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MAGAZINE  
OF TEXAS

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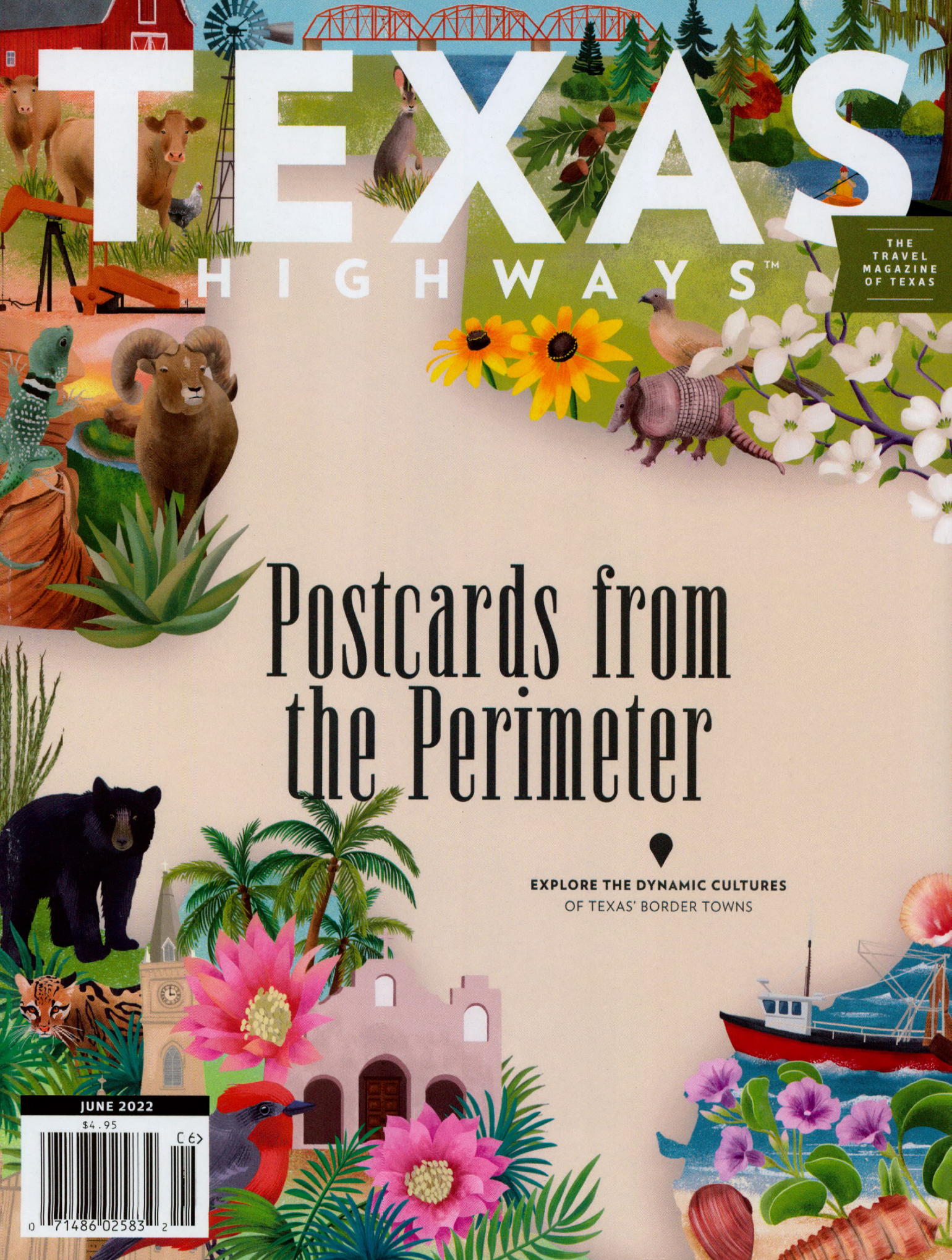


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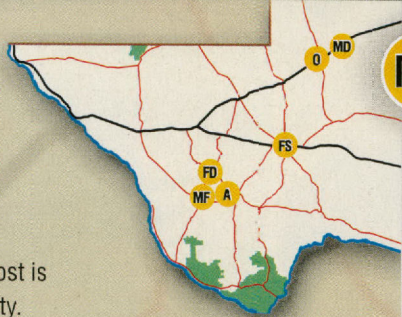
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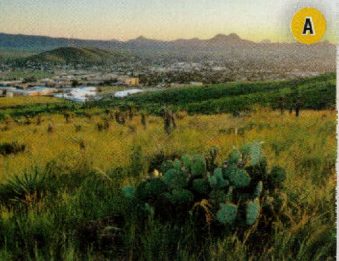
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## NOTE



## You Can Go Home Again

**W**hile she was growing up in Laredo, contributing writer Katie Gutierrez longed for life in a bigger city with more bustle and less monotony. But after living in San Antonio for 10 years, the third-generation Laredoan found herself missing her hometown's sense of community—something she had mistaken for “sameness” as a child. “I miss hearing Spanish everywhere and looking around and knowing that most of us in any given place—a school, a restaurant, a mall—grew up in Laredo and share a common language of experience and culture,” she says.

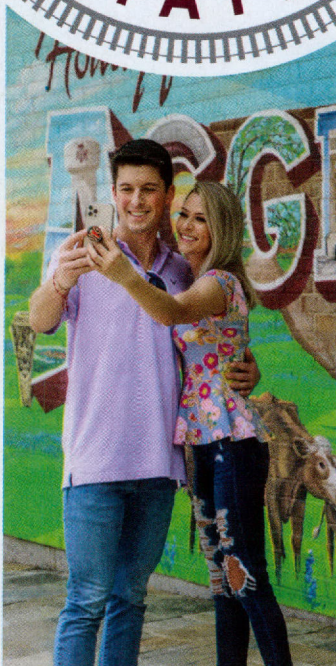
For “Always Both and Neither” (Page 52), Gutierrez shares the story of a new generation of residents who are revitalizing the downtown with restaurants, bars, and art venues. Laredo has grown and changed since her childhood, but Gutierrez found it retains its distinctive blend of Mexican and American cultures. Over the last four years, she immersed herself in the history and character of the town while working on her debut novel, *More Than You'll Ever Know*, which is set in Laredo and Mexico City.

“I wrote from a combination of memory and research” she says, “including many conversations with my parents, who described the Laredo of their childhoods in the 1950s and 1960s.”

In addition to her book coming out in June, Gutierrez's story from last year's Cowboy Issue, “The Original Cowboys,” will be published in the 2022 edition of *The Best American Magazine Writing*. The piece explores the history and legacy of vaqueros and was one of three stories from the September 2021 issue nominated for a 2022 National Magazine Award in the Lifestyle Journalism category. The American Society of Magazine Editors' staff selected Gutierrez's piece alongside 19 stories curated from finalists and winners, marking the first time *Texas Highways* will be featured in the annual anthology.

*Emily Roberts Stone*

**EMILY ROBERTS STONE**  
EDITOR IN CHIEF



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# JUNE

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## Round the Bend

The Texas-Louisiana border blurs at Toledo Bend Reservoir, where cultures blend into a jambalaya of good conversation and great fishing.

*By Clayton Maxwell  
Photographs by Kenny Braun*

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## We're Still Here

Texas history books have long described the Karankawa people as extinct. Now, descendants are reclaiming the heritage of their Indigenous Texan ancestors.

*By John Nova Lomax  
Photographs by Kenny Braun*

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## Always Both and Neither

A Laredo native reveals how her South Texas hometown exemplifies the dual identity of life on the border.

*By Katie Gutierrez  
Photographs by Christ Chávez*

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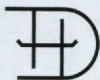
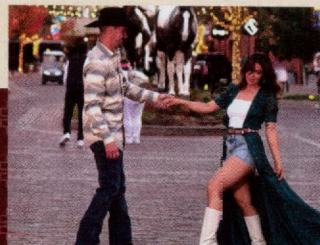
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# JUNE

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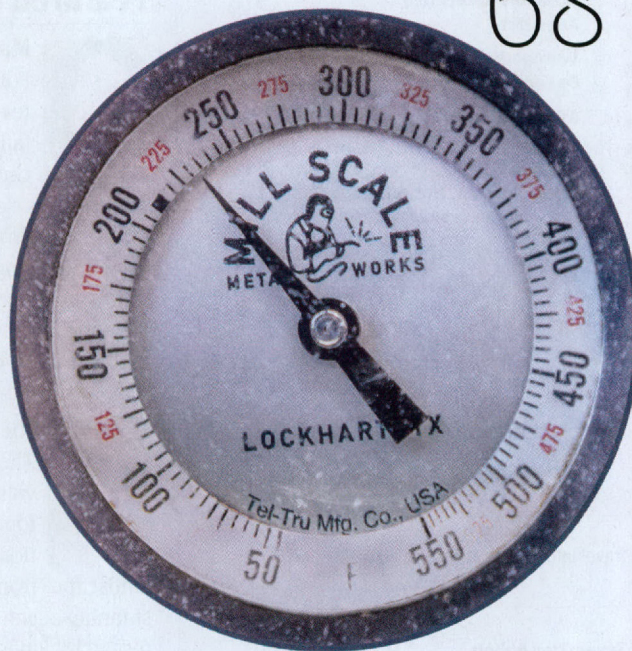
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Illustration by Nic Jones

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## Behind the Story



Adolfo Valle, the Michigan-based artist who illustrated "A Single Silver Spur" (Page 14), spent hours researching bridles, saddles, and *escaramuza charra* performances. "I had to know exactly how the pieces fit in order to make the image believable," he says. "This is part of the excitement of being in the world of creative arts—I get to learn about new subjects to draw all the time." He based the image on writer Marcela Fuentes' 1984 photo, above. Valle strived to maintain the image's original intent "and the emotional memories it holds for the people who were there," he says.

## Featured Contributors



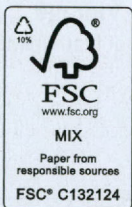
### Marcela Fuentes

For "A Single Silver Spur" (Page 14), Fuentes revisited childhood memories of her father and her years in *charrería*, or Mexican rodeo. "Talking to my former teammates, it was clear being an *escaramuza* was a deeply affecting experience," says the College Station-based writer. "Interrogating these memories made me realize our experience was truly my father's labor of love." Fuentes is an assistant professor at Texas A&M University. Her work has appeared in the *Kenyon Review*, *The Rumpus*, and *New Stories from the Southwest*.



### Nic Jones

The illustrator based in northwest England was delighted to learn about Texas' varied topography for this issue's cover illustration. "Texas encompasses such a diverse landscape, from farmland to arid environments to stunning ocean views, which has been fascinating to research," Jones says. She specializes in nature illustrations inspired by muddy walks in the English countryside, where she collects textures and color palettes to combine into her illustrations, creating overlays and brushes to paint digitally.



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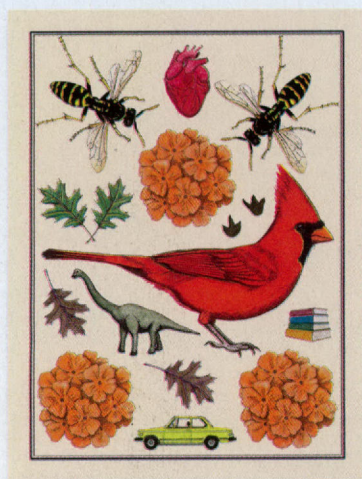
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# MERGE



Just finished reading “An Open Palm” by Fowzia Karimi and could not wait to commend her writing gift. She captures the pain of grief so poetically. More from this talented writer, please.

*Jan Barth, Longview*

## This Is Where I Draw the Line

“Pushing the Boundaries” [May] by John Nova Lomax was a nice article to read and certainly had a lot of truth in it. But there was a touch of disingenuousness in it, saying there are no “real” boundaries to the Hill Country. Just look at the map of Texas in the Events section. There, in the middle of the state, in solid color and sharp-drawn boundaries is the official *Texas Highways* magazine definition of the Hill Country. As I live and die.

*Richard Dasheiff, Plano*

## Not So Scenic After All

In “Hidden Hill Country” [May], you

mentioned the scenic view from the Devil’s Backbone picnic area on Ranch Road 32. Unfortunately, the view cannot be enjoyed at that location due to high overgrowth of vegetation on the outside of the chain-link safety fence and an overabundance of memorabilia and numerous other articles stuck into the links. Although not as safe, there is a good view prior to reaching the picnic area. There has been no view available at that picnic area for a number of years now.

*Melinda Pilgrim, Canyon Lake*

## March of the People

Volksmarching is a great way to get outside, enjoy some fresh air, and get in

quality exercise [“United We Walk,” April]. In the two places in Germany where I lived 50 to 65 years ago, some folks went on as many as possible to collect the medals.

*Chip Smith, College Station*

## Star Power

I’ve been many times and highly recommend doing the Star Party [“An Elevated Outlook,” April]. It’s a fun educational experience you won’t regret, and at the end you get the opportunity to look through telescopes. I recommend checking out the lunar phase, though, because the sky is most impressive when the moon is new or almost new.

*Kristyn Miranda, San Antonio*

## Astronomers Lodge

When I worked for McDonald Observatory from Austin, I got to stay there a couple of times a year [“An Elevated Outlook,” April]. Loved it.

[f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [p](#) Jacqueline Gray, Temple

## 800 Feet Deep

We visited Palo Duro Canyon a few years ago [“The Day-tripper,” April]. I had no idea a place like this existed in Texas. It is breathtaking!

[t](#) @Boadicea34101

## Cross That Bridge

As a kid my uncle took us over the dilapidated bridge over the Pecos near Iraan [“Nerves of Steel,” April]. Timbers splitting and falling down as we drove over it, then back. I had bad dreams about that bridge for years.

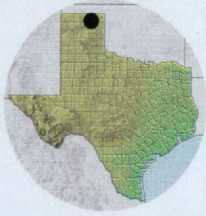
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## Sun-Kissed

Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge harbors 110,000 acres of coastal wetlands, prairies, and beaches near Los Fresnos and South Padre Island. The federal government established the refuge in 1946 to protect habitat for wintering waterfowl and other migratory birds. "We are located along two major flyways, making it great for birding," says George García, visitor services manager at the refuge. Laguna Atascosa is also home to more than 450 plant species, including Spanish dagger (*yucca gloriosa*), shown here against the backdrop of the Laguna Madre at sunrise. The refuge, which has more than 60 miles of hiking and biking trails, opens daily from sunrise to sunset.





# Perryton

Ranching roots and basketball elevate life on the High Plains

By Jason Boyett



**NAN COOK** grew up on the ranch her great-great grandfather founded in 1902 and made her career coaching high school basketball across the Panhandle.

**H**igh school girls basketball is huge in the Texas Panhandle. Nan Cook ought to know. The Perryton resident retired in 2020 from a teaching career that included 22 years coaching high school teams from Abilene to Amarillo and in various small towns, including nearby Spearman. “In a small-school setting, it’s fun to watch the community come out to watch the kids play,” Cook says. “At larger schools, you have mostly parents and family members [in the stands]. But here, it’s everyone. You’d better be there on Tuesday night and Friday night, or people will wonder what’s wrong.” Since becoming the Ochiltree County seat in 1919, Perryton has been a center of agribusiness in the northern Panhandle, just 7 miles south of the Oklahoma state line. Cook learned to drive farm equipment as a child, and several years ago turned that skill into an ongoing summer job driving tour buses in Alaska, including at Denali National Park. “It just worked with my teaching schedule,” she says. “I was always done around the first week of August. I met people from all over the world and never missed a day of school.”

### Ranch Hand

“My dad [87-year-old Tark Cook] has been a lawyer, farmer, and rancher. He still is. He was not afraid to put his kids to work. I got put on a tractor and learned to drive it at a young age and didn’t think much about it. That’s just what you did on a small ranch. He taught us a great work ethic. He still goes to his law office in Perryton every day.”

### Life Courtside

“I’m 5-foot-10. I don’t really consider myself tall until I get around my short friends. I started playing in 8th grade in Perryton and fell in love with it. I walked on at West Texas State University in Canyon and learned so much from [Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame coach] Bob Schneider. My first few years of coaching, I used his offenses and defensive philosophy.”

### Cowdog Crowd

“Our family property is right next to [author] John Erickson’s cattle ranch. When people ask where I’m from, sometimes I’ll ask, ‘Have you heard of Hank the Cowdog? Hank’s my neighbor. We share a fence line.’”

### Summer Jobs

“In 2007, when I was coaching at Spearman, I got a phone call from a gentleman who said, ‘Hey, what do you think about driving a combine for me this summer?’ I thought he was pulling my leg, but it wasn’t a joke. So I did it. I’ve planted wheat, I’ve hauled wheat into town, and now I can say I’ve cut it.”

### Driving Into Retirement

“I went on a cruise to Alaska and spent a few days with my mother, who lives in

Anchorage. We took a road trip to Denali and saw all the shuttle buses out there. I thought, ‘I have a CDL license. I can do this.’ I thought it would eventually be a nice retirement job. That’s what it turned into. I work in one of the most beautiful places in the world.”

### America’s Wheatheart

“Every August, the Wheatheart of the Nation Celebration signals to kids that summer is over and school is right around the corner. I played flute in junior high and through my sophomore year. I always looked forward to being old enough to be one of the first to march down Main Street. The band still marches in the parade every year.”

### Celebrating History

“I like to take visitors to the Museum of the Plains. It’s everything about Perryton, from farming and ranching to oil and gas production to some of the archeological finds in this area.”

### Classic Burgers

“You can’t not go to the Dixie Dog Drive In and get a burger and fries, maybe even a hand-dipped corn dog. It’s local and family-owned—the same family has owned it since the ‘60s.”

### Outside Perspective

“I had some friends from Kentucky who came through Perryton around Christmas several years ago. They were so impressed to drive through a small town and see a nativity scene in the park. Those are things we take for granted. We still have that, and that’s the beauty of small towns.” 🐾



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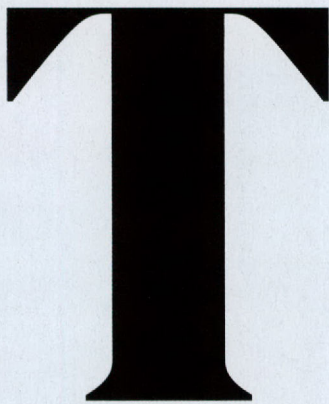




# A Single Silver Spur

A daughter and father share a devotion to *charreadas* in Del Rio

By Marcela Fuentes



There's a photograph of my father and me from 1984, when I'm 8 years old. We're at the Fiesta de Amistad, the annual weekendlong "feast of friendship" between the United States and Mexico. The event is Del Rio's most popular celebration, commemorating the joint construction of the Amistad Dam by the U.S. and Mexico. It's a big deal: Fiesta de Amistad starts on a Friday with an *abrazo*, or embrace, between the mayors of Del Rio and Ciudad Acuña, Mexico, and includes a craft fair and grand parade featuring Miss Del Rio and Señorita Amistad.

My father and I are in the parade, among 200 participants from both sides of the border. There are floats galore, flashy convertibles carrying local belles, whirling native *matachine* dancers, conjunto bands thumping out polkas

and cumbias, high school marching bands, Shriners buzzing circles in their red minicars. Anyone and everyone who is part of a local club, civic organization, musical group, or school is in this parade.

We're on horseback, riding with the Del Rio Charro Association at the tail end of the parade just after the American rodeo riders. Horse folks are always last in the parade because no one wants to promenade through piles of horse dung.

I ride beside my father. He is dashing in his formal charro suit, black with silver *botonaduras*—metal ornamentations embroidered into the sleeves and down the trousers from hip to ankle. My father's *botonaduras* are beautiful: rows of horse heads facing each other, each pair connected by a thin chain. He wears a sombrero, a gun holstered at his hip. He rides Coronela, his sorrel mare quarter horse, who I love intensely but am not allowed to ride. She is powerful and spirited, too much horse for 8-year-old me. My mount is Paloma, small and white, a gentle creature content to keep pace at Coronela's shoulder.

