



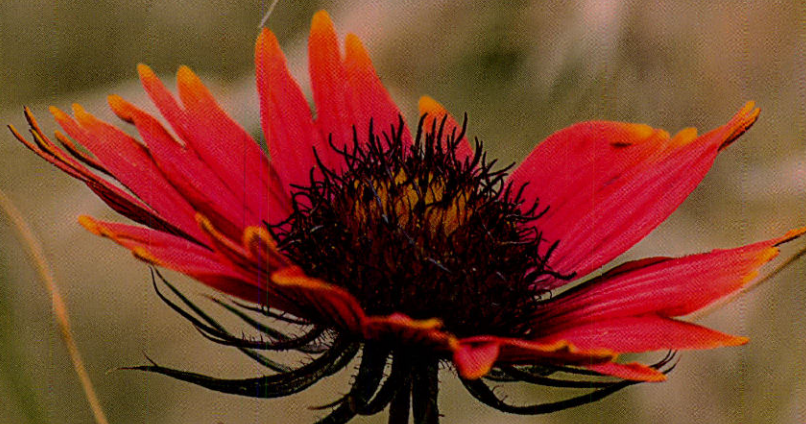
# TEXAS

HIGHWAYS™

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

## Wild Slope

THE POETRY OF SPRING IN BLOOM BY IRE'NE LARA SILVA



**+**  
CAMPING 101  
LUCHA LIBRE'S  
EL PASO ROOTS

MARCH 2021

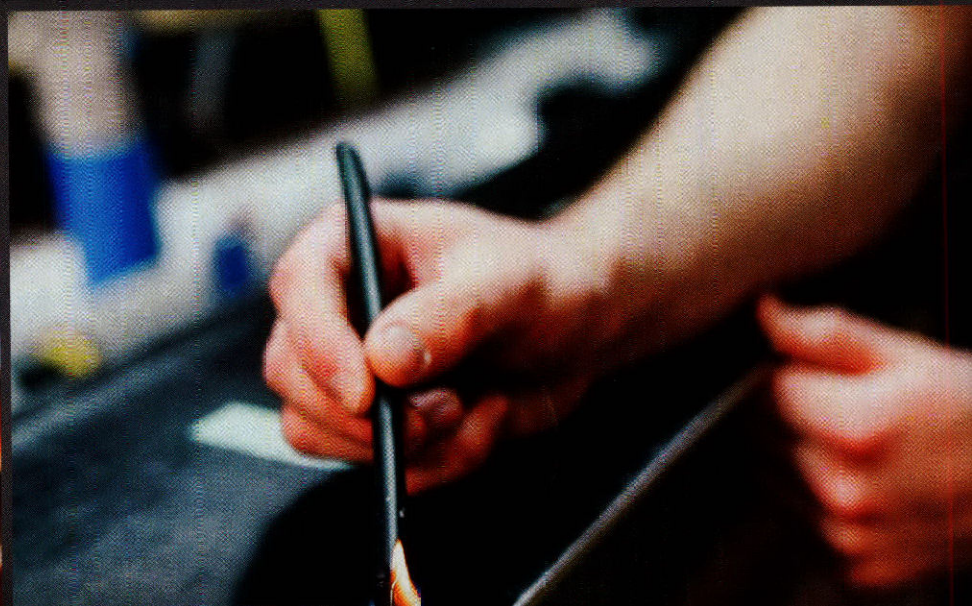
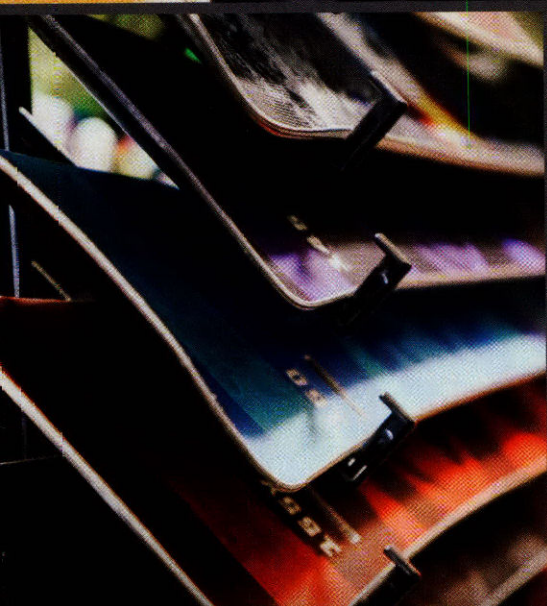
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# HALFWAY TO THE SLOPES

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PICTURED ABOVE: Troy's SKI Lubbock



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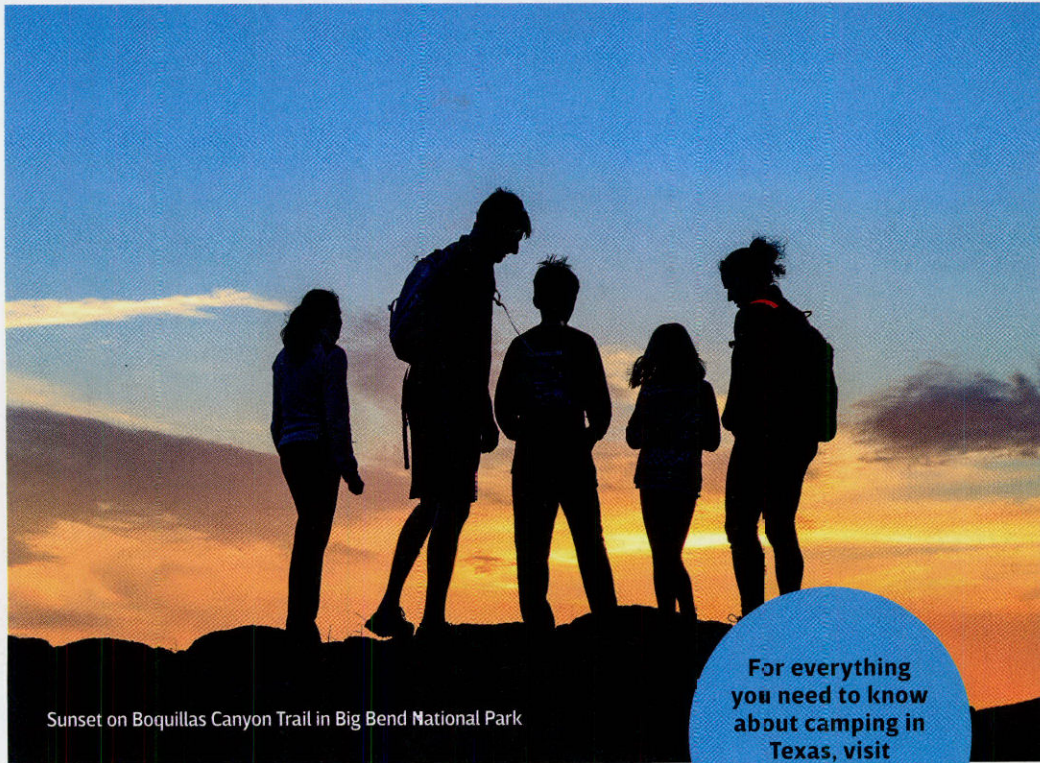
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EDITOR'S  
**NOTE**



Sunset on Boquillas Canyon Trail in Big Bend National Park

For everything  
you need to know  
about camping in  
Texas, visit  
[texashighways.com/camping](http://texashighways.com/camping)

## Nature's Balm

**T**his month's cover is an homage to the well-known Lady Bird Johnson quote, "Where wildflowers bloom, so does hope." This spring, perhaps more than any in recent memory, we are in need of the hope and optimism of the season. Throughout this magazine's 48-year history, hundreds of pages have been devoted to wildflowers—from where to find them, to how to identify and grow them, to photo spreads splashed with their beauty. But heading into a wildflower season knowing more than 36,000 of our fellow Texans have died from a pandemic over the past year called for something different. And who better to write authentically and eloquently about loss and rebirth, grief and hope, than a poet?

While Austin-based poet Irene Lara Silva has written about mortality and grief throughout her career, she explains, "The pandemic inspired a laser focus on thoughts about death and the afterlife." The Rio Grande Valley native had her own brush with COVID-19 immediately after turning in the first draft of this month's cover story, which explores the expansion of green cemeteries and the way nature can comfort us in difficult times.

Thankfully, she recovered after a tough 10-day battle. "I am still suffused daily with gratitude," Silva says. "It was a gift to write this story, to speak fear with beauty and memory, and to find peace knowing where my body will rest—though hopefully not for many decades!"

However you choose to mark the changing of seasons, you can find our favorite wildflower stories from our archives and updates on this season's forecast at [texashighways.com/wildflowers](http://texashighways.com/wildflowers). While you're there, don't miss our new Guide to Camping in Texas. Along with a searchable database of every public campground in the state, you'll find tips and recommendations for backpacking, canoeing, tent camping, RV trips, and glamping. Beyond the promise of mild temperatures, spring camping offers some of the best views of the season's blooms.

*Emily R Stone*

**EMILY ROBERTS STONE**  
EDITOR IN CHIEF



**GO VISIT**

**GO PLAY**

▶ **GO EAT** ▶

**GO STAY**

**GO SHOP**

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Corpus Christi, Texas — 

# Admission includes Two-toed sloths, Caribbean flamingos, *and* three months in rehab.



There's a lot going on at the Texas State Aquarium, like the rescue of this critically endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtle from the Padre Island National Seashore. This resilient sea turtle was found with a near-fatal wound, and thanks to the quick action of the Texas State Aquarium wildlife rescue team, she received emergency care. After months of rehabilitation, she was released back into the Gulf of Mexico. Funds from your admission make stories like this possible and help save wildlife.

**Your visit makes the difference!**

[TexasStateAquarium.org](https://TexasStateAquarium.org)  
#SaveMoreThanMemories





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# MARCH

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## Where Wildflowers Bloom

A poet examines the cyclical nature of wildflowers and what they have to teach us about life, death, and rebirth.

*By Irene Igra Silva*

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## The Good, the Bad, and the Exótico

Meet the wrestlers from the El Paso–Juárez borderland who exemplify lucha libre's enduring culture.

*By Roberto José Andrade Franco*

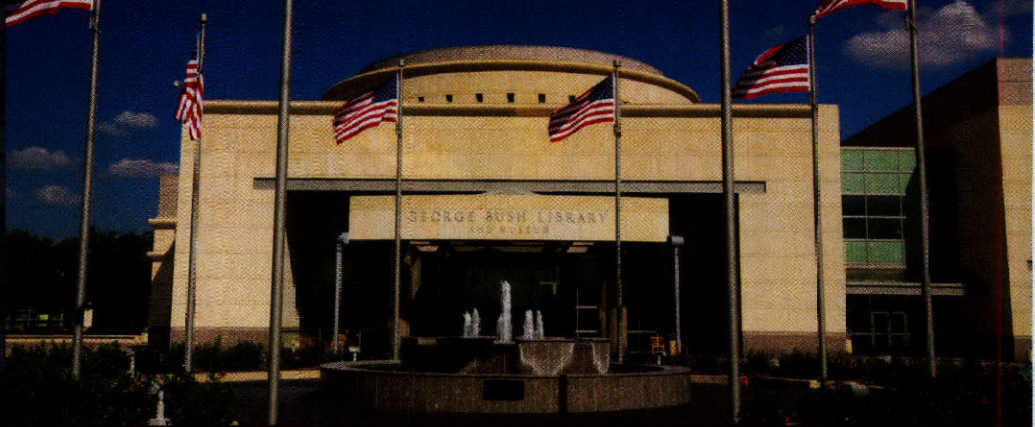
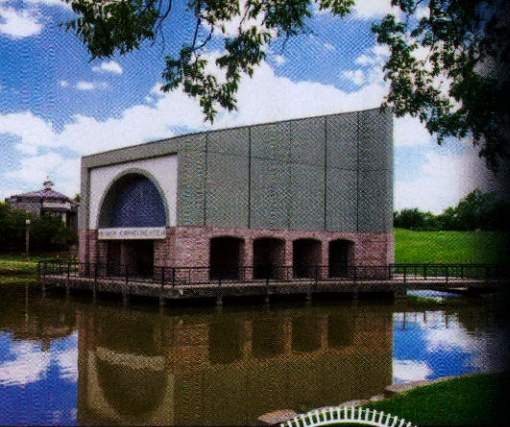
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## Intro to Campology

As Texans head outdoors to escape quarantine, first-time camping mishaps abound. We've collected tips for beginner campers and experienced adventurers alike.

**A BACKPACKER**  
hikes near Tuff  
Canyon in Big Bend  
National Park.





## COLLEGE STATION



# The Heart of Aggieland

College Station is the proud home of Texas A&M University, but we're also a destination full of unique experiences, such as the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, and one of America's finest collections of war memorials at Veterans Park & Athletic Complex. Visit our legendary Northgate Entertainment District or catch a concert under the stars at Wolf Pen Creek Amphitheater. Round out your stay with a delightful variety of dining and shopping experiences that you won't forget.



# MARCH



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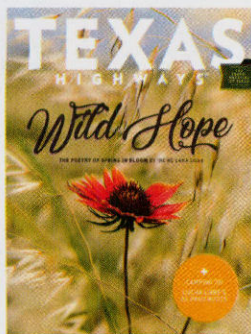
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**ON THE COVER**

Photo by Theresa DiMenno  
A firewheel wildflower along  
State Highway 152 near Castell



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Visit  
[texashighways.com](http://texashighways.com)  
for more.

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*"Spring is nature's way of saying  
Let's Party!"*

Robin Williams

Consider yourself invited ... and bring the family!



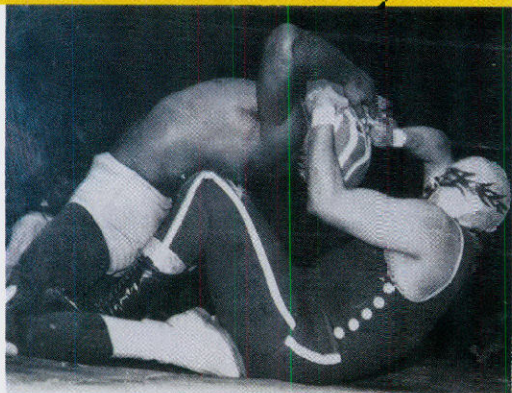
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## Behind the Story



As a child, Roberto José Andrade Franco spent summers in the El Paso-Juárez borderland where he would accompany his family to lucha libre matches. He wrote about the sport in “The Good, the Bad, and the Exótico” (Page 52). “It was one of my early goals and dreams to be a luchador in Juárez,” says Franco, now an Arlington-based writer. “I think that was more of an 8-year-old’s dream.” That aspiration was partly inspired by his uncle’s career as a luchador and his grandmother’s love of the sport. “My grandmother’s a big sports fan and a lucha libre fan,” he says. “One of the things that distinguishes lucha libre from wrestling in the U.S. is audience involvement. It’s like a Greek chorus.” Franco, who will join the *Texas Highways* staff as a writer-at-large with the April 2021 issue, recalls sitting next to his grandmother as she joined the rest of the crowd heckling the luchadores. “I was embarrassed,” Franco says. “I was 8!”

## Featured Contributors



### Lara Prescott

For the essay “At Home on the Road” (Page 16), Prescott wrote about the challenges—and triumphs—of traveling in an RV with a baby in tow. “Writing about our first cross-country trip with my infant son in a restored 1967 Yellowstone Cavalier was not only a joy to work on, but also something I’ll put in his baby book,” the Austin-based writer says. Prescott is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Secrets We Kept*, a Reese Witherspoon Book Club Pick set to be adapted for television.



### Lisa Bubert

Bubert is a librarian and writer born and raised in the Wendish area, near Giddings and Serbin, settled in 1854 by immigrants from near present-day Germany and Poland. She wrote about her search for her grandma’s Wendish coffee cake recipe in “Wendish Delight” (Page 75). “I grew up in my Granny Kilian’s kitchen surrounded by stories of our Wendish heritage,” Bubert says. “She passed in 2013, but in recreating this old cake recipe, it felt like she was right there by my side, nodding along.” Now based in Nashville, Bubert’s work has appeared in *The Rumpus*, *Washington Square Review*, and *Carolina Quarterly*.

Photos: Christ Chavez (top); Trevor Paulhus (middle)

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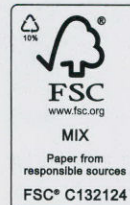
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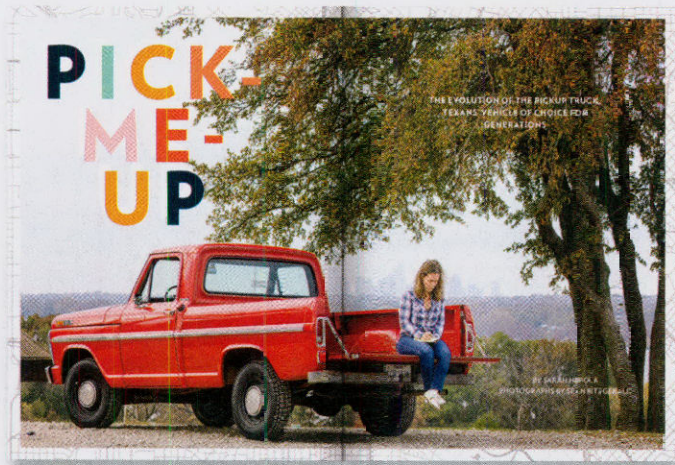
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# MERGE



Not only are trucks useful and reliable—they are timeless. Not only do I use mine to haul my horse trailer but I've found that I feel safer on the highway in my truck. Glad to see Sarah is a convert!

Amber Parker, Oak Leaf

### Rich History

Very cool ["My Hometown: Palestine," January]. Historical driving tours have become a new hobby during the pandemic, and I'll check this one out soon.

**f** Heidi Vance, Austin

### Nonalcoholic Options

I don't drink, but I hang out at a craft brewery in Brownwood called Teddy's Brewhaus ["The Toppling of the Tipple," January]. They give me the most awesome root beer ever made!

**f** Michael Evans, Brownwood

### Sea Shell Shoppe

Back in the '50s my grandmother made shell jewelry ["See Shells," January]. She bought her supplies here. Good memories.

**f** Sue Emmite, Dickinson

### Beauty in All Corners

This morning I read your February edition from cover to cover. Thank you for loving Texas so deeply and proudly and for presenting her in all of her glory, diversity, and uniqueness without political slant or shallow opinion. Thank you for letting our lovable, talented citizens tell their own amazing stories, for projecting our magnificent landscape through your photography, and for opening new books on our epic Texas history. Thank you for showing us the richness in our small towns and the beauty in all corners. Because of you I want to eat at Snapka's Drive Inn in Corpus Christi, stand before the 1,000-year-old oak tree in Goose Island State Park, and toot my horn and wave when I pass a slab in Houston.

Wanda Waters, Utopia

### Seeking Shelter

The fascinating February issue focusing on car culture in Texas was an intriguing read from cover to cover! When I saw

the teepee picnic shelters near Lajitas, I immediately found a postcard I have cherished for years with this very same photo ["One for the Ages"].

David E. Huebner, Spring Hill Tennessee

### Stuck in the Mud

The photo of early road construction on Page 41 of the February issue reminds me of traveling to see my grandparents during the '30s and '40s ["Time Travel Through Texas"]. Their farm was on the "Dallas Highway" on the southwest outskirts of Greenville. One vehicle would have to leave the one paved lane when two cars met. During wet weather, my granddad would often pull cars out of the Hunt County black gumbo. He first used mule teams and later used a tractor.

Mollie Joracn Stinson, Austin

### Golfing Great

I grew up in Dallas, and as a little boy I would get together with elementary school buddies and swing a golf club at the park ["Outworking the Field," February]. We were inspired by Lee Trevino. Today, I am

a 61-year-old Tejano, and I want to say thank you for writing stories that I can identify with—my heroes and culture.

Anthony Barron, Terrell

### All Work and No Play

I read with great interest and amusement Mr. Guillory's account of his working at AstroWorld in Houston ["For Your Amusement," January]. I was a third-generation Houstonian as a teenager when AstroWorld opened. Mayor Hofheinz was a high school friend of my father at San Jacinto High School in the early '20s. When he announced the plans for the Astrodome way back in the '60s, people thought he was crazy. When I heard about the AstroWorld opening, I applied for a job. I was put into a big windowless room with a bunch of other people, and my job was to count cash. When the park opened, they did not have enough employees, and I literally worked a 24-hour shift. I only lasted about a week, as the long hours got old in a real hurry.

Richard Foley Santamaria, Dripping Springs







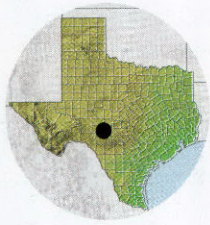


# Blue Beauties

Photographer Theresa DiMenno discovered this bluebonnet field near Whitehall during an April 2009 scouting trip for spring wildflowers. She has since returned to Grimes County during wildflower season and ventured to other Blackland Prairie areas known for blooms, including Brenham and Chappell Hill. Despite the lack of fall rain, which could mean fewer blooms this year, DiMenno plans to hit the road again this spring. "I don't need an immense blooming field to tell the story of a wildflower," says DiMenno, who lives in Austin. "I also love the chase of searching for peak blooms while driving endless country roads."







# Rocksprings

Debra Wolcott sought retirement but found another calling at the Historic Rocksprings Hotel

By Sarah Thurmond



**DEBRA WOLCOTT**

owns both the Historic Rocksprings Hotel and the Texas Miniature Museum across the street.



**P**erched on top of the Edwards Plateau, Rocksprings dates to the 1880s, when natural springs lured ranchers to the area. As the town grew, so did the prevalence of sheep and angora goats, which are suited to the region's semi-dry climate. In the 20th century, Rocksprings became known for producing wool and mohair, fibers valued for their quality and durability. The sheep and goat industry has declined from its peak in the mid-1960s, but Rocksprings remains a popular destination for tourists visiting the Devil's Sinkhole cavern; hunters of deer, quail, and turkey; and bikers and cyclists riding the Three Sisters Loop. The winding route along state highways 335, 336, and 337 offers canyon vistas and fields of wildflowers in the spring. Many visitors stay at the 105-year-old Historic Rocksprings Hotel, co-owned by Debra Wolcott. Wolcott and her husband, Craig, bought property outside of town in 2004 and made a permanent move from Houston in 2009 when they acquired the hotel. Wolcott also owns the Texas Miniature Museum, across the street from the hotel, where she displays her vast dollhouse collection.

### Top of the World

"I had heard people refer to Rocksprings as 'on top of the world,' and I thought, 'Well, isn't that pretentious.' But the phrase came from an article written in the 1920s [referring to the town's 2,400-foot elevation]. It was in *Grinstead's Graphic* [a Kerrville monthly magazine from 1921-1925]. Then they used to have a festival here, and they called it Top o' the World."

### The Courthouse Square

"I remember my first visual of seeing this town, and what really stood out to me was the courthouse square. I thought, 'This is the perfect town square.' You have the old courthouse, the old jail, the city hall, the old hotel across from the courthouse."

### Angora Goats

"At one time there were more angora goats in this region than anywhere else in the world. There's a goat sculpture on the courthouse lawn, and an angora goat is the mascot of the high school football team. It's all honoring what used to be a huge industry based on the fiber the goats would produce, known as mohair. It was used to make soldiers' uniforms. A lot of these ranches counted on the mohair production. If you are interested in having a registered angora goat, you're going to be calling the American Angora Goat Breeders Association here in Rocksprings."

### Hotel Hauntings

"In the first couple of months we owned the hotel, I went upstairs and was outside room 221. I felt all this cold air coming around the door. I opened the door, and it was just as warm in there as it could be. Then I looked

over my shoulder, and I see this white foggy cloud thing. I looked back and it was gone. People have had experiences and told me about them. I'm not scared. I hear things, but they're not dark at all."

