter, but I would never cross the man's path again.

I had an assigned panel on the docket. Big deal with big names of the day, some friends, more strangers. Good souls for the most, casting light on grim times: Mission Accomplished and all, so what's the point anymore? One of the newspaper Lions (no longer with us either), served as moderator. I recall that he was not particularly impressed with my first book, that maybe he had taken umbrage at some parts of it. He'd made this clear in our pre-panel meeting early that morning. So it must have been after this session when I saw Studs, that's right. Recall that the rhythm of the Lion's panel question intended for me resonated with that forewarned derision. And yet the moderator posed himself as equally enamored with another panelist's work. That writer/panelist is a friend from a place I knew well, so the countervailing approval struck me as telling of the setting, of the festival of literature back then, much as it told of the Lion.

My son had not been born yet, but my wife sat among those packed in the sweltering big tent underneath suspended fan blades, spinning to little effect. She was accompanied by a friend of ours from my adolescent neighborhood and his companion at the time, this stunning young lady from the Abyssinian side of the continent of my father's birth. After the panel, after seeing Studs, they mentioned the audience members' heads nodding in agreement at whatever response I'd offered to the moderator's prompt. I probably cracked back with a quip about how the sweaty strangers likely nodded to create a head-level breeze, desperately seeking to move air and lower the tent's temperature. But I think it was my friend's mate who replied, "No," without a comforting smile nor a nod of her own,

in that corrective African way. Without speaking another word, she assured, "they heard you."

As we move through these End Times, I can not say whether it was "mo' better" back then, but I do believe that Chicago was more Chicago with its paper Lions officiating unintended nods, and Studs holding court on the corner, crooked insignia all about him. I wish I'd stopped to hear the rest of his story.

Cindy Gountanis Lynch: In 2003, my husband, Christopher Lynch, had his first book published, "Chicago's Midway Airport: The First Seventy-Five Years." While Chris signed books at the Lake Claremont Press tent, our triplet two-year-olds, Angela, Katherine and Pierce and I explored the book fair.

The book fair always provided unique exhibits for children. The books that kids loved came to life with physical characters interacting with the audience into live entertainment as they greeted the children from the booths. One year Angelina Ballerina was dancing on the stage. Another year a trailer turned into a storybook house with separate rooms. Costumed storytellers also read aloud to the kids. That year it was the Berenstain Bears, who walked around, greeting kids. But the real star that summer in 2003 was Barney the purple dinosaur, along with his friends. Many may forget that in that era Barney was a superstar who was like Taylor Swift and Beyoncé combined in popularity.

We ushered our triplet children to meet Barney. To say they were excited would be an understatement. They were giggling with anticipation, until we turned a corner, and standing at seven feet tall was Barney. Our daughter Katherine and son Pierce transformed from excitement to sheer terror and began wailing with fright. They ran and hid behind my skirts, peering out with dread. The only brave child was Angela, who ran up to Barney and gave him a big hug.

Randy Albers (longtime professor, Columbia College, founder, Story Week): On Saturday, I introduced Dave Eggers in a steamy,

packed-to-the-gills community room of the Columbia College residence hall. Characteristically engaging, witty, unpretentious, Dave read from new work and carried on a Q&A that could have gone on much longer if not for the tight PR schedule and the heat in that breathless space. Then, the next day, I presented one of my literary idols, Jim Harrison, fresh off his publication of "True North." We had lunch be-

"As we move through these End Times, I can not say whether it was 'mo' better' back then, but I do believe that Chicago was more Chicago with its paper Lions officiating unintended nods, and Studs holding court on the corner, crooked insignia all about him. I wish I'd stopped to hear the rest of his story."

forehand at an outdoor cafe on Dearborn and talked about subjects near and dear to our hearts—writing, food, hunting, fishing in the North Country. We were almost late for the reading at the Winter Garden of the Harold Washington Library, where a very large crowd waited for Jim to work his word-magic. But arrive we did, and word-magic was indeed woven.

I was struck by the contrasts between these two men: Eggers with his youthful good looks, hip

argot, voice clean and clear; and Harrison, features weathered by the years and the elements, one eye lost and in a perpetual squint from a youthful accident, voice a buck-saw rasp from years of cigarettes and drink. Two very different personalities, at very different points in their careers, but joined by their commitment to storytelling.