I wear a green cotton dress, *estilo adelita*, adorned with a white lace applique across the bodice and stitching along the collar and sleeve cuffs. My hair is in two braids, the ends tied with bright red ribbons. I wear a straw sombrero. I'm dressed as a pint-size *escaramuza charra*.

Some bits: *Charrería* is a Mexican equestrian sport akin to rodeo. Charros compete in *charreadas*. Escaramuzas are the female performers at charreadas. The name escaramuza, or "skirmish," is derived from the mythos of the Mexican Revolution, when female soldiers, like Pancho Villa's legendary *compañera-at-arms*, Adelita, rode into battle alongside the men. Escaramuza charra is simply the formal identifier: the skirmish, charro-style.

While charros compete in events called *suertes*, roughly analogous to American rodeo events, escaramuzas perform choreography more akin to a troupe of ballerinas. They appear in colorful dresses, frothy crinolines, starched white pantaloons, and under their sombreros, ribbons and flowers twisted in their hair. They ride sidesaddle, so each one wears a single silver spur. They are all precision and artistry and skilled horsemanship.

In the photograph, I'm not an escaramuza. I'm just a kid pretending to ride sidesaddle, right leg hooked around the horn, artfully hidden by the long skirt of my dress. It's an adult charro saddle, meant for a grown man. I'm too short to reach the stirrup, so I've thrust my left boot into the leg fender, just to hold on to something.

Probably, my mother has said this is not safe but been overruled by my father. It

would have been his idea, me appearing with him, seated in this haphazard way.

*You'll be fine*, I can almost remember him saying. I probably didn't need convincing anyway. I'd been riding on the back of his Harley since the age of 5. If my daddy said I was safe, then I was.

In the photograph, my father stares straight ahead, unsmiling and aloof, his thick moustache the very height of charro swagger. Next to him, I'm doing my best imitation. Chin out, meeting the crowd with a fearless gaze. Trying to look, well, tough.

We represent Texas. We represent America.

**I visited home last December**, driving to Del Rio from College Station, where I live and where I teach young Aggie STEM majors about writing poetry and fiction. I had not been home in nearly two years.

There's a pandemic; most of my family has migrated to the Dallas area; and, without stops, it's a six-hour drive.

By dusk, San Antonio was in my rearview. I felt the psychic relief of finally being on the road home—my road home—this specific 150-mile stretch of US 90, where the world abruptly shifts into miles and miles of sweeping brush country, mesquite trees, and cacti, hemmed by barbed wire fences. After sunset, the gentle swells of low hills are outlined against an expanse of starry horizon, and at the very edge, a dim aura of artificial light marks some small town in the distance.

This piece of highway dwells in my heart. When I lived outside of Texas during graduate school, I constantly dreamed of US 90, always at sunset, always the road ahead of me stretching toward an uninterrupted sky.

If I'm driving alone, it's my habit to



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wave at Lienzo Charro 4 Palmas, the site of my childhood career in escaramuza. The ranch is off the highway just a few miles before arriving in Del Rio proper. It's a terribly sentimental habit, but 4 Palmas was the scene of some of my happiest memories.

This time, though, I couldn't spot 4 Palmas. New buildings had sprung up along the highway. There was too much light pollution. I couldn't see the roofed grandstand jutting into the night sky.

**The first charro associations** in the U.S. sprung up in Texas and California just after World War II and proliferated during the 1970s in the full flower of the Chicano movement. Mexican Americans were defining their own identity, reclaiming pride in their culture. As mestizos, we draw from the colonized and the colonizer.

The Flag of Aztlán, a symbol of political action, connected Mexican Americans to the Indigenous "histomythology" of the mighty Aztec civilization. The surge of interest in charrería was simply another manifestation of Chicano pride, this time in an iconic archetype with Spanish roots. A charro can rope and ride with the best of them, but with his gorgeous attire and military code, he's more than a cowboy; he's almost a knight.

My father graduated high school in 1970. He grew up during the height of Chicano consciousness. It doesn't surprise me that, years later, he'd choose charrería over rodeo. He was proud of his heritage.

My father didn't grow up around horses though. He'd spent his childhood working: summers on Wisconsin farms, night shifts at the Coca-Cola Bottling Company. My grandfather had died young, so my father

constantly had a job to help keep the family afloat.

Whatever repressed energies he'd possessed as a laboring child came roaring out of the adult. He was a law unto himself, undoubtedly responsible for every white hair on my mother's head. He was a dreamer, a man of energy and many enthusiasms. He loved new records and new Wranglers. He had a Harley and a horse. When I was 6 years old, he dove headfirst into the charro scene, a barrio kid set on rebranding himself as a horseman.

In the mid-1980s, he was a family man with firm ideas. His children would not join the labor force until they were 18. They would play sports and participate in scouts, learn piano, act in school plays, and after all that, attend college. There was soccer and Little League baseball for my brother. For me, there was riding.



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I shared my father's devotion to horses. He taught me how to care for our horses, pick out their hooves, brush and bathe them, as well as the importance of cooldown walks after exercise. How to talk to them, how to be confident in the saddle. Horses were our thing, just his and mine. He was enthusiastic, proud of my abilities. I basked in the light of his love.

I was fast becoming a competent rider. Only, as a female, there wasn't anything for me to do other than barrel racing, which he nixed. He was a charro. He wanted me to participate with him. The Del Rio escaramuza team came into existence because my father wanted me to share his heritage and be proud of it. He dreamed up the escaramuza team and made it real for me, for my teammates. He wanted us to have our own space.

In later years, after he found his faith, my

father channeled his creativity and energy into his church parish, mentoring scores of teenagers through youth programs and volunteering at men's retreats. He helped establish the local chapter of Knights on Bikes, for motorcycle-loving Catholic men such as himself.

So, it is not hard for me to imagine my father convincing the Del Rio Charro Association to start an escaramuza team. There were other charro teams around small-town southwest Texas, but no one else had a girl's group. It was a thing seen in cities, with larger, more established organizations—Laredo, El Paso, San Antonio. An escaramuza team would set Del Rio apart. It wouldn't be hard either; all they needed was a half-dozen girls.

By 1986, my father had managed to gather enough girls for a fledgling team, all high school juniors and seniors. My

cousin Raquel and her best friend, Erika, attracted by the novelty of learning to ride and the promise that someone would loan them horses. Beautiful, green-eyed Pati, an experienced rider and our team's Charro Queen. Judy and Sophia, whose fathers were charros too. And me, a fourth grader, the baby of the team. I'm sure they thought I was a pest most of the time, but I idolized those girls, especially Erika and Pati.

Our team purchased all our gear and regalia across the border. Team moms, in charge of costumes, chose the ribbons and material and took us for fittings: made-to-order crinolines, pantaloons, and full-skirted dresses. Meanwhile, the dads bought our gear from El Caballo Blanco, the leather goods store in downtown Ciudad Acuña. Sombreros, white calf-high boots, silver spurs, riding crops, and the *albarda charra*, the escaramuza



sidesaddle. The equipment had to be special ordered from Guadalajara, Jalisco.

We even had jackets—red satin sports jackets with “escaramuza” stitched in fancy letters across the back. Never mind that even the adult small was absurdly big for 10-year-old me. I flapped around my elementary playground in it every day. I wanted everyone to know I was cool, part of a teenage club, just like the Pink Ladies in *Grease*. Kids would scrunch up their faces to spit out that word—escaramuza. *What is that?* I’d just smile, tell them it was too hard to explain. Oh, I was lofty. My team and I were special. Nobody else was doing what we were doing. The six of us were the only escaramuzas in town.

**Tooling around Del Rio last winter,** I found a veneer of homey sameness. The courtyard of the Whitehead Memorial

Museum—home to a replica of Judge Roy Bean’s saloon and court, the Jersey Lilly—was transformed into Santa’s North Pole. The Val Verde Winery, the oldest continuously running winery in Texas, was doing a brisk trade. The parking lot at Del Rio Feed & Supply was packed.

I decided to hunt for the entrance to 4 Palmas. In daylight, the roof of the grandstand appeared in the distance, rising above the tops of mesquite trees. When I was little, a trip out to the *lienzo*, the charro arena, meant leaving the city limits. Now, there were new commercial buildings all the way out to 4 Palmas. The road to the ranch entrance was easy to miss too, tucked between a U-Haul rental shop and a convenience store.

As I crossed the cattle guard on the way in, I realized this was the first time I’d ever driven myself there. All the other

times I was a child listening to *corridos* in my father’s 1978 Ford F-150 Supercab, known in our family as “the Big Ranchera.” My love of music is another thing I share with my father. Those years when I was an escaramuza, the drives out to 4 Palmas cemented my lifelong love of Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, Vicente Fernández, and, most of all, Antonio Aguilar, master of the Mexican folk story-song, the corrido.

My favorites were Aguilar’s corridos de caballos. A horse-crazy preteen, every song enthralled me. These were stories about the Mexican Revolution, the famous steeds of charros and soldiers, songs full of poetry, bright brass horn, harp, and romanticism. They were tales of Seven Leagues (*Siete Leguas*), Pancho Villa’s faithful steed, rearing at the sound of the train whistle; Golden Nugget’s daring

continued on Page 76

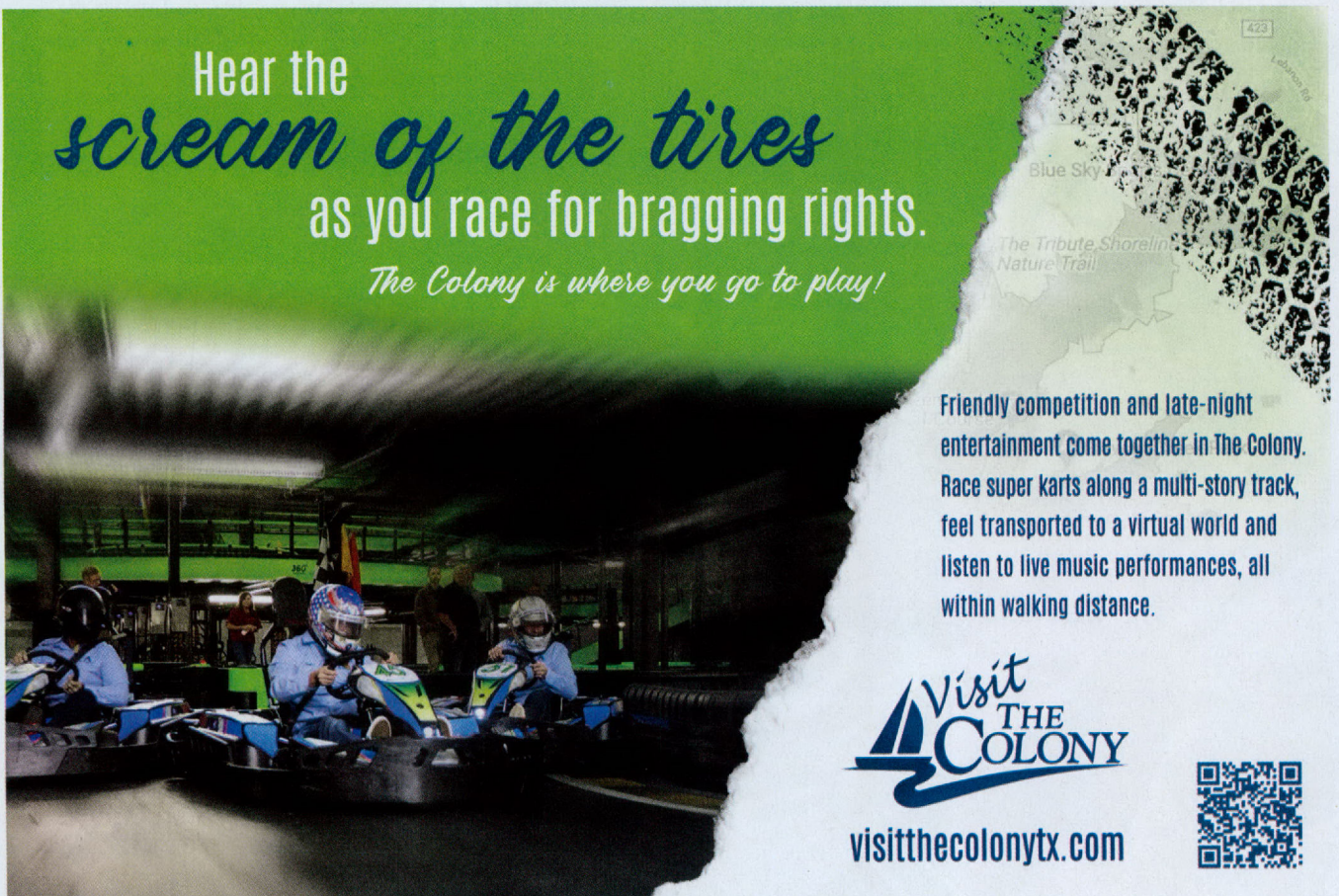
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*Sandbar shark*

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*Milla - Ocelot*



# DRIVE



**A REPRODUCTION OF**  
*Religion Enthroned* is  
housed at the Gelman  
Stained Glass Museum  
near the Texas-Mexico  
border.

# Light Bright

The Gelman Stained Glass Museum in San Juan showcases designs from defunct U.S. churches

By Anthony Head

**D**r. Lawrence Gelman purchased his first stained-glass window for his McAllen home over 30 years ago. Despite never intending to collect them, he became captivated by the antiques. “Subsequently, I bought two or three more,” Gelman tells me, throwing up his hands as if to indicate he had no choice.

Gelman’s favorite stained-glass window designer is the celebrated Louis Comfort Tiffany, whose father, Charles Lewis Tiffany, founded the famed New York luxury retailer Tiffany and Company in 1837. A couple years after an exhibition of his Tiffany windows at the International Museum of Art & Science in McAllen, in 2013, Gelman began building a permanent space to display a collection that had by then grown to nearly 100 pieces. Last December, the Gelman Stained Glass Museum opened in the Rio Grande Valley city of San Juan. Located near the Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle national shrine, the museum was designed in the same Latin cross layout of old cathedrals.


“We tried to make it church-like,” Gelman says, noting he acquired most of the windows from U.S. churches that were either closing or had closed. “We just wanted to put the windows back in the environment they were made for.”

The museum’s three galleries display 174 sets of fully restored windows set into dark red-oak walls and illuminated from behind to enliven the jewel-toned portraits of Jesus, the saints, and scenes depicting biblical events and landscapes. The atmosphere is reflective, almost spiritual.

“This is the largest and most comprehensive stained-glass window exhibit in the United States,” museum director Miriam Cepeda says. Most were produced by Tiffany and other stained-glass studios of the late 19th and early 20th century, considered a popular era for stained-glass production.

In addition to the century-old windows, Gelman commissioned two pieces from Texas artists. The dome recessed within the lobby ceiling is called *The Ascension of Jesus* by La Casa del Vitral, a stained-glass maker in nearby Edinburg. The same business produced the richly colored reproduction of *Religion Enthroned*, measuring 97 inches by 141 inches, located in the main gallery.

“Everything you’re seeing is a masterpiece by a master artist in the stained-glass world,” Cepeda says. Admission is \$20 for visitors over 12 and \$10 for visitors 12 and under.

For more information, visit [gelmanmuseum.org](http://gelmanmuseum.org). 







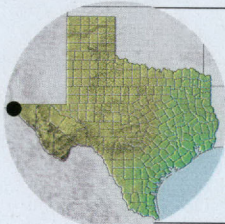


**HUGS NOT WALLS** allows families to visit for three minutes along the Rio Grande.

# Don't Let Go

Families separated by the border reunite for a temporary embrace

By Roberto José Andrade Franco



**HUGS NOT WALLS** is organized by the Border Network for Human Rights. 915-577-0724; bnhr.org

**H**ernan Hernandez and his mother, Leticia Lozano Martinez, are sitting on a park bench in South El Paso. They take cover from the sun underneath a black umbrella that rests over Martinez's right shoulder. It's a hot June morning in 2021. They, along with hundreds of others, are wearing blue T-shirts with #HugsNotWalls on the back.

Hernandez and Martinez wait, staring at the people forming a long line that wraps around a park and ends underneath the shade of a gazebo next to the community center in Chihuahuita, one of El Paso's oldest neighborhoods. Not far from them, children laugh on a playground no more than 20 feet from the border wall. Hernandez and Martinez listen to other families talk among themselves. Those families are also waiting, doing anything to make time feel as if it's passing faster, until they can finally hold the family members they came to see.

That's the reason they're all here. Why Hernandez and his mother drove four hours from Albuquerque, New Mexico. Why they've been waiting since 6:40 a.m., why they've been waiting far longer than that.

"I have two sons in Juárez," Martinez says in Spanish. "One, I

haven't seen in 10 years. The other, 15 years." Hernandez is the second youngest of her six children. He hasn't seen his two oldest brothers in that same time. When he talks about how long it's been, and how he'll soon see them again, his eyes water. He smiles and lets out a gentle laugh that's a combination of nerves, excitement, and disbelief.

Just two weeks before, one of Martinez's sons in Juárez heard a radio advertisement for Hugs Not Walls, an event that allows separated families to reunite for a few minutes in the middle of the El Paso section of the Rio Grande. He gave her the number for the Border Network for Human Rights, the event organizer, and she called to find out more information. "They told me I qualified," Martinez says.

Hugs Not Walls—hosted in partnership with the Border Patrol, the International Boundary and Water Commission, and the El Paso and Juárez police departments—is designed for families who can't visit one another by traditional means. This is due to a variety of reasons, among them a lack of a passport, financial constraints, undocumented status, and safety.

Once Martinez told Hernandez, he researched the event and its legitimacy before he allowed himself to believe he would see his brothers again. "I looked into it," Hernandez says, "and it was true. I said, 'We're going.'"

And so, here they are, along with about 200 other families—some just a single person, others as many as eight or more. All wearing blue T-shirts. All waiting to see family who, on the other side of the border, are waiting just like them. The only difference is members on the river's south side are wearing white T-shirts.

"There are a lot of parents and grandparents here," Hernandez says as he looks around. He then says what's obvious, but hard to put into words—that this could be the last chance some family members, separated by a border and by a variety of other factors, will get to hug each other. "There are a lot of people out here who haven't seen their people," Hernandez continues. "They would like to see them at least once more before they go."

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**FROM LEFT:**  
Leticia Lozano  
Martinez and Herran  
Hernandez traveled  
from Albuquerque, New  
Mexico. Participants file  
in the entrance.



In the early 1990s, before becoming the executive director of the Border Network for Human Rights and helping create this event, Fernando García was a journalist working in Juárez. Living on the border, he couldn't help but notice immigration's importance. Born in Mexico City, a 20-hour drive from Juárez, García wondered about immigrant life in the United States. How immigrants crossed the border. How they survived. Seeking answers to those questions, García spent a good part of the '90s living in immigrant communities across the country, including Phoenix, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, and Philadelphia. He then moved to El Paso in 1998 and founded the Border Network for Human Rights.

The nonprofit's mission is to educate and organize border residents and families. He quickly homed in on a more pressing problem. "Everybody was talking about a change of policy," García says. "But nobody was talking about the daily reality of family separation."

That's how Hugs Not Walls began. García and his team would temporarily reunite families in the middle of the very border that separated them. It was a

simple concept, but it required cooperation between multiple local, state, and federal agencies.

"We try to be as helpful as possible and accommodating," says Lori Kuczanski, public affairs officer for the International Boundary and Water Commission. Before approving the event, they'll look at potential hazards and make recommendations for where to meet along the river.

The first event happened in 2016 and brought together almost 300 families. Since then, families have reunited in the middle of the Rio Grande on a mostly annual basis. People have traveled from Illinois, Georgia, California, Kansas, Colorado, and all over Mexico to reconnect in a space that's neither here nor there, where they hug and touch and kiss each other.

