

# **OKLAHOMA** **CENTER FOR THE BOOK**

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## **Winners Announced in 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Oklahoma Book Awards**

A crowd of 200 book lovers, authors, publishers and illustrators gathered for the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Oklahoma Book Awards on Saturday, April 30 at the Embassy Suites Medical Center in Oklahoma City.

Two books — one fiction, the other nonfiction, each dealing with how public corruption and crime can deeply affect a small town or an entire state — won awards in their respective categories at the 33rd annual Oklahoma Book Awards.

*Blood on the Mother Road*, a mystery-suspense thriller by Tulsa author Mary Coley, won the top prize for fiction. Published by Moonglow Books, Coley's eighth novel deals with a small-town plagued by toxic pollution, meth production and a brutal drug ring.

"I'm so choked up!" Coley said, accepting her award. "I want to thank my family for their support and so many people in this room who contributed to my writing journey."

The top prize for non-fiction went to *At War with Corruption: A Biography of Bill Price, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Oklahoma*, by author Michael J. Hightower, who splits his time between Oklahoma City and Charlottesville, VA.

In his book, published by 2 Cities Press, Hightower explores Bill Price's prosecutions in the most pervasive public corruption spectacle in Oklahoma history: the County Commissioner scandal of the 1980s.

The annual book competition is organized by the Oklahoma Center for the Book, a program of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries , in partnership with the Friends of the Oklahoma Center for the Book.

Also honored during the evening was the acclaimed inspirational author Jim Stovall of Tulsa, who was presented with the 2022 Arrell Gibson Award for Lifetime Achievement.

Stovall should be considered the embodiment of achievement. Despite losing his sight in his 20s, he has been a national Olympic weight-lifting champion, a successful investment banker and the best-selling author of more than 50 books, five of which have been made into movies. He was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 2021.

During his acceptance, Stovall admitted he had probably never read a book "cover to cover" before he lost his vision at age 29 and became very isolated and depressed.

A volunteer from the Oklahoma Library for the Blind introduced Stovall to books on tape, which opened the world to him and eventually induced him to write his own books.

"Now," he said, "I write books I can't read and movies I can't see. I dictate every word."

Stovall urged those in the audience who may be longing to write their own book to do so. "Keep the dream alive. Keep the words inside you, and write them down," he added. "Sow those seeds that people need to see and read."

The Center's posthumous Ralph Ellison Award honored Sanora Babb for her contributions to Oklahoma's literary heritage. Babb was born in 1907 and spent much of her childhood in the town of Red Rock, on the Otoe Tribe's reservation.

With a nomadic father who had a penchant for gambling, Babb's family moved often, living in Ponca City, Blackwell, and Waynoka, before settling in a dugout homestead in Baca County, Colorado. After repeated crop failures, the family moved to the Oklahoma Panhandle where Babb graduated as valedictorian from Forgan High School.

After college, she obtained her Associated Press credentials before moving to Los Angeles, California, in 1929 to work as a journalist and later as a radio scriptwriter.

From adolescence and for the next 70 years, Babb wrote countless short stories and poems that were published in a wide variety of literary journals and magazines. Yet despite her prolific output, many scholars believe Babb's writing has not received the attention and respect it deserves.

Her novel, the autobiographical *The Lost Traveler*, first published in 1958 and reissued in 2013, reflects her turbulent teen years. Babb's memoir, *An Owl on Every Post*, published in 1970 and reissued in 2021, chronicles her early childhood on the plains.

Some 60 years after Babb wrote her Dust Bowl novel, *Whose Names are Unknown*, she saw it finally published by OU Press in 2005, the year before her death at age 98 in Los Angeles. Filmmaker Ken Burns has described Babb's Dust Bowl book as "a literary masterpiece."

Organizers said Babb's Ralph Ellison Award will be placed on display in the Oklahoma Room on the second floor of the Metropolitan Library System's Downtown Library in Oklahoma City.

This year's awards recognized books written in 2021 by Oklahomans or about Oklahoma. Of the 115 books entered in this year's competition, 34 were selected as finalists. Thirty-one of the book finalists were by authors, poets, designers or illustrators who live in Oklahoma.

Winners of this year's literary awards are:

**Non-fiction** — *At War with Corruption: A Biography of Bill Price, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Oklahoma*, by Michael J. Hightower of Oklahoma City and Charlottesville, VA., and published by 2 Cities Press.

**Book Design** — *Recovering Ancient Spiro: Native American Art, Ritual, and Cosmic Renewal*, designed by Eric Singleton of Edmond and Julie Allred of Oxford, N.C., and published by the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum.

**Book Illustration** — *Funny Fani'*, illustrated by Josh (Lokosh) Hinson and designed by Corey Feters, both of Ada, and published by White Dog Press.

**Fiction** — *Blood on the Mother Road*, by Mary Coley of Tulsa, and published by Moonglow Books.

**Children's Book** — *Run, Little Chaski! An Inka Trail Adventure*, by Mariana Llanos of Oklahoma City, and published by Barefoot Books.

**Young Adult Book** — *Living Ghosts & Mischievous Monsters: Chilling American Indian Stories*, by Dan SaSuWeh Jones of Kaw City, and published by Scholastic Press.

**Poetry** — *Contour Feathers*, by Ken Hada of Ada, and published by Turning Plow Press.

**Lynn McIntosh Award for Excellence** — *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre: A Photographic History*, by Karlos K. Hill of Norman, and published by University of Oklahoma Press.

The Center's Lynn McIntosh Award for Excellence, previously known as the Director's Award, celebrates an Oklahoma book of special merit. The award was renamed this year to posthumously honor McIntosh, director for 25 years of the Southern Oklahoma Library System, for her steadfast support of the Oklahoma Center for the Book and its programs.

For additional information on the Oklahoma Book Awards, which have been called the premiere state book awards program by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, visit [libraries.ok.gov/ocb](http://libraries.ok.gov/ocb) or contact the Oklahoma Center for the Book's director, Connie Armstrong, at 405-522-3383 or at [connie.armstrong@libraries.ok.gov](mailto:connie.armstrong@libraries.ok.gov).

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