Seaman: My admiration for Barry Lopez had me quaking as I prepared for my Printers Row conversation with him. I spent hours reading and working on my introduction and questions. I arrived early at Jones College Prep and was happy to see that a table with a tablecloth was set up on the auditorium stage with mics. I like to have something to hide behind as well as a surface for my notes. But when Barry arrived, he laughed. "What's this for?" he joked, "a Soviet inquisition? We don't need all that." He asked the volunteers who were running the venue to please remove the table. He gestured to me to grab a mic and bring a chair close to the front of the stage. I was clutching my notes; Barry said, "You won't need those." He was so relaxed and amused. He wanted a spontaneous and organic give-and-take. I read my introduction, set aside my notes, and asked my first question, and Barry, a phenomenally acute observer, spellbinding storyteller, intrepid explorer and deep thinker, took us on a thought expedition of extraordinary, mind-opening dimensions. This was in 2004. In 2023, I attended a poetry reading at the Independence branch of the Chicago Public Library hosted by the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame. Afterward a man came up to me to say that he remembered me from that long-ago Printers Row, that he never forgot that profound event with Barry Lopez.

Billy Lombardo (author): My first Printers Row was as an author on a panel of debut fiction to celebrate the publication of my first book, "The Logic of a Rose: Chicago Stories." Oh, to bump into literati like Stuart Dybek and Reg Gibbons and Elizabeth Taylor and Alex Kotlowitz and Donna Seaman and Sara Paretsky and Frank Deford and John Irving and Richard Ford

and Luis Urrea and Joe Meno and Christine Sneed and Tony Fitzpatrick and Sting! (Whaaaaat!) while overwearing my author lanyard and holding my Printers Row Lit Fest swag bag (this was in the days of the SWAG bag). Whaat? I wasn't sure life could get any better.

Seaman: One year, it might have been 2007, the weather turned on us. Thunderstorms and books displayed in open-sided tents do not a good match make. More alarmingly, I was moderating a panel of fiction writers when the rain gusted in. I can't recall the complete

lineup, but I was talking with Ana Castillo when I heard thunder and realized that we were sitting on a metal stage in metal chairs with metal microphones and stands. The audience was also seated in metal chairs. All perfect conduits for lightning. I reluctantly called the program to a hasty close.

Amy Danzer (director of programming): Confession: the Printers Row Lit Fest was already twenty-four years old when my grad school bestie Paula Derdiger invited me to meet her at Dearborn Station for a book fair in 2009.

After a late night of carousing (table dancing, a screen door, bloody nose and other shenanigans), I considered taking a pass. But I pulled it together, and though I'm not one to champion destiny or planets aligning, when I emerged from my Red Line stop, I was Dorothy in the Emerald City. (Fun fact: "The Wizard of Oz" was published in Printers Row.) Whole city blocks were closed off to cars and opened to books. Thousands and thousands of glorious books. My eyes were black and blue after the screen-door incident, but they saw a magical world that day.



[[[in my soloem voice]]]

my favorite part of printer's row is

i.

after check-in &/or panel(s).

nina [who be blonde, silver & smilin] whispers
towards me, an invite to her penthouse full of book(s).

& dem somebody(s) who have dey name(s) on spine(s)
of volume(s) of verse dat save(d) my life dat time
my nose got wide(r) from Dove's meter,

be sittin within ear-hustle lenf of me. dey on a stool
wif bit(s) of brie & grape stuc(k) tween dey teef. singin *My Girl*,

after check-in & panel(s).

ii.

silver-blond nina is always smilin & whisperin.

always wif a tote flappin thru plymouth court.
silver-blond nina red. rushin to beat a call-time.

or rushin to solicit a poet bout a feature
at her monthly open-mic [out in de western burb(s)].
she red & rushin to her seat as de sun river-dance(is)

upside de head of de tent we are under. we
lissen to Dove in meter. yes. at printer's row

silver-blond nina is always whisperin. & smilin.

iii.

always wif a tote flappin thru plymouth court.

among a multitude of folk wif vary(d) sunburn(s),
shape(s) & height(s). age(is). grateful for 4pm

sunday. when all of de book(s) a whole buncha percent off.
at 4pm sunday, dem tote(s) weigh mo(re). belly(s) be mo(re)
poke(d)-out. & de wine in bottle(s) of merlot be saltine-thin.

promise. favorite part. silver-blond nina hug(s) me
as if we havent hug(d) in a ghazal of sunday(s).

always. wif our tote(s) flappin thru plymouth court.

— avery r. young

PART 4.