**Hernandez and Martinez walk along** the border wall, so close that if they wanted to, they could reach out and touch it. Organizers have called their

number: 24. It's their turn. Martinez asks the woman leading their walk—one of many volunteers—when the next event will take place. She says she doesn't know. García doesn't know either, but he hopes for some time in 2022.

As they walk, songs pour out of several speakers so loud sometimes people must raise their voices to talk. They're Mexican songs about the border and what it does when it divides not just countries but families. They're songs of longing, and the music only stops when a man's voice tells families, holding each other in the middle of the border, their time is up—three minutes per family. "*Tiempo, familias, tiempo!*" When a family's number is up, that same voice tells the next group of families to get ready. "*Siguiente grupo de familia ya lista!*"

At 9:55 a.m., Hernandez climbs the steps of a wooden platform organizers have built in the middle of the river. There isn't much water here, but there's

enough to make mud. Once atop, Hernandez helps his mother. On the opposite side of the platform, the sons she hasn't seen in over a decade are waiting.

They all smile through tears. They hug, saying things into each other's ears that no one else can hear. They pull out cellphones to take photographs. It's a moment to capture since no one here knows when they'll see their loved ones again. They do what every other family on this wooden platform is doing: savoring the few minutes they have.

That might be the hardest part of watching it all. That moment when you can feel time moving faster than it should, and it's back to being separated. That moment when, as García describes it, tears of happiness turn back to tears of suffering. There are so many tears that after the first couple of events, García and his team wondered if they were doing more harm than good.

"We asked families if this was fair, if this was just, if this was OK with them," García says, "because I saw there was so much suffering. They said they wouldn't change a thing for that moment."

That moment is Hernandez, Martinez, and the two brothers and sons they haven't seen in forever hugging in the middle of two countries. It's hundreds of other families doing the same.

Hernandez and Martinez walk back, past other families waiting for their turn. Martinez's eyes are red. She says she told her sons to take care.

"It's been about a year since my husband died, and they didn't get to see him," Martinez says about her sons. "He wanted to see them but couldn't."

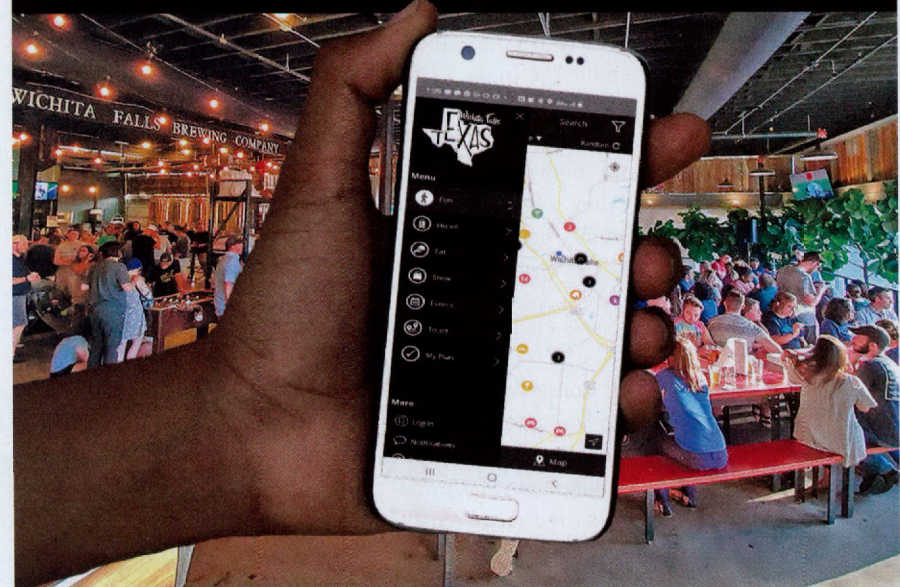
While his mother talks, Hernandez looks away and takes a drink from his bottled water as if that will help distract from his emotions. It doesn't. His hand slightly trembles while he tries to drink away the knot in his throat.

As she keeps talking, Martinez says she's grateful for the few precious minutes when part of her family reunited. She wishes all her family was together. She says she'll see her sons again at the next Hugs Not Walls event—if God allows it. 🐾



Check out our **NEW** website!

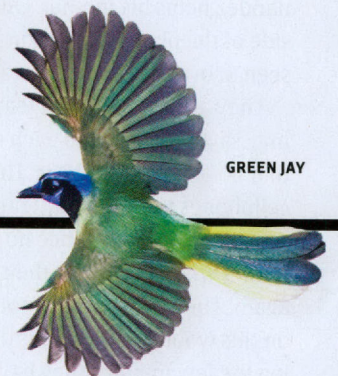
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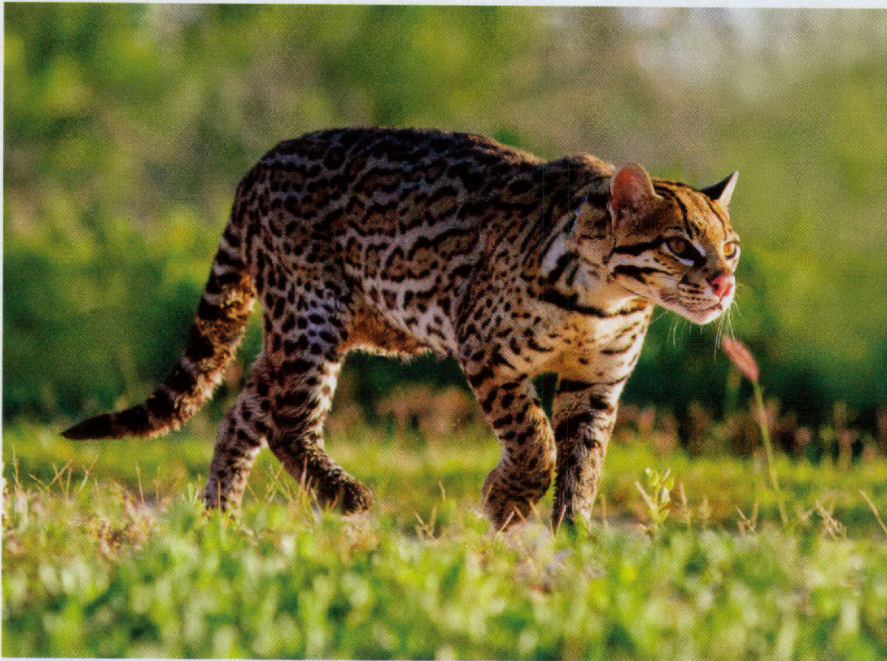
# Animals Crossing

Wildlife agencies work across borders to protect rare species

By Melissa Gaskill



GREEN JAY



## A River Runs Through It

Wildlife professionals in Texas have strong relationships with their counterparts at government agencies and conservation groups across the border in Mexico. A joint project in the Big Bend area is removing nonnative plants along the river. “Invasive species can be really hard to control if you’re not working closely together, so we’re lucky to have such a good relationship,” Athens says. Multiple parties on both sides work to protect ocelots, too, says George Garcia, visitors services manager at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. “We’re in constant communication with the agencies in Mexico,” Garcia says. “We have a good partnership and all have the same goal of improving the genetic diversity and restoring habitat.”

For information on volunteer opportunities at the refuge, visit [fws.gov/refuge/laguna-atascosa](http://fws.gov/refuge/laguna-atascosa).

**Borders can be a big deal to humans**, but the habitats of wild creatures transcend lines drawn on paper. Along the Texas-Mexico border, for example, animals like ocelots, beavers, and black bears rely on habitat in both countries.

In fact, if wildlife could not freely cross the border, Big Bend National Park would have no black bears, according to Thomas Athens, a wildlife biologist at the park. The species was eliminated from the U.S. in the 1940s, but in the late 1980s, bears began crossing on their own from Mexico. “To this day, they still move back and forth in search of food and new territory,” Athens says. “The park area can only support 25 to 30 bears, so it’s important for them to be able to cross.”

The Lower Rio Grande Valley, while mostly urbanized, ranks as one of the most biodiverse areas in the U.S., and the region is home to more than 20 public venues for wildlife viewing and world-class birding.

## Birds of a Feather

The Nature Conservancy’s Lennox Foundation Southmost Preserve, which hugs the twists and turns of the Rio Grande south of Brownsville, contains one of two remaining stands of native Mexican sabal palm and Tamaulipan thornscrub

in the country. Among the many species that need the habitat on both sides of the border are raucous chachalacas and colorful green jays, says Sonia Najera, TNC Coastal Plains Project director. The preserve’s spot along the coastal flyway makes it a prime location for the

birds. “They have no problem crossing the border and finding habitat on both sides,” Najera says, aside from issues with stretches of border wall. Southmost Preserve is closed to the public, but see the “In Plain Sight” sidebar for information on wildlife viewing in the area.

118

Miles of the Texas-Mexico border within Big Bend National Park

50-80

Estimated number of ocelots remaining in the U.S.

110,000

Acres in the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge

## Cross-Country Travelers

Journeying north and south of the border is a common pastime for these wild creatures.



### BIGHORN OR MOUNTAIN SHEEP

*Ovis canadensis*

Habitat: rugged, mountainous terrain with sparse vegetation

## In Plain Sight

The best chance to see black bears in Texas is by driving or hiking in Big Bend National Park's **Chisos Basin**. A majority of the bears' range in the park is contained in the basin's roughly 40 square miles.

A small population of bighorn sheep—fewer than 14—remains in Big Bend National Park's **Persimmon Gap** and **Deadhorse Mountains** areas.

The **Black Gap Wildlife Management Area**, open year-round on the park's northeast corner, has a larger population.

Kayak or canoe on the **Rio Grande** to look for beavers. Rather than constructing dams, this subspecies builds bank dens in muddy river banks.

**Santa Anna National Wildlife Refuge** is open every day from sunup to sundown. Ocelots live in the area but are small and elusive, so few people have seen them.

See chachalacas, green jays, and more species of birds in the Rio Grande Valley at **Resaca de la Palma**, **Estero Llano Grande**, and **Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley state parks**; and **World Birding Center** sites along the border between South Padre Island and Roma.



### BLACK BEAR

*Ursus americanus*

Habitat: desert scrub or woodland within scattered mountain ranges



### OCELOT

*Leopardus pardalis*

Habitat: dense, thorny, low brush



### PLAIN CHACHALACA

*Ortalis vetula*

Habitat: brushy and thorny forests along streams



### RIO GRANDE BEAVER

*Castor canadensis mexicanus*

Habitat: the Rio Grande and nearby ponds



# From the River

Spring-fed San Felipe Creek and borderland culture anchor this community along the Rio Grande

By Sarah Thurmond

**T**he Del Rio area has been a haven for humanity in the arid shrubland of southwest Texas since prehistoric times. Spanish settlements in Ciudad Acuña—across the Rio Grande in Mexico—led to Spanish farming north of the river along San Felipe Creek. The same resource drew Anglo land developers, who dammed the creek in 1869 and built a network of irrigation canals that still operate today. Goat and sheep ranching also flourished in the region, boosted by the arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad in the 1880s. Today, Del Rio is home to Laughlin Air Force Base; Val Verde Winery, the oldest operational winery in Texas; the beloved Julio's Tortilla Chips; and Amistad Reservoir, a recreational paradise. With the railroad dividing the city, visitors will find more commercial developments in the north, while the southern part of town harbors historic attractions, like South Main Street, which is being revitalized with new shops.



Amistad Reservoir



**San Antonio**

2.5 hours

**Austin**

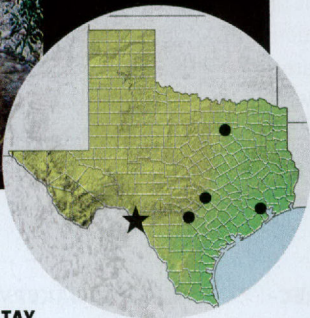
4.25 hours

**Houston**

5.5 hours


**Dallas**

6.5 hours




 **STAY**

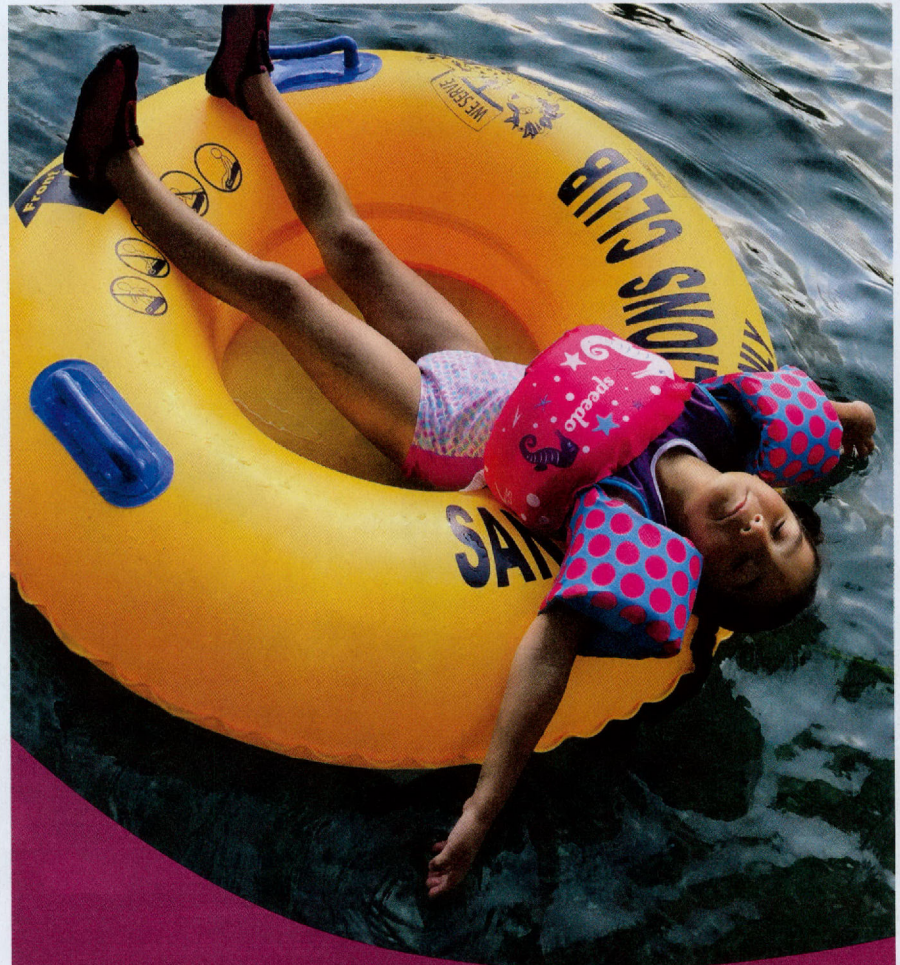
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 **SEE**

 **DRINK**






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5



8



4



1



2



**1 / MESQUITE CREEK** Located on the second floor of an 1898 office building, this restored apartment offers lodging (\$299/night; for up to eight guests) with vintage architecture, contemporary furnishings, and stylish Tex-Mex décor. Owners Sarah and Cade Sigmar are also the proprietors of Mesquite Creek Outfitters, a craft beer and wine bar that also sells apparel located downstairs.



**2 / SAN FELIPE CREEK** Fed by prolific springs that are the city's main water source, San Felipe Creek flows through the southern part of town. Find popular swimming holes at Horseshoe Park and Lions Park, as well as a public swimming pool at nearby Moore Park. Walkers and joggers love the paved Mayor Dora Alcalá Hike and Bike Trail that follows the creek through parkland and picnic areas.



**3 / MEMO'S RESTAURANT** Opened in 1936 by Guillermo Calderón, this family-owned restaurant located near historic Brown Plaza features views of the San Felipe Creek greenbelt. See live music on Thursday nights, a tradition started by Guillermo's late son Blondie Calderón, who was the pianist and bandleader for country music legend Ray Price for more than 30 years.



**4 / LEMON DROP SHOP** This charming women's clothing store features accessories and home décor with local flavor—think dish towels stenciled with “Del Rio, Texas.” It resides on a stretch of South Main dubbed The Shops on Main Street, which includes antiques store Casa Bella, Jéfita's Sewing and Fabric, and elegant women's boutique La Florentina.



**5 / WHITEHEAD MEMORIAL MUSEUM** Spread across 2.5 acres, this museum presents the history of Del Rio in exhibits that include an 1871 general store. Displays cover pioneer life; the border radio era of sister city Acuña; the infamous “goat-glanc doctor” John Brinkley; and Foy Bean, the Wild West saloonkeeper and justice of the peace, who's buried on-site.



**6 / VAL VERDE WINERY** The Qualia family owns and operates Val Verde Winery, which was founded in 1883 by Frank Qualia, an Italian immigrant. The winery offers a variety of wines for sale and places to sip in its intimate tasting room and outdoors adjacent to the vineyard. The tart and fruity Blanc du Bois is a standout white wine made from grapes grown on the 12-acre estate.



**7 / AMISTAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA** The Devils and Pecos rivers meet the Rio Grande at this lake, built by the U.S. and Mexico in the 1960s. Located northwest of town, Amistad offers fishing, paddling, camping, and hiking. For the best swimming, head to the pebble beach shorelines of Governor's Landing and Diablo East.