### Local Eats

"There were no restaurants except King Burger when I first started coming here in 2004, but now we have the Jail House Bar and Grill. They serve steaks and hamburgers. Up on the highway you have Vaquero, which is a Mexican food restaurant, and King Burger. Then we have Lotus Thai Café. The owner, Aisika Davidson—people call her 'A'—is from Thailand. She used to work as a sous chef in Vegas, but her dream was to own a Thai restaurant."

### Natural Attractions

"We have two state natural areas here: the Devil's Sinkhole and Kickapoo Cavern, which is off the road to Brackettville. Both of these parks have Mexican free-tailed bats. Birding is also popular, and I've had groups of ornithologists stay at the hotel. Also, one year I had a group of spelunkers. They said that some of the best caves in the world are here in Edwards County."

### In Miniature

"In the '90s, I picked up an old produce crate that had been made into a dollhouse. I decorated it, just as a whim. It was really fun, and I ended up seriously collecting. All the decades are represented in the museum, from 1900 to 2000. I stopped inventorying a couple years ago, and I had over 100 doll houses." 🏠



## TOWN TRIVIA



POPULATION:

1,135



NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:

0



YEAR FOUNDED:

1891



NEAREST CITY:

Kerrville, 77 miles east



MARQUEE EVENT:

Slick Rock Challenge  
Professional Bull Riding,  
June 25-26



MAP IT:

Historic Rocksprings  
Hotel, 200 W. Austin St.







# At Home on the Road

The pandemic inspires a new mom and dad to embrace RV life

By Lara Prescott



“She’s perfect,” I told my husband, Matt, when he first showed me the listing in August. A few days later, she was in my driveway in Austin: a 16-foot, 1967 Yellowstone Cavalier travel trailer with white metal paneling and a thick gold stripe that reminded me of the West Texas landscape. She was a beaut. I imagined her as a time capsule from a bygone era, parked majestically by the Grand Canyon, or perched on the shores of Port Aransas, or nestled deep in the Great Smoky Mountains. Her original features were intact: the American eagle emblem next to the door, Formica table that converted into a bed, olive-green gas stove, propane refrigerator, and original heat lamp. An old promotional brochure I found online marketed the Cavalier as *Tops for traveling!* I was sold.

The RV had been restored by two entrepreneurial young men out of San Antonio with serious carpentry skills and marketing acumen. They tore out the bathroom,

built a long bench that slides out into another bed, put on a new roof, fixed a water-damaged wall, gave the interior a fresh coat of white paint, and made sure the water and electricity were in working order. Over the old vinyl floor, they installed 100-year-old pine boards, apparently salvaged from a home owned by famed San Antonio architect Atlee Ayres.

They listed the Cavalier with staged photos that would appeal to the Instagram set, complete with a felt letterboard sign that read *Awaken Your Soul’s Adventure*. The sign was corny; the rest was exactly what we needed. After handing over a check, the men unhitched the Cavalier from their white Ford F-150, and just like that, we were RV people.

Our kind have existed since the early 1900s. In 1915, the Conklin family of Huntington, New York, set off for San Francisco in one of the first known motorhomes. The custom-built, 25-foot, 8-ton vehicle was equipped with a generator, full kitchen, phonograph, pull-down bunks, and even a rooftop garden. The cross-country trip garnered national media attention, and soon, this unique home-on-wheels became a trend. By the 1920s, the simplified tent trailer was the popular choice, as more and more people set out to see the country. In the 1930s, the tent trailer evolved into the “covered wagon,” which had the signature boxy look of an RV. Nowadays, there seems to be an RV that suits anyone’s tastes and needs, including motorhomes, campervans, caravans, fifth-wheel trailers, pop-up campers, and truck campers.

Before that moment in our driveway, we didn’t know we were RV people. While I love to travel, if given the choice between a campsite and a nice hotel room, I’d go with the nice hotel room 99% of the time. Matt and I had to cut our last camping trip short because I couldn’t sleep in the tent. If you would have asked me a year ago if I was in the market for a vintage camper to drive across the country because it was the safest way to travel during a global pandemic—well, you get the point. The world had changed. We had changed.

Back in February, a few weeks before the country shut down, we adopted our newborn son, James. The plan was for our parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and close friends to fly to Austin and see the newest addition



to the Prescott clan. They'd take him on walks so we could rest. They'd pick up around the house. They'd make us soups and lasagnas to freeze. And they'd dote on little James, introducing him to his large, loving network of friends and family.

Instead, he spent the first nine months of his life in lockdown. Other than a few hours spent each day at the home of our neighbors, Jaelene and Jeff, and visits here and there with a few friends in our quarantine pod, it was just the three of us. Which was fine, for a while. But James quickly began to grow and engage more with the world around him, becoming curious and cuddly and increasingly social. We decided that if he was to spend time with that big, loving family thousands of miles of away, we needed a Plan B.

Flying was out of the question. As for a road trip, the idea of a hotel—let alone several of them—didn't exactly seem safe.

How could we change diapers in the back of our packed Toyota RAV4? And what if James hated being in the car? The longest we'd driven him up to that point had been 15 minutes to his pediatrician appointments. What if he freaked out, then we freaked out, then we were parked on the side of the road somewhere, all freaking out together in a cramped car?

There were enough "what ifs" to put off our plans. But, as time wore on and it became clear the world wasn't going back to normal anytime soon, Matt proposed renting or buying an RV to drive to our families in Pennsylvania and Maine. We could camp along the way, make and eat all our meals in the camper, not come into contact with many people, and also be able to pull off at rest stops to feed and change the baby in comfort.

I liked the idea of bringing our little bubble on the road—our pod traveling

inside a pod—so Matt set off to research RVs. Unfortunately, we weren't the only ones with this plan. According to the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association, North American RV sales rose 4.5% in 2020, likely due to the pandemic. And Outdoorsy, the online RV rental marketplace, saw a significant increase in bookings from the prior year. Skeptical about flying, travelers were setting out on the open road.

**There is something undeniably American** about a cross-country road trip. In the 1920s, F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife, Zelda, drove a 1918 Marmon dubbed the "Rolling Junk" 1,200 miles from New York to Zelda's Alabama hometown to have a breakfast of biscuits and peaches. Jack Kerouac crisscrossed the country in the 1940s, seeking thrills, jazz, and an



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alternative way of life. John Steinbeck set out with his standard poodle, Charley, to discover America in 1962. And the list goes on.

I love the romance of an adventure on the open road. Some of my fondest memories in my marriage have been on road trips. The time we drove to Yellowstone and got caught in a freak snowstorm at the top of a mountain. Or the time we drove through Minnesota and the police stopped us for taking a late-night photo of the "World's Largest Otter." Or the time we drove to South Padre Island to see the baby sea turtles hatch and make their way to the ocean. We love being on the road, where you can discover new places you'd miss if you only flew over them. We even drove 3,000 miles across South Africa for our honeymoon.

But the idea of a road trip with a baby on board was daunting. I wasn't sure we

**Matt and I had always talked about the importance of having James experience the joy of traveling. We just weren't planning on doing it before he could walk.**

were up for the monumental task. Matt and I had always talked about the importance of having James experience the joy of traveling to a new place, meeting new people, and experiencing new cultures. We just weren't planning on doing it before he could walk.

But it was too late for me to change my mind; Matt had found the '67 Cavalier. After we bought her, there was still the small matter of how to pull her. Our poor RAV4 just wasn't up for the job. So, off to the dreaded used car lot we went, where we upgraded to a BMW X5 that could haul 2,800 pounds of metal and wood.

To make the Cavalier road-trip ready, we added solar panels (so we could have electricity without having to find power outlets at rest stops) and a rooftop air conditioner (this is Texas after all). We installed a new suspension and tires. We added new brake lines and repaired some

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electrical issues. Matt even conjured some of the minimal skills he'd learned in a welding class several years earlier to take an angle grinder to the Cavalier's rusty frame. And finally, we slapped a fresh coat of paint on her—turning the faded and chipped gold stripe a turquoise blue and making the door canary yellow to give it a midcentury flair.

When we were done, we took her out for an inaugural spin around our neighborhood. Baby on board, we drove to an empty church parking lot to practice turning, parking, and—yikes—backing up. If you want to back up to the right, you need to turn the wheel to the left, which felt a little like trying to pat your head and rub your stomach at the same time. We flinched at every sound and sway.

"Is that normal?" I kept asking.

"Who knows?" Matt replied.

How could we possibly think about

**How could we possibly think about going cross-county when driving around our neighborhood made us nervous?**

going cross-county when driving around our neighborhood made us nervous? I decided we needed more practice.

Our first real test drive was to McKinney Falls State Park in Austin, home to soaring bald cypress trees, blue-green waterfalls spilling over smooth limestone rocks, and the ruins of an old Texas homestead. We set out one warm afternoon in October, driving the 20 or so minutes to the park, weaving our way through traffic and several construction zones. With Matt white-knuckled behind the wheel, I made light of people cutting us off. I looked back at our drooling, carsick dog, Mo, sitting next to the baby in his car seat. "Almost there," I said.

We pulled into our campsite around 4 p.m. By the time we plugged into the electricity, popped up James' play tent, unfolded the collapsible camping chairs, and put out a bowl of water for Mo, the



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sky was already beginning to darken.

James started to fuss and Mo was restless, so we walked the campsite loop. It seemed we weren't the only ones with the idea to camp. Every site bore the same sign: "Reserved." A family was setting up their picnic table for dinner with a red and white checkered tablecloth, real plates, and a mason jar full of flowers. A young couple was reading in matching nylon hammocks strung from pecan trees. An older hippie-type in colorful balloon pants waved at us from his portable rocking chair.

We took stock of how our little camper compared with the Thor Freedoms, American Coaches, Keystone Raptors, and Winnebago Sunstars. Sure, we didn't have the large flatscreen TVs, the king-size beds, the full-size bathrooms (or any bathroom, for that matter), but ours suited us just fine.

Back in the camper, James leaned against some propped-up pillows on the folded-down bed and played with our dangling car keys as he drank his bottle. After he finished, I read him a few books until he squirmed away. He wanted to explore our new space—stick his tiny fingers in everything, stand up on the pillows and look outside the window, pull on the homemade curtains, toy with our face masks hanging from a hook by the door, crawl and cruise the approximately four feet of walking space, and open and close the cabinets. When he'd thoroughly explored his new digs, he whined as if to say, *Is that it?*

It was nearing his bedtime, which brought to light a problem: If he goes to bed around 6:30, what do we do after that without waking him? We decided to put him to bed in the Pack 'n' Play crib wedged between the two single beds and cook and eat our dinner outside. After changing him into his pajamas, we set him in the crib, put the monitor on, and closed the door. I expected the worst: for him to start crying and not stop. But after a few whimpers, he settled down and went to sleep. "What a camping champ," I told Matt.

We brought out some wine, s'mores fixings, and Yahtzee to play on the picnic



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table. We cooked dehydrated vegan chili on our portable stove and poured two metal mugs of red wine. The food tasted great, the way it always seems to when you cook it outside over a flame. But our night relaxing beneath the stars was cut short. Those damn Texas mosquitoes that linger well into November had descended. After slapping a bloody mosquito off my calf, I downed the rest of my wine, rinsed our plates under the spigot, and shoved an untoasted s'more in my mouth.

We snuck back into the camper and watched the presidential debate on an iPad with split earphones and Mo at our feet. Through it all, James didn't stir. The campground had quieted. I began to doze off. Matt checked the clock and said it was only 8:30. I reminded him that on camp time, you sleep when it's dark and wake when it's light. I quickly fell asleep, awoken only briefly by Mo, and then permanently when the baby stirred around 5:30 a.m.

We changed James and fed him. After some oatmeal and two cups of instant coffee, we set out for home with the sun rising and a faint moon still hanging in the air. We learned a lot from that test trip. We needed better bedding but fewer pillows, bungee cords for securing items, and plenty of bags for diapers. We also learned that James was suited for adventure. I just hoped he'd feel the same way when we were thousands of miles from home.

**A few weeks later, we'd created an** itinerary and booked our campsites. Then, the day after the election, we set out on our adventure: first to Pennsylvania to see my family, and then to Maine so James could spend time with his grandparents, Aunt Hillary, and his new cousin Ella.

The Texas skies were cloudless and the weather warm for November. Our first drive of the trip was the shortest—five and a half hours from Austin to Texarkana. We made it in seven, including stops, with no baby meltdowns. Our destination for the night was the Texarkana KOA campsite in a patch of woods behind an IHOP.

After we set up camp, I took James for a

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walk around the grounds. We passed the empty swimming pool, the surprisingly clean bathrooms, the small dog park, and a playground right out of my childhood, with a metal slide and a seesaw.

Only a few RVs were parked in the spots reserved for people just spending a night or two. People waved at us as we passed by, as if we were neighbors. After having spent months in isolation, my heart felt full seeing these new, friendly faces. The pandemic often made me feel trapped, but out on the road I finally felt a sense of freedom that I think everyone at the campsite must've been feeling.

Deeper into the grounds were the sites people rented out for longer periods of time. Some had gardens behind tiny white picket fences, while others stretched out with decks built off their RVs. One tenant flew a Texas flag big enough to cover our entire camper and car together. A Chihuahua gave us the evil eye, saving his high-pitched bark for when we'd passed by.

As we settled in for the night at the campsite—1,700 miles to go until Maine—we listened to the drone of traffic from the nearby highway. James in the portable crib between us. It wasn't a nice hotel room like I might've preferred in the past. It was better. We were out in the world, free from the constraints of home but also armed with its comforts.

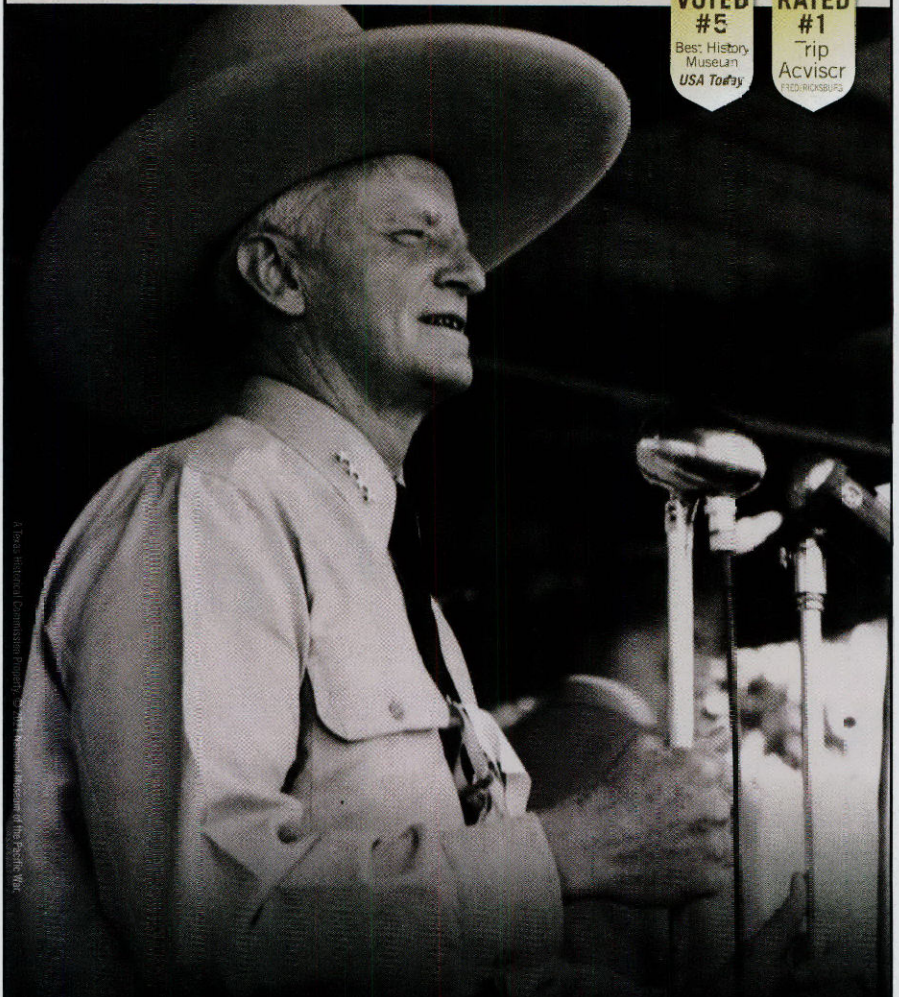
What comes next, I won't get into. I won't say how the trip back from Maine was horrendous, or that we ran into a snowstorm in Ohio, or that we couldn't make it to the campsite in Arkansas because of a rainstorm and had to stay in a hotel. I won't give the details on the many diaper blowouts and crying fits, or how James caught his first cold and was teething at the same time, and how everything seemed to go wrong at once.

At that moment, in our little RV at that campsite in Texarkana, everything in the world felt right for the first time in a long time. It was just the three of us and the prospect of the open road ahead. After an arduous year, we were at the beginning of a long journey—the first, I hoped, of many such adventures for our son, James. We were on our way. **L**

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LAST SPRING, the Blue Barn was converted into a full-time, self-serve market with honor-system payment.

# From Gloom to Bloom

COVID-19 came *this close* to wreaking havoc on Arnosky Family Farms

By Allison McNearney

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When COVID-19 slammed into the U.S. last March, nearly 30,000 Dutch irises were about to bloom on Frank and Pamela Arnosky's farm in the Hill Country town of Blanco. They were destined for H-E-B floral departments around the state. But just before harvest, the Arnoskys received a call. Due to an inundation of panicked shoppers at the beginning of the pandemic, H-E-B was temporarily closing certain specialty departments, floral among them, in order to dedicate its resources to stocking staples.

Staring down a major financial loss at the beginning of a year that was shaping



up to be more unpredictable than even farmers were prepared for, the Arnoskys made a big decision.

"We put all these irises out in our Blue Barn, buckets and buckets of them, and we said, 'They're buy one, get one free,'" Frank says. During normal times, the Blue Barn Farm Market is the community hub of the Arnoskys' flower operation, open to visitors throughout the week, with a farmers market on weekends. But as COVID-19 escalated and the irises bloomed, the Arnoskys turned it into a full-time, self-serve market with honor-system payment.

It was a hit. In just three weeks, all of the irises were gone, the Arnoskys broke even, and there was a crop of newly quarantined Texans with smiles on their faces and fresh-cut flowers on their tables. A few weeks later, the H-E-B floral department resumed its regular activity.

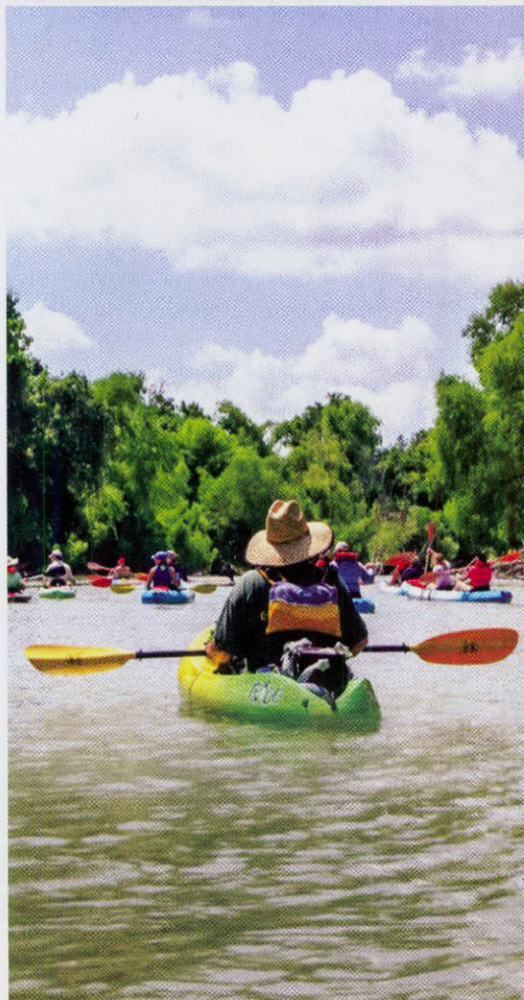
Other flower farmers around the state shared similar experiences. Business looked precarious with several big-box stores initially scaling back their floral orders, and the cancellation of events ranging from farmers markets to weddings, due to stay-at-home orders. But as the pandemic became the new normal, Texans not only began to buy flowers at record levels, they also prioritized buying local. "The pandemic really did not hurt my business at all," says Rita Anders, owner of Cuts of Color in Weimar. "I think the pandemic actually made people enjoy their homes, and they wanted flowers more than ever."

The Arnoskys were still recovering from several years of business losses at the start of 2020, which had caused them to put their Blanco farm on the market for a short time and to think about retiring. But in a strange twist, COVID-19 proved to be an unexpected boon for flower sales. The couple ended 2020 with renewed excitement and big plans for the future of their nearly 30-year-old family business.

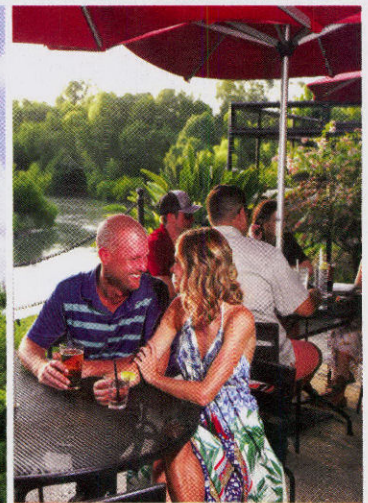
On a warm Sunday in mid-October, Frank and Pamela were in the Blue Barn, greeting masked guests and offering kids the chance to pick a pumpkin from the nearby flower beds. It was the height of

Photo: Tom McCarthy Jr.

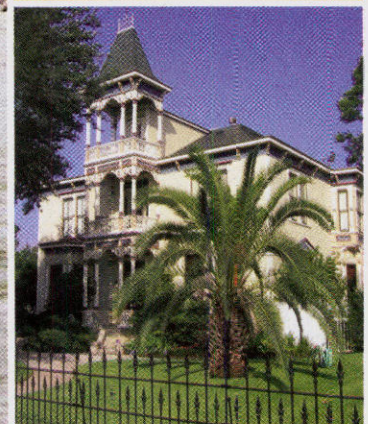
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marigold season, and monarch butterflies fluttered through the colorful blooms outside. Inside, the Arnoskys were stripping leaves from the lower stems of what would eventually be 20,000 bunches of marigolds, banding the bundles together, and dropping them into buckets of flower food. Within 48 hours, the sea of marigolds surrounding them would be at H-E-Bs around the state to accommodate the demand sparked by Día de los Muertos and Diwali celebrations.

The Arnoskys met at Texas A&M University when Pamela was an undergraduate and Frank was a graduate student, but their romance blossomed several years later during a series of serendipitous meetings that culminated in back-to-back weekends dancing to the Texas polka band Brave Combo. Thirty-one years later on a balmy Hill Country day, Frank sports the same bushy beard and Pamela the same trademark long braids they did on

their wedding day.

Because of Frank's education in and passion for horticulture, the pair always felt farming was their destiny, but it took a few years and a little trial and error to realize that cut flowers had big potential.

In 1992, on the 12 acres of land they had recently acquired in Blanco, the Arnoskys planted their first crop of snapdragons and statice. Two years later, they secured their inaugural client, Central Market, a grocery store owned by H-E-B. This proved to be a fortuitous partnership. Well before buying local became popular, the upscale chain debuted with an emphasis on offering specialty products right as the Arnoskys were attempting to innovate the way flowers were promoted by labeling their bouquets as "Fresh from the Texas Hill Country."

"When we started in 1993, there was nobody who was marketing local flowers," Frank says. "In fact, most flowers didn't

even have a brand on them; they just had a plain plastic sleeve. So, we were one of the first people in the country to put our name on a sleeve to identify where the flowers come from.