The 2010s

Trib Goes Tronc, But Lit Fest Stays Steady

In the wake of the Great Recession, newspapers around the country were struggling with reduced advertising budgets and a shift away from print, and the once-invincible Tribune's fortunes started to change. By 2016, the company would embark on an ill-fated rebranding as Tronc (Tribune Online Content), adopting a "tech startup culture" posture. Printers Row Lit Fest mostly felt the same, save for a slightly smaller footprint and fewer corporate marketing activations.

Cynthia Pelayo (author and poet):

I had just graduated from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and was doing what many of us with MFAs in writing do, submitting my work everywhere, and alas, I was receiving rejections everywhere as well. I attended the Printers Row Lit Fest that year, just to walk around. As a recent grad I didn't really have money to buy books, but I just wanted to be around books. It was there that I stopped at this independent publisher's table to look at their books. They struck up a conversation with me and I told them my name. They said that my name was familiar, and I told them I had sent them a manuscript to review and gave them the synopsis. They said they knew that submission and would be in touch soon. That publisher went on to publish that book, and another.

Danzer: Years later, when one of the Lit Fest's guardian angels, artistic director Elizabeth Taylor, invited me to moderate a panel, I was over the moon. I was invited to moderate the following year as well, and it was then that I met my partner Billy Lombardo. He was working the table for Polyphony Lit, the high-school literary journal he founded when the fest wasn't even old enough to drink.

Lombardo: I was there when a dance party broke out in the hospitality suite. It was started by a poet!

Brennan: I was thrilled when I started Tortoise Books in 2012 and realized I'd be able to sell books at Lit Fest, but it did mean a change in my old routines. Gone were the lazy days of leisurely purchasing. That year I was tethered to one spot, a sidewalk table on the west side of Dearborn. I still lived in the neighborhood, so I loaded my inventory onto one of the building's carts and pushed it across Polk Street to get to my spot—probably the easiest load-in I'll ever get. It was brutally hot that year, and I was mostly alone; I shared table space with some zine friends, and my very pregnant soon-to-be-wife sat with me here and there before retreating to our air-conditioned condo. Still, selling books was electrifying. (Even if it was just my book back then.)

We missed 2013—we didn't have any new titles, and I was reluctantly moving out of the neighborhood for more spacious environs as I grew my family. But we've been there for every festival since, taking up a little more space each year, and getting a little less lonely as we signed on some incredible authors—Giano Cromley, Joe Peterson, Rachel Slotnick, Cyn Vargas, Nestor Gomez, Turi Ryder—and they started working the booths. Once we got by with half a table; soon we had a full table, and an overflowing table, and a table in a tent, and a table-and-a-half, and now two tent tables, close to overflowing. In the early years we were a suitcase press, but we became a two-suitcase press, and then a fill-the-entire-back-of-a-2018-Ford-Escape press. But the real thrill has been working with our authors and seeing them get the direct-selling experience, and meeting new customers—the ones who pick up a book one year and then come back next year to

get more books, the ones who tell you one of your titles was the best book they read in the past year, the ones who show up on a near-rain-out day and wordlessly grab several new titles.

Lori Rader-Day (author): If there was a story I could tell about Printers Row, it would be about finding your writing community. I have a photo from the festival in 2013, when I was first given an "Author" badge, and I have a photo from 2024 when I handed off my Author badge to a younger writer and friend who gave a reading at Printers Row for the first time. It was a nice full-circle moment.

The Storybook Mom (host, The Lil' Lit Stage): To me the Lit Fest will always be my way of honoring the memory and legacy of one of the foremost children's book authors and local Chicago legend, Amy Krouse Rosenthal.

At the thirtieth-anniversary Lit Fest, Amy decided she would see how many of her books she could read in thirty minutes. The thrill for me was that I would assist her by holding a copy of each book up as she performed and since I know all her books by heart it was helpful to keep things moving at a fast pace.

When we got to "Duck! Rabbit!," a New York Times bestseller in which the reader has to decide if the character is a duck or a rabbit, I got to play the Rabbit (or maybe the Duck?) and had a fast-paced word volley back and forth with Amy. I believe it was decided it was a Rabbit.

The final tally was eight books in thirty minutes and I believe it was the last time Rosenthal did Lit Fest. Amy passed away two years later from ovarian cancer but her work lives on in books, films, events and as part of the fabric and joy of Lit Fest.