**8 / CHAPA'S BAKERY** Chapa's first location opened in Acuña more than 80 years ago, but you don't have to cross the border to get the bakery's tasty pastries. In 2013, the business opened a storefront on Bedell Avenue. Along with cakes and donuts, popular offerings include fruit-filled empanadas, frosted *conchas*, and pig-shaped cookies called *maranitos*. 🐷



## Laughlin Air Force Base

Aviation has been part of Del Rio since Calbraith Perry Rodgers—the first person to make a transcontinental flight across the U.S.—landed here on his historic 1911 flight. The U.S. Army Air Corps established a base in 1942, naming it for pilot Jack Thomas Laughlin, the first Del Rioan killed in World War II. Though the base was closed after WW II, the Air Force reopened it in 1952 as a flight school, taking advantage of the region's mild climate and wide-open spaces. Visitors can learn about aviation history and the base's role as a center for flight training and strategic air command for U-2 reconnaissance missions during the Cuban Missile Crisis at the Laughlin Heritage Foundation Museum in downtown Del Rio. 309 S. Main St. 830-719-9380; [laughlinheritagefoundationinc.org](http://laughlinheritagefoundationinc.org)

**Rough Canyon Campground at Lake Amistad**, about 25 miles from Del Rio, offers tent camping and RV sites (no hookups) for \$6 a night. **Lake Amistad Rentals**, near Rough Canyon, offers furnished lake-view lodgings, from small cabins for \$115 a night to larger condos for \$325 a night. Accommodations include fresh linens, cooking utensils, and water and trash service. RV sites cost \$45 a night. [nps.gov/amis](http://nps.gov/amis); [lakeamistadrentals.com](http://lakeamistadrentals.com)

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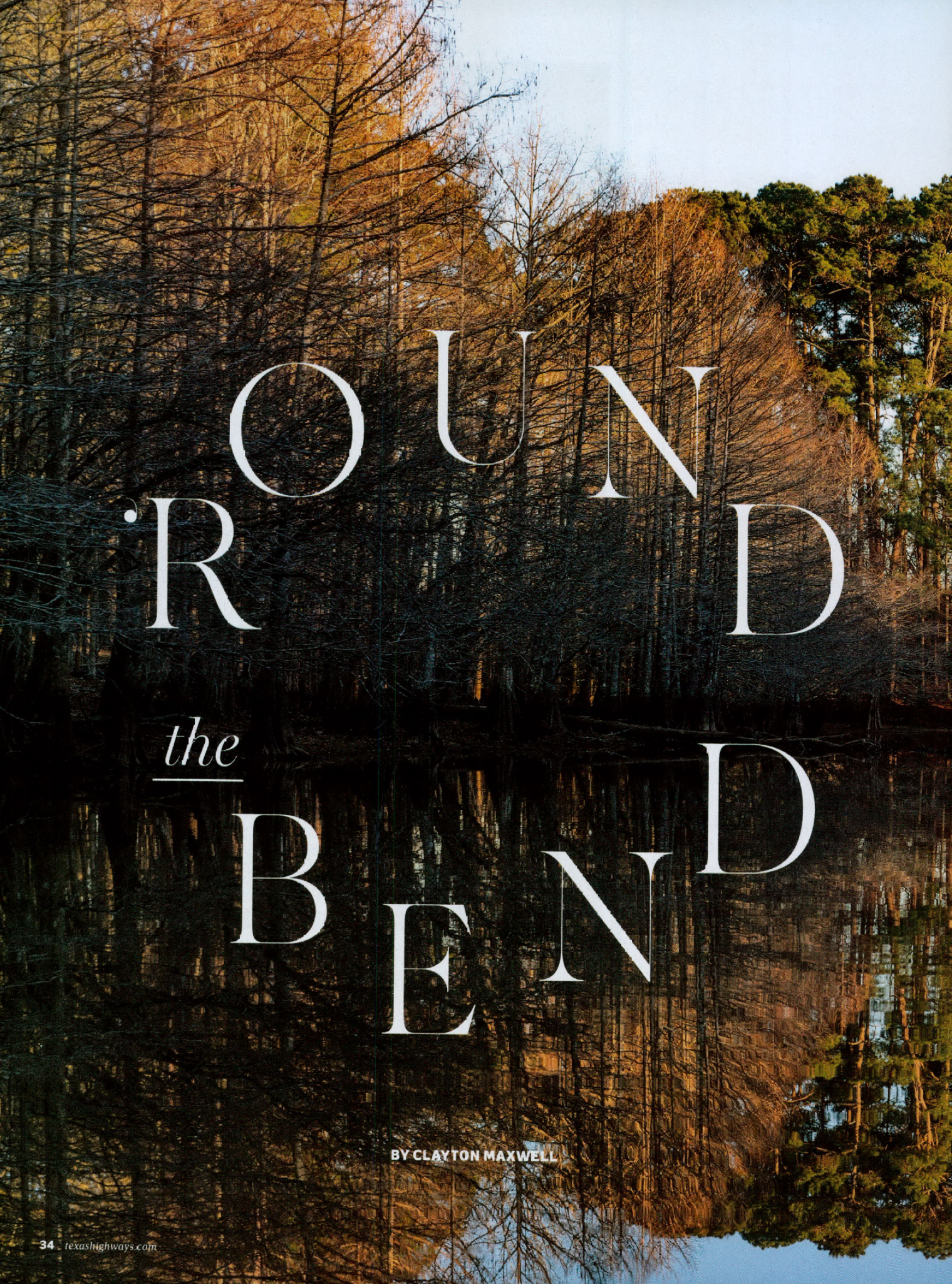



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ROUND  
*the*  
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BY CLAYTON MAXWELL



**TEXAS AND LOUISIANA FIND NEUTRAL GROUND ALONG TOLEDO BEND RESERVOIR**

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY KENNY BRAUN**

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IF YOU WANT  
TO KNOW  
HEMPHILL,  
THE EAST  
TEXAS TOWN  
NEAR TOLEDO  
BEND RESERVOIR  
ON THE TEXAS-  
LOUISIANA  
BORDER, THEN  
YOU NEED TO  
KNOW PENNIE  
FERGUSON.



Her friends call her the Janis Joplin of Hemphill, and with her skein of red gray hair tied high, husky laugh, and quick wit, I can see why. A self-described “ninja,” Pennie leveraged her position on the board of the local hospital to bring better EMS services to Sabine County. She runs the *Hemphill Daily News and More* online newspaper and the Fishermen’s Village lodge where photographer Kenny Braun and I are staying. She’s also a volunteer firefighter. “I get so crazy,



**OPENING SPREAD:** Winter cypresses and pines reflected in Toledo Bend Reservoir.

**THIS PAGE, FROM TOP:** Pennie Ferguson at the wheel of the Sabine County EMS truck with her crew; early morning steam rises off the lake at North Toledo Bend State Park.

girl,” she says, “but I can’t stop.”

We meet Pennie in early February at her lodge about 2 miles from the Texas-Louisiana border on State Highway 21, the two-lane road that crosses into Louisiana and follows the ancient Camino Real, the roadway of the Spaniards in the 1700s and the Caddo people before that. Within minutes, Pennie loads us into her truck for a drive over to Louisiana on the Pendleton Bridge, a narrow concrete engineering feat built in the late 1960s when the Sabine River Authority dammed the river and gave birth to this mammoth lake. With overcast skies above, the water today is a flat gray expanse stretching endlessly north and south. We pass a small green highway sign just off the Texas shore that simply says “Sabine River,” a reminder that the river



PENNIE, CAPTAIN  
SCOOBY, AND  
CREW REGALE  
US WITH THE  
MYSTERIES  
OF TOLEDO  
BEND; WE MIGHT  
BUMP INTO A BIG-  
FOOT, OR EVEN  
THE LOCH NESS  
MONSTER.

channel is still there, invisible to us now.

Kenny and I are exploring Toledo Bend, a fishing mecca that stretches 65 miles between Texas and Louisiana, to see what kind of border a lake makes. Although it's the largest body of water in Texas and consistently yields prize-winning bass, I only just discovered it because I heard some Louisiana folks touting its charms on a recent trip to New Orleans. Toledo Bend is relatively unknown to many Texans, particularly those unfamiliar with the eastern edge of the state. Back in 1806, after the Louisiana Purchase, Spain and the United States couldn't agree on exactly where their border here should be, so they declared the area east of the Sabine a "neutral ground." It was an in-between space where people weren't necessarily from one side or the other, where cultures collided and mixed like a jambalaya. I've set out to discover what the region is like now, 50 years after the creation of the 289-square-mile lake turned the area into a recreational destination.

Looking out from the Pendleton Bridge, I imagine what else that water





**FROM TOP:** Signage in downtown Zwolle; light through the pines at North Toledo Bend State Park; the staff at Lasyone's in Natchitoches, Louisiana.

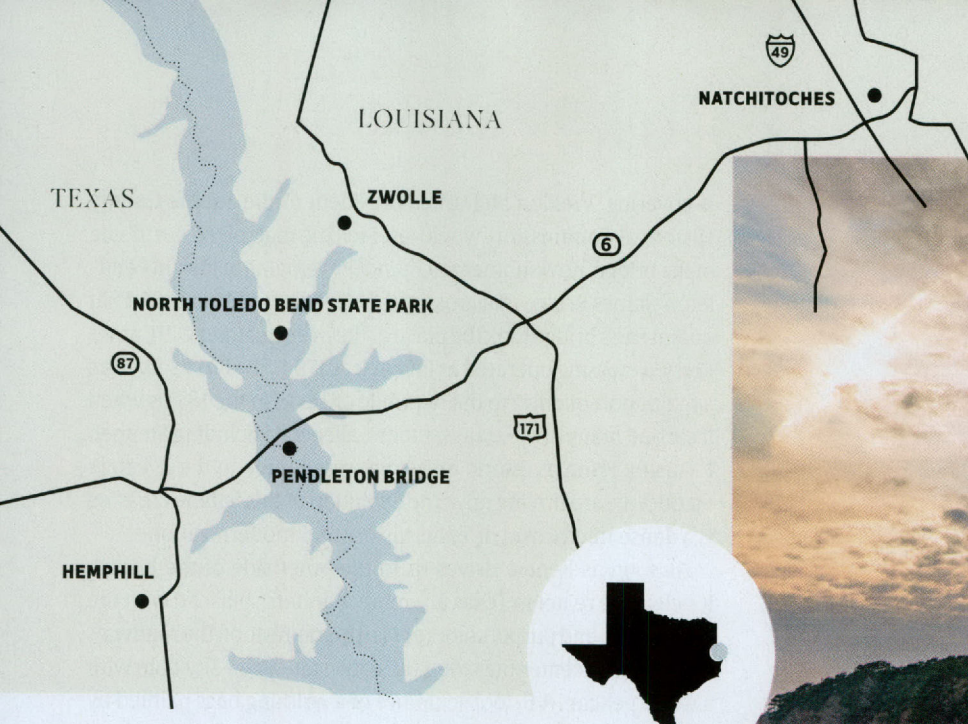
is covering. Weldon McDaniel, president of the Sabine County Historical Commission, would later tell me that on the north side of the bridge, now submerged, stand the remains of the old Pendleton Gaines Bridge that crossed the river from 1937 to 1967. That quaint truss bridge took the place of the even quainter Old Gaines Ferry, a crossing operated as far back as 1794. The ferry served as a major port of entry to the Republic of Texas in the 1800s when it carried many of the state's settlers, allegedly including Stephen F. Austin. From a historic ferry to a truss bridge to the 2.4-mile viaduct we are driving now, the evolution of this Sabine crossing is a dense microcosm of Texas history and modernization.

As soon as Pennie drives us to the other side of the bridge, it's clear we're not in Texas anymore. Banners splashed with the gold, green, and purple colors of Mardi Gras festoon the roadway, and a tourist center flies the Louisiana state flag—sky blue with a white pelican. A 6-foot sculpture of a writhing bass painted by local artists reminds us that whatever side we're on, we're in bass country. And to put us in a festive state of mind, a tackle shop and convenience store just up the road sells drive-thru daiquiris.

Opting to skip the daiquiri in favor of a Texas margarita, Pennie scoots us back across the bridge for dinner with her friends at Lost Frontier—a marina and restaurant full of taxidermy, fried food, and fishermen. There we meet Stephen Stubbe, aka Captain Scooby, an Orvis-endorsed fly-fishing guide and retired engineer who promises to take Kenny and me on a “mudfishing” trip once the sun comes out. With sparkly eyes and a mustache, Captain Scooby is part Captain Kangaroo, part mad scientist of fishing. He tweaks old techniques to find new ways to fish, crafting flashy 8- to 12-inch flies with tinsel and fur to lure bass out of cypress roots in Toledo Bend's shadowy backwaters. Scooby also commissioned himself a customized boat with GatorTail boat manufacturers. Rigged with a motor that's part lawn mower, its essential superpower is popping over the ubiquitous stumps and fallen logs that have stranded many a vessel on the Sabine River and Toledo Bend. Hence, Scooby can go “shallowing” where high-end bass boats cannot.

Over “alligator kickers”—spicy fried and battered alligator bites—Pennie, Captain Scooby, and crew regale us with the mysteries of Toledo Bend; we might bump into a Bigfoot, or even the Loch Ness Monster. We discuss arcane variations between alligator hunting in Texas and Louisiana. It's legal with a license in both states, but there are endless technicalities in how to go about it. Numeric differences between Texas and Louisiana come up often in our four-day tour of this borderland. Gas tends to be cheaper in Texas, but fishing licenses cost more. Weldon's wife, Beth McDaniel, says her grandparents drove from Texas across state lines to marry because her grandmother was only 14, the legal marrying age in Louisiana at the time. I ask Pennie if she goes over to Louisiana much. “Don't be silly,” she jokes. “I wouldn't mingle with those people unless I needed a daiquiri.”

Pennie's quips aside, people here mingle plenty across state lines. Pennie is part of the Lasyone family from outside of Natchitoches (pronounced Nack-Uh-Tush), the oldest settlement in the Louisiana Purchase and about an hour's drive from Pendleton



Bridge. In 1967, the Lasyones opened an eponymous Cajun restaurant famous for its empanada-like meat pies. On a day where I'm wearing two pairs of socks to keep my toes from freezing, hot meat pies seem worthy of a pilgrimage.

So we leave the pine curtain of East Texas and follow the Camino Real—State Highway 6 on the Louisiana side, a two-lane road that cruises past rural homes shaded by scattered pines. One of those numeric state differences Pennie did not mention is the speed limit: On the other side of the border, it drops down to 55 mph. It feels as slow as strolling in a Mardi Gras parade. But, what's my big hurry? Natchitoches has been there since 1714; it's not going anywhere.

Besides, when I go too fast I'm likely to miss things, like the sign for the Los Adaes State Historic Site just outside of Robeline. It's closed today, so I drive right past an underappreciated hot spot of Texas history. During the French-Spanish tug of war for this terrain in the 1700s, Spaniards built Los Adaes as a fort around 1720 and soon thereafter named it the capital of the Spanish province of Tejas, which it remained until 1772. Consider that: Thanks to the vagaries of border-making, the first capital of Texas ended up in Louisiana.

We arrive at Natchitoches' historic Front Street overlooking the Cane River, a tributary of the Red River, and I'm instantly charmed. We've landed upon a mini French Quarter, with wrought-iron balconies atop blues bars and restaurants. Lasyone's, an unpretentious diner, is even more endearing than Natchitoches' red brick streets. The real gold here is the staff, like Travis Newton, a congenial manager who pops out of the kitchen for a little Drew Brees versus Tom Brady quarterback smack talk with me, a reminder that when you cross into Louisiana, you also cross into Saints Nation. Equally affable is our waitress Helen Winn, who is proud of Lasyone's global fame. "People come here from France," she says. "They've heard about our meat

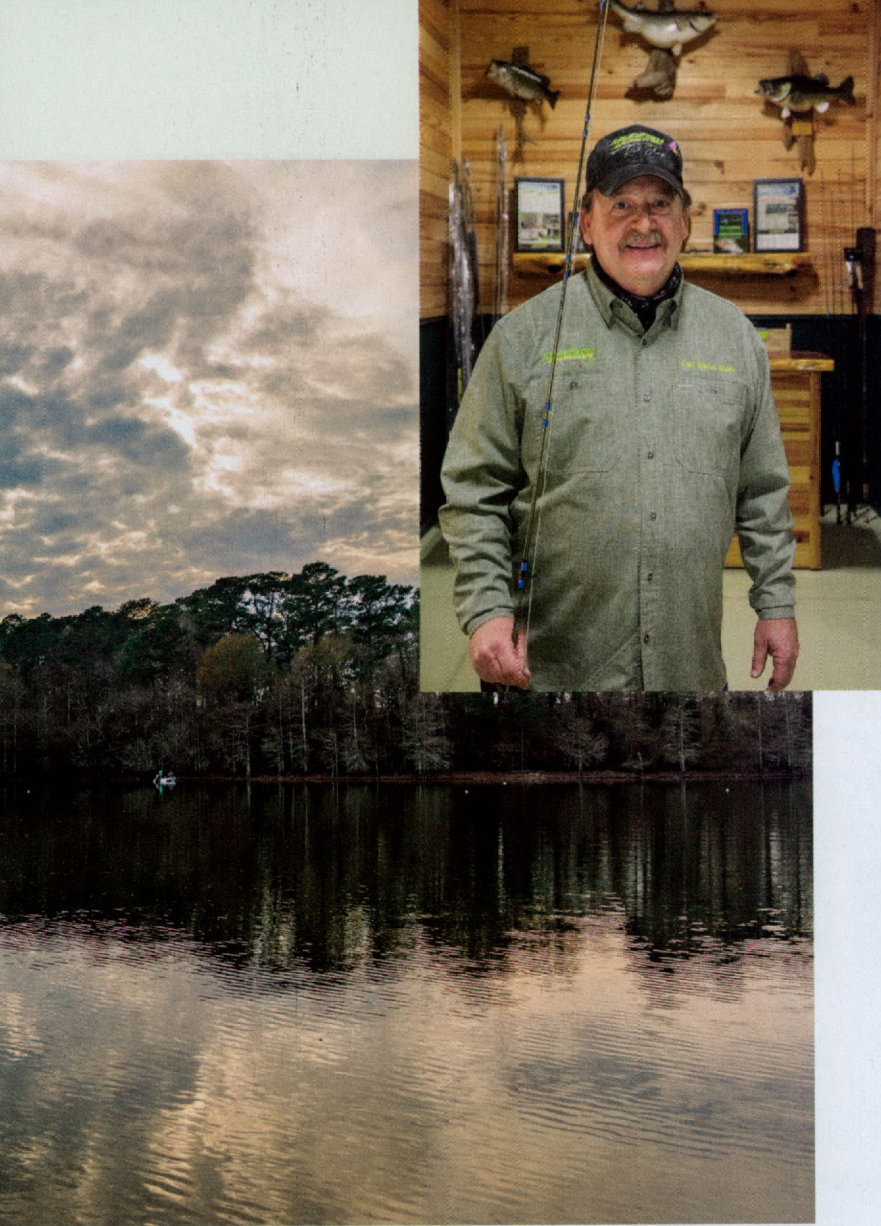
**FROM LEFT:** Day's end on Toledo Bend Reservoir; Captain Scooby in his shop with one of his custom fly rods.

pies clear over there." As I bite into the fried pastry containing a savory mix of ground beef, pork, onion, celery, and bell peppers, I can taste why.

**ON OUR WAY BACK TO TEXAS**, we stop in Zwolle, a town about 15 miles from the border with an improbable number of tamale makers. Perhaps even less probable is that the town's name rhymes with the food for which it is known. We pull up at L&W Tamale House, a white house with smiling frog statues in the yard, and order a dozen tamales to go. L&W's owner, Linnie Sepulvado, her fingernails painted gold for Mardi Gras, meets us at the tamale pickup window. She is the "L" in the name. Her husband, Wayne Sepulvado, is the "W."

"Ever since I came up out in the country, we was always making tamales in the old black pot at home," she says. "When we moved over here I just kept on making them. All the country people around here make them. It's not Mexican. This is more Indian and Spanish over here. Apache and Choctaw." Marveling at the cultural forces that collided to bring about this hot bag of tamales in my hand, I unwrap one from its corn husk and bite into the fresh and tender masa.

Back in Texas, we try to pop in to Hemphill's Patricia Huffman Smith NASA Museum, a tribute to the Columbia Space Shuttle and its fatal disintegration



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844-683-3474;  
[mudfishadventures.com](http://mudfishadventures.com)

## **LOST FRONTIER RV PARK AND MARINA**

With cabins, RV spots, lake access, and a restaurant, this is a mainstay of Toledo Bend fishing culture.

360 Frontier Drive, Hemphill.  
409-404-9972;  
[lostfrontierrvpark.com](http://lostfrontierrvpark.com)

## **LASYONE'S MEAT PIE RESTAURANT**

This laidback eatery serves authentic home cooking in the heart of the Natchitoches historic district.

622 Second St., Natchitoches, Louisiana.  
318-352-3353; [lasyones.com](http://lasyones.com)

## **L&W TAMALES HOUSE**

The tamales served through L&W's take-out window are as fresh and flavorful as it gets.

1547 Oak St., Zwolle, Louisiana.  
318-645-6407; [facebook.com/lw-tamale-house-116187349781404](https://facebook.com/lw-tamale-house-116187349781404)

## **FISHERMAN'S VILLAGE LODGE**

The house accommodates fishermen and lake lovers; sleeps 12. Rooms start at \$125 for two guests.

5518 State Highway 21 East, Hemphill.  
409-787-3138;  
[fishermansvillage.us/lodge.asp](http://fishermansvillage.us/lodge.asp)

## **TOLEDO BEND NORTH STATE PARK**

The fishing-centric state park offers boat access and comfortable cabins starting at \$150.

2907 N. Toledo Park Road,  
Zwolle, Louisiana. 318-645-4715;  
[lastateparks.com/parks-preserves/north-toledo-bend-state-park](http://lastateparks.com/parks-preserves/north-toledo-bend-state-park)

across Sabine County in 2003. But this visit would be more than a pit stop; the stories told here are so gripping, I leave an hour-plus later with tear-smudged mascara. The museum's documentary, *Of Good Courage*, relates how the people of Hemphill aided the NASA and FBI recovery teams who came to town to search for the shuttle's scattered remains. Bethany Dorsey, the bright-faced museum docent who wasn't yet born when the Columbia fell, ably shares details of the tragedy. One tidbit: Mission Control played "Fake Plastic Trees" by Radiohead as the astronauts' morning wake-up call because it was a favorite of Willie McCool, the Columbia pilot from Lubbock.