**Today, the Arnoskys farm during all four seasons on 20 of their 88 acres in Blanco. They also cultivate 16 acres in Minnesota for late-season peonies and 7 1/2 acres in Fort Davis for early-season peonies. From the 30,000 seedlings they plant in the ground each week during growing season, they produce 2,500 mixed bouquets and another 2,000 single-flower bunches a week. Everything they grow is sold in Texas—under their Texas Specialty Cut Flowers brand—through Central Market and H-E-B, or in the Blue Barn.**

"The thing that we never thought about when we started is, I thought we were just going to be some kind of little subsistence



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farm," Pamela says. "But flowers bring people together and open doors, so we have met some amazing people."

In 1995, they began a friendship with Lady Bird Johnson after cold-calling the LBJ Library to see if they could deliver some experimental long-stemmed blue-bonnets to the former first lady. And in 2001, they were invited to one of George W. Bush's presidential inaugural balls, an opportunity secured because of the flowers they provided to the Governor's Mansion in Austin while Bush was in residence.

Though farming is their passion, they are just as committed to preserving and uplifting their community in Blanco. One of the groups that has recently made use of the Blue Barn is the movement against the Permian Highway Pipeline. The pipeline project is routed just over a mile outside of downtown Blanco, a small town that is finally starting to recover from the devastating Hill Country floods of 2015.

"We were all just on the idea that Blanco is really hitting its stride as a rural destination," Frank says. "The momentum was there and then all of a sudden, you get told there's a pipeline going through town. It's kind of a death punch."

Ultimately, the opposition effort failed, partially due to the momentum drain of COVID-19. And while the couple remains concerned for the pipeline's impact on the area, Pamela says, "We won't notice the pipeline as much once it rains—and if they plant wildflowers on it."

A more pressing issue is securing their legacy. The Arnoskys face the same dilemma as many farmers today, whose average age is now 58 years old: So far, none of their four children have expressed a desire to permanently take over the business. Without a clear succession plan, the Arnoskys are trying to find a way to preserve their valuable piece of undeveloped Hill Country land as San Antonio and Austin slowly converge on the area.

"This farm has to pass to the next generation, some kind of a way," Pamela says. "The land was here before we were; it's going to be here after. It ought to be our bounden duty to not turn it into a subdivision. It needs to be kept in green space." 🌱



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One morning early last March, an inquisitive woman from Laredo named Mari Vargas; my wife, Kris Cummings; and I convened in East Laredo. We gathered near the bamboo thicket outside the residence of Tony Ramirez in the Heights neighborhood, admiring fat grapefruit and brightly colored oranges hanging on trees in the garden. We had signed up for "Medicine in the Wild," Ramirez's walking lecture in the brush about the plants within that have medicinal uses.

Ramirez isn't just a tour guide; he's considered a *médico tradicional*, or traditional healer, among the Nahua/Chichimeca people. But unlike Mexican folk saints Don Pedro Jaramillo, El Niño Fidencio, and Teresita Urrea, he focuses strictly on the practical: identifying and collecting useful plants. Consider it the fieldwork for discovering increasingly popular herbal remedies.

We were dressed for our adventure in pants and long-sleeved shirts, and we carried a lot of water. Ramirez had a straw hat with feathers in the band, and a machete and pistol strapped to his side. We peppered him with questions as he drove us in his SUV 20 minutes east before stopping to open a ranch gate. Vargas was rapt.

For the past two years, she has studied alternative medicine, working with medical doctors from Monterrey, Mexico, who venture into the same brush in search of natural medicine. She'd registered for Ramirez's workshop to learn how to better

# In Wild Pursuit

Tony Ramirez ventures into the Brush Country in search of plants with healing powers

By Joe Nick Patoski



address her family's and friends' ailments. "My parents are from Mexico and lived in a place where medicinal plants were all they had to treat illness," she said.

The vehicle continued down a dirt path and came to a final stop beside a concrete slab with an aluminum roof that serves as a staging area for hunters and anglers dropping lines in a nearby stock tank. The brush beckoned, but before we entered, Ramirez gathered us around a mesquite with a canopy of fresh pale-green spring leaves. This is the signature tree of the Brush Country.

"The mesquite has a lot of uses beyond cooking," Ramirez explained. "Its beans are a protein source. Its leaves are good in tea for gastrointestinal problems and as an astringent for topical infection prevention. If you have conjunctivitis, rinse and crush the fresh green leaves, mix them with a bit of clean water, and squeeze the antimicrobial liquid into the affected eye as eye drops."

He knelt down and surveyed the stubby succulents covering the ground below the mesquite. He pointed to halophyte saladilla, a plant whose sap was a source of salt for Native Americans. Then guereque, a member of the melon family whose tuber contains monoglyceride compounds that can treat diabetes. Next, a pencil-thin cactus called sacasil, used to treat insect bites and bone fractures.

"You think this stuff out here is just brush," Ramirez said with a smile. "Everything here has value."

The Laredo native grew up in a family that practiced herbal medicine. His *abuelo*, proprietor of the Glorioso Medicine Company in Laredo, formulated liniments and poultices, which he sold town to town, ranch to ranch. And his *abuela* was a healer who cleansed people with medicine from her garden. "Growing up, whenever I'd get sick, I was taken to my grandmother," Ramirez said. "If I didn't get better taking whatever tea or herb she gave me, I'd go to a doctor."

This old school method of dealing with illness or injury is still practiced in communities and rural parts of the Texas-Mexico borderland. It serves as inspiration

## EXPERIENCE ODESSA

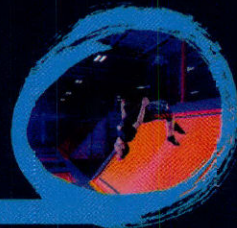
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for the increased usage of herbal and natural medicine among a population seeking alternatives to prescription drugs. But the inexperienced user should exercise extreme caution.

"It is hugely important, [for those teaching about] native plants in any capacity that might encourage someone to ingest anything, to use the botanical names," said Lynn Marshall, research coordinator for Useful Wild Plants, an Austin-based organization devoted to Texas' botanical domain. "Common names can be applied to multiple species, and a mistake has the potential to be fatal."

**After a career with Texas Instruments** and IBM, Ramirez returned to Laredo in the 1970s to study ethnobotany and folk medicine through college classes, books, and talking to elders. He authored numerous papers and learned the ways of healers from Chichimeca, Huastec, Huichol, and Nahua natives in Central Mexico.

Following a stint with the Texas Department of Agriculture, he has led students at the UT Health Science Center Regional Campus at Laredo into the brush since '96.

He was also a columnist for *LareDOS*, a newspaper turned online news journal, in the late '90s and early '00s. "His writing bore the careful note of credibility that came from experience and research," said Meg Guerra, *LareDOS* publisher and editor. "Each column was a gift of information, such that many consulted Tony for the herb and tree-bark remedies we once heard our grandmothers discuss."

As we put on our backpacks to enter the brush, Ramirez produced a small bundle of dried native tobacco tied together for a *limpia*. "We do a cleansing before we enter the brush," he said. Vargas went first, standing with her arms extended. Ramirez waved the bundle in all seven directions: east, south, west, north, above, middle, and below. After my cleansing, Ramirez let me cleanse him.

Off we went, following an animal path into the brush. "Be careful," Ramirez said. "This area has a lot of jumping cactus. They're really well-camouflaged." Early on, he spotted fresh scat on the sandy path—mountain lion. He holstered his pistol and suggested we stay vigilant.

We stopped every 20 or so paces to investigate plants. Ramirez identified each and pointed out their uses. When the thicket grew impassable, he pulled out his machete and whacked out a path. Though our pace slowed, Ramirez's talk continued apace as he pointed in every direction, settling on a *junco* plant. "It's used for stomachaches and dizziness," he said.

Eventually, we stopped at a tree in a small clearing, with colored twine wrapped around a few branches. At 8 feet high, it was tall enough to provide shade if we squatted down and didn't perch in the nest of thorns thriving in the understory.

"This is the medicine tree," Ramirez explained, reaching into a small bag to

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## Mother Nature's Natural Remedies

A sampling of healing plants from Tony Ramirez's Brush Country tour. Consult a medical professional before using.

### **Bitter Goat Brush**

"This plant can save your life. It will kill amoebas."

### **Blackbrush Acacia**

"It can be used as a topical antibacterial to treat sores that aren't responding to medication."

### **Gobernadora (Creosote)**

"It's a really versatile plant: antifungal, antibacterial, antibiotic, and antiviral."

### **Palo Santo (Guayacán)**


"This is where Mucinex comes from. It's an expectorant and COX-2 inhibitor that fights inflammation."

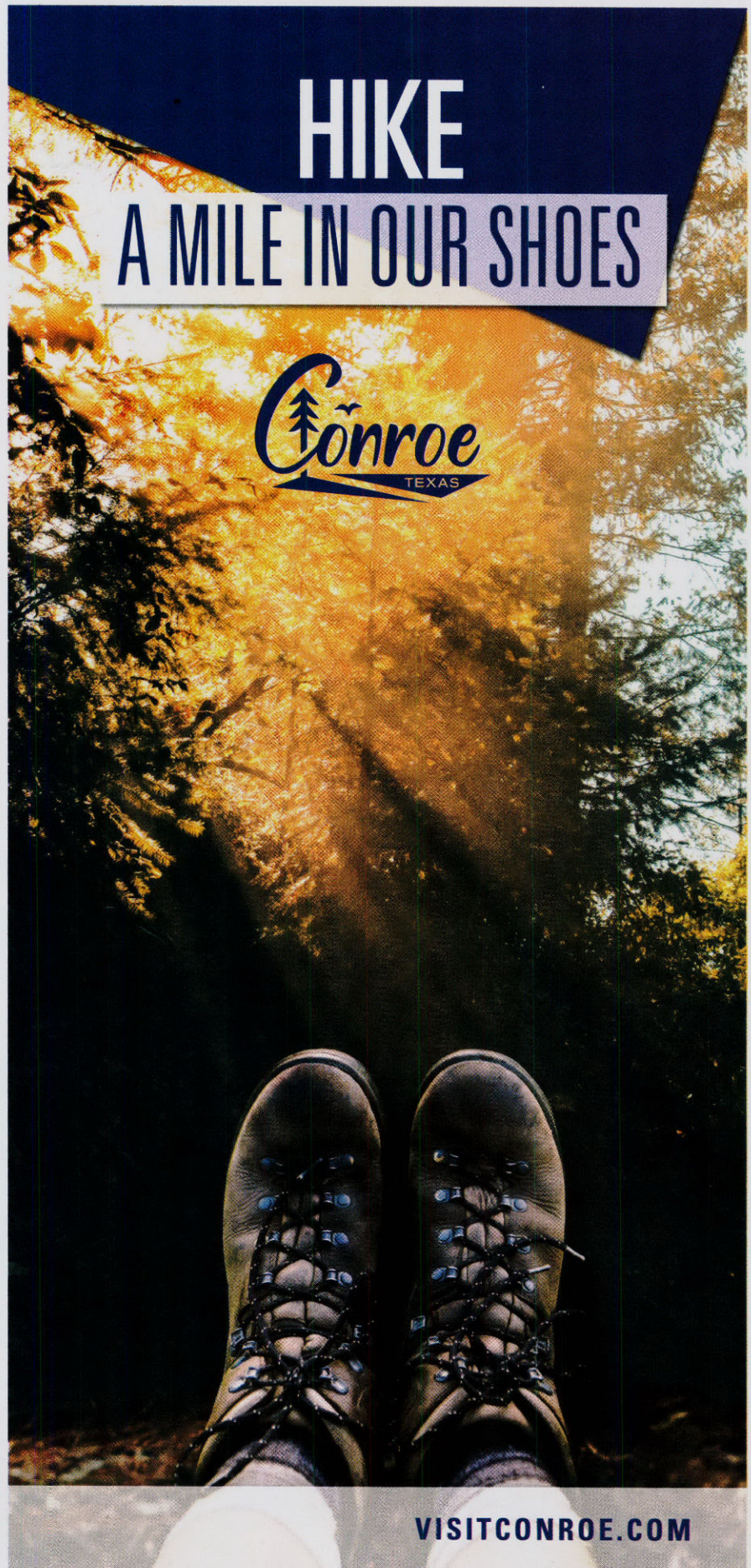
### **Pita (Yucca or Spanish Dagger)**

"It's flavorful, an anti-inflammatory, and a phytosteroid."

fetch more colored twine. "Each color represents something: black for fear, white for compassion, green for healing, yellow for vision, red for strength and power, blue for protection." He encouraged us to tie some twine to a branch, which we did.


After resting, we ventured back toward the day shelter. We'd been in the brush close to two hours, but we hadn't walked much more than a mile. Ramirez checked his phone and said the high inside the brush had reached 108 degrees. Back at his place, Ramirez handed out certificates for completing his workshop. "These plants aren't going to replace medicine," he admitted. "What you learned is this is another tool for your toolbox."

Driving back to Austin on Interstate 35, the Brush Country looked as harsh and forbidding as ever. This time, though, I knew that deep inside there was a whole other story. 



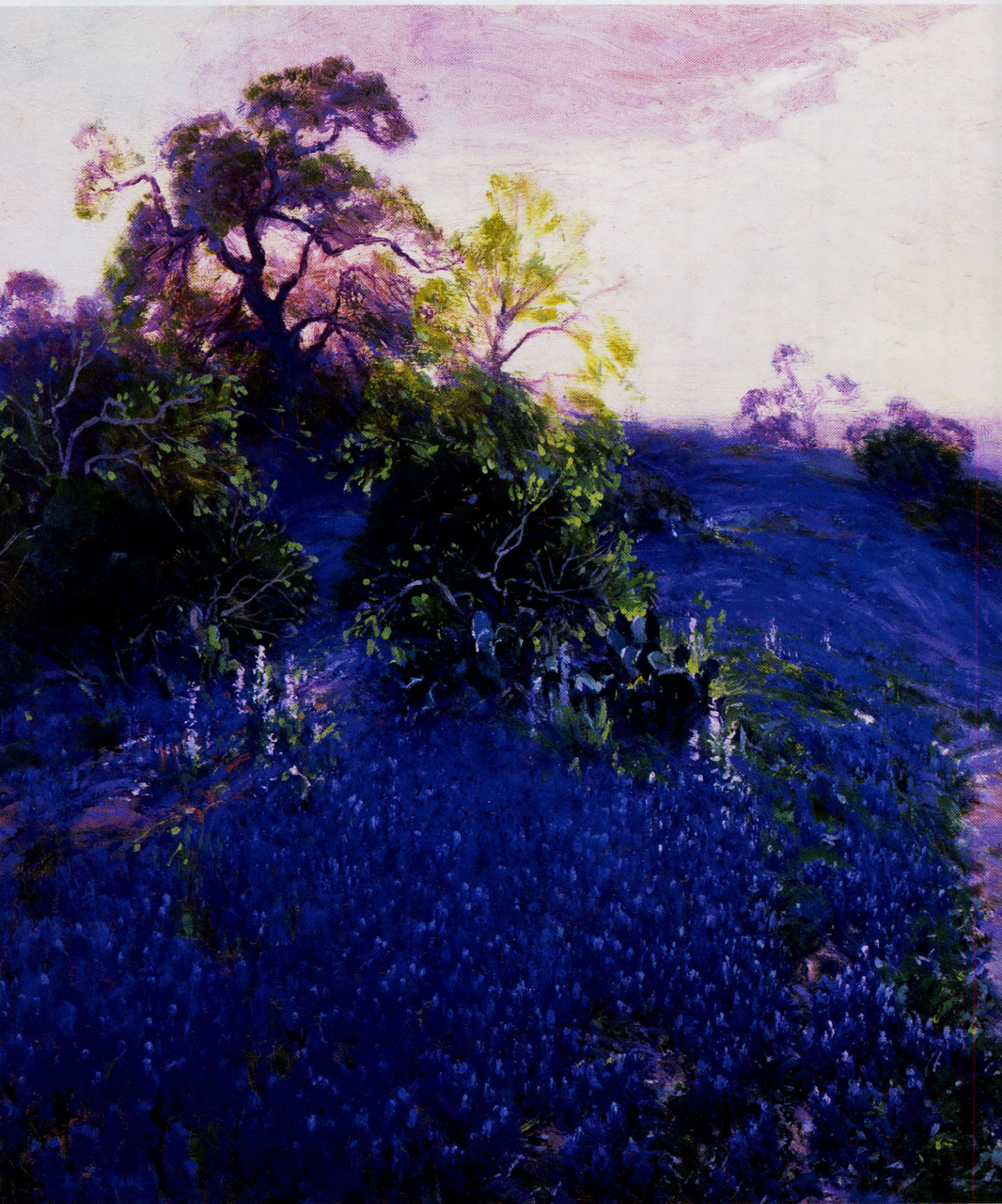
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# Scrolling Through Bluebonnets

Julian Onderdonk, “the father of Texas painting,” lives on via Twitter

By Austin Kleon

**L**egislators named the bluebonnet the state flower in 1901, but the man who would become famous for painting them, Julian Onderdonk, was leaving Texas for New York at the time. Up north, Onderdonk studied with painters Robert Henri and William Merritt Chase, who convinced him to get outside in the open air and pay close attention to light and shadow. After years of struggle in New York, Onderdonk returned to his hometown of San Antonio in 1909. With fresh eyes on his native state, he found his ultimate subject, and painted the bluebonnet-covered landscapes that would make his name. Tragically, he died at the peak of his success in 1922, at only 40 years old, but he left a trail of imitators behind. Some now call him “the father of Texas painting.”

Almost a century later, I’m stuck at home during a pandemic, scrolling through the @julianonderdonk Twitter feed and looking at images of paintings with titles such as “Bluebonnets on a Grey Day,” “Bluebonnets at Dusk,” “Bluebonnets at Twilight, near San Antonio,” “Morning in the Bluebonnets,” “Late Afternoon in the Bluebonnets,” and “Bluebonnet Field” (left). I can’t tell if the pictures make me more or less lonely, but I feel the urge to jump in the car and drive to the Hill Country.

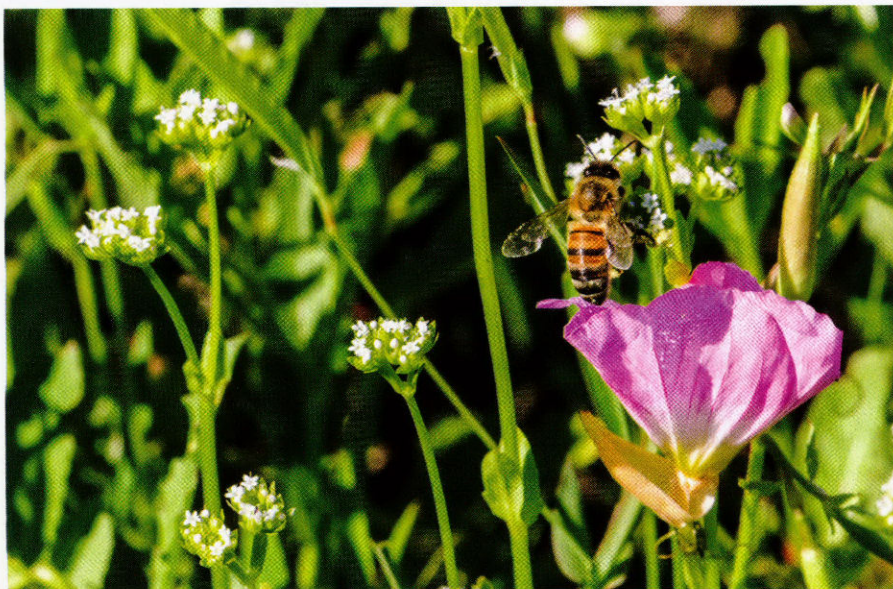
The feed is an “art bot” created by Andrei Taraschuk, a Colorado-based, Russian-born software engineer. In a 2018 Ignite Boulder talk, Taraschuk described it as a social media account that runs on autopilot. “I know what you guys are thinking,” he joked. ““Oh no, not another Russian building bots.”” But instead of spreading disinformation, he’s on a mission to beautify social media. He’s trained hundreds of art bots—a whole “network of dead artists” including @agnesmartinart, @rauschenbergbot, and @edekooning—to follow each other and retweet each other’s work. Taraschuk estimates the bots have shared over 1 million pieces of art. For Texans who can’t get enough of bluebonnet season, following @julianonderdonk is like being served fresh flowers all year long. 🌸



# Bee-haw!

We have bees to thank for our beloved Texas wildflowers

By Melissa Gaskill



**Mention bees, and most people** picture the familiar little honeybee, *Apis mellifera*. Native to Europe and first domesticated in Africa or Eurasia thousands of years ago, this species produces honey and beeswax and pollinates plants and agricultural crops. But Texas is home to more than 800 native bee species that pollinate the state's plants.

While most of these natives don't produce honey, their life cycles are synced with those of native flowers, and they have physically adapted to the shapes and needs of Texas plants. For example, since bluebonnets bloom early, their pollinators can withstand cooler temperatures. And bluebonnets' pollen-producing parts are tucked behind fused petals known as a keel, so bumble, digger, and mason bees know to put weight on the keel to open the flower. These subtle connections between native bees and plants make their survival possible.

"Without native pollinators, we wouldn't have all those roadside flowers in spring," says Ross Winton, invertebrate biologist at Texas Parks and Wildlife.

Unfortunately, both foreign honeybee and native bee populations are declining due to a combination of habitat loss, pesticide use, disease, air pollution, and climate change. More hot days, for example, affects bumblebees, as does increasing urbanization.

Bees need both nesting places and food, says Laurel Treviño, outreach coordinator at the University of Texas Department of Integrative Biology's Jha Lab. "You can provide plenty of food, but if they have nowhere to nest, they aren't going to hang around," she explains.

You can help bees by providing habitat like bare ground or fallen logs, or by building a nesting block (see illustration). To provide food, plant native plants or leave them where they grow naturally. Limiting pesticide use is important, too. Chemicals used to exterminate ants and other pests are not specific and will affect anything that comes into contact with them. "Just be targeted in your approach," Winton says.

## Keeping Busy

Honeybees and native bees pollinate nearly 90% of wild plants, including wildflowers, and about a third of U.S. crops.

Different bees have different ways of collecting pollen. Bumblebees, for example, are "buzz pollinators," Treviño says. "They hug the flower and vibrate really fast, shaking the pollen out like salt from a shaker."

Most female bees are intentional collectors when they are nesting. But bees are generally more accidental pollinators: Pollen sticks to hairs on their body at one flower and fall off at the next. "Bees that go from sunflower to sunflower, one tomato plant to the next, or one bluebonnet to the next are more effective pollinators,"

Treviño says.