Michele Weldon (author): In the Dearborn Room of Hotel Blake, I was part of a panel discussion about my 2015 memoir, "Escape Points" (Chicago Review Press), with fellow author Joan Barnes, speaking about her memoir, "Play It Forward: From Gymboree To The Yoga Mat and Beyond," with beloved Chicago Tribune journalist and author Barbara Mahany. The title of our talk was "Struggle and Strength" and I was aware that having a late Sunday afternoon session was not optimal.

I didn't care. I was ecstatic to be speaking with Barbara, who by then had written "Slowing Time: Seeing The Sacred Outside Your Kitchen Door," a mesmerizing, thoughtful book about parenting and life. Two of my three sons were in the crowd—OK, it was not a huge crowd, only about twenty-five people—as was a former journalism student of mine at Northwestern University, and I assume many fans of the billionaire Gymboree founder. There was also an awkward man with a lumpy backpack in the back row who stood up and interrupted often to ask questions based on himself.

I felt seen. Understood. Listened to. As if my words and my work mattered. It helped that the food in the authors' hospitality room

was delicious. I soaked in the applause and the laughter, sighs, head nods of recognition in every session as if I was with the community I was born to be in: a community of book lovers, readers and authors, famous or not, but all immensely grateful to be together.

Dick Simpson (UIC Professor Emeritus and Former Chicago Alderman): Although my memoir had not yet been released by them, I remember attending a panel of Golden Alley Press in 2017. One of the great things about Lit Fest is that smaller publishers can reach a larger audience. Golden Alley's

publisher flew in from Pennsylvania and her Chicago authors spoke especially of memoir writing. It encouraged many audience members and would-be authors to think about writing their own histories. I published my own memoir, "The Good Fight," with Golden Alley the next year.

Lombardo: Joyce Carol Oates-spotting (or it may have been Shelley Duvall now I think about it) camouflaged in a giant hat the color of the tent and listening to an author panel within until she heard someone say, "There's Joyce Carol Oates." And she flitted away.

PART 5.

The 2020s

Independence, a Pandemic and a New Era That Resembles the Past

By the end of the 2010s, the Tribune's bad fortunes had gotten worse, with a steady drumbeat of layoffs and buyouts announced regularly. They informed the festival's founders they would no longer produce the event, and control went back to its original stewards, the Near South Planning Board. Founder Bette Cerf Hill worked with their team to pull off the event on short notice in June 2019.

Of course, the pandemic made the next year's festival

impossible, and when it returned, it had moved to its current September berth.

Youngman: Ultimately, subsequent owners of the Tribune decided not to continue putting on the fair—and a clause in the 2002 contract is probably why we are writing today about forty years of history. That clause stipulated that the Planning Board could buy the event back for the most nominal of sums if the Tribune wanted to walk away, and sure enough, that's what happened in 2019.



Brennan: When the festival moved from June to September, it landed smack near my wife's birthday; she's September 10, and the fest is now always on or near it. So for whatever successes we have there, Lit Fest is still causing me lady troubles. Still, I wouldn't have it any other way.

Seibold: When the pandemic interrupted Printers Row Lit Fest, it made for a welcome break after all of our years of attendance. When the show resumed, moving to September, I think we only took part one year after that. I've done a few panels, but for the most part, our participation has really dwindled, regrettably. Agate is a smaller company now and it's even harder to ask our staff to sacrifice a weekend. I miss it—but I don't miss how demanding it was to exhibit.

Lombardo: A heart attack in 2018 is the only reason I haven't been to every lit fest since 2005.

NaBeela Washington (author): I had just made the move from the bitter East Coast, on the heels of the insurrection, one week before a new presidency was set to begin. A pandemic was still raging. The world felt unmoored, like everything familiar had been stripped away and scattered.

I had chosen the South Loop as my nest. A high-rise off of Ida B. Wells that was only twenty-percent occupied, the hallways echoing with the absence of potential neighbors who had fled the city or never arrived. Most days, the elevator felt like a tomb. But it was

only a several-block walk to Printers Row Lit Fest, and that proximity felt like a lifeline.

I arrived at the 2021 festival nervous, masked, as this was the largest group setting I had been in since the pandemic began. But excited too—my empty tote bag dangled from my shoulder, waiting to be filled. The child in me who loved spending her days in the library, leaving weighed down with books, was curious what she might find. She was most excited about seeing Lemony Snicket, or Daniel Handler, and no uneven vaccine rollout or virus was going to shut her in.

She had started reading "A Series of Unfortunate Events" in middle school, devouring later installments as they were released, so the festival felt like a full-circle moment. Getting to hear from one of her favorite authors—before she learned of his unfortunate mistakes—and being in the company of other book lovers who had also found a way to come together here.