Next, we are treated to some unexpected sorcery courtesy of Weldon, whose history center office is lined with tidy binders featuring titles such as "Sabine River Authority Photographs of Black African American Farms in the Robertson Bend, Book One." A local cemetery expert, Weldon is dedicated to helping people find their ancestors, particularly those of African American descent. He employs a witching stick to determine if a buried body is male or female. He shows us, with jaw-dropping accuracy, how his witching stick works. Holding the bent stick in front of him, Weldon walks toward me, and as he gets close, the stick makes a sharp turn to his left. When he walks toward Kenny, the



“CAN’T YOU HEAR  
YOURSELF THINK?”  
SCOOBY SAYS,  
EYES SPARKLING.  
I WONDER WHY  
IT TOOK ME SO  
LONG TO FIND  
THIS PLACE.

stick takes a far right. Is he pulling our legs? We check his methods and deem it impossible that Weldon is manipulating the stick. Amused by our stunned faces, Beth says, “Now, that’s some New Orleans voodoo right there.”

**THE NEXT DAY THE SUN COMES OUT**, and it’s time to get out on the water. We meet Captain Scooby on the shore of the cypress-lined Toledo Bend feeder creek that is his backyard. The lake that had been dull gray on our arrival is now translucent blue and shimmering, as if someone had turned on a disco ball. It’s not unlike being around Scooby. He is so in love with fly-fishing and his corner of Toledo Bend that his boyish enthusiasm radiates, catching us in its shine.

For my first casting lesson, he shows me how to press my thumb on a Scooby-designed women’s fly rod—crafting lightweight fly rods for women as one of his innovations. I angle the rod back and forth

# WHAT WENT UNDER

On the south side of the bridge near Texas lie about 70 graves the Sabine River Authority did not disinter before the dam flooded them. Weldon McDaniel, a retired school teacher and historian who grew up in the '40s in the Sabine River bottomlands, devotes himself to chronicling all that was lost when the Sabine was dammed. He created a Facebook page titled "What Went Under" that posts the homes, churches, and cemeteries that disappeared and the people who lived among them. The group became so popular that Weldon helped organize "What Went Under" live gatherings. Four to five hundred people from both sides of the Sabine came together to honor what was lost. "It's really neat to get all these people together," he says. "They bring all their pictures, and everybody reminisces." The next event is tentatively planned for spring 2023. [facebook.com/groups/1502194386501422](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1502194386501422)

overhead from 11 to 1 o'clock, my line tracing a serpentine trail against the blue sky. Scooby has Kenny pull on the end of my line, emulating the tug of a big fish. I am giddy before we even get in the boat.

After backing his custom rig into the water with a joyful shout, Scooby zips us across the lake to those stump-strewn sloughs where other boats can't go. It's an exquisite freedom, to glide through the mazes of marsh grass and moss-cloaked cypress while Scooby points out things I would never notice, like the slide marks in the mud where snapping turtles crawl in and out of the water. With reverent glee, he shows us all the hollows where big bass lurk. The water is so glassy in the descending light, it's hard to tell where the reflections of the cypress trees end and the real things begin.

As if we are on safari, Scooby is quiet and alert, his eyes scanning the water and skies around us. He's good at explaining the complex relationships between species and elements out here. "You have to pay attention to everything," he says. "If it's too muddy you can't catch fish because they can't breathe in it. If there is an eagle in the air, he's looking at fish, so I'm watching him. I go into an area and there's an alligator, I know there's a big group of fish there."

We practice casting in a quag spacious enough for a couple of beginners who can't yet control where they fling flies. Captain Scooby points to a reed sticking out of the water and tells us to aim for that. I want to be good so badly, I cast too fast. The gap between my aspiration and execution looms large. Scooby tells me to ease up, to say out loud "Toe-Leeeeee-Doooooo-Beeeeend" and slow my movements to the rhythm of the words. With his guidance, I find my groove. Spoiler alert: Kenny and I don't catch a fish; it's a cold day in February. This is just casting practice.

But I don't care. Scooby's fly-fishing brio is so contagious, I get a vicarious high from it, even though there's no fish on my line. With the sun going down, we motor to the spot where the cormorants perform their sunset ritual, flying graceful Vs against the rosy sky. Watching the show, we are quiet. "Can't you hear yourself think?" Scooby says, eyes sparkling. I wonder why it took me so long to find this place.

The next morning at sunrise, Kenny and I hike through the woods by our cabins in the North Toledo Bend State Park near Zwolle. As sunbeams first hit the loblollies, the ruckus of thumping woodpeckers and calling crows make the silent anglers gliding by on their bass boats seem like serene monks. A loud screeching noise, which I first took for a wild hog, turns out to be the protective cry of a glorious bald eagle perched by her nest. She locks eyes with me, asking what I'm doing in her woods. My heart leaps.

There is much more here than I had realized: the nature in these woods and Toledo Bend's backwaters; smart characters like Pennie and Weldon who are passionate about Hemphill and its history; the warm crew at Lasyone's and L&W infusing the border with their distinctive flavors. I am humbled by all that I'd missed on previous trips. The area may no longer be called "neutral ground," but this border lake retains a friendly stew of culture and people, no matter which side you're standing on. **L**



**FROM TOP:** A cabin in North Toledo Bend State Park; a bridge reflected over Toledo Bend Reservoir; Weldon McDaniel, president of the Sabine County Historical Commission.





by john nova lomax  
photographs by kenny braun

KARANKAWA DESCENDANTS ARE REVIVING

We're

THE HERITAGE OF A NATIVE TEXAS

Still

TRIBE WRITTEN OFF AS EXTINCT

Here

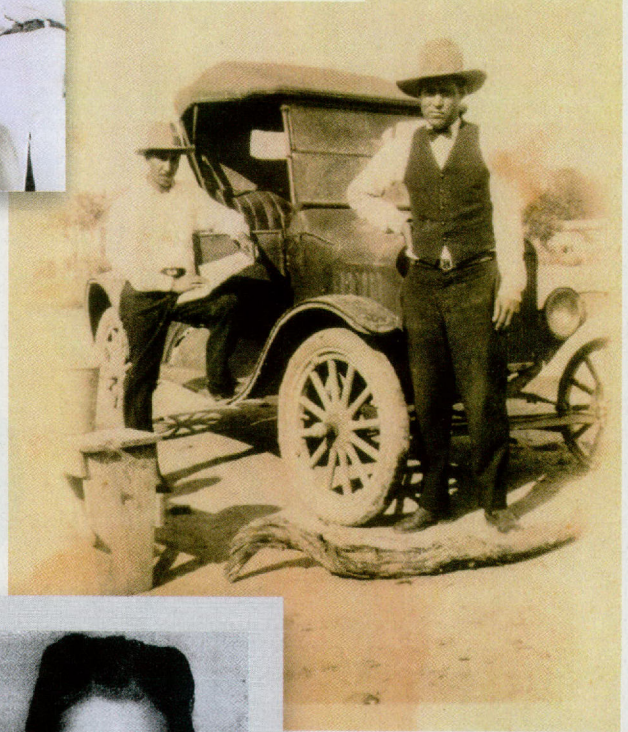
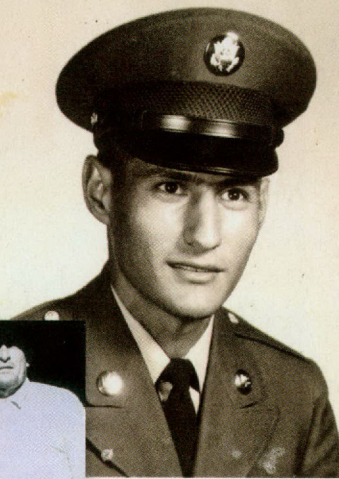
# W

With cane ornaments piercing their noses and nipples, Karankawa warriors were the stuff of nightmares. Reports of their savagery date to the accounts of French and Spanish explorers in the 17th and 18th centuries. The indigenous inhabitants of a strip of Texas coastal inlets, marshes, and forests from Galveston Bay to Corpus Christi Bay, the Karankawa were described as wearing breechcloths or nothing at all, revealing muscular bodies covered in tattoos and paint. The men were said to have frequently topped 7 feet in height, described as fleet of foot and powerful wrestlers. They coated themselves in a poultice made of either shark oil or alligator grease, which warded off mosquitoes and also gave them a pungent aroma. Their red cedar longbows were almost as tall as they were, and their strings sent steel-tipped, goose-feather guided arrows hissing with unerring accuracy through the bodies of their prey and combatants alike. And on top of everything else, we were told, the Karankawa were voracious cannibals.

"Ask any school-aged child in a Texas public school what they know about the Karankawa and you will, most likely, receive a testimony about their despicable savagery, gruesome cannibalism, and general lack of civility and appeal," wrote Vivien Geneser, a former Texas A&M-San Antonio associate professor of early childhood education, in the *American Educational History Journal*.

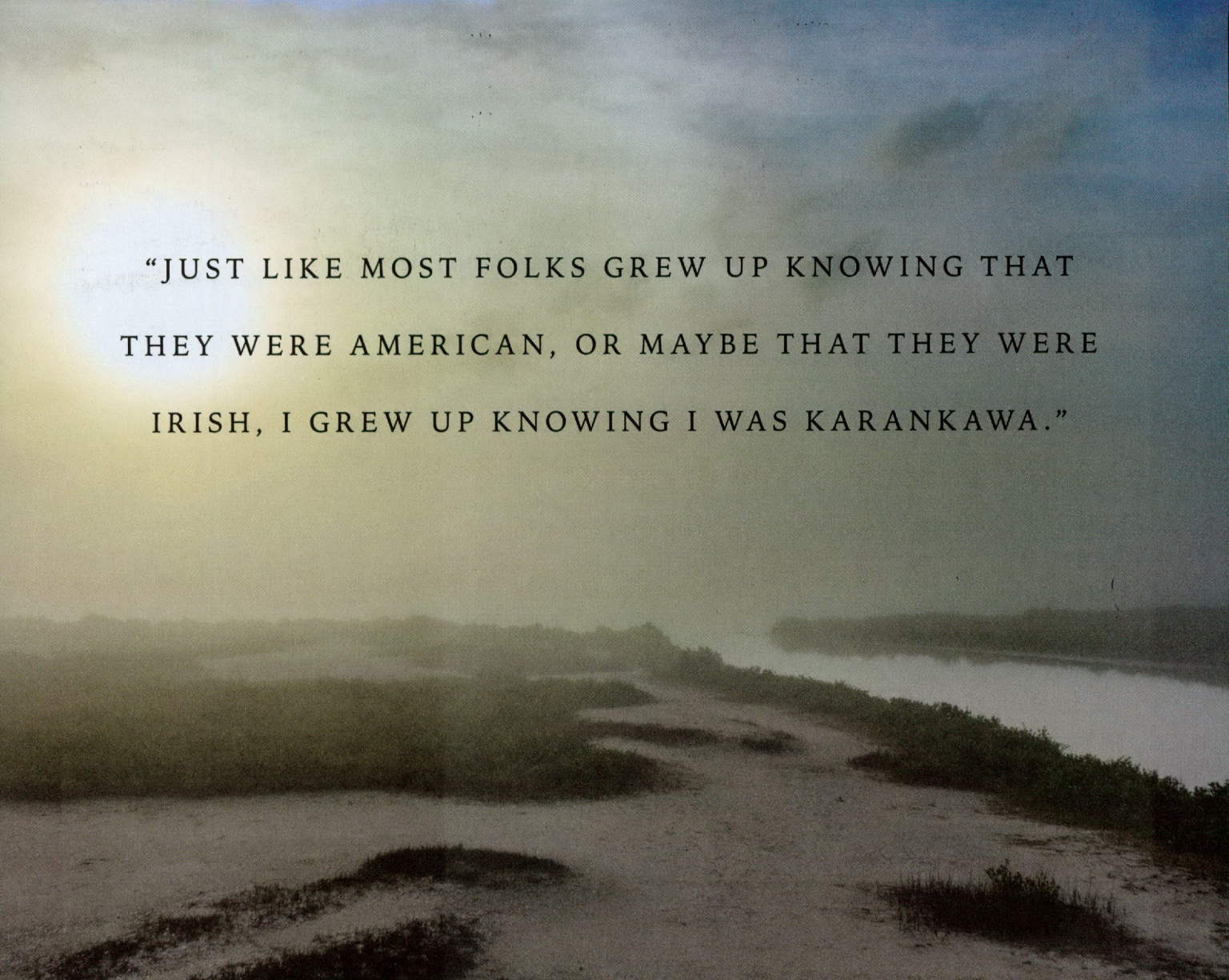
While you might think such teachings are a thing of the past, Geneser—who wrote those words in 2011—says the same characterizations persist. She recently took an informal poll of Texan fourth graders on what they'd been taught about the Karankawa. "It was all, 'Oh, they were terrible, they were horrible cannibals,'" she says. "The story prevails."

And not just in the classroom. A 2015 installment of a newspaper column syndicated across Texas ran with the headline "Nobody Red or White Cared Much for Kronks." The story went on to claim the tribe's "prize catch was the occasional European who wound up the main dish at the next village feasts."



**OPENING SPREAD:** Karankawa descendant Chiara Sunshine Beaumont, of Austin. **THIS SPREAD:** Enrique Gonzalez Jr.'s family photos on display in the City of Alamo Museum; North Harbor Island near Aransas Pass.





“JUST LIKE MOST FOLKS GREW UP KNOWING THAT  
THEY WERE AMERICAN, OR MAYBE THAT THEY WERE  
IRISH, I GREW UP KNOWING I WAS KARANKAWA.”

You couldn't get away with printing that about a group of living people in today's press, but here's the thing: Even now, most people think the Karankawa are extinct. As the 2015 column concluded, by 1860, they were “just an unpleasant memory.”

While you cannot libel the dead, this justification doesn't hold up: The Karankawa are not extinct, and almost everything you thought you knew about them is wrong.

**THE REVIVAL OF** the Karankawa community can be traced to September 2009 when the *Brownsville Herald* ran a profile of Enrique Gonzalez Jr. A resident of Alamo, the U.S. Army veteran claimed to be a direct Karankawa descendent.

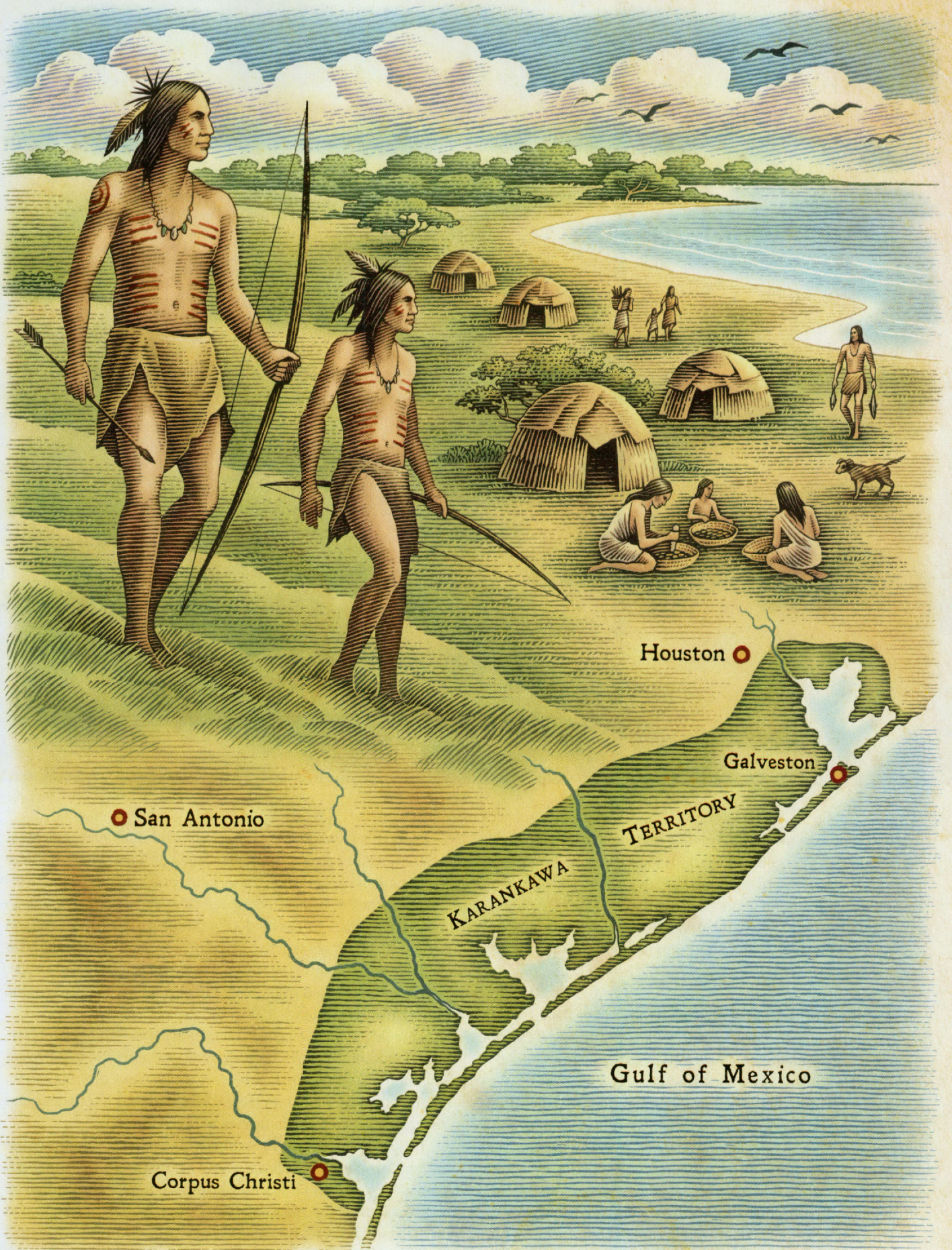
Gonzalez had a Karankawa grandparent on both sides of his family. When he was a child, his father would take him to tribal mitotes, where fellow Karankawa danced among mesquite trees to the rumble of drums and tambourines handmade with bottle caps. The dancers would sleep on the ground all weekend, and on Sundays, they'd bring out a bucket of ferocious bootleg mezcal.

“They'd pour some in another little container and set it on fire,” recalls Gonzalez, now 77. “They liked it if the flame burned blue.”

These rituals took place in El Gato, a Rio Grande Valley settlement where Gonzalez grew up and the same borderland region where his Karankawa ancestors fled after being driven first from the Texas coast and then from more populated areas along the Rio Grande in Texas and Mexico. He has heirlooms from the 19th century: You can see a fishing bow of his at the museum at Mission Espíritu Santo in Goliad, another bow at the Museum of the Coastal Bend in Victoria, and keepsakes including pictures and documents on display at the City of Alamo Museum.

Emboldened by Gonzalez's revelation in the *Herald*, others followed. From one isolated crypto-Karankawa family to another, word got out over social media: *You are not alone*. In a process known as ethnogenesis, the Karankawa Kadla, or mixed Karankawa, are rising. A new people built on ancient foundations.

This is welcome news to hundreds of families across Texas and beyond. Absolem Yetzirah was one of the first to chime in on social media. “I'd heard the same stories growing up, and I got on a mission to find relatives,” says Yetzirah, who was born in Galveston and lives in Houston. “Every story I would see about the Karankawa, I would answer in the comment section.” Steadily, he heard from others with





**ABOVE FROM LEFT:**  
 Karankawa descendant Enrique Gonzalez Jr., of Alamo, displays an heirloom fishing bow at the Museum of the Coastal Bend in Victoria; Mission Espíritu Santo in Goliad.

similar oral histories who wanted to learn more about their heritage. One person was 27-year-old Chiara Sunshine Beaumont. Now living in Austin, where she works as an outdoor adventure guide, Beaumont grew up in Virginia, where her Corpus Christi-raised mom had found work.