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Mikaila Ulmer, founder  
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**800+**

Number of bee species native to Texas

**2 million**

Number of flowers it takes to make 1 pound of honey

**\$3 billion+**

Annual value of pollination provided by native bees to U.S. agriculture

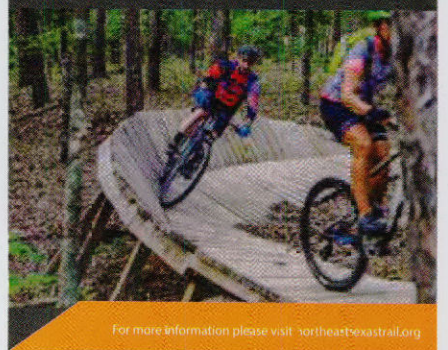
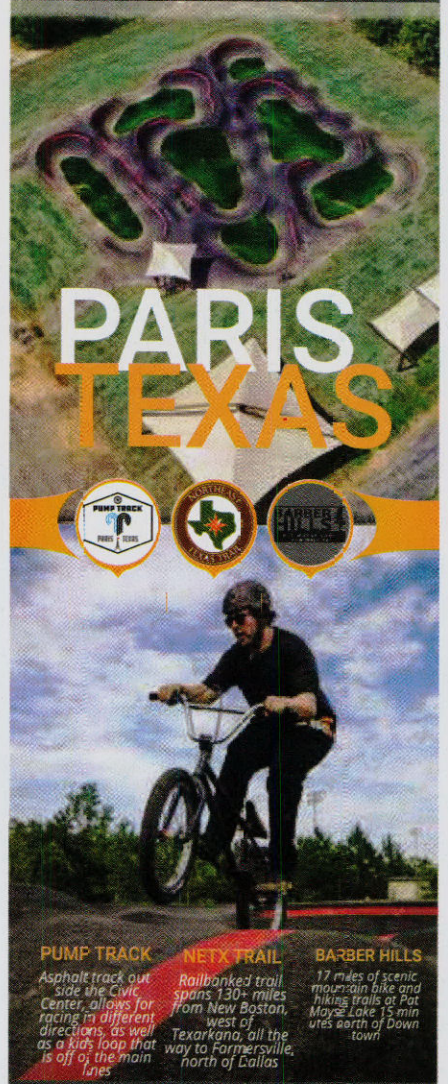
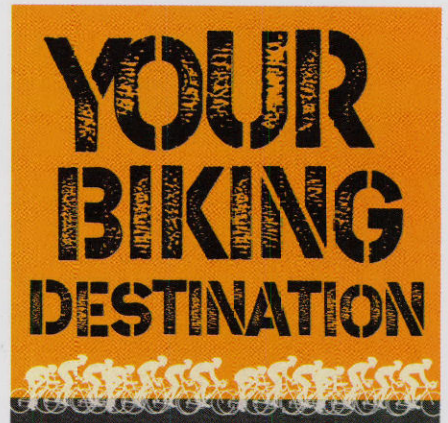


## How to Build a Bee Abode

Native bees nest in the ground or other cavities, and you can build them a nesting block to provide shelter. The types of bees that use these blocks are normally nonaggressive, so there's no need to worry about stings.

1. Use a 4-by-8-inch block of untreated wood, or combine other sizes to form a block at least 8 inches tall.
2. Drill holes varying from ¼- to ⅜-inch diameter, 3 to 6 inches deep, spaced ¾ inch apart. Stop holes about ½ inch from the
3. Attach a roof.
4. Secure firmly to a building, fence, or post at least 3 feet above the ground.
5. Orient the face toward the southeast.
6. Leave in place through winter—the bees will vacate the space for hibernation—or put in an unheated garage and replace outdoors in late winter or very early spring.

Photo: Courtesy Me & the Bees Lemonade (middle). Illustration: Sarah McMenemy



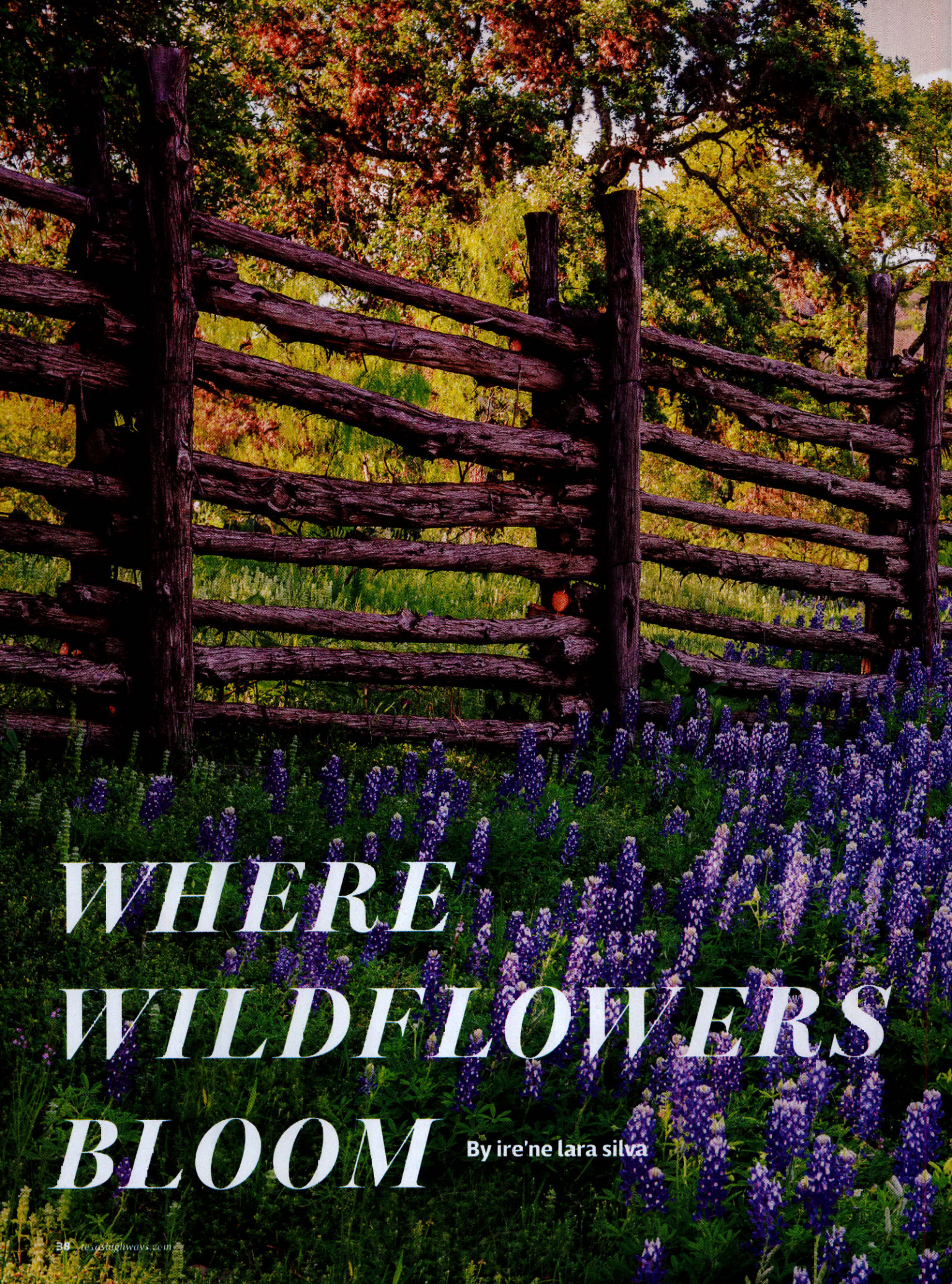
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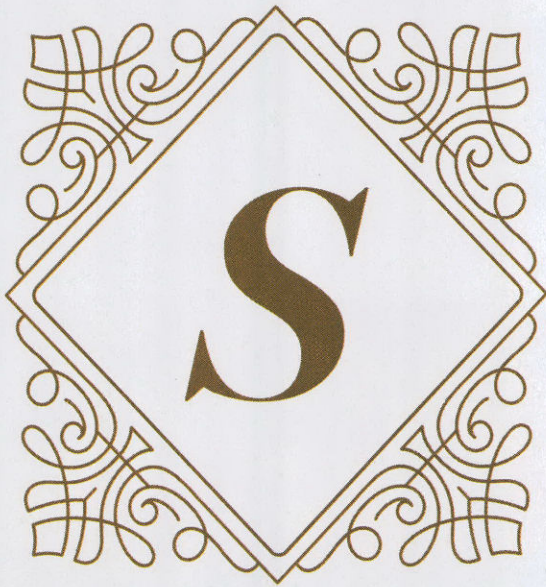
*WHERE  
WILDFLOWERS  
BLOOM* **By ire'ne lara silva**





**More than just a pretty  
roadside show, the  
season's bounty reminds  
us that hope springs  
eternal**





Sixteen years ago this month, I took one of the most beautiful road trips of my life. Not a very long trip—only slightly more than 200 miles—at least 10 of us in two cars, making our way from Austin to San Antonio to Uvalde to Brackettville. Warm sunshine rendered the roadside wildflowers incandescent with color.

I wasn't driving, so my eyes were free to drink in the trees bursting with new growth, lush grasses, and flowers blooming everywhere—bluebonnets, Indian blankets, dandelions, thistles, sand dollar cacti, and nightshade. Less than half an hour west of San Antonio the landscape shifted markedly—scenic creeks and small towns, farmhouses and little wooden barns, a few horses and cows wandering in flowering meadows. Scenes so picturesque it seemed a shame to be without a camera.

There's a particular field I remember, somewhere near Uvalde, filled with red gaillardias swaying this way and that, almost as if the earth was breathing. Red gaillardias are similar to Indian blankets but entirely red. They grow between 12 and 20 inches tall, with flowers that are almost 3 inches wide. They like to grow in large masses, taking up acres or miles. I left a little part of myself there that late morning, red-petaled and swaying.

We were on our way to the funeral of a friend. He died at 28, taken suddenly by a brain aneurysm. All these years later, when I think of him, I think of his love for Big Red, how he'd play Los Lonely Boys' song "Heaven" over and over again, and the way he seemed lit from within when he read his poems.

When we got to Brackettville, there were flowers at the overflowing church. Flowers at the cemetery. There are always flowers when we grieve and when we celebrate. We demonstrate love with flowers. We add beauty to our lives with flowers.

The past year has been marked not only by a world gone strange and isolated, but also by loss after loss, scoring deep wounds and leaving us disconsolate. But then Lady







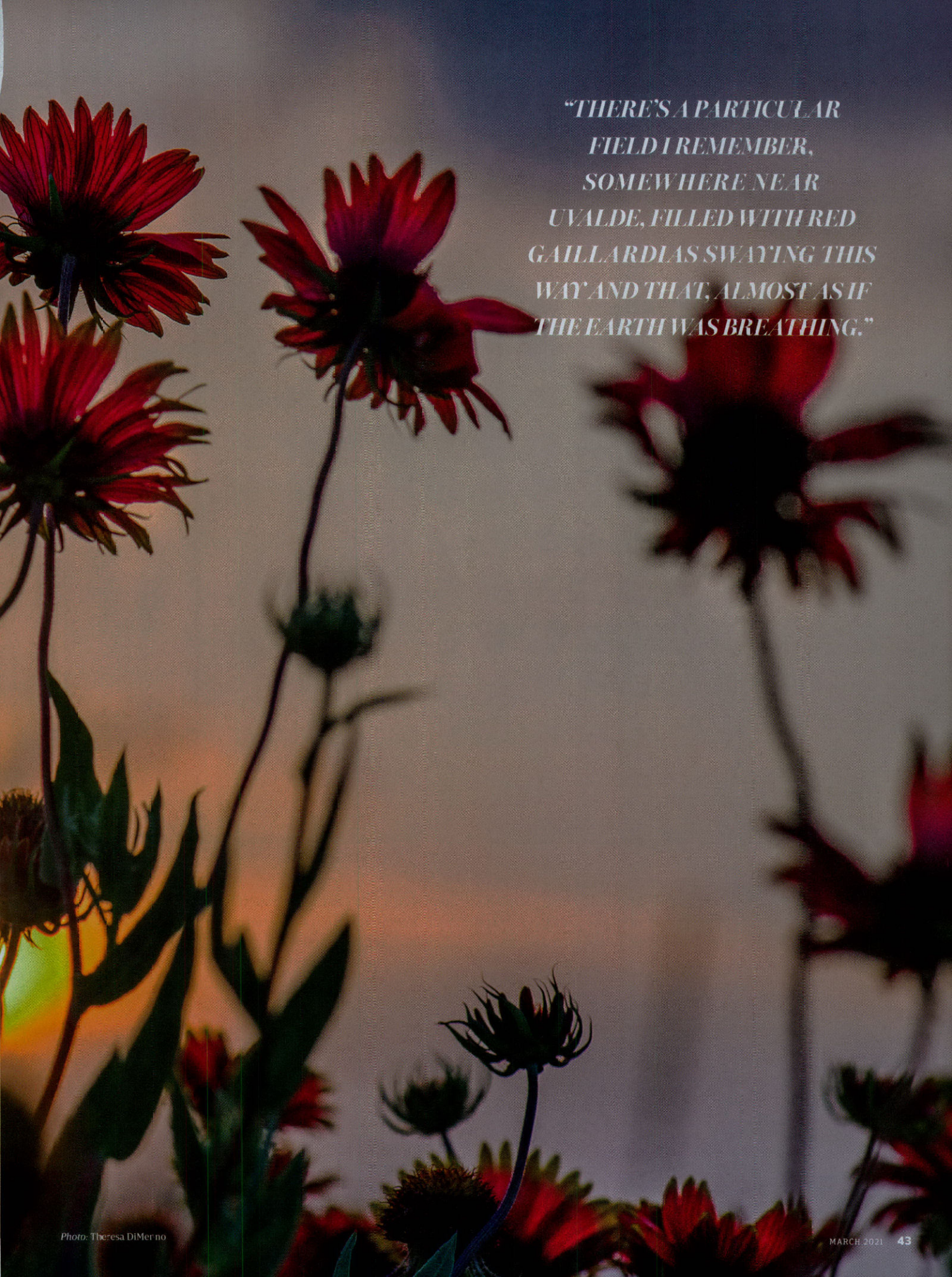
PURPLE  
CONEFLOWERS  
AND BLACK-EYED  
SUSANS





*RED GAILLARDIAS*





*“THERE’S A PARTICULAR  
FIELD I REMEMBER,  
SOMEWHERE NEAR  
UVALDE, FILLED WITH RED  
GAILLARDIAS SWAYING THIS  
WAY AND THAT, ALMOST AS IF  
THE EARTH WAS BREATHING.”*





*SILVERLEAF  
NIGHTSLADE*



Bird Johnson's quote comes to mind: "Where wildflowers bloom, so does hope." Wildflowers are not just pretty spots of roadside color or willful weeds; wildflowers are a reminder that where life ends, it will return. That beauty endures. That the stubborn and glorious earth harbors and nourishes and compels life to bloom: again and again.

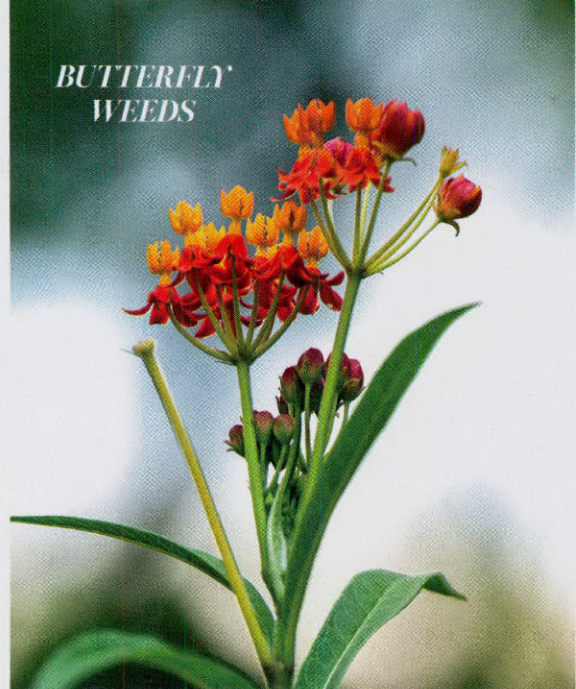
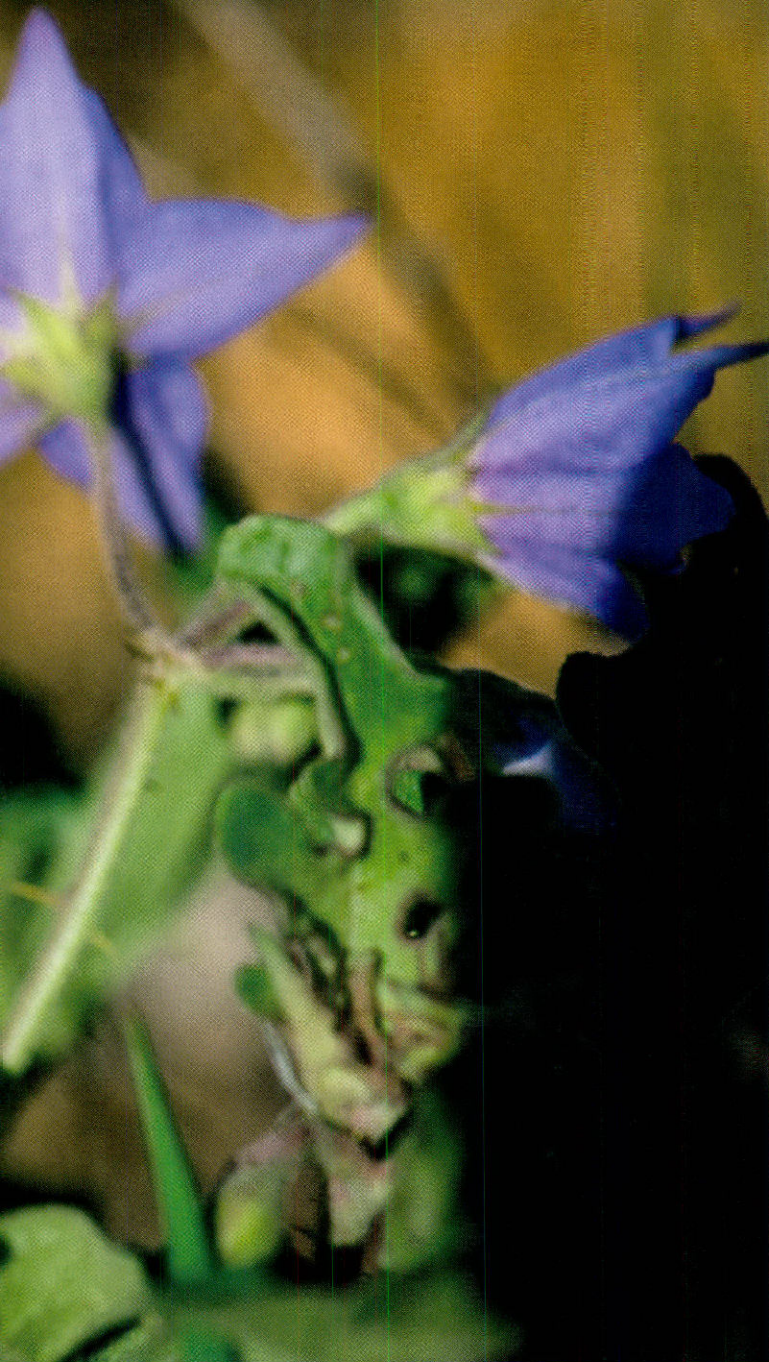
**My parents are buried** in La Piedad Cemetery in McAllen, between La Plaza Mall and the airport. You hear both the rush of traffic and the sounds of plane after plane taking flight. The grass is green and neatly manicured. There are plentiful trees and gravestones in every possible color and shape. In the spring, butterflies visit the ubiquitous plastic flower bouquets, fruitlessly searching for sweetness. I've wished I could plant butterfly weed there for their benefit. The flowers are only half an inch across, but the 2-foot

plants abound with blooms that draw butterflies and bees.

Traditional flowers for funerals include lilies, roses, gladioli, carnations, and chrysanthemums. Funerals bring to mind careful and elaborate wreaths and sprays, created by practiced florists who understand what is expected. But the wild and quiet grief tumbling inside of me wanted to gather flowers from the field, soft and pretty, thick and bright, pulled gently from the ground or taken with the swing of a machete. Wildflowers that live as we do, at the mercy of the sun and time and life. Not grown in a hothouse, not smelling of chemicals. Wildflowers that are always gifts, stubbornly taking root in every hospitable and inhospitable corner, giving themselves to us without demanding we thank them for their beauty or their presence or their infinite solace.

**Until recently, I'd planned** on being cremated and asking





a few cherished friends to go on a road trip and toss my ashes along the U.S.-Mexico border. Embalming and a cement-lined coffin didn't appeal to me, but a few years ago my brother saw a news story about a green cemetery only a few miles outside of Austin. I hadn't known it was even possible to be buried the "old way"—a body wrapped in a shroud of natural fibers, given directly to the earth. There are approximately 160 of these cemeteries in the United States, five in Texas—Countryside Memorial Park in La Vernia, Eloise Woods Natural Burial Park in Cedar Creek, Ethician Family Cemetery in Huntsville, Deer Park Funeral Directors in Deer Park, and Our Lady of the Rosary Cemetery & Prayer Gardens in Georgetown.

Green burials completely abolish the use of cement, steel, copper, and toxic embalming fluids. Remains decompose naturally and are returned to nurture the earth. Generally,

green cemeteries only allow flat markers or benches. Many of them are also conservation sites and only accommodate the planting of wildflowers and native trees. The options in Texas vary widely in size, from Countryside Memorial's 1.58 acres of dedicated burial land within an 86-acre farm, to Eloise Woods' 9.4 acres, to Ethician Family Church's designated lots within an 88-acre conservation site. The cost of a green burial is also much lower than a traditional funeral, with prices in Texas varying from \$500 to \$5,000 for a single plot.

Campbell Ringel, a burialist at Eloise Woods, describes the property as being natural and comparatively "rough around the edges." They are dedicated to disturbing the earth as little as possible, preserving natural cycles, and bringing forth new life. They don't use chemical weed killers, and they maintain the habitat as naturally as possible for the plants and animals that live on the land as well as the people who visit to sit with nature and their loved ones.

Sunny Markham, co-owner and head of family services at Countryside Memorial Park, spoke to the necessity of doing what we can to "keep Texas beautiful," pointing out the plentiful bluebonnets and Indian blankets on the land. An artist herself, Markham creates decorative gravestones that are laid flat on the ground.

Both Ringel and Markham remarked on the unique nature of their work, how involved and hands-on families and loved ones can be in the case of a green burial. Markham relayed experiences that included the washing and preparation of the body, and the power of creating new rituals or honoring ancestral traditions.

I've chosen the site that is the most conveniently located and the one that would allow me to add wildflowers and trees to the land—red gaillardias for their color, huisaches for their scent and thorns, butterfly weed to beckon butterflies, and wild morning glory for the sake of memory.