The festival was eerie but hopeful. People were masked and (mostly) spread apart, an introvert's dream, really. Vendors had spaced their tables and programs wider than usual, creating breathing room that felt both cautious and generous. I moved through the day methodically, snagging copies of small-press publications, zines with hand-drawn covers, and books like "White Negroes: When Cornrows Were in Vogue and Other Thoughts on Cultural Appropriation" and "The Secret Lives of Color."

When I finally sat before Daniel Handler, under a large white tent, as he discussed "Poison for Break-

fast," the moment felt surreal. Here was the man who had taught me that terrible things happen to good people, but that humor and intelligence could be survival tools. Looking back, something was fitting about greeting him after his talk during such an uncertain time, when the world itself felt like one never-ending unfortunate event.

I left with my shoulders aching in that familiar, satisfying way. For the first time since moving to Chicago, I felt like I might actually belong somewhere.

Simpson: Laura Washington, Gordon Mantler ("The Multiracial Promise" on Harold Washington) and I (on my book "Chicago's Modern Mayors") had a lively panel discussion on the mainstage about the role of mayors in Chicago's history, and especial-

of my immigrant experience and Chicago story with other residents from all over the Chicago area.

Anne Yoder (Co-publisher, Meekling Press): The most notable thing in my mind is that last year the mood on the street was so surprisingly festive that we were commenting on it during the festival. The weather was perfect but also Kamala had just been named the Democratic candidate and the mood was running hopeful and high post-DNC, when we thought she had a chance of winning.

Hill: It's peaceful and joyous to be in the middle of a street with no mechanical noise.

The only sound is of people talking quietly, if at all, as they turn the pages of books; a sea of books spread out before them like a feast



ly Harold Washington's role in changing Chicago political history. The animated audience discussion which followed demonstrated that every Chicagoan has an opinion on who is Chicago's best mayor and on the good and bad that they have done.

Ugochi Nwaogwugwu (poet): I returned as a panelist and read from my book of poetry and prose called, "Seasons of Separation. An Igbo Family Tale." The experience filled my soul with so much joy to share not only my words, but part

of adventure. Printers Row Lit Fest is a visual and visceral banquet that goes on for blocks. There is excitement and a feeling of calm at the same time—at the exploration of books old and new and at the shared wonder of abundance.

Why schlep all these treasures here? Why plan programs to tickle our imagination and answer questions we didn't know we had? Why has this two-day literary playground been going on for forty years in downtown Chicago? That's like asking why live in the South Loop, or why live downtown?

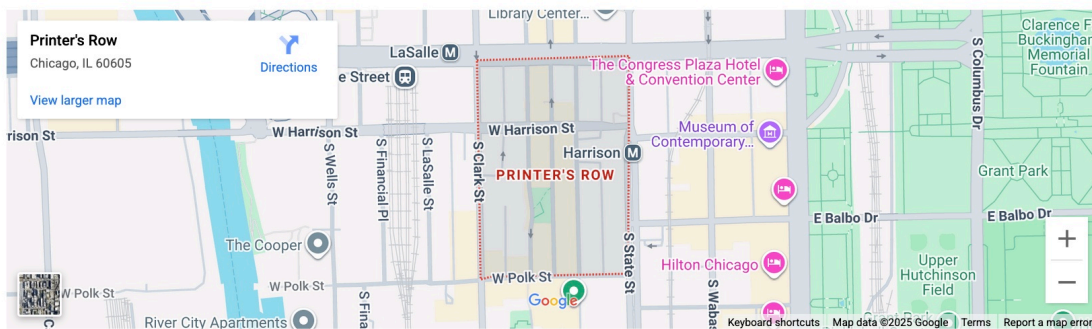




Sunday, September 7th
5pm CT – Joseph & Bessie Feinberg Foundation Stage



MD pioneered America's first hematopoietic stem cell transplant for autoimmune diseases like multiple sclerosis and scleroderma. He was awarded Leukemia Scholar of America, the Lupus Foundation Fidelitas Award, the European van Bekkum Award, the Clinical Research Forum Distinguished Clinical Achievement Award, the "Keys to the Vatican" and is recognized by Science Illustrated for accomplishing one of the Top 10 medical breakthroughs and by Scientific American as one of the Top 50 individuals for improving humanity and outstanding leadership. He has written 150 medical / science articles, four medical textbooks, and two lay books: *Everyday Miracles* and *Kill Switch*.



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