“Just like most folks grew up knowing that they were American, or maybe that they were Irish, I grew up knowing that I was Karankawa,” she says. “When I went to school and was learning about Native Americans, my mother would correct what I was being taught.” For example, the portrayal of tribes like the Karankawa as irrational savages.

In elementary school, there were “culture days,” Beaumont recalls, when students could talk about their heritage in front of the class. “I remember my mom telling us that we weren’t exactly Mexican, we were Tejanos: ‘You were there before the border—the border crossed us.’ We were related to Mexicans because they were also indigenous, but we were not Mexicans.”

Love Sanchez, a 40-year-old Corpus Christi resident and founder of the group Indigenous People of the Coastal Bend, says her Karankawa family’s heritage goes back to Goliad’s Mission Espíritu Santo, which the Spanish built: to convert the natives to Christianity. Karankawa heritage is a prominent part of her family’s oral history. “We are definitely out here,” she says. “We were assimilated, but I was taught that my ancestors were bad enemies of the whole land.”

Galveston native Alex Perez, the author of the 2021 book *Karankawa*

*Kadla Mixed Tongue: Medicine for the Land & Our People*, is an authority on the Karankawa language. He peppers his emails and conversations with phrases like “M’tchawɿ” (How are you?). He believes oral history is key to Karankawa identity.

“It takes more than saying you have lived in Corpus Christi all your life, or Galveston,” he says. “If that’s true, half of Galveston or Corpus would be Karankawa. Sometimes the facts match up, and sometimes they don’t. We look for stories of forced migration to Mexico and back to Texas and then assimilation.”

Assimilation amounted to hiding in plain sight for 150 years—an “extinct” people who simply accepted new labels as Hispanic, Tejano, or American, and intermarried with other ethnicities while retaining their core identity. Perez is a believer in ancestral memory, that recollections travel down through generations in our DNA. That connection is strongest for him at the West End of Galveston Island. “Not just because of memories I have, some good, some bad, but I can also feel the memories of my ancestors there.”

As Perez notes, at about the same time the Karankawa Kadla revival began, scientists began studying the DNA of



## Traces of the Karankawa

Because the Karankawa were semi-nomadic and utilized mostly perishable materials such as wood and cane, there are no ruined village sites to see. The places they dwelled have been washed away or buried under the sand in river floods or by coastal erosion.

The greatest man-made remnants of Karankawa influence are **Presidio La Bahía** and **Mission Espíritu Santo**, both in Goliad. The Spanish built both in hopes of converting the tribe to Catholicism and staving off feared attacks. Presidio La Bahía, which is owned and operated by the Catholic Diocese of Victoria, is at 217 Loop 71. 361-645-3752; [presidiolabahia.org](http://presidiolabahia.org). Mission Espíritu Santo is part of Goliad State Park, 108 Park Road 6. 361-645-3405; [tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/goliad](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/goliad).

In the Rio Grande Valley, the **City of Alamo Museum** chronicles the final days of the Karankawa as a distinct tribe both in Texas and Mexico, including a display of photos and family relics from Karankawa descendants. 130 S. Eighth St. in Alamo. 956-961-4398; [alamotexas.org/government/departments/alamo-museum](http://alamotexas.org/government/departments/alamo-museum).

To get a sense of the unspoiled Texas coastline the Karankawa called home, visit a wildlife refuge—**Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge** in Angleton; **San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge** in Brazoria; and **Aransas National Wildlife Refuge** in Austwell. [fws.gov](http://fws.gov)



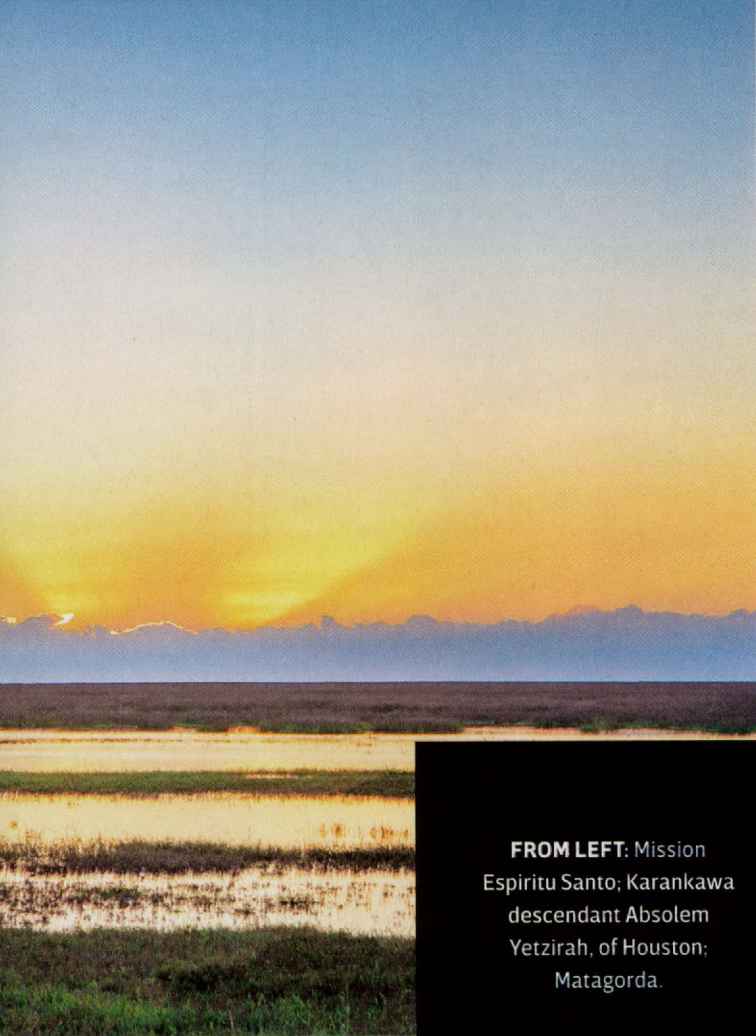
coyotes living in Galveston's West End. For years, residents had been saying there was something different about these particular coyotes—their legs longer, their snouts pointier, their fur redder. Biologists conducted DNA tests and found the coyotes had as much as 30% of the DNA of the red wolf, a once-common species in the Southeast U.S. stretching to Texas that's nearly extinct. Scientists believe these hybrids can be bred back into animals like the red wolf of old. In other words, hybridization had saved them from the extinction humans had intended for them.

Mixed red wolf descendants—hiding in plain sight, just like the people who'd lived alongside them for untold centuries. "We've had so many synchronicities like that," Perez says. Coastal storms have uncovered human remains and possible Karankawa village sites, he says. Historians in Wharton handed over a trove of artifacts. To Perez, it all seems like fate—meant to be.

**FEW PEOPLE HAVE DONE AS MUCH TO DISPEL** the myths of the Karankawa as Tim Seiter, a doctoral candidate in history at SMU. He's working on a history book of the people, and he maintains [karankawas.com](http://karankawas.com), a website for all things related to the tribe.

Seiter, who has no Karankawa blood, grew up in Friendswood within the tribe's former homeland. As a schoolboy, Seiter rejected what his teachers taught him about the Karankawa. "I started researching the Karankawas simply because I grew up on their land," he says. "The myths I heard about them being 7 feet tall and baby eaters didn't really feel all that accurate."

His work on their behalf has won him praise from Karankawa Kadla



**FROM LEFT:** Mission Espiritu Santo; Karankawa descendant Absolom Yetzirah, of Houston; Matagorda.

members. “Through his doctoral research, he has been able to correct misconceptions about our tribe,” Sanchez says. “And it has been well documented enough for it to change the false writings from the past.”

Seiter says modern archaeology has disproved the notion that Karankawa were giants. Though taller than the average European, their skeletal remains average about 5-foot-8. He also dispelled a theory that the tribe arrived on the Texas coast by boat from the Caribbean in the 1400s. He notes that archeologists have found Karankawa pottery—adorned with asphaltum, the naturally occurring tar balls from the Gulf of Mexico—predating the 1400s.

As for the cannibalism? Yes and no. “They did practice a very limited form temporarily,” Seiter says. “There are no firsthand accounts of them engaging in any form of cannibalism after the late 1600s.” Cannibalism was reserved for ancient enemies. “It served to dishonor an enemy and as a means of absorbing a foe’s power.” History’s only firsthand account of Karankawa cannibalism came from Jean-Baptiste Talon. In 1688, the 10-year-old colonist was abducted and adopted into the tribe after they attacked a French settlement known as Fort St. Louis in present-day Victoria County. Years later, in Spanish naval service, Talon was taken prisoner by the French, who interviewed him on all he knew about both New Spain and the Karankawa.

His interrogator reported: “The only meals that horrified him were those [the Karankawa] made of human flesh, as they are all cannibals, but toward their savage enemies only.” That account was enough to seed a pernicious and deadly myth, which later emerged as the Spanish launched their missionary program in Texas to pacify and Christianize the Native Americans. Making a mockery of the missions, the Karankawa would accept gifts but

ignore religious services. When asked to work, they simply headed back to the coast. To them, the missions were a luxury, not a life-saving necessity, as they were for some tribes who needed Spanish protection from rivals. In 1767, Fray Gaspar José de Solís, the Zacatecas, Mexico-based superior of the Texas missions, blamed the missions’ futility on the savagery of the Karankawa: “Dancing and leaping and with sharp knives in their hands,” he wrote, “they draw near to the victim, cut off a piece of their flesh, come to the fire and half roast it, and, within sight of the victim himself devour it most ravenously.”

Over the years that myth grew to include the false idea that the Karankawa hunted Europeans. Empresario Stephen F. Austin encountered a peaceful band of Karankawa in 1821, likely in Brazoria County, and apparently he was terrified by their appearance. “The Karankawas may be called universal enemies to man—they killed of all nations that came in their power, and frequently feast on the bodies of their victims,” Austin wrote. “There will be no way of subduing them but extermination.”

Western settlers, including companies of Texas Rangers, routed the Karankawa in a series of massacres that removed them from what is now Galveston, Brazoria, and Matagorda counties. In later years, different leaders from both sides of the Rio Grande would chase them farther and farther south and then up the Rio Grande Valley, where the last nine Karankawa warriors made a final stand against a force led by Juan Nepomeceno Cortina, a borderlands rancher, near the Mexican town of Mier.

“They were annihilated,” says Alex Oyoque, director of the City of Alamo Museum. “But not the women and children. They went to ranches and cities on both sides of the border. So when they say they are extinct, it’s not true. The children grew up, and they married and carried on the legacy.”

**TODAY THAT LEGACY IS BECOMING A LIVING**, breathing reality. The Karankawa descendants have a tribal council now and two clans—one centered in Corpus Christi and the other in Galveston. They have organized and fought to protect their ancient tribal lands, such as protesting industrial development on the coast. In November 2020, the first sentence of the Karankawa entry in the *Handbook of Texas*—the Texas State Historical Association’s encyclopedia of state history—was changed from “The now-extinct Karankawa Indians played an important role in the early history of Texas” to the Seiter-penned “The Karankawa Indians *are* an American Indian cultural group whose traditional homelands are located along Texas’ Gulf Coast.”

There is still plenty of work to be done. Sanchez hopes one day the federal government will recognize the tribe. But first Texas would have to recognize the tribe—a process tangled with red tape that takes years.

“None of this is about money,” she says. “All of us have good jobs, a roof over our head. It’s more about how we want to be recognized. We want people to know we are here.”



# ALWAYS BOTH

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIST CHÁVEZ

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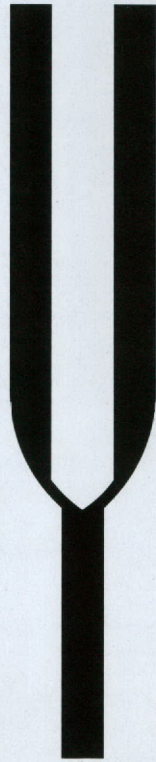
THE DUALITY  
OF LIFE ON  
THE BORDER IN  
LAREDO

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A photograph of a person wearing a blue jacket and a straw hat, standing on a dirt bank and fishing in a river. The river is surrounded by tall reeds and green trees. The sky is clear and blue. The text 'AND FURTHER' is overlaid on the image in a large, white, serif font.

AND FURTHER

BY KATIE GUTIERREZ



Your hometown is like your body—so familiar you stop seeing it, so familiar you think you’ve seen it all, though there are whole geographies only visible with a specific angling of mirrors. Your hometown is like your face—just OK, until you look back at old photos and realize you were beautiful then. How could you not have noticed?

**Laredo is a flat 150-mile drive south** from San Antonio, where I live with my husband and two kids, past small towns and the mesquite and cactus that thread the landscape of my childhood. Follow Interstate 35 until you reach its end—or, rather, its beginning—and there you’ll find Laredo: a city in between two countries, a city that is and is not American, is and is not Mexican. An interstitial place of both and neither.

I’m a third generation Laredoan, and when I was growing up, 99% of the city’s population was of Mexican descent. Now it’s closer to 95%, which still makes it among the least ethnically diverse cities in the U.S., creating a bubble for those of us who grow up there. Many have family living just across the bridge in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, and many others can trace their Texan roots back to the first Spanish land grants along the Rio Grande. Today only 10% of the population speaks English alone, while the remaining 90% are bilingual. Anywhere you go in Laredo, you’re as likely to hear Spanish as you are to hear English, and often both in the same sentence in that third language dubbed Spanglish.

With a population of 270,000, you can’t exactly call Laredo a small town. But growing up, when the population was half that—before the North American Free Trade

**OPENING SPREAD:** *El Abrazo* mural at Hotel Rialto; John Peter and Consuelo Montalvo Los Tres Laredo Park. **THIS SPREAD, FROM LEFT:** San Agustín Cathedral; *Our Story Is Our Power* mural downtown.



Agreement went into effect and turned Laredo into the largest inland port—it often felt like one. At the Chick-fil-A in Mall del Norte, where my family ate lunch most Saturdays, I wondered how my parents could possibly know people at every table. Once, when I was in eighth grade, they took us to watch *Titanic* at the new Cinemark Movies 12, and the entire row in front of us was occupied by the popular kids in my class. I slunk low as my dad whispered, “Was there a field trip you didn’t know about?”

When I was about 12, I searched for my last name in the phone book. There were hundreds of us, line after line until the letters blurred, until *Gutierrez* looked like hieroglyphics. I’m not sure





what I was looking for, but what I felt was a throbbing sameness, the sense that Laredo was one immutable thing, and I was just like everyone else here. I thought I'd have to leave to set myself apart.

I was wrong. Laredo exemplifies duality. Scholar Gloria Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, describes the border as "... una herida abierta (an open wound) where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture."

I read *Borderlands* during my freshman year at Southwestern University in Georgetown, where, for the first time, I was the only Gutierrez. Ironically, my two best friends there were also from Laredo. "Laredo people find each other everywhere," we joked. Reading Anzaldúa's words,

it struck me that I had lived in Laredo my whole life taking for granted the very thing that made it special: the culture that blends Mexicanness and Americanness into something new.

**The Webb County Heritage Foundation** is a vast portal for exploring Laredo's rich past. The foundation operates two museums: the Republic of the Rio Grande Museum and the Villa Antigua Border Heritage Museum. They're both located in downtown Laredo and open year-round, featuring exhibits about Laredo's origins and historical development. The Republic of the Rio Grande Museum, a Mexican vernacular structure constructed in 1830, has thick walls made of sandstone with lime plaster, hand-quarried and filled with adobe and lime mortar. Located on the storied San Agustín Plaza, it's one of Laredo's oldest buildings.

Exhibits at the museum trace Laredo's founding to 1755, more than 230 years after the Spanish "conquering" of the Aztec empire, when Captain Tomás Sanchez was granted permission to settle 15 leagues of land near a





**FROM LEFT:** The San Agustín steeple is visible from La Posada Hotel; The Plaza Theatre is located on West Mills Avenue.

ford on the north bank of the Rio Grande. He named it San Agustín de Laredo. By then, many Spanish settlements existed along the Rio Grande, most founded by José de Escandón, known as the colonizer and first governor of Nuevo Santander, a Spanish colony that comprised the present Mexican state of Tamaulipas and part of Trans-Nueces Texas. Because Laredo had no missions or presidios associated with its founding, it's considered the oldest independent settlement in Texas and one of only a few remaining Spanish colonial settlements north of the Rio Grande.

In the century after its founding, Laredo was at the center of multiple tugs of war. When Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, Laredo became a Mexican city. Then, in 1836, the Republic of Texas won its independence from Mexico and attempted to claim Laredo.

"People in the region decided they'd had enough," says Margarita Araiza, executive director of the Webb County Heritage Foundation. "They were being ignored by the government in Mexico City, defending themselves from Native American attacks in a region that was very harsh, and then getting incursions from the Texans up north. They weren't getting help from either side, so they decided, 'We'll go our own way.'"

Thus the creation of the Republic of the Rio Grande, established on January 7, 1840 by a constitutional convention that attempted to unite parts of northern Mexico and South Texas. For 283 days, Laredo was the capital of

the Republic, until it was defeated by the Mexican army.

"To me, that's an iconic part of Laredo's history," Araiza says, "because it represents what the character of the population was, which was very self-sufficient and self-determined. That continues to this day in the DNA of the population."

In 1845, the annexation of Texas to the U.S. led to war with Mexico, and the following year, when the war ended, the Rio Grande officially became the international border and Laredo a part of Texas. Those who wanted to retain Mexican citizenship moved across the river and founded Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, Laredo's sister city. Today, Laredo is one of only a few Texas cities to have been governed under seven flags: the Spanish, French, Mexican, Republic of Texas, Confederate, United States, and Republic of the Rio Grande.

"Some people like to say we're one city in two nations," Araiza says. "We're both Americans and Mexicans. We're in the middle of two worlds, and that's a good thing. We really are our own republic."

**Growing up, I took for granted** the way signage was in both English and Spanish, how we cracked *cascarónes* on Easter, how on Sundays at my grandpa's house it wasn't the "ice cream man" who drove by but the "*raspa* man," from whom we'd buy a Pickle on Ice—a whole dill pickle shoved into shaved ice, with a straw to suck out the pickle juice.

As a young writer, I didn't know how to show the specificity of border culture. I'd never encountered such a place or people in fiction before, so I set all my stories in nameless big cities—sleek, vague skylines upon which a reader might attach their own memories of places I'd never been. The stories were blurry and indecisive, more like parables than meaningful narratives. Where we live, after all, tells a story about who we are. Without a concrete place for my characters to plant their feet, I knew almost nothing about them.

When I started writing a novel about a woman living a double life, Laredo seemed the only place to set it. Where better to explore the duality inside all of us than a city that is always both and neither?

One afternoon, as part of my book research, my mom and I went downtown, where she'd spent a lot of time as a child. She pointed out where my grandfather had helped her nanny's husband, Aurelio Arrellano, open his shoe repair shop; where she used to buy a bag of pistachios salted

white for a dime at City Drug, a now-closed apothecary. I'd always known downtown as rundown, but when my parents were growing up, it was the thriving heart of the city.

There are four vehicular international bridges in Laredo. Until drug violence began escalating in Nuevo Laredo in the early 2000s, crossing the border was a routine part of life for both Mexicans and Americans, who drove from one side to another to shop, eat, drink, visit family, and seek medical care. My mom and her siblings used to walk across the pedestrian bridge, a footbridge that today requires a \$1 toll and a passport, PASS card, trusted traveler card, or enhanced driver's license approved by the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. They would visit Josefina Arrellano, their nanny and my daughter's namesake, who moved in with us when I was born. Fina, as they called her, bought them cold glass bottles of Mexican Coke sweetened with real cane sugar.