I would also like to add a few flowers with medicinal



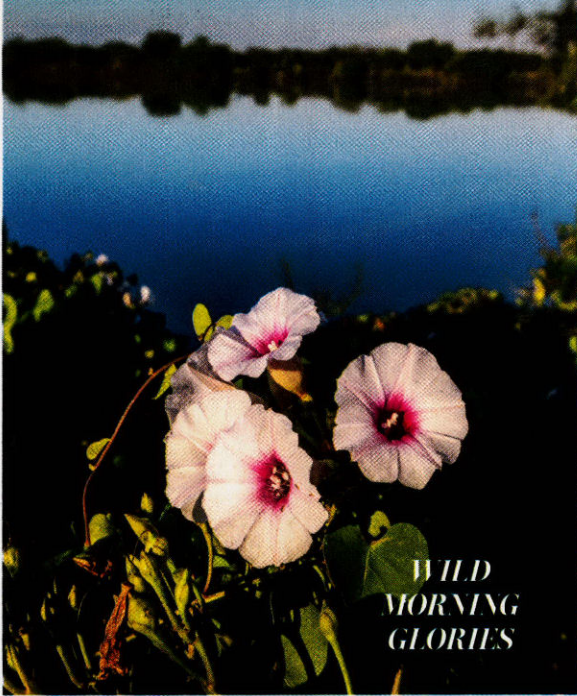
*“HUISACHES ARE NEITHER  
AS LARGE NOR AS PLENTIFUL  
AS MESQUITES, BUT IN THE  
SPRING YOU CAN EASILY SPOT  
THEIR POWDER-PUFF-LIKE  
YELLOW BLOSSOMS. THEIR  
SCENT IS SWEET AND SOFT AS  
A WHISPER.”*





*HUISACHES*



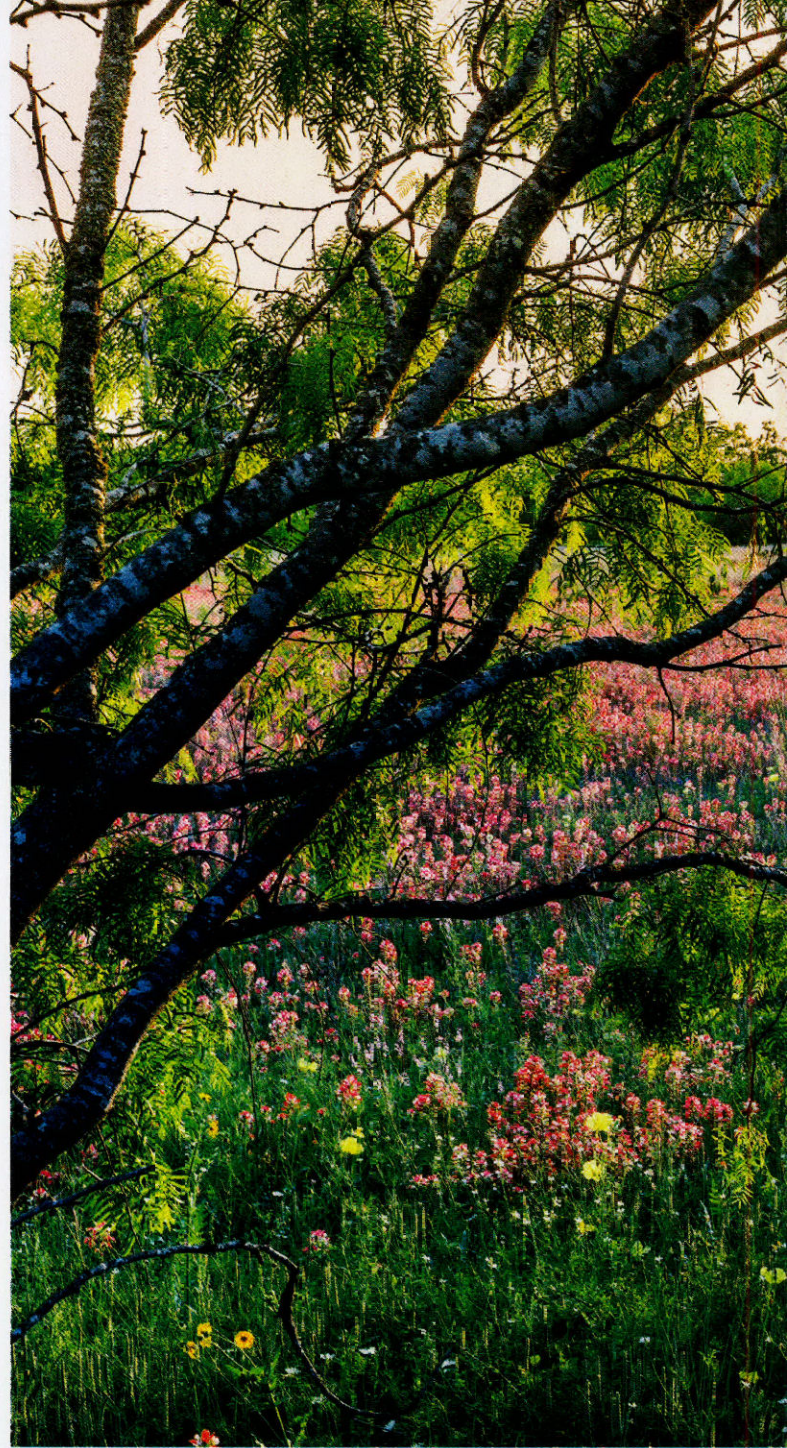


**WILD  
MORNING  
GLORIES**

uses, like tall goldenrod, which grows from 3 to 6 feet high and has clumps of tiny golden flowers that bloom in the fall. They supply abundant nectar and pollen, and a tea made of the flowers is used to treat fevers. Wild onion grows 8 to 12 inches tall and has tiny flowers that range between pale and dark pink. The wild onions can be eaten or made into a tea to treat colds and coughs. The crushed plant also works to relieve the pain of bee and wasp stings. Wild bergamot is an exotic-looking bloom with 2- to 4-inch-wide flowers. They bloom in the early summer and can be as tall as 6 feet. The entire plant has a lovely scent, from the petals to the leaves. They can be dried for their scent, eaten fresh for their flavor, or made into a soothing tea. Silverleaf nightshade can grow up to 3 feet tall and has purple star-shaped flowers. The berries can be used to treat toothaches.

**The first funeral I remember** attending was for one of my maternal great aunts in Crystal City. I was 5 and careful with my new outfit, a white blouse with a plaid skirt and a little navy blue blazer. I don't remember the coffin or the church or the graveyard; only that we visited the house she'd lived in, that water came from a well, light came from kerosene lamps, and I was afraid of spiders in the shadowy outhouse. The adults talked over coffee while I sat quietly and watched the lamplight play over their faces.

Decades later, I drove to Crystal City on my own. Although I grew up among mesquites, huisaches, and other thorned trees in the Rio Grande Valley, it was the wild area around Crystal City that truly made me understand what was meant by a "thorn forest." There are miles and miles of thorned trees in that area, only briefly interrupted by creeks, bridges, or roads. Thorn forests occur in places with little rainfall and are inhabited by trees with long roots and sharp barbs. Huisaches are neither as large nor as plentiful as mesquites, but in the spring you can easily spot their powder-puff-like yellow blossoms. Their scent is sweet and soft as a whisper.



**My mother loved roses, hibiscus, and canna lilies** most, but when I think of her, I always think of wild morning glories, which she called "flores de la mañana." There was one in front of our house by the chain-link fence, rooted in dirt that was more caliche than soil. It was neither especially leafy nor graceful, but the exquisite lavender blossoms were tinged with silver and purple, as fragile as if they were made of crepe paper. They greeted every dawn avidly but always closed up by late afternoon. Numerous types of wild morning glory grow in a wide variety of ecosystems, usually in 5- to 15-foot vines, with funnel-shaped blossoms in various shades, including pink, lavender, and purple.

If you Google "wild morning glories," one of the first





INDIAN  
PAINTBRUSHES

entries will tell you how to rid your garden of them. I think that makes me love them more. Other people may love the exquisite peony or the regal orchid or the fragrant rose—I love flowers that grow even though no one asked them to. That grow in any damned place they choose to grow. It took my breath away one night when I looked up to see a 2-foot dandelion blooming from a neglected rain gutter.

**My sophomore year** in a northeastern university, my dorm window looked out on an old graveyard that was just across the street. I'd walk there sometimes, entranced by the years etched on the gravestones, some of them dating to the 18th and 19th centuries. I remember one grave with a large cement throne-like chair that I dared to sit

on a few times. It was so different from the manicured and plastic cemeteries I knew in Texas. The weathered stones and ancient trees softened its edges somehow. The property was cared for, but time had created tufts of grass impossible to reach with a weed wacker, giving refuge to tiny blossoms that sometimes even pushed up through the snow in winter. I went there when I needed to breathe in the sense of the natural, of rest and peacefulness.

The green cemeteries I visited possessed that same sense of peace—under wide blue Texas skies, breeze blowing, abundant wildflowers within view, and that quiet joy nature exudes when it's able to just be. There was no grief or fear—just the comforting idea that wildflowers would someday dance, not weep, above my grave. ♣






WILD ONIONS





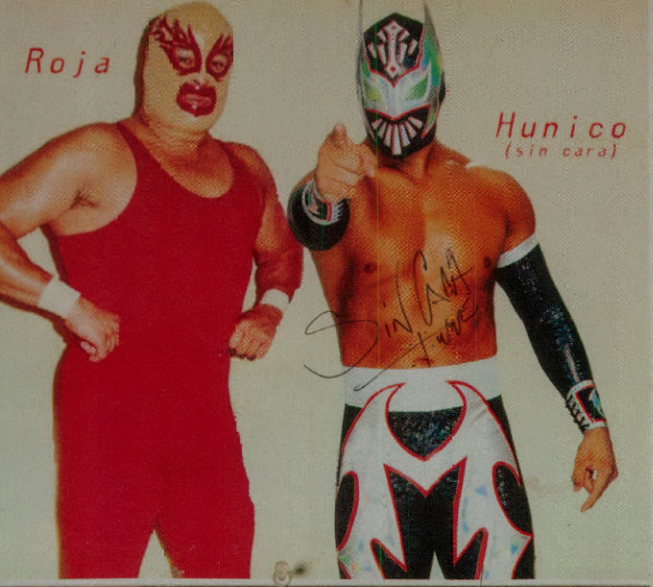


*“THERE WAS NO GRIEF OR  
FEAR—JUST THE COMFORTING  
IDEA THAT WILDFLOWERS  
WOULD SOMEDAY DANCE, NOT  
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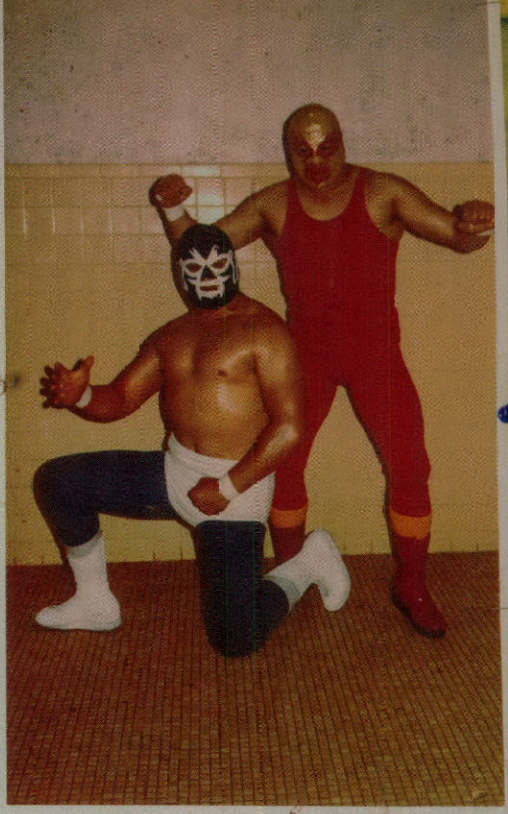






Roja

Hunico  
(sin cara)

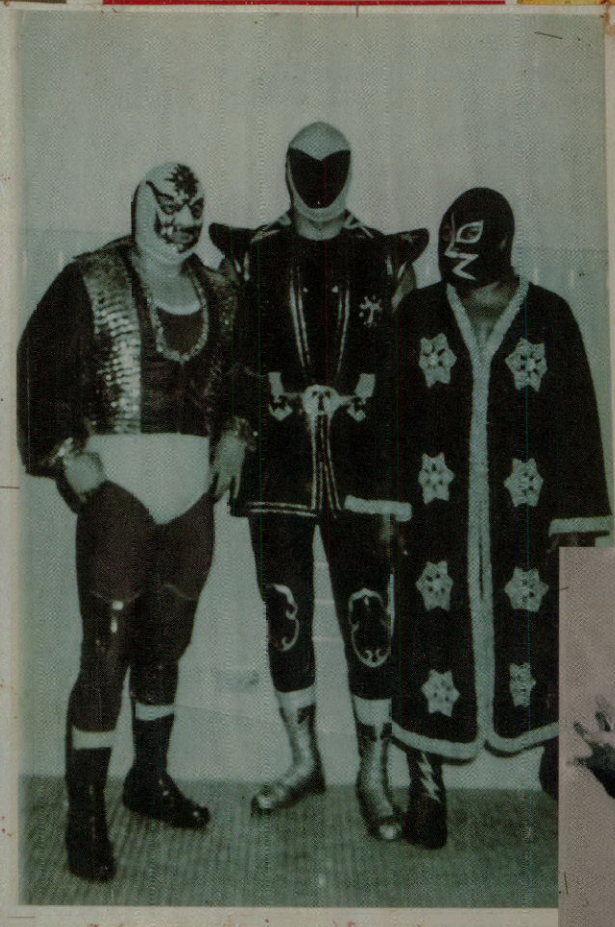


ARTURO GARCIA  
GUADALAJARA, NL



# LOS ÍDOLO DEL RING

Dorrel Dixon, aplicando la de a caballo con cadenas a Flama Roja, a quien saludamos desde nuestra tribuna.





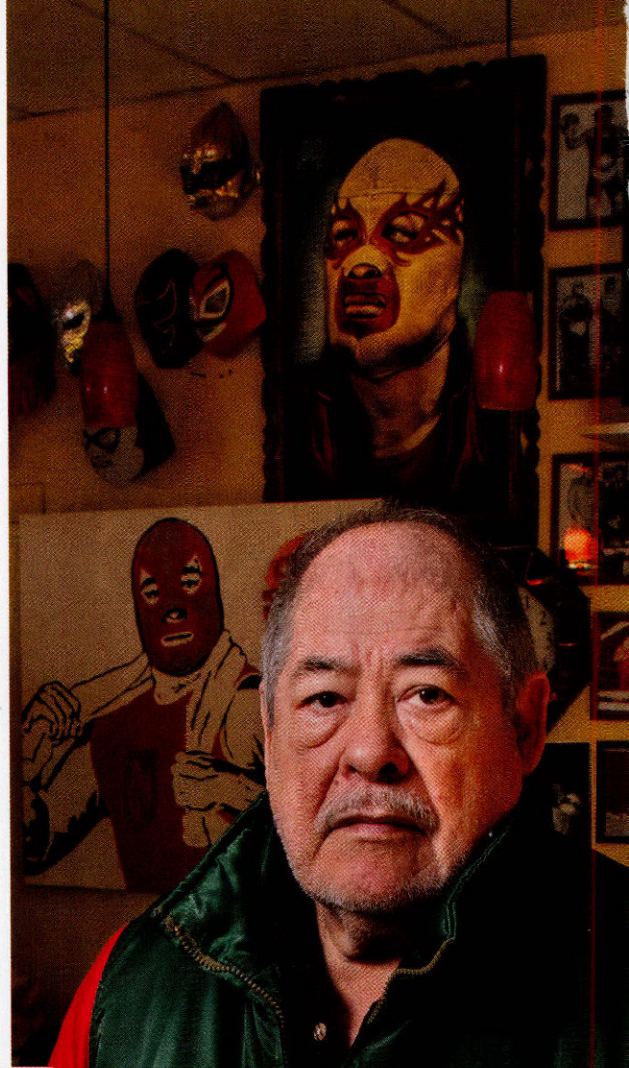


very day at 7 a.m., Arturo García walks into an El Paso panadería. Because of his former profession, he moves even slower than an average 75-year-old. He broke his ankle once. His knees ache from the countless times he's jumped from turnbuckles high above a ring. He has a broken clavicle that never healed properly. His forehead is full of scars that look

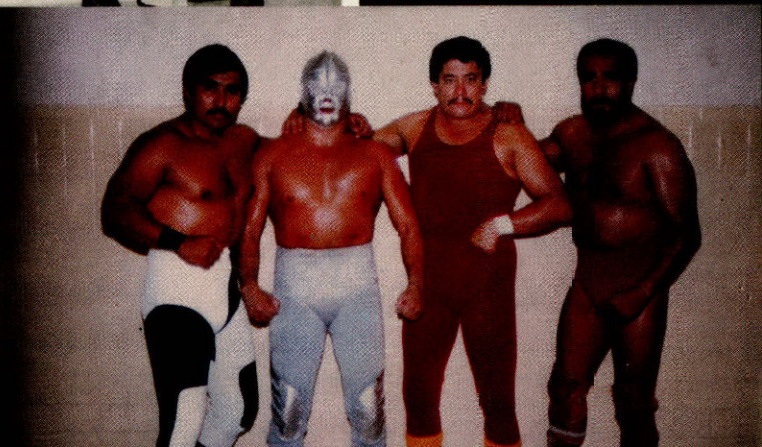
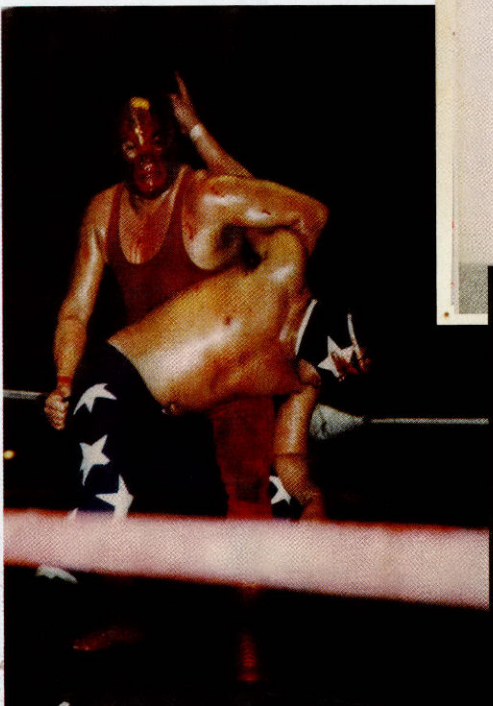
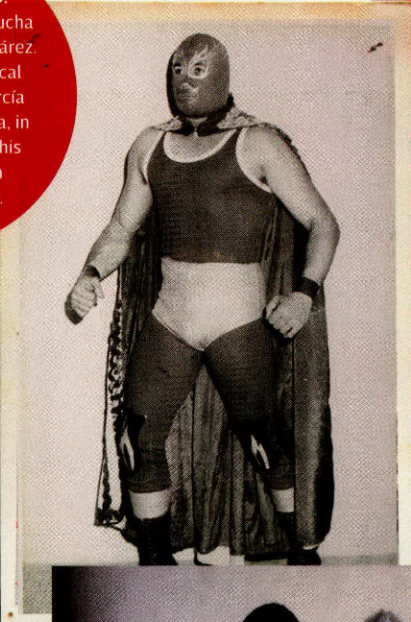
like vertical striations. He has more scars on his torso from emergency surgery after a stranger stabbed him with an ice pick.

García comes from a family of bakers: first his grandfather, then his father, now him. He spends most days making cookies to fill the display case at his Five Star Mexican Bakery. He looks like a typical grandfather. It's easy to imagine a young grandchild giving him a hug. It's more difficult to imagine him as one of lucha libre's greatest *rudos*.

Lucha libre is a Mexican style of wrestling full of cultural symbolism. Part sport and all drama, it's a metaphor for life. *Técnicos* are the good guys—the wholesome heroes worth emulating. They win by following the rules. *Rudos* are the villains. They do whatever's necessary to win, their



**OPENING SPREAD:** Historical photos of lucha libre in El Paso and Juárez.  
**FROM LEFT:** Historical photos of Arturo García as Flama Roja; García, in present day, inside his Five Star Mexican Bakery in El Paso.







embodiment of their characters so believable that sometimes fans are driven to violence against them.

"If you're representing a técnico, you must wrestle clean," García says in Spanish, while sitting inside his bakery. García wrestled under the name Flama Roja, and when he fought, he wore a gold-colored mask with red flames burning from his eyes and stretched across his temples. "If you're representing a rudo, you must be bad," he continues. "Not just against the wrestler but also against the people. So that the people *feel* it. Why do you think I got stabbed?"

García began training at just 12 years old in his native Guadalajara. By 16, he was a professional, working for a company that sent him all over Mexico. At first, he wrestled in Juárez for a few weeks at a time. Then for longer. Eventually, he married a woman from El Paso, had two daughters, and stayed in the U.S. to make his living, partly from wrestling in independent leagues like the one in Juárez. He fought on both sides of the border. Across both countries, anywhere a lucha libre crowd needed riling. García was there with his wicked tricks: poking opponents with forks, beating them with chains and brass knuckles. He loved how people hated him, even if police had to escort him out of the building.

"About six cops would take me out," García says of those nights when furious fans waited for him after a show. "The promoter would call them. 'Escort

★ ★ ★  
**GARCÍA WRESTLED  
UNDER THE NAME  
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HE FOUGHT, HE WORE  
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AND STRETCHED ACROSS  
HIS TEMPLES.**



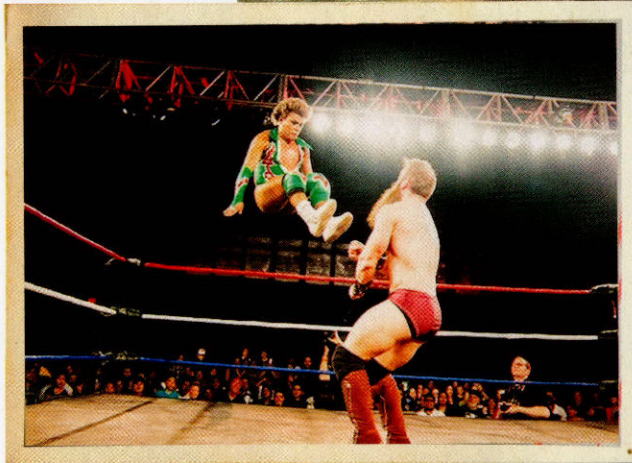
this [expletive] out because they're going to lynch him.' And they'd put me in the squad car, and they'd take me home." Even in retelling the stories decades later, there's a satisfaction in García's voice, an occasional laugh.

Flama Roja is one of the great villains of the El Paso-Juárez wrestling scene. The binational sister cities are full of lucha libre history, and some of it decorates the walls of García's cozy bakery. Fight posters, old photographs of luchadores long dead, and luchador masks—a sacred part of a wrestler's identity—honor the baker's past life. The histories of border cities like El Paso and Juárez can't be separated from each other. And yet, there's enough difference between the two that they also heavily influence each other. That's what happened with lucha libre.

In 1929, Salvador Lutteroth González, who fought in the Mexican Revolution against Pancho Villa, moved to Juárez to work for Mexico's Tax Department. Soon after, he attended wrestling matches in El Paso's Liberty Hall. The fighting was a type of freestyle wrestling with few rules, which sometimes descended into pure violence. González was captivated and felt certain his home country would also love the spectacle. In 1933, he founded Empresa Mexicana de Lucha Libre to expand the sport's popularity from El Paso to Mexico, earning González recognition as the "Father of Lucha Libre."

García remembers this era, though his own career coincided with the Golden Age of lucha libre in Juárez, in the '80s. "I fought against the best," he says. He points around his bakery, where the photos hang, as he lists names. "El Santo, Blue Demon, Huracán Ramírez, Mil Máscaras. The photos don't lie." These are some of the greatest Mexican luchadores who've ever lived. They made their names in Mexico, fought in the El Paso-Juárez borderland and

**FROM LEFT:** Historical photos of Saúl Armendáriz as Cassandro Armendáriz, in present day, sporting one of the long gowns he wears in the ring.



**WHEN CASSANDRO FIGHTS, HE WEARS MAKEUP. HIS HAIR IS PERFECTLY COIFFED, AND HE DONS COLORFUL GOWNS. HE IS CAPTIVATING. HE IS AN EXÓTICO.**





sometimes across Texas, and always drew a crowd.

Today, inside his bakery, there's always someone who remembers García back when he fought as Flama Roja. He doesn't attend wrestling events anymore because, he says, *lucha libre* isn't what it used to be. Once the old luchadores died, he says, the style changed. Gone are the leg and head locks and throwing of opponents—traditional Greco-Roman moves old wrestlers learned prior to becoming luchadores. “Today, it's just jumping and s---,” García says. Yet in March 2020, he made an exception when a promoter hosted an “Homage to Flama Roja” event in Juárez.

On that Sunday evening, García walked toward the ring wearing a black sports coat, black pants, and a button-down shirt open at the top. He wore his old Flama Roja mask, and several men helped him climb into the ring. Mariachis played as the promoter presented García with a plaque. García tried raising the plaque above his head to show the crowd, but his arms couldn't fully extend. He then exited the ring as carefully as he entered.

“Flama!” some fans yelled as he walked back to the locker room. “Don Arturo!” others shouted. Fans cheered and reached out to touch him, as if all hate had been forgotten. García stopped to shake hands, sign a few masks, and pose for pictures.

“Gracias,” one fan told him. “Dios lo bendiga”—*God bless you*. And then one of the greatest villains in *lucha libre* history slowly walked away.

One afternoon in late July, cars formed a line that wrapped around three city blocks in El Paso. It was a curbside beer release party during one of those rare days when it rained for hours. Some drivers and passengers wore face masks; others sported luchador masks.

Out of Old Sheepdog Brewery, one car would exit and another would enter the parking lot. Masked luchadores milled about, posing for photos and signing



# PICK A FIGHT

## AMERICAN ENTERTAINMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

During the pandemic, American Entertainment has staged drive-in lucha libre events as well as pay-per-view cards. [americanentertainmentgroup.com](http://americanentertainmentgroup.com)

## PROMOCION 915-656

As the El Paso and Juárez area codes indicate, Promocion 915-656 hosts lucha libre events on both sides of the border. They also host events in other parts of Texas. [facebook.com/promocion915656](https://facebook.com/promocion915656)



autographs. But the real reason people waited hours in line was to meet Cassandro and to buy the mango-flavored New England-style IPA beer made in his honor—even though Cassandro hardly drinks. No current wrestler embodies the El Paso-Juárez borderland's duality better than Cassandro, born Saúl Armendáriz. He's a native of El Paso, but like many from here, he grew up with one foot on each side of the border.

"El Paso was Monday through Friday because of school," Armendáriz says. He's a petite man with a mischievous smile that reveals perfect front teeth. "As soon as Friday's bell rang, 'Let's go to Juárez.'" For El Pasoans with ties to Juárez, it's common to spend the entire weekend with friends and family in Mexico, and then return to a different life in Texas. "Sundays, we went to a lucha show and then came back."

As he explains, Juárez was once "la catedral de la lucha libre" for wrestlers on both sides of the Rio Grande. Most events happened on Thursday and Sunday evenings inside Josué Neri Santos, the municipal gym in downtown Juárez, located a few blocks from the international bridge connecting to downtown El Paso. Fans from El Paso often parked their cars on the north side of the border and walked south to cross it. "That was the best arena in the whole of Mexico," Armendáriz says.

Inside that gym were elite wrestlers, some of whom would go on to fight for large promotional companies across the world, including World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) and organizations in France, England, and Japan. Young Cassandro—he still describes himself as a "little kid from the hood"—watched luchadores he considered superheroes. But unlike Spider-Man or Superman, these were heroes fans could touch. Being around so much lucha libre inspired him to begin wrestling. Thirty-two years later, at 50, he still enters the ring periodically.

When Cassandro fights, he wears makeup. His hair is perfectly coiffed, and he dons colorful gowns with trains so long they flow down to the floor after he's climbed into the ring. He is captivating. He is an *exótico*. If técnicos are the heroes and

rudos the villains, *exóticos* are somewhere in between. Depending on the situation, they can be both heroes and villains. But regardless of which side they're on, they're always stylish. "Exóticos are the flamboyant wrestlers," Armendáriz explains.

*Exóticos* have always been part of lucha libre, but during the 1930s and '40s, they were closer to circus clowns than to today's drag queens. "They would just make people laugh," Armendáriz says. "But when we came in, we said, 'No, we're really gay people, but we're really wrestlers.' So now we have to step it up so they can respect us more. And then we did all this work."

For Cassandro, "all this work" means he's had his teeth knocked out on three separate occasions. Twice, a luchador dressed as a skeleton kicked them out. He's had eight surgeries, countless broken bones, and stitches galore. He's gotten cut by beer bottles four times.

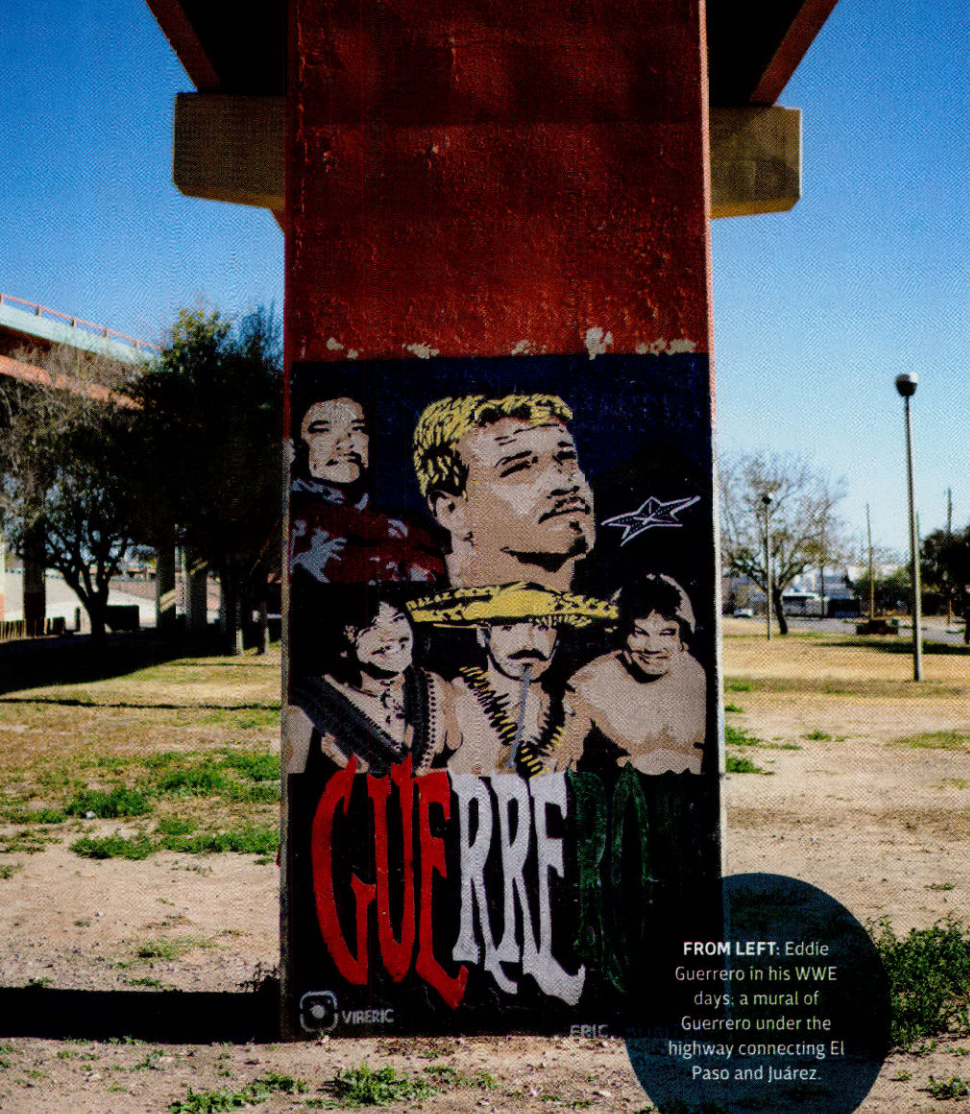
"This is lucha libre, not a beauty parlor," he says, accepting that even if wrestlers choreograph some parts, the physical toll is real. In a sport so infused with machismo, Cassandro, aka the "Liberace of Lucha Libre," has helped revolutionize how fans and fellow luchadores perceive *exóticos*.

Around El Paso and Juárez, Cassandro is an icon. Everywhere he goes, someone—even those who don't watch lucha libre—recognizes him. That recognition will likely grow with celebrated Mexican actor Gael García Bernal playing Cassandro in an upcoming film about the luchador's life. The biopic, currently in production, will chronicle the hardships he went through, in the



**LUCHA LIBRE IS AN EXPRESSION OF THIS PLACE BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES DIVIDED BY A DRIED RIVER BUT CONNECTED BY FAMILIES, SHARED BRIDGES, HISTORY, AND CULTURE.**





**FROM LEFT:** Eddie Guerrero in his WWE days; a mural of Guerrero under the highway connecting El Paso and Juárez.

ring and out, as a gay luchador before he gained international recognition with a profile in *The New Yorker* in 2016. The struggles before he became so beloved, he had a beer named after him.

At his beer release party, it seems as if everyone has a story they want to share with Cassandro. About where they watched him wrestle, or how they watched *Cassandro the Exótico!*—the documentary on his life. It's why long after the beer ran out, people remained in line to get an empty can of the special El Exótico brew. To get a moment with Cassandro.

"Si se acuerda de mi, verdad?" a woman asks if he remembers her. "Claro que sí," Armendariz responds as he smiles. Yes, of course. They then pose for a photo as the rain dies down and the long line of cars dwindles to a last few. Speaking two languages, spending his life on both sides of the border, and embracing femininity and masculinity, Cassandro's duality gives him strength in what he calls "a grueling life."

The long evening has left Cassandro's hair wet. Makeup runs down his face. He's put away the purple and pink gown he wore when the event began. Still, he mirrors the smile of the woman who waited until the end to see him. Picture taken, they thank each other.

"Bye, love you," she says out her car window as she drives off.

A quarter-mile from the brewery, under the highway connecting El Paso to Juárez, there's a mural dedicated to Eddie Guerrero—arguably the most famous luchador from El Paso. His father was Gory Guerrero, one of Mexico's most influential unmasked wrestlers and the patriarch of an important lucha libre family. Eddie was the youngest of the four Guerrero sons, who all wrestled. And part of

his continuing influence is that he looked, lived, and talked like everyday El Pasoans.

In 1987, when Guerrero made his wrestling debut in Juárez, as a técnico, he fought against an aging Flama Roja and won. Years later, he wrestled with Cassandro. When Guerrero graduated to the WWE—the top wrestling company in the United States and likely the world—the announcer always said he was from El Paso, as if it meant something extra. When he won the WWE championship in 2004, as a sort of rudo, pride filled those who had watched him wrestle since his days in Juárez.

Conversely, sorrow filled those same devotees when, inside a Minneapolis hotel room, Guerrero passed in 2005. The 38-year-old's tragic death from heart failure made the front page of the *El Paso Times*. Over time, the mural has become a pilgrimage for fans and wrestlers who pass between the two border cities.

"Lucha libre is like a form of good and evil," says Manny Hernandez, founder and CEO of Promocion 915-656, a promoter based in El Paso. Hernandez grew up watching lucha libre inside Josué Neri Santos. He got into the promotion business in 2018, after serving 15 years in prison for organized crime, by using lucha libre to raise almost \$10,000 for schools and shelters on both sides of the border. "We have los rudos and los buenos," he adds. "Some of us, like me, I'm a rudo."

Lucha libre is an expression of this place between two countries divided by a dried river but connected by families, shared bridges, history, and culture. It suits the lifestyle of people embracing two identities. A baker by morning and a treacherous villain by night. A student who imagines himself a superhero as soon as the week's last school bell rings. A former inmate now using lucha libre for the common good.

The El Paso-Juárez borderland thrives on duality. Here, where two worlds meet—and sometimes clash—something was born that isn't always easy to understand. It may not make sense unless you've spent time here and borne witness to its surreal power. That's the peculiar magic of lucha libre—a world where the good, the bad, and the in between are one. **L**



# INTRO TO CAMPOLOG

## TALES AND TIPS FOR MAKING THE MOST OF A TEXAS CAMPING ADVENTURE

Martin Bluff lies  
downstream from  
Mason on the Llano  
River.





# Y



**E**ven before the pandemic swelled interest in outdoor activities as never before, a growing number of Texans were heading to our hills, lakes, beaches, and mountains for adventures al fresco. And for many, the experience isn't complete without the simple joy of waking up in a campsite, surrounded by the beauty of nature.

Camping's popularity means demand for sites frequently outpaces supply in Texas. Many federal, state, and county campgrounds are booked months in advance, particularly on the weekends. When making camping plans, flexibility is key, both with your dates and your destinations.

Camping has many interpretations. Some people prefer a busy park with electricity and flushing toilets nearby. Others prefer the solitary backcountry, opting for the company of coyotes over humans. Some hardy souls sleep best under the open sky in a sleeping bag or hammock, with nothing to obstruct the stars. Most, however, appreciate at least a tent for shelter, or perhaps even the cozy confines of a camper or motor home.

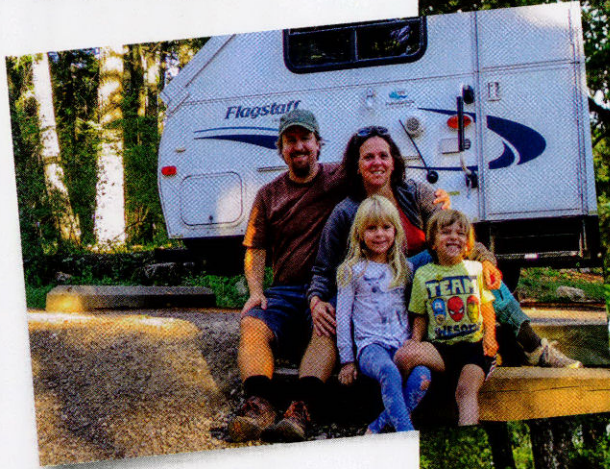
Here we explore three types of camping adventures: RV camping, tent camping, and backpacking. Regardless of your preference, don't forget to plan ahead. And then, plan ahead again.

It'll all be worth it once you settle in and bask in the freedom of our wide-open spaces.



# RV CAMPING

BY MATT JOYCE



**T**he first time I seriously considered buying an RV was in the aftermath of a family tent camping trip to Kerrville-Schreiner Park. Highlights of the weekend included rainstorms, a nauseous 1-year-old, and very little sleep.

My wife and I were accustomed to shrugging off the discomforts of tent camping. But the addition of a baby in diapers presented a new challenge, particularly when it came to sleep. When I found out a second baby was on the way, I knew my tent camping days were numbered.

The first lesson I learned about RVs is you should never attend an RV expo unless you're OK with the idea that you might leave owning one. On a February day in 2012 at the Dallas RV SuperSale, we marveled at the hundreds of gleaming rigs that filled Dallas Market Hall. Dealers displayed everything from 45-foot motor homes with outdoor TV screens to diminutive campers ingeniously designed for compact living. We gravitated to the A-frame pop-up campers, found one that suited us, and signed on the dotted line.

Over the ensuing nine years, we've towed our 19-foot trailer to every corner of Texas and parts of New Mexico and Colorado, adding up to nearly 200 nights. For the most part, they've been restful nights, thanks to the two beds, air conditioner, and heater. One of the best things about an RV is that it extends the camping season. We've dozed comfortably through a 17-degree December night at Lost Maples State Natural Area and napped on a 105-degree July afternoon at Dinosaur Valley State Park.

If there's an upside to the coronavirus pandemic, it's that we've had more excuses than ever to go camping. We camped all over Texas in 2020, keeping to ourselves except for gas station stops.

We weren't totally alone, of course. The popularity of camping during the pandemic has been well documented. State park campgrounds routinely book up months in advance. Outdoorsy, an Austin-based RV-sharing website, reports that rental bookings in Texas grew 190% from 2019



A campsite at Canyon of the Eagles park on Lake Buchanan. **INSET:** Writer Matt Joyce and family with their camper in 2017.





## TOP SPOTS FOR RV CAMPING

At **Fort Clark Springs** in Brackettville, immerse yourself in both frontier cavalry history and one of the state's finest spring-fed swimming pools, [fortclark.com](http://fortclark.com). At **Maverick Ranch RV Park at Lajitas Golf Resort**, take advantage of a spa-kling swimming pool and easy access to the Big Bend region's outdoor adventures, [lajitasgolfresort.com](http://lajitasgolfresort.com). **Kerrville-Schreiner Park** in Kerrville offers nicely distanced sites, quiet Hill Country hiking, and Guadalupe River swimming, [kerrvilletx.gov](http://kerrvilletx.gov).

**ONE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT AN RV IS THAT IT EXTENDS THE CAMPING SEASON. WE'VE DOZED COMFORTABLY THROUGH A 17-DEGREE DECEMBER NIGHT AT LOST MAPLES STATE NATURAL AREA AND NAPPED ON A 105-DEGREE JULY AFTERNOON AT DINOSAUR VALLEY STATE PARK.**

to 2020. The company lists more than 200,000 camper vans, trailers, and motor homes for rent in 14 countries. As the pandemic set in, 2020 accounted for 44% of Outdoorsy's rental activity since the company launched in 2015.

"RVing is socially distant by design, and it's the most ideal way to travel for those wanting to control the cleanliness of their environment and camp at a distance and away from crowds," says Jen Young, Outdoorsy co-founder and chief marketing officer.

Renting is a good option for campers who are not ready to commit to buying their own RV or just want to try it for a vacation. Renting also offers immediate gratification that isn't available in the current RV sales market. At present, most dealerships have waiting lists.

"We get a lot of new customers who have a trip planned in a couple of weeks, but they don't realize how long it takes to get an RV right now, and unfortunately they're finding out the hard way," says Chris Barecky, owner of Colonia Del Rey RV in Corpus Christi. "You've got to plan three months out, if not more. You've got to purchase it now and get your name on it, and hopefully it will be here by then."

Barecky says his business jumped more than 25% in 2020, and it would have grown more if suppliers could keep up. The industry expects demand to keep growing in 2021 as more people take vacations but remain wary of public travel.

"Nobody wants to fly or cruise, so they're all doing the RV thing," Barecky says. "They don't want to stay in hotels—they'd rather have their own thing."

There's a learning curve to pulling a trailer or driving a motor home—scrapes and dings come with the territory. I wouldn't be surprised if more than a few divorces can be traced to the exercise of backing a trailer into a tight spot—the wife standing outside signaling wildly while the husband blindly reverses into the trees.

But that's just life on the road. Regardless, my family sleeps better in the camper than we do at home.



# TENT CAMP

BY JOHN NOVA LOMAX

Camping among the dunes on South Padre Island. **INSET:** Writer John Nova Lomax on a family camping trip in the 1990s.



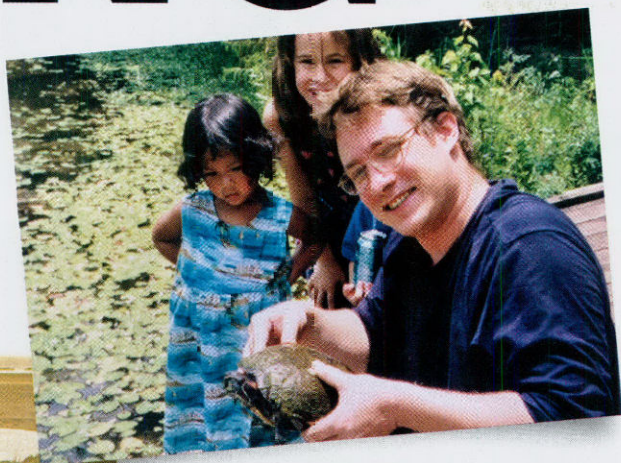
## TOP SPOTS FOR FAMILY CAMPING

Shaded by grandiose pine trees, **Daingerfield State Park** in East Texas is a peaceful haven rich with birdsong. The refreshing small lake makes you feel a bit like you're in Maine, minus the frigid water. Near Brackettville, **Kickapoo Cavern State Park's** remote limestone hills offer plenty of hiking trails, dark skies, and a nightly bat flight during summer months. **Goose Island State Park** near Rockport is one of the only places on the Texas coast where you can enjoy easy access to fishing and a beach while setting up a sandless camp in a shady oak forest. [texasstateparks.org](http://texasstateparks.org)





# ING



“**W**e’re not going on a family vacation this year. We’re going camping!”

As the old joke suggests, camping with kids can be stressful. But connecting your children with nature, and the memories made along the way, are worth it. Despite the inevitable hiccups, you’ll want to do it year after year—and you’ll miss it when your kids are grown.

If anything exemplifies the adage of a penny’s worth of prevention being worth a pound of cure, a family camping trip might be it. This is not the sort of scenario you can throw together on a whim, like a college road trip.

Preparation is key, agrees Lisa Henderson, outdoor education specialist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Simple steps like checking the weather forecast, carrying a map in case there’s no cell-phone service, and storing food in the car to protect it from critters can make a big difference. Plus, it helps get kids in the right mindset.

“Camping connects children to nature and their public lands,” says Henderson, who works with TPWD’s Texas Outdoor Family, a program that offers camping workshops and equipment rentals. “Camping helps build confidence, communication, and problem-solving skills, and best of all, it creates wonderful memories with family and friends.”

Should things get difficult—an unexpected gully washer, for example—ail will not be lost. “We call that Type 2 fun,” Henderson says. “It might not seem enjoyable in the moment,

but they become treasured memories in the years to come.”

Indeed, many years ago on a family campout at Pedernales Falls State Park, an assertive armadillo joined my family for dinner, accepting handout after handout before snuffling in contentment and tottering off into the brush. (Though it’s against the rules to feed wildlife, we obviously weren’t the first for this persistent critter.)

One aspect of preparation is practice. Be like Ike and wargame the trip. Rehearse pitching a tent in your backyard, and if you have a fire pit, you can practice the rudiments of fire safety. No camping trip is complete without s’mores, but the combination of flames and clumsily-waved-about skewers makes the treat one of America’s most dangerous dishes.

Such a controlled experiment also offers an opportunity to prepare for a weekend away from screens. We all agree screens should be banned around the campfire, right? As a transition, provide some old-fashioned activities for back-seat amusement—Mad Libs, 20 Questions, out-of-state plate-spotting, etc. This goes for parents, too. What’s good for the goslings is good for the geese.

Once arrived, hopefully your little platoon is well-drilled enough to set up camp pretty much on their own. Well, that might be a tad optimistic, but don’t be shy about assigning chores, such as gathering firewood or prepping meals.

On the surface, camping is all about the activities—swimming, biking, hiking. But mealtimes should be fun, too. Whether it’s hot dogs on a stick, s’mores, fajitas—food always tastes better when it’s cooked over an open flame. On a campout, you’re taking the bubble wrap off your kids for a few days, the better to let them live and learn.

My old Houston friend Hans Hansen, now a business professor at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, takes his three daughters, all under the age of 13, camping about twice a year at state parks like Palo Duro Canyon and Caprock Canyons.

“Basically, all the things you’ve been busy protecting your child from for the last few months or years? Now you are going to be not just permitting them, but subjecting your kids to these trials,” he says. “Camping with them is the worst idea I insist on doing every year.”

## CAMPING FORGET-ME-NOTS

Most people are familiar with basic camping equipment, such as tents and sleeping bags. But years of experience have taught us that a few extra items will help make campouts more fun and comfortable.

**Tweezers.** Nagging splinters are the worst.

**Glow sticks.** A toy that also keeps track of kids after dark.

**Bicycles.** If you can find a way to bring them along, bikes are perfect for campgrounds.

**Extra tent.** A surplus structure can serve as a playhouse, a circus tent, or a domicile for moody teens.

**Newspaper.** Perfect for catching up on public affairs and starting campfires.

**Dish bucket.** Helpful for keeping wet dishes out of the dirt.

**Solar-powered lantern and/or string lights.** Available from online retailers and some outdoors stores.

**Tarp and rope.** Extra shelter from the sun and rain.

**Solar shower.** Let the Texas sun heat your water for outdoor showering.

**Fire wood**

**Lighter fluid**

**Bug repellent**

**French press coffee maker or instant coffee**

**Grill brush**

**Hammock**

**Portable speaker or radio**



# BACKPACKKI

BY PAM LEBLANC

**A** few weeks ago, stir-crazy from pacing around the house, I stuffed a change of clothing, food, and a tent into my backpack and drove to Pedernales Falls State Park, near Johnson City in the Hill Country.

The campgrounds were booked solid, even midweek, but plenty of primitive walk-in sites were still available. My husband and I reserved a spot online, printed the forms, and checked in at park headquarters, where a park ranger asked me, "You know it's a 2-mile walk, don't you?"