When I was born in 1984, Laredo was in the middle of an international recession. For a while, the city's economy had been protected from the U.S. recession because of Mexican activity, but when the peso devalued, Laredo crashed twice as hard. Hundreds of retail stores downtown closed, and a third of the city was unemployed, up from just over 10% several years earlier, according to a report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

My mom was teaching at Laredo College (Laredo Junior College, at the time), and my dad owned an electrical supply store. He moved up to Austin for a time, sleeping on a warehouse floor at night and trying to drum up business for the store during the day.

"It was a big blow to downtown," Araiza says of the peso devaluation. "But it wasn't a knock-out blow. Once the pandemic hit and the international bridges were closed for more than a year—the first time since the Mexican Revolution—frankly, for some it was the last straw. We have a lot of boarded-up storefronts. But if you look carefully, you'll see the beautiful architecture that still exists and that is just waiting to be restored or rehabilitated into something new."

When the museums were closed for three months in the first surge of COVID-19, Araiza says, the owners of an empty storefront allowed them to use their windows for a historical display. On the corner of Grant Street and Lotus Avenue, passersby can still see the exhibit, which revolves around an 1886 shootout in the St. Agustín Plaza between two political factions.

These days, you can see the possibility of downtown Laredo coming to mean something different to a new generation. On Iturbide Street—newly nicknamed "IT Street"—a host of locally owned bars and restaurants have opened, including Downtown Drafthouse, Happy Hour Downtown Bar, and Cultura Beer Garden. The Pan American Courts, a historic landmark motel and café built in 1946,

are a venue for arts and entertainment groups, including Schwartz Gallery. And city officials recently designated \$12 million toward renovating the 1940s-era Plaza Theatre.

When I was a teenager, my chief complaint about Laredo was there was nothing to do if you didn't go across the border, where the legal drinking age was 18. But by then my parents feared the violence in Nuevo Laredo, so I was not allowed to cross. Instead, on weekend nights, my friends and I frequented the Outback Steakhouse or Chili's on San Bernardo Avenue. We haunted the Starbucks that appeared on Del Mar around the time we graduated. *Of course, we groaned. Now we get something good, when we're about to leave.*

**FROM LEFT:** Margarita Araiza of the Webb County Heritage Foundation; a statue of Ignacio Zaragoza Seguín in San Agustín Plaza.



**Today in Laredo, some of the most** exciting new ventures are locally owned. In 2018, Telissa Molano, Linda LaMantia, and Alyssa Cigarroa, the latter a city council member, founded the Laredo Cultural District to get three distinct parts of the city—Avenida San Bernardo, El Centro, and Fort Mac—officially recognized as cultural districts by the Texas Commission on the Arts. The designation as a cultural district can help attract artists and cultural resources to the community, preserve historic buildings and landmarks, boost tourism, and enhance economic development. Now the organization is headquartered in Casa Ortíz, the oldest continually occupied residence in South Texas.

“We are helping amplify and embrace our cultural uniqueness while improving our quality of life,” Molano says. “Our city is challenged by low income, so free and accessible outreach provides a great opportunity for our area. We are culturally dependent on ourselves to embrace and keep our heritage alive.”

The organization has revived the Caminarte art walk on the first Friday of the month, where venues downtown will offer exhibits, live music, and food. Molano says they’re

“WE ARE  
CULTURALLY  
DEPENDENT  
ON OURSELVES  
TO EMBRACE  
AND KEEP OUR  
HERITAGE ALIVE.”





working toward creating an arts and culture festival in October to celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day. And the organization is collaborating on an exhibit to share the history of the five generations who lived in Casa Ortíz.

North Laredo, too, is benefiting from a generation of Laredoans who left for college and then brought their ideas back home.

Gerry Salinas thought he would get his master's degree in accounting or real estate after graduating from Texas A&M University. His plan was to establish himself in Dallas, Chicago, or New York before coming home to work in the family real estate business. But after his father was diagnosed with cancer, Salinas came straight back to Laredo.

"We didn't know how much time he had," Salinas says. "The concern was learning the family business as quickly as possible so my father could focus on his treatment."

It was 2008, and the U.S. was sinking into a recession. After a long crawl out of its depths, Salinas hit a wall when his father passed away in 2014. The next year, Salinas began dreaming

of a new venture.

"Life is short," he says. "I started thinking about what interested me and what Laredo could benefit from, something I would be adding to the city. Because I'm in Laredo for the long haul."

Salinas began mulling over the concept of food truck parks, which he'd enjoyed in bigger cities. "A food truck is a staple of Mexican culture," Salinas says, "but it was always a mobile truck, like the raspa truck. It was never a permanent fixture."

Salinas was walking in North Central Park in North Laredo when he saw the undeveloped site of what would become Golondrina Food Park. Salinas envisioned an inviting, shaded outdoor area feeding off the energy of diverse, chef-driven food trucks, anchored by a craft cocktail bar.

"Golondrina means swallow [a type of bird] in Spanish," Salinas explains. "Sailors used to get swallow tattoos as a symbol of home because once they saw the swallows, they knew they were close to shore. And swallows mate for life.



**FROM LEFT:** Gerry Salinas and Jaime Campos of Golondrina Food Park; cocktails from Bar Nido.

So, they're a sign of loyalty and family."

Salinas enlisted his longtime friend, Jaime Campos, to be his partner and manager of Bar Nido, as in, "nest." Finally came the food hall, offering a large air-conditioned space with various vendors, including El Horno Pizzeria, Velo Bike Shop + Repair, and Pícate Mucho, a *chilito* candy shop.

The project took years to develop. When Golondrina opened in 2019, Salinas says people complimented him by saying it "felt like Austin." In response, he'd say, "No, it feels like Laredo."

**I never moved back to Laredo** after I left. Where I live now, all the signs are in English. My kids have never had a Pickle on Ice. I speak Spanish to them knowing they only grasp a word here or there. Sometimes I feel there's a piece of me missing that only clicks into place when I return home.

In many ways, the novel I wrote about a woman living a double life between Laredo and Mexico City is a book about love and the complicated ways it can multiply and fracture. The novel, *More Than You'll Ever Know*, is also a love letter to my hometown. I hope when people from the border read it, they see themselves in all their beautiful duality, always both and neither. **L**

# COMER Y BEBER

Eat and drink like a local on your next visit to Laredo.

## **BORDER FOUNDRY RESTAURANT & BAR**

Named after the Border Foundry & Machine Company, established in 1922, this is fine dining with a twist—think fried oyster nachos. 7718 McPherson Road. 956-724-5907; [borderfoundrylaredo.com](http://borderfoundrylaredo.com)

## **TABERNILLA**

For a taste of Spain in South Texas, this tapas bar serves paella, *patatas bravas*, *albondigas*, or *tabla de carnes y quesos* (charcuterie board) with house-made sangria. 7124 Bob Bullock Loop. 956-523-0989; [tabernillalaredo.com](http://tabernillalaredo.com)

## **CULTURA BEER GARDEN**

After exploring Laredo's Cultural District, enjoy a cold one in the Pan American Courts for casual outdoor ambiance and live music. 916 Salinas Ave. 956-568-6697; [culturabeergarden.com](http://culturabeergarden.com)

## **GOLONDRINA FOOD PARK**

Cool down after a walk in the park with a cocktail from Bar Nido and dinner or a snack from a multitude of eateries. 10211 Golondrina Drive. 956-282-3127; [golondrinafoodpark.com](http://golondrinafoodpark.com)

## **TACO PALENQUE**

Grab a late-night *pirata* (fajitas, beans, and cheese folded generously into two flour tortillas) from one of Taco Palenque's several locations, open 24/7. [tacopalenque.com](http://tacopalenque.com)

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# PLATES

A high-angle, close-up photograph of two Micheladas. The drinks are served in tall, clear glasses with rims coated in a dark, textured salt mixture. Each glass is garnished with a fresh lime wedge. The liquid is a vibrant, reddish-orange color. In the background, a bottle of beer is partially visible on the left, and a small white bowl containing a dark, granular spice mix sits in the upper center. To the right, a bottle cap with white powder inside and a metal tool with a wooden handle are scattered on the dark, textured surface. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the salt rim and the freshness of the lime.

FROM MICHELADAS  
to "ArModelos,"  
beer salt adds big  
flavor to cocktails.

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# A Dash'll Do Ya

Beer salt's journey from the shaker to the bottle and beyond

By Anthony Head



**TWANG IN**  
San Antonio offers a variety of beer-salt flavors.

For 30 years I've written about how the world drinks, with the last 15 years concentrating on Texas. While researching my book *Texas Dives: Enduring Neighborhood Bars of the Lone Star State*, out in July, I noticed something peculiar: a saltshaker in a beer joint that didn't serve food or liquor. The shaker felt out of place at the time, but I would soon discover it was and remains a curious token of beer history.

Surely, some readers recall that folks used to shake table salt directly into beer. Charles Staats, who lives near Seguin and is the Texas chapter president of two brewery collectibles clubs, says, "I'm right at 60 years old and, yeah, I saw it back in the day in, shall we say, the dive bars." Staats collects vintage brewery merchandise and showed me some promotional saltshakers from several Texas breweries. "They often came in a set, one for pepper, but not always," he says. "And in some bars, they'd just use the pepper shaker for salt."

At Texas T Pub in San Antonio, local Bill Hickey has a similar memory. "I remember seeing my granddad and dad always putting salt in their beers," he says. Now 75, Hickey continues the custom occasionally. "I like the flavor, but it seems like a generational thing that was passed on."

Of course, leave it to Texas to ensure the salt-and-beer custom includes big flavor. Beer salt is flavored salt sprinkled onto a bottle, can, or glass of beer. It's noted by some experts outside our state as a Texas tradition. Indeed, dressing a beer with flavored salt is common here, mostly due to the success of Twang, a flavored-salt company in San Antonio.

Twang launched in 1986 after its founder, sixth-generation San Antonian Roger Treviño Sr., traveled to Mexico City. "A street vendor there sold citrus-flavored salt, which reminded Roger of something he ate as a kid," says Edmundo Macías, Twang's marketing director. "Kind of like Pixy Stix, only salty, not sweet. But

**Beer salt is flavored salt sprinkled onto a bottle, can, or glass of beer. It's noted by some experts outside our state as a Texas tradition.**

he couldn't find it at home." So, Treviño made his own flavored salts, initially lemon, lime, and pickle flavored.

In the early 1990s, Twang began packaging salts in small, beer-bottle-shaped saltshakers and called them Twang Beer Salt. Macías says Twang was the first in Texas to do so and most likely the first in the United States. With other Texas companies now in the beer-salt business, like Bolner's Fiesta Brand in San Antonio and The BeerDresser in Edinburg, the tradition seems destined to grow.

The history of salting beer goes back further than the introduction of beer salt. It's too often mentioned that, post-Prohibition, the practice arose in North America because cheap ingredients made commercial beers taste pretty awful, and salt perked up their palatability. But salt and horseradish were used *during* Prohibition to make near bear taste better, and historical clues point to customers salting beers during the saloon era, around the turn of the 20th century.

Still, salting beer has only occasionally popped up in the media, like in a 1941 *Centralia Evening Sentinel* article about a Chicagoan who choked on a saltshaker lid after it fell into his foamy beer (salt shaken into flat beer briefly increases the foam). And in 1943, the Texas Health Department issued a bulletin stating that adding salt to food and drink—including beer, according to the *Corpus Christi Times*—helps "workers who perspire freely" to replenish the body's need for salt.


Beer companies didn't want to admit their product needed tinkering with after

production. Instead of remaining silent about it, one company broadcast a rare public rebuke. In a beer commercial from 1976, Budweiser pitchman Ed McMahon—Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show* sidekick—throws shade at drinkers for putting table salt in their beer. Here was the biggest beer company in the U.S. shaming its customers for salting their beers.

By piecing together enough of these references and adding in anecdotal evidence, I can confidently propose that due to flavor preferences, family traditions, and dubious medical advice, Texans have salted their beers for over a century.

"One of the earliest recollections I have about a salted-beer tradition was thinking it came from Mexico and made its way into the Rio Grande Valley," says Travis Poling, who's written about Texas beer for 25 years, including *San Antonio Beer: Alamo City History by the Pint*. "People coming up from Mexico were drinking Tecate, which was dirt cheap and not known for being very good. They'd pour salt onto the rim of the can, and sometimes if they had lime, they'd squeeze it in."

Although lime has become salt's de facto beer buddy, their partnership lacks an official origin story. And it doesn't necessarily begin in Mexico, since countries further south on the globe also have customs of drinking beer with citrus, salt, and other flavorings. But by virtue of Texas and Mexico sharing a border, both have long inspired one another to think of beer as a canvas on which to create different flavors.



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RECIPE

## Beer With a Kick

The *michelada* beer cocktail was invented in Mexico in the 1960s, or the 1940s, or maybe around 1910. Nobody knows for sure. Although the original *michelada* (also called a *chelada*) was likely beer over ice with lime juice and salt, there's no official recipe. This flavorful drink may come with hot sauce, spices, *chamoy* (a sweet and spicy fruited condiment), Worcestershire sauce, tomato juice and/or Clamato—and, of course, salt.

### MICHELADA (AUTHOR'S RECIPE)

- Chamoy for glass rim
- Twang Hot Lime Beer Salt for glass rim
- Ice
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- ½ teaspoon Cholula Original Hot Sauce
- ¼ teaspoon chili powder
- 10 to 12 ounces light beer
- Lime wedge for garnish

Chill a pint glass. Coat glass rim with chamoy; shake beer salt abundantly atop chamoy. Combine next five ingredients in a cocktail shaker, shake for 15 seconds, and strain into chilled pint glass. Add beer slowly. Garnish with lime wedge.



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*michelada*: Eddie Costilla of La Perla fixes an ArModelo.



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The perfect example is Mexico's *Michelada* beer cocktail, which introduces savory and spicy flavors to the beer-salt-lime tradition. In Texas, there is also the ArModelo (a spin on "armadillo"), invented about 10 years ago by Eddie Costilla, owner and general manager of La Perla in Austin. He starts with Modelo Especial beer and adds lime juice, hot sauce, and Twang's lime salt to the can for a savory, refreshing drink.

La Perla employee Fin Pérez says some customers bring their own beer saltshakers to the cantina and continuously salt their bottles and cans, something that never surprises him. "Growing up in Corpus Christi, I saw a lot of people putting table salt in their beer," Pérez says. "Or they'd just put it in their hand, lick it, and take a drink."

Despite today's better beer and the popularity of beer cocktails, I like how some Texans still prefer to shake some table salt into their beer because they just like the taste. I also like the notion of boozy trends drifting north and south of the border, teasing our taste buds with new flavors. Who knows where or when the next great Texas alcohol tradition will begin? Perhaps it already has. **L**



Photos: Eric V. Pohl

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# Root to Stem, Nose to Tail

Chef Damien Brockway elevates family recipes at Distant Relatives

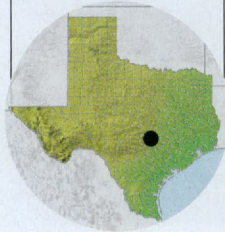
By Laurel Miller



**THE BARBECUE** and sides from Distant Relatives are made using plantation cooking methods.

**DISTANT RELATIVES**

3901 Promontory Point Drive, Austin. Open Wed-Sun noon-8 p.m. or until sold out. distantrelatives atx.com



**W**hen Damien Brockway launched his food truck, Distant Relatives, early last year in the parking lot of an East Austin tire shop, it was a radical departure from his fine-dining background. Brockway had garnered accolades at Austin restaurants like popular sushi spot Uchiko and the now-closed tasting menu restaurant, Counter 3. Five. VII, which left many diners eager for his next act.

No one—including Brockway—was expecting his first independent venture to be a 128-square-foot box on wheels. But, when the original location for his modern African American restaurant fell through, Brockway pivoted to the truck, which is now permanently located at South Austin's Meanwhile Brewing.

While Distant Relatives is frequently referred to as barbecue, that's an oversimplification of the layered, nuanced dishes Brockway and his team—sous chef Wesley Robinson and assistant pitmaster Omari Mackey—produce in such tight quarters. Brockway's wife, Kornpawee Brockway, oversees service operations and can often be found taking orders at the window.

"The name is a collaborative homage to our heritage," Damien Brockway says. "That's why the 'Relatives' in the name is plural. I could have just called it Brockway BBQ, but it's about so much more than just me."

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Seasonal dishes like Carolina gold rice grits, burnt-end black-eyed peas, pulled pork with tamarind-molasses barbecue sauce, and a brisket sandwich with green bean remoulade showcase a historical influence. Their ingredients—rice, peas, grains of paradise (a West African aromatic spice), *piri-piri* (a chile), and peanuts—are prepared using traditional African techniques that enslaved people brought with them to the West Indies and North America.

“Plantation cooking is a huge part of the evolution of American barbecue, and you’ll also find that influence in soul food,” Brockway says. “It was all done using live fire, and it’s important to us to emphasize that, as well as incorporate elements of smoke into the menu. Distant Relatives is about understanding and preserving this heritage and finding modern applications for historic ingredients and cooking techniques.”

Brockway has traced his own ancestry back to his maternal great-grandparents, who were sharecroppers in Virginia.

He was born and raised in Connecticut, where he grew up gardening and cooking with his mother and both sets of grandparents. “Holidays, we’d all gather for a backyard barbecue,” he says. “It was always a potluck situation. My maternal grandfather was a meat and potatoes guy—he’d get a cast iron skillet scorching hot and add calf liver or make barbecue chicken or collard greens.”

The chef also incorporates family recipes into the menu, like peas with burnt ends, as well as those of his team: A golden rice and coconut ambrosia with bird chile relish was inspired by a similar dish Mackey’s mother made on June 19th to educate him about his own

heritage. “Our style of cooking comes from the heart,” Mackey says. “It’s close to home for me.”

The variety of cultural influences on Brockway’s cuisine result in rich and complex dishes. He methodically builds flavor using technique—fire, smoke, cast iron—and the “root-to-stem, nose-to-tail” cooking born out of poverty. “Slaves could have private gardens outside of their cabins,” says Brockway of the prolific and diverse range of cookery and preservation methods found in plantation cooking.

At Distant Relatives, meat trim and drippings are infused into dishes like the lima beans with smoked pork butter, and burnt ends take the place of ham hock

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** A busy evening at Meanwhile Brewing; pitmaster Omari Mackey, Damien Brockway (middle) and team outside Distant Relatives.





**“Plantation cooking is a huge part of the evolution of American barbecue, and you’ll also find that influence in soul food.”**

in the black-eyed peas. Smoked chine, or backbones, left over from the pit are turned into barbecue bone stock; vegetables are pickled; peanuts are smoked and served as a snack.

Brockway graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, in 2013. His foundation in classical French cuisine led to stints at some of the top restaurants in San Francisco, Boston, and Austin, but by the time Brockway arrived at Counter 3. Five. VII, he was questioning his career trajectory.

“When you’ve been cooking professionally for over 20 years, you get to a point where you ask yourself, ‘Why am I cooking this?’” he says. “We used a ruler at Counter to measure knife cuts, and I had to wonder, ‘Why am I here? Why am I stressing out about a ruler?’”

The July 2018 closure of Counter left Brockway “rudderless.” His friendship with Jeffrey Stuffings, founder of Jester King, led to a stint revamping the brewery’s culinary program, but Brockway was already conceptualizing Distant Relatives.

With time and, hopefully, a permanent restaurant location, Brockway plans to expand on what he and his team are building at Distant Relatives: an inclusive place that supports “agricultural, artisan, and underserved communities” through partnerships, education, and job training.