Absolutely. The hike was just what I needed—45 minutes of crunching across a gravel path, hauling everything I'd need for the night on my back. I like backpacking because it tests my self-reliance. Even at a busy place like Pedernales Falls, I knew I wouldn't see many folks in the primitive camping area.

The sun was sinking as my husband and I hiked down a wide and undulating gravel path. We skirted a creek-side bluff and cut through groves of oak and juniper trees, where a white-tailed deer dashed away from us.

When we reached the primitive camping area, no one else was around. We unrolled our sleeping bags and lit a camp stove to heat water for our dehydrated meals. As we sipped wine and ate packets of reconstituted pasta and shepherd's pie, the stars popped out and coyotes yipped.

Texas' backpacking destinations range from rugged Big Bend National Park to more accessible sites such as



Pedernales Falls and Lost Maples State Natural Area. Whatever your preference, you'll need to prepare ahead of time.

If you don't want to buy your own gear, outdoor stores rent the basics, including a tent, sleeping bag and pad, and backpack. Load the pack with 30 pounds of books or cans and take a neighborhood stroll. The weight on your shoulders will remind you to bring only what's absolutely necessary.

Depending on your destination, you may need to bury your excrement. Remember to pack out everything that you brought in, including toilet paper and other trash.

Ian Atkinson, a product specialist at Gossamer Gear, an Austin-based company that sells lightweight backpacking equipment, says he's seen a surge of interest in backpacking since the pandemic began. "More people are recreating outdoors than ever due to social distancing rules," he says, which sometimes results in crowded trails, especially near big cities. "On the flip side though, we are incredibly happy to see a bunch of first-time backpackers. We want everyone to be able to reap the benefits of time spent outdoors in nature."

The Outdoor Industry Association also notes that more Americans are heading outdoors. "We know anecdotally from our own experiences and conversations with the public land managers that traffic is way up," says Deborah Williams, a spokeswoman for the Colorado-based organization.

Atkinson advises rookies to keep both their trips and their gear simple. "Buy your backpack last to make sure it fits all of your other gear," he says.

After a chilly night snuggled inside my sleeping bag, I awoke to the chirp of birds. I took a few minutes to stretch out the kinks, heated water for a cup of hot tea, then sat quietly, drinking in the stillness. No news, no computers, no distractions.

Spending just one night out in the woods, my shoulders felt lighter. I reflected on a thought Atkinson had shared: "The trail will provide you exactly what you need."

## TOP SPOTS FOR BACKPACKING

Texas is known for classic backpacking destinations like **Big Bend National Park**, **Guadalupe Mountains National Park**, and the 128-mile **Lone Star Hiking Trail** in Sam Houston National Forest. If you're not ready to commit to a long trip, or just want to test your gear, primitive sites at **Enchanted Rock State Natural Area**, **Palo Duro Canyon State Park**, **Lake Bob Sandlin State Park**, and **Lost Maples State Natural Area** offer a quick fix.



# NG



Big Bend National Park. **INSET:** Writer Pam LeBlanc at Pedernales Falls State Park.

## RIVER CAMPING

The world feels more tranquil from the seat of a boat, especially after a couple of days of drifting down one of Texas' scenic rivers. Like backpacking, camping on a canoe, kayak, or rafting trip offers a remote

adventure. The difference is you've got the water close at hand to swim and fish, plus the luxury of carrying more gear for a comfy riverside campsite.

Holly Orr, who offers instruction through her San Marcos-based company Paddle With Style, has guided trips on the Colorado, Guadalupe, and San

Marcos rivers. Other popular destinations include the Brazos, Rio Grande, Devils, and Neches rivers. Orr's tips for a good trip? "Do your homework," she says. "Have a float plan. Know where you're getting in and getting out, and what to do in an emergency. Make sure your equipment is ready for the task, along with

your abilities."

It's also important to identify safe places to camp on publicly accessible land. Depending on the river's flow, canoe campers can typically cover 10 to 15 miles per day, but why rush? 🐾

*San Marcos-based Paddle With Style is at 512-749-2350; [paddlewithstyle.com](http://paddlewithstyle.com)*



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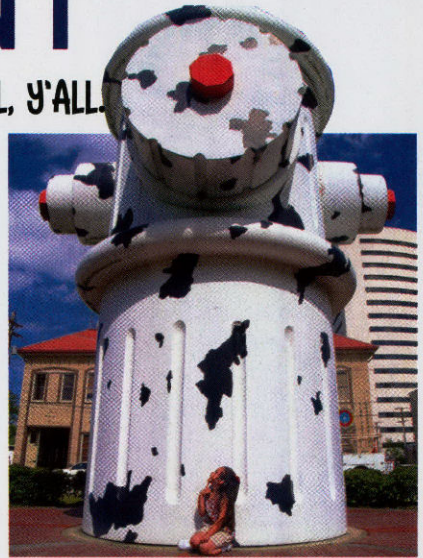
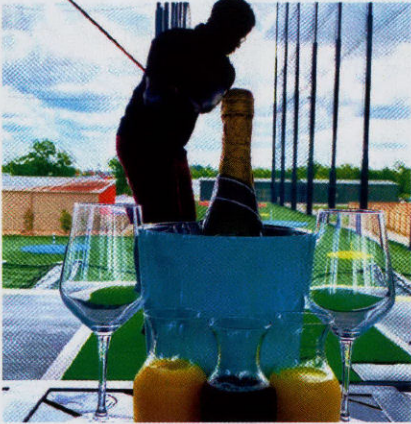
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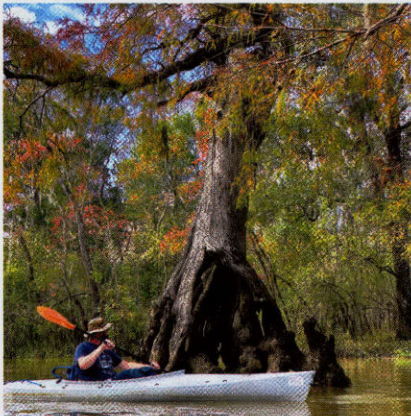
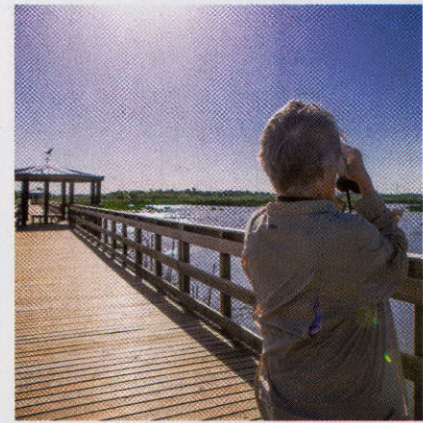


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# PLATES



**DUMPLINGS** are the signature dish of Fort Worth-based company Hao & Dixya.



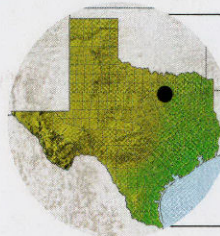


**FRIENDS** Hao Tran, left, and Dixya Bhattarai started a food business together in 2018.

# Dumpling Darlings

Two Fort Worth cooks share their cultures through classes and events

By June Naylor



**THE TABLE MARKET AND CULINARY STUDIO**  
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In the refrigerated section of Fort Worth food market The Table sits a powerful testament to friendship. Sure, on the outside it might seem like just a package of dumplings filled with kimchi, potato curry, or pork. But every mound of dough was lovingly pinched by pals Hao Tran and Dixya Bhattarai, who work under the moniker Hao & Dixya and co-own The Table.

In addition to crafting prepared foods, Tran and Bhattarai teach cooking classes, host pop-up events, and offer catering inspired by global flavors and traditions, including their own. Tran is a native of Vietnam, and Bhattarai hails from Nepal. Dumplings are common in both countries, although the ingredients and preparations differ. Given their expertise, dumpling-making classes have proved to be some of their most popular offerings.

When the duo met about three years ago, neither of them had experience in professional kitchens. What they did have were wonderful memories of cooking with and learning from their elders.

"In Vietnam, my grandmother kept a wood stove going all day to make our meals and heat our water," Tran says. She moved to Arlington with her family at age 6 and spent summers in



Montreal, Canada, in her aunt's restaurant. "My aunt's French-Vietnamese cuisine was simple but flavorful," Tran recalls. "These women really define how and what I cook."

Bhattacharai's recollections of family meals in Kathmandu also stayed with her, but her interest in cooking didn't develop until after college, during a dietetic internship. "In learning about health and nutrition, I was introduced to new ingredients, techniques, and recipes, which I really enjoyed," she says.

As their respective careers evolved—Tran teaches high school chemistry and physics and coaches high school swimming, and Bhattacharai is a dietician—they both spent free time producing elaborate meals for informal gatherings. A mutual friend who noted their common passion connected them. Their ambitions turned into a business. In 2018, they started producing pop-up dinners under the name Hao & Dixya.

"We knew it would be a good partnership if we channeled our energies together," Bhattacharai says. "The pop-up format made perfect sense, giving us flexibility and freedom to be more creative with our menus."

Soon their dinners were selling out, and they added cooking classes, held in professional kitchens, to teach people how to make dumplings, vegetarian sushi, fermented vegetables, and Vietnamese and Indian dishes. They were approached by friends Dena and Trent Shaskan about starting a brick-and-mortar shop to sell their prepared foods. Dena is a longtime restaurant and catering chef in Fort Worth, and her husband, Trent, is a prolific baker with a devoted farmers market following.

"Dena and I talked to other people, but nobody was as ready for risk-taking and creative development as Hao and Dixya are," Trent says. "They make things happen, and they're edgy-smart."

Together, the foursome opened The Table in September 2019.

Their partnership created a sense of community, Tran says. Purveyors, including the owners, share their



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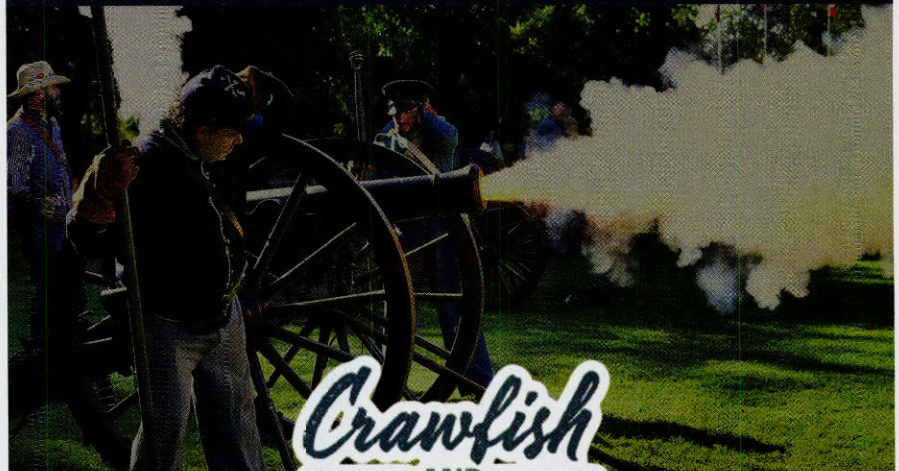
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knowledge and experiences with everyone who comes into the store. “Teaching people what is possible with a few ingredients and showcasing our ethnic influences evolves into conversations around the table and relationships built from there,” Tran says.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic quashed in-person events, Hao & Dixya held classes at The Table as well as a cookbook club, in which participants brought a dish prepared from a designated cookbook. These events often serve as fundraisers for local charities such as the Fort Worth Food & Wine Festival. Over the past year, the duo kept business up by transitioning to to-go dinners and virtual classes with ingredients available curbside. Luckily, their fan base stuck with them as more people cooked at home.

**“Nobody was as ready for risk-taking and creative development as Hao and Dixya are. They make things happen, and they’re edgy-smart.”**

“There’s a good community sense to their virtual classes with a lot of bonding experiences and practical kitchen learning, too,” says Zameika Williams, a high school culinary arts teacher who’s worked at Hao & Dixya pop-up events. She and fellow members of a Fort Worth women’s organization recently participated in an online

dumpling-making class. “We picked up groceries in advance from The Table, got our prep work readied, and then worked together as Hao and Dixya walked us through the process. Having them interact with us and see what we were doing was great—they provide good encouragement.”

Hao & Dixya look forward to eventually opening a larger culinary studio with a big commercial kitchen, a café, and a community garden where they can grow ingredients alongside their clients.

“In retrospect, 2020—and COVID-19’s impact—gave us time to pause and reflect on many personal and business-related goals, and we are developing those ideas that we have held so passionately,” Tran says. “We definitely missed the in-person connections and conversations, but The Table is here to stay.”

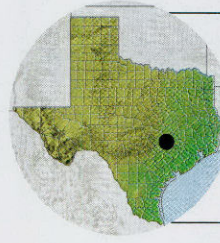
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**ALICE WILSON** of Winchester, a Wendish Fest bake-off champion, presents her version of a Wendish coffeecake.

# Wendish Delight

A granddaughter searches for the elusive coffeecake of her late grandmother's kitchen

By Lisa Bubert

Last year, my husband and I went to visit his parents in Maryland. It was my birthday and my mother-in-law wanted to make me a special treat. She called my mother to ask for my all-time favorite cake, and my mother pulled a memory from the recesses of her mind: I had loved my grandmother's Wendish coffeecake.

Of course, my mother-in-law had no idea what a Wendish coffeecake was, and the cake proved impossible for my mother to describe. My mother-in-law found a recipe for a Polish coffeecake and figured it was close enough. She whipped it up and presented it to me at the party.

It was a delicious cake. But it was not a Wendish coffeecake.

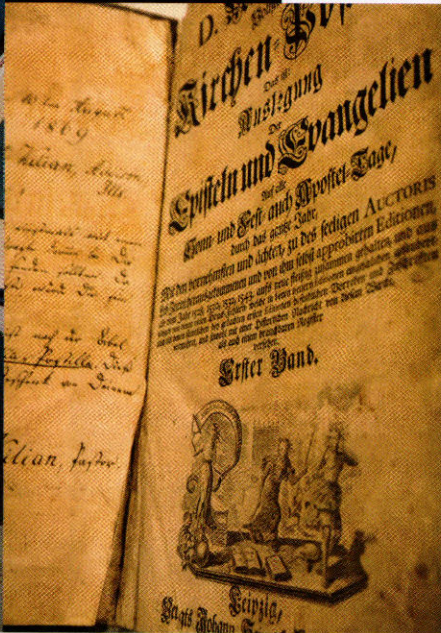
It turns out Wendish coffeecake—or cheese coffeecake, as it's also known—is hard to pin down. It's a slightly sweetened dough leavened with yeast. It has a custardy topping made with a mix of cottage cheese, cream cheese, and lemon (the ratios vary per baker). And it's Wendish because it was born out of an area in Central Texas between Lee and Fayette counties where I grew up, and where Wendish—a mix of Slavic and German—culture thrives.

In 1854, my great-great-great-grandfather, Johann (Jan) Kilian, boarded a boat with 600 other Wendish-speaking Germans. (Also known as Sorbish, Wendish is a Slavic language developed on the border of modern-day Poland and Germany.) They set out for Texas where land could be acquired and their Wendish religion and customs would be out of reach of the German monarchy, which had ordered a merging of Lutheranism into a national church. Almost 170 years later, there's still a smattering





FROM LEFT: St. Paul Lutheran church in Serbin; book given by Wendish immigrant Jan Kilian to his son, exhibited at the Texas Wendish Heritage Museum.



of original families in the area, and the Texas Wendish Heritage Museum in Giddings preserves the Wendish language, along with traditions like egg-decorating, coffeecake-baking, and noodle-making.

Unfortunately, my husband and Maryland-in-laws remained unaware of Wendish coffeecake, which seemed just *wrong*. I knew the only way to truly communicate the unique deliciousness of this cake was to make it myself. Only, I didn't have my late grandmother's recipe. No one in my family did.

The thing about this cake is that it's only made in this specific area of Texas, in the triad towns of Serbin, Winchester, and Warda. If you ask for any granny's coffeecake around those parts, you will likely get a pastry featuring a creamy cheese topping—close to a cheese kolache topping but still not quite.

"It's funny; you go to [parts of] Germany where they still speak the Wendish language and they have no

idea what this cake is," Texas Wendish Heritage Museum docent Marian Wiederhold says. Asking for *käsekuchen* (cheesecake) in Germany will get you a New York-style cheesecake. But asking for *käsekuchen* in these particular 300 square miles of Central Texas will get you a cake with yeast dough and a cottage cheese topping. "Even my husband who grew up in [nearby] Dime Box had never heard of cheese coffeecake," Wiederhold adds. "Somehow or another, this cake evolved right here in this area."

And no, it can't be bought in a bakery. This is a granny's kitchen special, one I suspected was made by feel—not by recipe. So I did what any good millennial would do: I Googled it. There were a few results, but nothing close to what I was familiar with.

That led me to search through church cookbooks. I grew up going to the Winchester church of St. Michael's, where most of my childhood memories revolve around the barbecued chicken

and noodles served at church fundraisers where these cookbooks—compiled by area elders—were sold.

I found one such cookbook from 2004. It contained recipe after recipe for coffeecake with cottage cheese in the topping, including a Wendish coffeecake from a woman who shared my grandmother's maiden name. Bingo.

Except, not bingo. I made the cake, and it was okay. The dough tasted close enough—it had the yeast, not too sweet, dense without being bready—but the topping was all wrong. There was a specific *something* that was missing. A note at the bottom of the recipe stated: "Try as I might, I can never get it to taste like my mother's."

I called Dorothy Loewe, who submitted the recipe, and she told me her mother evolved it from her weekly bread-making. She would knead bread dough, pull off a hunk to sweeten, and add the topping for a dessert. I also called Alice Wilson and Mary Ann Prellop, both winners of the coffeecake bake-offs at the annual Wendish Fest in Serbin. They said they also found their recipes by scouring church cookbooks. Take a dough recipe here, a topping recipe there, add a couple of tweaks and modern flairs, and you've got a winner. They're happy to share their recipes, they told me, but they're not exact.

"I don't even measure anymore," Wilson says, further confirming my suspicion that everyone has a recipe but no one actually uses one. "You just get a feel for it." It's a tradition around these parts that everyone has to work up their preferred coffeecake recipe, and it looked like I would be no exception.

But Wiederhold eventually came to the rescue. After I contacted her, she found my granny's recipe tucked away in her personal copy of the 1987 St. Michael's Winchester Church cookbook. It was a cheese coffeecake recipe from Mildred Kilian herself.

When I pulled it out of the oven, my eyes watered at the sight of it. Biting into it prompted a scream of recognition. I sent pictures to my brother who used to



love the cake so much he would even eat it stale. He made me promise to make it the next time I came home. And of course, I'll be making it for my in-laws as soon as I can get to Maryland. My version of the cake is close, but requires some tweaks. Try as I might, I still can't get it to taste just like Granny's. 🐼

RECIPE

## Mildred Kilian's Wendish Coffeecake

**INGREDIENTS**

**Dough:**

- 3 ½ cups flour
- Pinch of salt
- Dash of nutmeg
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 3 tablespoons shortening
- 1 cup warm milk
- 2 teaspoons yeast dissolved in ½ cup warm water

**Topping:**

- 8 ounces cream cheese
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- 3 eggs
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 2 ½ tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 or 3 pints of cottage cheese
- Granulated sugar to taste

**DIRECTIONS**

To make the dough, mix dry ingredients, then add shortening. Add milk and yeast. Knead and let rise 1-2 hours. Punch down and fold over three or four times. Flatten to two cookie sheets. Prick with fork all over. To make the custard topping, mix cream cheese and powdered sugar. Add eggs, flour, lemon, and vanilla, and mix. Add cottage cheese and mix. Cook custard over low heat or in a double boiler until it begins to thicken. Spread over dough. Add sugar to the topping to taste. Bake at 325 F for 20-25 minutes.



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# The Sweet Spot

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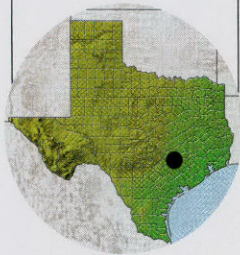
By Lorie A. Woodward



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**R**ohan Meadery's bucolic setting in La Grange entices guests to linger long after they've finished their pints of mead.

The pastures, fruit trees, and grapevines that dot the rolling hills seem to glow in the late afternoon sun. Patrons gather under the sprawling live oaks and on the two open-air patios, where the sounds of laughter, clinking glasses, and live music mix with clucks, squawks, and quacks. The free-range chickens, ducks, and guinea fowl earn their keep by controlling insects on the farm and providing entertainment.

"We created the family-friendly place we longed for when our children were small," proprietor Wendy Rohan says. She co-founded the meadery and Blissful Folly, the 30-acre organic farm on which the meadery sits, with her husband, John Rohan, in 2009. "We built the farm with the hope of creating a community around craft beverages."

Mead is just one of the beverages they make and serve on-site, alongside wine and hard cider. Mead is mankind's oldest fermented beverage, with the earliest archeological evidence of it dating to 7000 B.C. Like grain in beer or grapes in wine, honey is the main source of fermentation for mead.

The Rohans left Houston in 2008

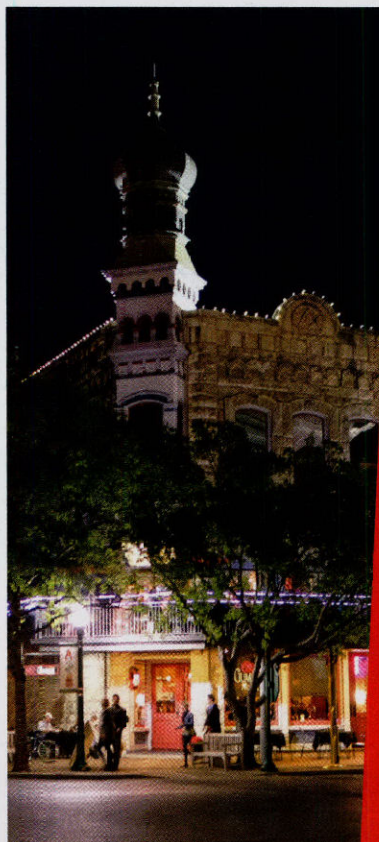
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**“We created the family-friendly place we longed for when our children were small.”**

**FROM LEFT:** Wendy and John Rohan, the couple keeps bees on their Blissful Folly Farm in La Grange.



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"HONEYMOON" and blackberry mead from Rohan Meadery.

to give their children the small-town upbringing they both enjoyed. As the couple contemplated what kind of business they could start, they settled on producing mead.

John first experimented with making mead (but not drinking it) in middle school. He was inspired by his great-great-grandfather, an immigrant from Moravia (a historic region in the eastern part of the Czech Republic) who settled in La Grange in the late 1800s and took up homebrewing. John went on to study chemical engineering and kept bees as a hobby. Wendy, a former high school science teacher, was knowledgeable about fermentation from her college lab courses on fungus, yeast, and microbiology. The couple searched for mead recipes and began experimenting with one from the 16th century. Today, the Rohans use wildflower honey from the 20 or so hives on their farm as well as honey from Bee Wilde Bee & Honey Farm in Montgomery.

"We love the art and science of

fermentation, which is the heart of it all," Wendy says. "For us, it's not about being the biggest business in Texas, but about how much we have our hands on it and in it."

Rohan Meadery's 14 styles of mead range from sweet to dry, with six to eight available at any given time. The myriad flavors include apple, cranberry, grapefruit, blackberry, and peach, and they can be sampled by ordering a flight. The meadery also offers pizzas, nachos, and traditional and vegan charcuterie boards. Live country music is a weekend staple.

Frequent customer Jill Hood, who lives about 30 minutes away near Columbus, first visited Rohan Meadery six years ago with her then-teenage sons. They were delighted by what they found.

"It's just a happy, friendly place where you can get a healthy, delicious drink served by happy, friendly people," Hood says. "Even if you don't feel like talking, you can catch the breeze, watch the chickens running around, listen to music, and just breathe." 🐔



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# TEXANA



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## ‘A Small Kingdom’

How the first Germans arrived in Texas and made a lasting impression

By James L. Haley

**G**ermans who visit Texas are often surprised to discover the depth of their homeland’s influence on the Lone Star State—the cities with German names, Oktoberfest traditions, and business signs printed in the fraktur lettering of the Old World.

In fact, thousands of Germans moved to Texas during the mid-1800s, bringing their culture and traditions with them, but few know this German influx can be traced to one man. A settler named Johann Friedrich Ernst, an enterprising swindler, would never have dreamed of his eventual legacy in the New World.

In April 1831, empresario Stephen F. Austin issued a league of land to Ernst, an immigrant from the Duchy of Oldenburg. Though the land grants in Mexican Texas were free, the recipients had to be married men, and Austin had to vouch for the character of his colonists. Ernst, who had a wife and five children, seemed to fit the bill. What Austin didn’t know was that Ernst’s name was really Dirks, his money was embezzled from the Oldenburg post office, and he was on the lam from the duke’s police.

No matter—it was common for fugitives to reinvent themselves in Texas. Ernst took his grant in the northern reach of Austin’s colony, between the present cities of La Grange and Brenham, arriving in high spring when the rolling prairies were blooming with wildflowers. The Ernsts made a go of it, and the following February he wrote a letter home, describing the new land: “A father of a family ... receives on his arrival ... a small kingdom. ... The expenses for the land need not be paid immediately. ... Climate like that of Sicily. The soil needs no fertilizer. No winter, almost like March in Germany. Bees, birds, and butterflies the whole winter through. ... Meadows with the most charming flowers. ... Scarcely three months work a year. No need for money,



free exercise of religion.”

Ernst's letter landed like a bombshell when newspapers published it throughout the patch-quilt of German states, which were rife with political discontent and economic depression. German peasants, merchants, even minor nobility, began to sell out, pack up, and head for the ports of Hamburg and Bremen.

Ernst sponsored these new arrivals, supplying them with goods and lending them money. On the 4,400 acres of his own league, he founded the town of Industry, sold lots to newcomers, and became—surprise!—the postmaster.

Ernst's stone post office survives, standing in Industry's quiet little Ernst Memorial Park. Its rock-solid walls mark a German-Texan approach that came to annoy the resident Americans, who were satisfied with their drafty log cabins.

“The Germans didn't care if it took two or three years to build something,” says Daniel Koennecke, a historical interpreter at the Sauer-Beckmann Living History Farm in Stonewall. “They built to last.”

German dukes and princes were initially alarmed at their countrymen's flight to Texas. But Adolph, Duke of Nassau, saw it differently. He realized that if the nobility sponsored the immigrants, they could develop a foreign market for German products and sow the seeds of empire. At Adolph's opulent Biebrich Palace near Wiesbaden, the *Adelsverein*, or Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas, gathered in March 1842 and enacted a plan that would finance German emigrants to Texas and eventually secure more than 3 million acres in the republic.

Three hundred German families came in the first wave. Carl, Prince of Solms-Braunfels, led the initial contingent. Dashing and adventurous, the 32-year-old prince had been reading avidly about Texas. The project began with enormous optimism, but quickly fell apart. The first ship reached Texas in November 1844. “The journey here was awful,” explains Keva Hoffmann Boardman, curator of the Sophienburg Museum in New Braunfels. “The holds of cargo ships were crowded

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**The Sophienburg Museum and Archives** in New Braunfels preserves and displays immigrant stories and historical photos of New Braunfels and Comal County. [sophienburg.com](http://sophienburg.com)

**The Ferdinand Lindheimer House** in New Braunfels contains exhibits about pioneering botanist Lindheimer, who settled in Texas in 1844. He's credited with identifying hundreds of new plants in Texas, including prickly pear cactus, mesquite, and milkweed. The house displays the printing press Lindheimer used to print Texas' first German-language newspaper, the *Neu-Braunfelser Zeitung*, starting in 1852.

[newbraunfelsconservation.org](http://newbraunfelsconservation.org)

**The Pioneer Museum** in Fredericksburg collects artifacts, including nine historic structures, chronicling Gillespie County history. [pioneermuseum.net](http://pioneermuseum.net)

**The Sauer-Beckmann Farm**, at the Lyndon B. Johnson State Park & Historic Site in Stonewall, interprets German farming life in early Texas. [facebook.com/sauerbeckmann](https://www.facebook.com/sauerbeckmann)

**The German Free School** in Austin opened in 1858 and now houses the German Texas Heritage Society, which maintains an active schedule of classes and events. [germantexans.org](http://germantexans.org)

**German Turnvereins** served as gyms, dance halls, and social centers. In Bellville, an elaborate, 12-sided frame structure from 1897 now serves as a municipal pavilion. [bellvilleturnvereinproject.org](http://bellvilleturnvereinproject.org)

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with tiny cubicles for passengers.”

From Galveston, they sailed on to the west shore of Lavaca Bay, where Carl founded a new port he named Carlshafen (later known as Indianola). Out of money and supplies because the prince was a terrible manager, and realizing their land grant lay hundreds of miles away, between the Llano and Colorado rivers, the settlers started walking inland. Immigrant diaries reveal a death march: Hundreds, possibly thousands, perished of disease and malnutrition.

Realizing they couldn't make it far, Prince Carl purchased 1,100 acres north-east of San Antonio and named the new town New Braunfels. “The first orphanage in Texas was organized in New Braunfels to care for the children of those who died en route from the coast,” Boardman says. Artifacts such as dolls and toys from that orphanage are on display in the Sophienburg Museum.

Prince Carl reserved for himself a hilltop on which he planned to build the Sophienburg (“Sophie’s fortress”), a combination house and fort for himself and his fiancée, Princess Sophie of Salm-Salm. But he didn’t last. The Adelsverein’s

finances were wrecked, the colonists resented Carl’s insistence on maintaining royal protocol, and worse: of all, Princess Sophie refused to leave Germany. So, Carl returned home. His New Braunfels hilltop, however, now houses the Sophienburg Museum.

Management of the Adelsverein passed to Baron Ottfried Hans von Meusebach, also age 32, who proved to be more suitable for the job. Unlike Carl, Meusebach renounced his noble titles and arrived in Texas as John O. Meusebach. His principal task was to move the Texas contingent onto their distant land grant before it expired. This required securing a treaty with the Comanche who lived there. Ignoring Texas authorities who warned him of the danger, Meusebach led colonizers into the Hill Country and founded the town of Fredericksburg—named for Prince Frederick of Prussia—80 miles west of Austin, in May 1846.

One year later, six Comanche chiefs rode peaceably into town and signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation. The Comanche regarded Americans as treacherous, but they were willing to work with Meusebach, impressed by

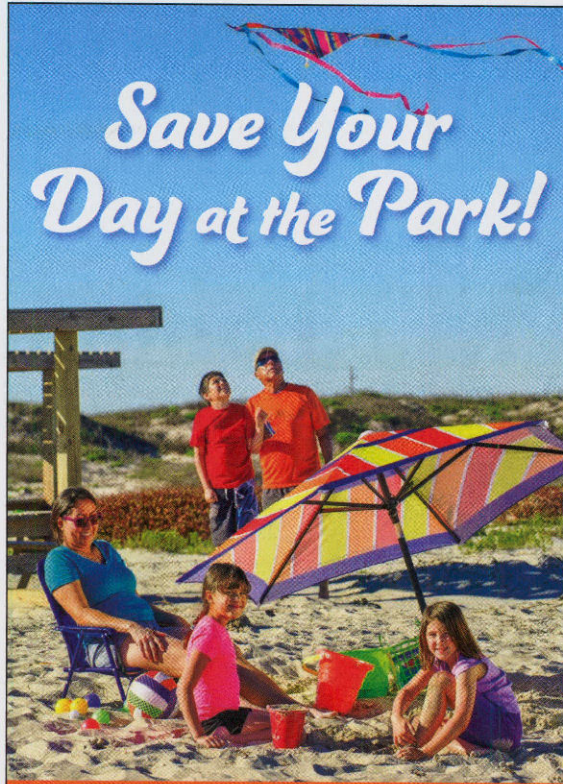


his flaming red hair, his candor, and the fact that he wasn't American. Infractions occurred now and then, but the treaty has been hailed as one of a very few between Anglos and Native Americans that was upheld by both sides.

Meusebach's success angered long-resident Texans, for they had fought the Comanche since President Mirabeau Lamar declared war in 1839, and only recently—thanks to the advent of repeating pistols—had started to take the upper hand. Fredericksburg thrived, and from there more new communities, such as Castell on the Llano River, were founded farther into the Hill Country. This history is presented in Fredericksburg's Pioneer Museum and in the reconstructed octagonal Vereins Kirche (society church) on the town square.

The lifestyle of these frontier settlers continues today at the Sauer-Beckmann Living History Farm at Lyndon B. Johnson State Park & Historic Site in Stonewall. Docents in period dress maintain traditional German practices of animal husbandry, vegetable gardening, and dairy and smokehouse operation. From the time when Americans arrived in Texas, they basically grew corn for food and cotton for cash. The Germans tended to diversify more readily. "They worked hard," explains farm manager Hannah Kellogg, "and had their eye open for any crops they could adopt, such as okra." The German settlers kept to themselves for decades and showed little interest in assimilating, leading many of their American neighbors to resent them. "Sometimes when you are successful, it can make people jealous," Kellogg says. Germans also disliked slavery, and that caused additional tensions.

By 1860, more than 20,000 Germans called Texas home. As much as their sheer numbers, their cultural, scientific, and educational advancements enriched Texas in innumerable ways, from bratwurst to biergartens, nine-pin bowling, classical music, and even county fairs. It's enough to make German tourists depart Texas with a sense of accomplishment. 🇺🇸



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## THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5

# Lampasas

Where the Hill Country meets the West

BY CHET GARNER



Lampasas lies in the region of Texas where the Hill Country transitions into the Great Plains. It's packed with the best of both worlds, from gunslingin' Wild West stories, to a crystal-clear spring, to platters full of steaming German schnitzel.

### Historic Downtown

More than just a square surrounding the stately 1883 courthouse, the historic district stretches for blocks in every direction, showing visitors the town has many stories to tell. Local legend asserts there were once 36 saloons in this area of town, catering to working cowboys and the outlaws who roamed through. To dig deeper, visitors can head to the Lampasas County Museum—occupying an old sheet-metal shop—and read about the infamous Horrell-Higgins feud that rivaled that of the Hatfields and McCoys.

### Eve's Cafe

German heritage stretches all across the Hill Country, but it's hard to find German food as good as Eve's. After emigrating from the Old World decades ago, Eve Sanchez, with her husband, Steve Sanchez, now runs this authentic restaurant on the square, which serves up crispy schnitzel that will make you shout, 'das beste!' The bratwurst sausage is stuffed in-house every day, and the Black Forest cake is far better than anything that tempted Hansel and Gretel.

### Hancock Springs

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Lampasas became a preferred destination, attracting folks from all over

the country to its natural springs, which were thought to have healing properties. Whether or not that's true, it's certainly good for the soul to take a dip in the Hancock Springs pool. The springs pump thousands of gallons per day into a human-made pool that's cold year-round. But don't let that stop you from participating in a century-old activity.

### Hanna Springs Sculpture Garden

One might not think quirky modern art and small towns mix, but this park proves otherwise. Take a walk among more than a dozen sculptures ranging from a monstrous catfish in the bed of a rusted old truck to a concrete sofa complete with a mosaic afghan. They're sure to leave you inspired, confused, and impressed, all at the same time. If you're on the hunt for more sculptures, check out the "World's Largest Spur" on the other side of town, standing 35 feet tall and weighing 10,000 pounds.

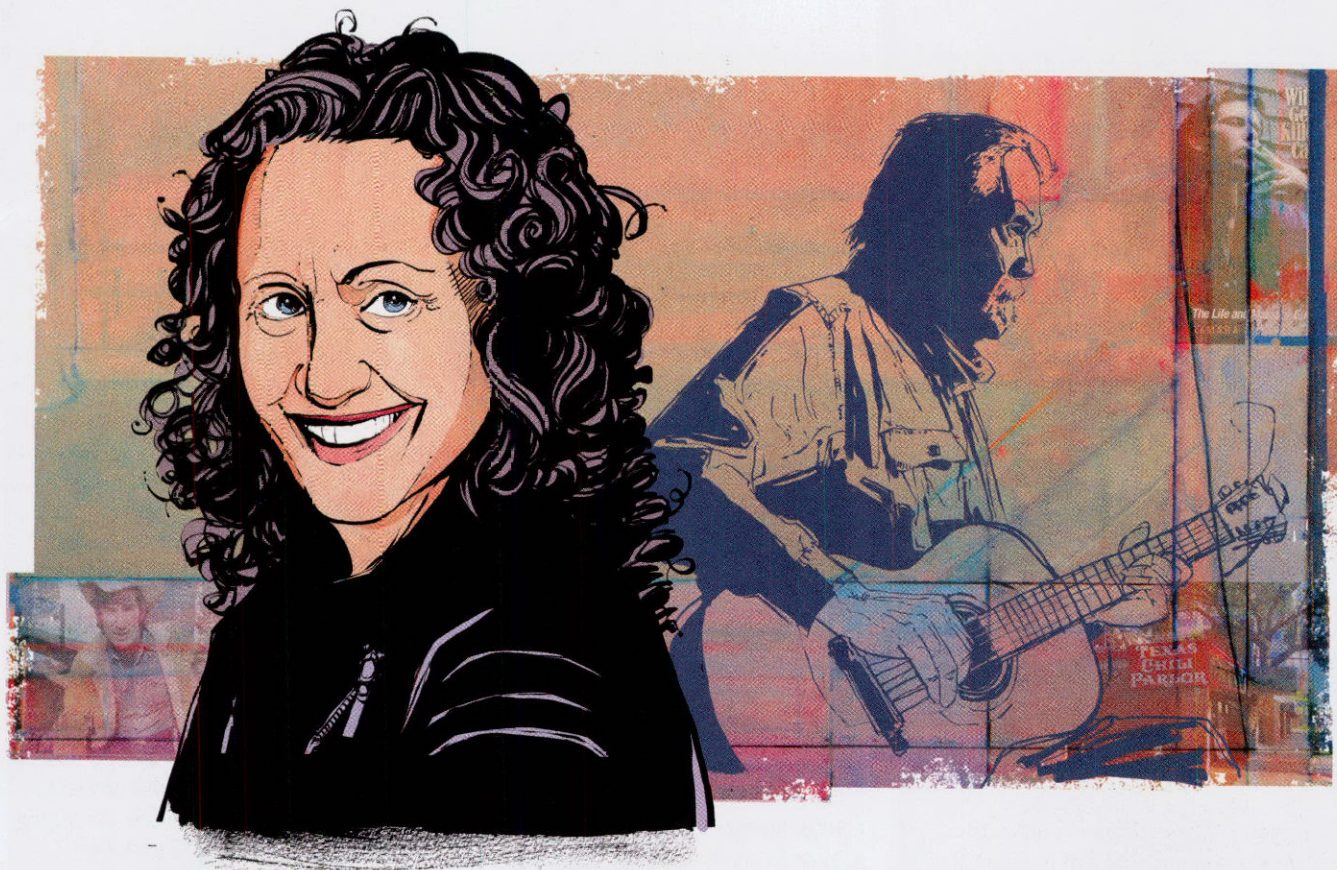
### Storm's Drive-In

This is your stop for a meal of historic proportions. The small-town drive-in started as The Dairy Cue, and its old-fashioned burgers and fries taste just as good as they did 70 years ago. Even Elvis himself enjoyed Storm's during his Army training at Fort Hood. Save room for dessert and order a Frosted Dr Pepper—ice cream blended with the famed Texas soda.

So whether you follow my footsteps or forge your own path,  
I hope to see you on the road.

Chet Garner is the host of The Daytripper® travel show on PBS.  
To view the Lampasas episode visit [thedaytripper.com](http://thedaytripper.com).  
Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chetripper.





# That Old Time Feeling

Filmmaker Tamara Saviano explores one of Texas' most beloved songwriters, Guy Clark, in a new documentary

By John Nova Lomax

**I**f you're talking about Guy Clark, there's no place better to do so than at the Texas Chili Parlor in Austin. And few living people are more versed on the subject at hand than Tamara Saviano. A veteran journalist and record producer, Saviano has spent more than a decade chronicling the life and music of the Texas troubadour. Starting as his publicist in the 2000s, Saviano co-produced a Grammy-winning 2011 tribute album, *This One's for Him*, and wrote the 2016 Clark biography, *Without Getting Killed or Caught*. In March, Saviano and Paul Whitfield, her husband and co-producer, will debut a film of the same name at the South by Southwest Film Festival.

Clark was born in Monahans and grew up in Rockport before eventually moving to Nashville, where he passed away in 2016 at the age of 74. But his legend continues to grow in the works and stories of friends like Rodney Crowell, Steve Earle, and Lyle Lovett.

**"We discuss Guy's career—that's the basis. But it's also this interesting relationship story. It was a really magical time. It was also a little on the dark side, but it is what it is."**

Friends and fans love to recall Clark's wild misadventures with his songwriting compadre Townes Van Zandt. But Clark never fit into Music City's template for a country star, and that's where Saviano came in. Crowell sees her as one of Nashville's greatest publicists. "She really did get inside Guy's world and bring him to the fore," Crowell has said. "I mean, she gets a lifetime pass for that alone." Clark's legacy bears that out: Though he never had a smash hit under his own name, his songs like "Desperados Waiting for a Train" and "L.A. Freeway" have become ensconced in Texas music and in the larger genre of Americana.

The Texas Chili Parlor looms large in Clark's iconic lament, "Dublin Blues." And it's where Saviano, who splits her time between Austin and Nashville, first hatched the idea for a Clark biography. When the documentary project followed, Clark consented—on the condition that Saviano be at the helm.



**TH:** *It's easy to see how the Texas Chili Parlor would appeal to Guy.*

**A:** Absolutely. Because of "Dublin Blues," tourists come to Austin, and this is part of their tour. But when you're in here, it feels like a Guy place. It doesn't feel like a tourist trap.

**TH:** *Would you call Without Getting Killed or Caught a documentary?*

**A:** It certainly has that. We discuss Guy's career—that's the basis. But it's also this interesting relationship story. There were always three people in that marriage. First it was Guy, Susanna [Clark, Guy's wife], and Bunny [Susanna's sister, whom Clark dated prior to her suicide and before his marriage to Susanna]. And then it was Guy, Susanna, and Townes Van Zandt. Not only that but the friendship relationships: Rodney Crowell moved to Nashville in 1972, and Steve Earle moved in '74, and they were with that group. We get into how that close friendship influenced all of their art. It was really a magical time. It's also a little on the dark side, but it is what it is.

**TH:** *Would Guy have wanted y'all to shy away from that?*

**A:** No, he would not. I feel quite confident that Guy would have liked our movie. There were a few instances where we got feedback from some filmmakers, and they were like, "Oh, do you want to soften that?" Nope. Guy would not want me to soften anything.

**TH:** *How would you describe the relationship between Guy, Susanna, and Townes?*

**A:** Susanna wrote a poem that we have in the film: "One is her soul, and the other her heart." Their art is what drove the three of them. Townes was the yardstick for Guy. Guy felt like Townes made him a better writer. Susanna loved Townes, and Guy was very stoic, very West Texas, logical, no-nonsense. And Townes and Susanna had this very mystical thing. Townes gave her things that Guy never could have given her. Steve Earle and Rodney Crowell talk about that in the film. Steve also says that Susanna was a

handful for any one man, so Guy gave her room to take up those relationships to take up some of the slack. And I think that's really true. But they loved each other. Guy loved Susanna; Guy loved Townes; Townes loved them both; Susanna loved them both.

**TH:** *Sissy Spacek narrates the film. How did she get involved?*

**A:** I found out that Sissy grew up in Quitman, 100 miles from Atlanta, Texas, where Susanna grew up, and that Sissy recorded an album [*Hangin' Up My Heart*], and Rodney Crowell produced it. I talked to Rodney, and he said, "Not only did I produce that album, but I put a Susanna Clark song on that album." I'm like—are you kidding me?

**TH:** *You grew up in Wisconsin, and that was where you first heard Guy's music when you were 14. Was Guy your gateway to Texas?*

**A:** Yes, definitely. Well, between Guy and Kris Kristofferson, who I've known for a really long time.

**TH:** *The premiere of Without Getting Killed or Caught during last year's South by Southwest Film Festival was postponed due to COVID-19. What are the challenges of releasing a movie during a pandemic?*

**A:** Between the coronavirus, the election, and all the unknowns about what is happening in the film business, we decided to just sit on the film for 2020.

**TH:** *Do you think there could ultimately be some benefit from waiting?*

**A:** If we had rolled it out at SXSW last year as planned, I would not have been as prepared and may have made some costly mistakes. My goal for this film is two-fold: to get it out to Guy Clark fans and to recoup my investors' money. We have decided to cut out the middle man and distribute directly to fans for the first year. We are still reviewing platforms to decide the best course of action, but there are many options.

We plan to do ticketed virtual screening events with Q&As and then make the

film available on demand. If all goes well with the COVID vaccine and people are going out, we can also start doing theater events in the fall of 2021.

**TH:** *Outside of Austin, what are some of your favorite places in Texas?*

**A:** Rockport is like my spiritual home now. I felt that from the first moment I was there. And I'm not sure that has anything to do with Guy. There's something about Rockport that I just fell in love with immediately. I go there, and I just feel this sense of peace. Monahans? I can understand why Guy's parents wanted to leave. I love, love, love the Hill Country. I love Luckenbach.

**TH:** *How is Guy connected to Luckenbach's musical lore?*

**A:** He is responsible in a big way because the night before Guy and Susanna flew down to Texas to go to Luckenbach, where Jerry Jeff Walker was recording *Viva Terlingua*, he was with Chips Moman. Guy had grown up knowing Hondo Crouch in Rockport, and so he was telling Chips all about Luckenbach, and saying, "Let's go to Luckenbach!" So the next day, Guy and Susanna did go to Luckenbach, and Chips got together with [songwriter] Bobby [Emmons], and they wrote "Luckenbach, Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)." Guy really never got over it because of course that song sold millions. He said to me, "I can't believe I gave away that song!"

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*Without Getting Killed or Caught* premieres in March as part of the SXSW Film Festival, which is being held online. The movie will be released on streaming platforms starting this spring. [withoutgettingkilledorcaught.com](http://withoutgettingkilledorcaught.com)

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# VINTAGE

BY JAC DARSNEK, TRACES OF TEXAS



## An Eye for Beauty

BRECKENRIDGE, 1935

**P**hotographer Basil Clemons rambled the West and served in World War I before he arrived in the North Texas town of Breckenridge in 1919—on tour with a circus—and decided to stay. His timing was fortuitous: The next year, drillers struck oil, and Breckenridge boomed with industry and newfound wealth. Clemons, who died in 1964, documented all aspects of daily life in thousands of pictures, including this one of women enjoying a spring day in 1935. He developed his photos in his home, which was a 10-by-6-foot wagon without electricity or running water, parked on a vacant lot. An eccentric artist with a keen sense of innovation, Clemons cared little for material wealth and lived for 40 years in the iron-wheeled wagon, often sleeping out under the stars. His best images reveal thoughtful composition and an exploration of light that goes beyond the typical commercial fare of the day. **L**

*Know of any fascinating vintage Texas photographs? Send copies or ideas to [tracesoftxphotos@gmail.com](mailto:tracesoftxphotos@gmail.com)*



A man wearing a cowboy hat and a denim jacket is shown in profile, playing a guitar. The background is dark, and the lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of his clothing and the instrument.

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