“We’re still educating ourselves, reading about the historical context of these ingredients as a way to keep our heritage documented,” he says. “This is what I like to eat, how I like to cook, but I also cook to make people happy. I’ve finally arrived at what I was meant to do.” 🍷



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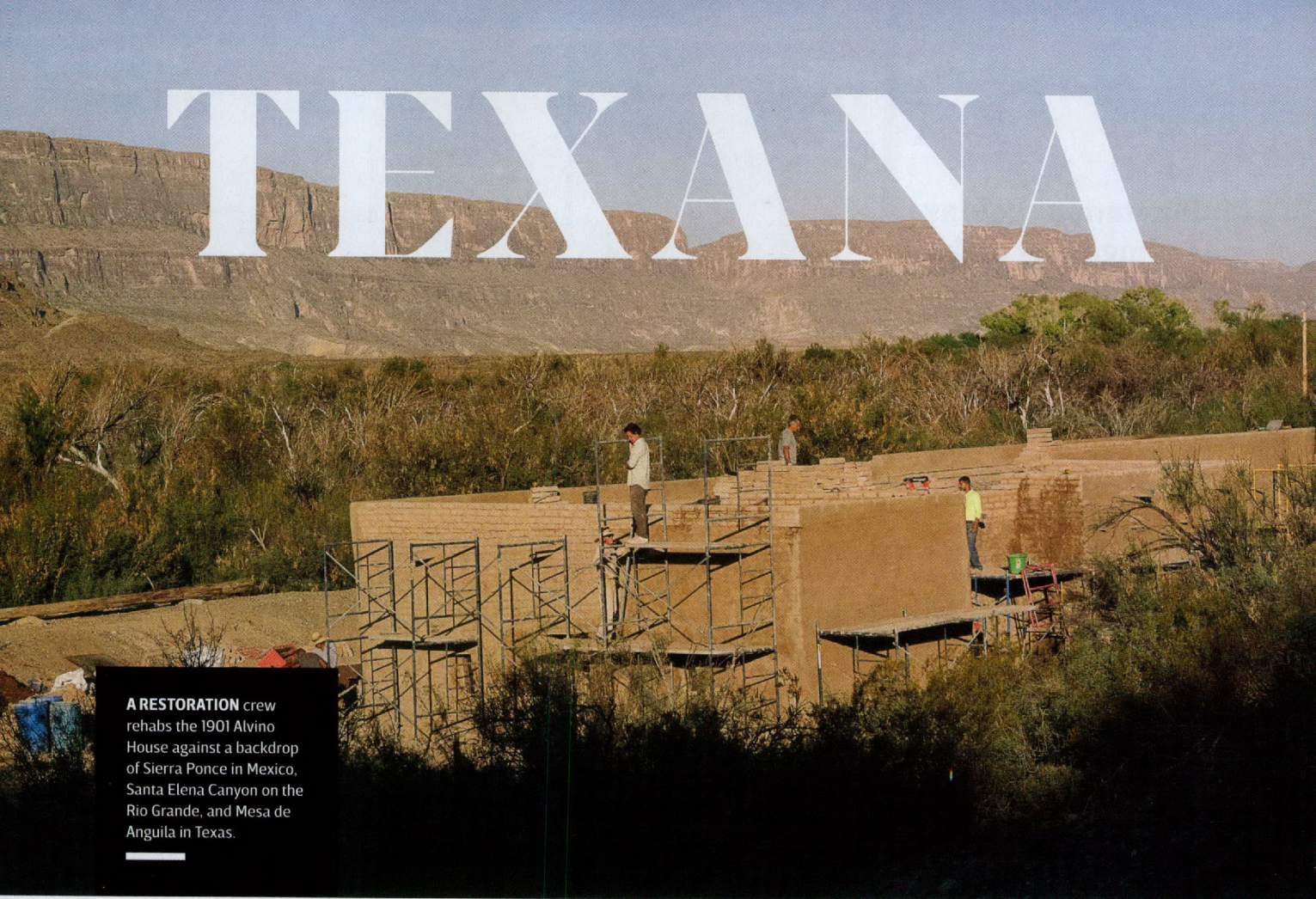
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**A RESTORATION** crew rehabs the 1901 Alvino House against a backdrop of Sierra Ponce in Mexico, Santa Elena Canyon on the Rio Grande, and Mesa de Anguila in Texas.

## Desert Dwelling

The Alvino House is a vestige of the riverside farming communities that preceded Big Bend National Park

By Matt Joyce

**B**ig Bend National Park's craggy Chihuahuan Desert landscape may seem incongruous with the verdant and neatly organized crop rows of a farm. But if you were to visit the Rio Grande bottomlands during a stretch of the early 1900s, you would've found fields of vegetables, hay, and cotton lining the muddy river—a cradle of fertility in an unexpected place.

Despite the arid surroundings, Mexican families started cultivating the rich soils on the Rio Grande's northern bank in the late 1800s. Where visitors today see fields of creosote, tamarisk, and mesquite trees, farmers raised crops for subsistence and

to sell to area mining and ranching communities. Most evidence of this agricultural era was lost with the establishment of Big Bend National Park from the 1930s to '60s. But vestiges remain, most notably the 1901 Alvino House, the oldest intact adobe structure in the 1,252-square-mile park. Recently, adobe specialists conducted a restoration of the five-room building as part of ongoing efforts to preserve this link to the region's past.

David Keller, an archeologist with the Center for Big Bend Studies at Sul Ross State University, spearheaded the Alvino House project. It's one of several adobe restorations and stabilizations—including the nearby Dorgan House—he's been

working on over the past five years in concert with the park. Visitors typically seek out Big Bend for solitude and natural wonder, he notes, but the park's cultural history adds a key layer of understanding.

"It's hard to imagine—to know people lived here and the hardships they had to endure in order to survive in the desert without air conditioning, without ice, without cool running water," Keller says. "Nowadays we have those things, and it makes the desert more tolerable. The house contextualizes the landscape on a human scale that people identify with."

**The one-story adobe home sits on Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, a road leading**

to the southwestern section of the park and sites including the Castolon Historic District, Cottonwood Campground, and Santa Elena Canyon, famous for its 1,000-foot limestone cliffs. In Castolon, exhibits including the restored adobe Magdalena House interpret life a century ago for farmers and for U.S. Cavalry troops stationed here during the Mexican Revolution. From Castolon, which sits on a mesa overlooking the Rio Grande floodplain, the road descends steeply past the Alvino House and into the fields that originally attracted settlers.

Among them was Cipriano Hernandez, an immigrant from the neighboring Mexican state of Chihuahua. He built the first room of the Alvino House in 1901 to be a store (it wouldn't become known as Alvino House until decades later). Located about 7 miles downstream from Santa Elena Canyon, the store catered to small farming settlements such as La Coyota, Terlingua de Abajo, and El Ojito—all since lost to time.

Adobe construction was popular at the time, Keller says. "Mud is everywhere, so you have your material almost anywhere you go; and it's a kind of building technology that people can do on their own without a lot of technical knowledge."

The farmers cultivated corns, beans, wheat, tomatoes, squash, and melons in the shadow of Cerro Castellan, a picturesque butte that presides over the area, working along the Rio Grande and its tributary creeks. Big Bend averages a paltry 12.5 inches of rain per year, which means the tributaries—including Terlingua, Blue, and Alamo creeks—are dry most of the time. But they flow periodically during the rainy season. "The farmers along the creeks were able to put in dams that would capture the seasonal runoff during flash floods and then channel the water into their fields," explains Tom Alex, a retired Big Bend National Park archeologist.

Shortly after the farmers moved in, cinnabar ore—the source of mercury—was discovered among the hills. Speculators built about a dozen mines in the region in the 1890s and early 1900s. "Once the mining started up over in

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**FROM LEFT:** A 1950s photo of the Alvino House and agricultural fields, Pat Taylor, left, and David Keller test adobe plaster mixes.

Terlingua, these farms began to provide those communities with food,” Alex says.

As time passed, the owner of the Chisos Mine in Terlingua, Howard Perry, and one of his employees, Wayne Cartledge, formed La Harmonia Company and bought the land where the Alvino House stands. The company grew cotton, wheat, and fruit trees, aided by the construction of a pump house on the river, an irrigation system, and a cotton gin. That’s all gone now, Alex says. Between scavenging of the materials and flood damage, the only remnant of the farm is a warehouse foundation near Cottonwood Campground.

Alvino Ybarra, who worked at the cotton gin and pump house, moved into Hernandez’s old adobe store in 1918. He and his wife, Teofila Luna, raised six children there, adding rooms as needed.

In an interview with a National Park Service volunteer in 2011, Concepcion Ybarra Gonzales, one of the Ybarra daughters, recalled that her father was always working. Concepcion, who was 84 at the time, has since passed away. She said their lives in Castolon were meager but content. “We had everything—plenty of food, clothing, friends, family,” she told the interviewer. “It did not seem hard. We

had a well for our water by the house.”

Teofila died in the 1930s, but Alvino stayed in the house until 1957, four years before it became part of Big Bend.

**The ingenuity of adobe buildings**—low-tech construction using local earthen materials—is also what makes them vulnerable. Rain, wind, flooding, sun exposure, and insects have all taken a toll on the Alvino House over the last 120 years.

Keller’s restoration is one in a long series of interventions to preserve the building and stop it from falling into ruin. For example, visitors will notice a 6-foot berm that was hastily formed around the Alvino House in 2008 to minimize damage from rising Rio Grande floodwaters.

This time around, with \$150,000 in funding from the Big Bend Conservancy, a crew led by Keller and contractor Joey Bentez of Silla Marfa spent seven weeks last fall repairing erosion and separation of the adobe walls, termite damage to the roof beams, and other dilapidation. To prepare for the project, Keller researched past restorations and tested different clay-rich soils from nearby sources, mixing them with various combinations of sand and horse manure to make bricks.

If you happened to pass by on the right day, you might have seen Keller spraying bricks with water jets to test which adobe mix would hold up best. Ultimately, he found the optimal clay for the adobe bricks on Blue Creek and for the wall plaster in the Rio Grande floodplain.

“When you have a premade product, a bagged product, you know exactly how it’s going to behave,” Keller says. “That’s just not the case with adobe.”

The crew made 1,450 new bricks to patch up the house. Adobe construction involves making walls from adobe bricks and mortar, and plastering the walls in adobe finish. On top of the walls, log beams known as *vigas*—typically cottonwood in the Big Bend area—support the roof. Builders then line *latillas*—skinny sticks like willow, ocotillo, or cane—across the *vigas*. On top of the *latillas*, dirt and other material are compacted into a roof. Roofs are sloped to funnel precipitation from the building via spouts known as *canales*.

As anybody who’s stepped into an adobe building on a hot day can attest, one of their great advantages is the thermal mass of the walls. The buildings cool off at night, and the mud bricks—18 to 20



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inches thick—keep the interior cool by slowing the advance of the Chihuahuan Desert’s intense heat during the day. Visitors to Big Bend can’t enter the Alvino House, however. While the exterior now looks fresh and new, the inside remains in a state of disrepair, the windows screened to keep people and critters out.

Keller has proposed to also restore the interior, which may eventually enable visitors to step inside and get a better feel for the lives of families like the Ybarras.

“You really can’t get a sense of the true vernacular without being inside those structures to see how effective they are in the desert heat,” Keller says. “It completes the story.”

After the La Harmonia Store in the Castolon Historic District burned in a 2019 wildfire, Big Bend National Park opened a temporary new store with drinks, snacks, books, and other essentials. The historic district, on a mesa just above the Alvino House, also includes the restored Magdalena House with historical exhibits and the restored Garlick House, which will open as a new visitor center in November. [nps.gov/bibe](http://nps.gov/bibe)

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continued from Page 19

escape from Huertistas; Jet Black charging a firing squad to save his rider. Every horse so brave and tragic and true. I'd sing along, a catch in my throat.

At 4 Palmas, I'd brush down Coronela. I was regularly performing with my team and finally good enough to ride her. I'd take her through sets of figure eights, warm her up before practice started, and imagine us being *soldaderas* together, picture her saving my life a thousand ways. I knew she was just as brave as any famous war horse.

Our coach was Chepe, tall and thin, a stern gaze under a beat-up cowboy hat. He demanded we practice four nights a week. Half the team needed to learn to ride, period. All of us needed to learn the sidesaddle.

An albarda charra doesn't hold you the way a charro saddle does. You sort of sit into a man's saddle, the cantle lightly supporting your back, both feet secured in stirrups. The albarda seat is high, boxy, and small, more like a perch. Instead of a saddle horn, there are three curved prongs. The first two make a U-shaped cradle on top, for your right leg. The other prong juts sideways, to the left of the "U." It curves downward to support your left knee. It took some getting used to, but soon I felt weird not riding sidesaddle.

After that, it was the painstaking process of tackling each maneuver. Chepe watching and correcting, stopping us, telling us to start again. Easy moves, like riding in synched, evenly spaced pairs. *Gros* and *cruces*, spirals and crosses. Intricate moves like *el abanico*, the fan. For that one, we'd gallop around the arena in a staggered line, a horse's head next to the shoulder of the horse ahead of it, all of us inches from each other, riding at different speeds to keep the line even. We'd swoop around the arena twice, and then the last girl would race to the head of the line, each girl in turn, until we were back to the original order. Round and round we went, Chepe calling, "¡Recógelo! ¡Ir allí! ¡Vamos!" *Pick it up! Get there! Come on!*

Practice, practice, practice, until the routine was muscle memory. I knew it by heart. My horse knew it by heart. I knew

## My father created an escaramuza team with his imagination, his energy, his will. He made that space for us.

my teammates' moves, their horses' moves. My teammates knew mine.

After practice, the horses lathered and exhausted, the saddle cinch, the blanket, and my jeans darkened with sweat and sticky horsehair, and all of us covered in dust, we prepped our horses for the evening.

I'd walk Coronela for a cooldown all around the ranch. It'd be fully dark out. The sky would be crammed with stars and the hard-packed ground would take on a ghostly pale quality, so that Coronela's dark, warm shape stood out clearly beside me. I'd hear the other girls in the distance, sometimes in pairs talking and laughing, or walking their horse with a teenage charro who'd waited through our practice for her. Soon, we'd reconvene at the stables and feed our horses together before heading home. Everything about it felt right.

Once a month or so, we'd perform in Eagle Pass or San Angelo, Odessa, maybe as far as Dallas, usually for a crowd big enough to fill the stands. We'd open the show with *la punta*, a maneuver where we'd charge into the arena one at a time, thrilling the crowd by skidding to a stop in the middle amid sprays of dirt and flying skirts. We'd salute them, riding crop against the brim of the sombrero. Then we'd canter to our places to begin the performance.

Eventually, teammates graduated and went to college or left Del Rio, causing the group to disband. I joined the Ciudad Acuña escaramuza team and performed for another few years. It was a good team, but as the only American girl, I was an outsider. Then I was in high school and an apathetic Gen Xer, unwilling to cross the border several times a week to ride with girls I didn't much like. I loved the sport, but I couldn't do it without my friends.

My father tried to argue. *But you're good. You're so good.* He was puffed with pride at my skill in the arena. By then, I was at least as good a rider as him. I was resolute though. I was done being an escaramuza.

**Lienzo Charro 4 Palmas** has changed.

The adobe walls of the arena have been painted a garish red. The pavilion, formerly for dances, has been enclosed. It looks more like a clubhouse. A water main near the tack rooms has been dug up, likely for repair.

The stables were still the same. The scattering of trucks, men in cowboy hats feeding and bathing horses. The small details of equine upkeep were pleasant. Still, I didn't stop. I drove around the ranch once, then left. Nothing felt the way I remembered it.

Later that night, I messaged Erika and Pati on Facebook. I had sorted through photographs of our performances, sent a few. "That was the best time of my life," Erika said. "Look at this one! Look at us."

The photograph is dramatic. We are performing *el abanico*, captured close-up as we enter the camera's frame. A line of horses in full gallop, manes flying, nostrils flared. Erika leads the column. The skirt of her dress, her crinoline, both completely swept back, a pantalooned leg curled across the saddle. Her face is focused, almost serene. Behind her Judy is smiling and saluting. Everyone else is a crush of sombreros and flying red dresses.

Except me. I am at the end of the fan, scowling slightly, my gaze zeroed in on the place I need to be, right in front of Erika. I'm about to dash past a line of galloping horses, take the head of the column. That is, sure enough, my game face.

My father created an escaramuza team with his imagination, his energy, his will. He made that space for us. Those years were a singular experience, an incredible, unforgettable gift for the girls, for me.

I don't know if it was the best time in my life. But in this photo, we are fearless; we are powerful; we are gorgeous warrior women in full charge. And I think, my God, weren't we something? Weren't we just? 



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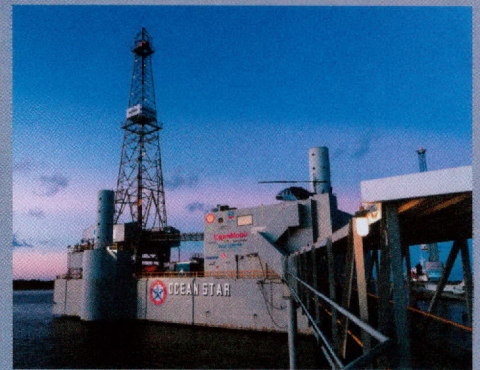
Your paradise awaits you at The San Luis Resort on Galveston Island. The opulent, 16-story hotel offers premier accommodations and amenities, breathtaking Gulf views, and unmatched personalized service. Guests can choose from an array of accommodations, including VIP floors, the elite “Club 10” and The Villas, five luxurious suites offering the relaxed charm of a secluded hideaway. Take time to relax and rejuvenate with top-shelf pampering at the Spa San Luis. Enjoy a stroll on the beach or soak up the sun with a cocktail at our trendy pool, The Cove. For added privacy, opt for a cabana, exclusively available for rental to overnight guests. In addition to sumptuous amenities, enjoy an endless variety of resort activities, events and entertainment perfect for couples, families and groups! For additional lodging on the resort, visit Hilton Galveston Island Resort and Holiday Inn Resort Galveston – On The Beach for an endless array of entertainment and activities fun for all ages.



## Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier

Be adventurous at [PleasurePier.com](http://PleasurePier.com)  
409.766.4950

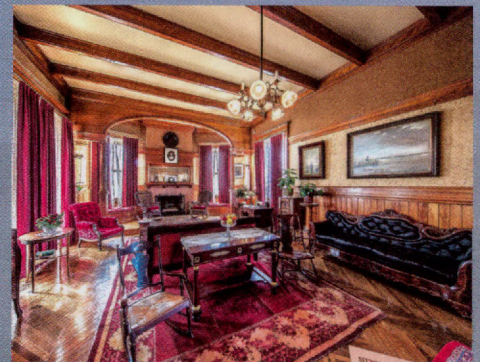
Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier is a Gulf Coast destination featuring family-oriented attractions including 17 rides, midway games, waterfront dining and retail shops. From the extreme steel coaster, the Iron Shark to their 5D Theater Ride, kids of all ages will relish in the excitement.



## Ocean Star Offshore Drilling Rig & Museum

[OceanStarOEC.com](http://OceanStarOEC.com)  
409.766.7827

Welcome aboard!  
Embark on an industrial-strength discovery in a modern museum setting. The Ocean Star offers the opportunity to physically enter the world of the offshore industry. So much of our modern society relies on oil and things made from it. At the Ocean Star Museum learn how hydrocarbons form and what it takes to extract them from the earth—from people and processes to tools and technologies. Open seven days a week for self-guided tours, step aboard for a unique learning adventure. Discount rates are available for groups.



## Moody Mansion

[MoodyMansion.org](http://MoodyMansion.org)  
409.762.7668

Galveston's Moody Mansion at 2618 Broadway is meticulously restored and filled with original furnishings. Self-guided audio tours and premium behind-the-scenes guided tours are available. Rotating exhibits of special interest are installed throughout the year. Moody Mansion is available for events, wedding receptions and bridal photography, and offers group discounts. Open daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.





## Galveston Naval Museum

[GalvestonNavalMuseum.com](http://GalvestonNavalMuseum.com)

409.770.3196

The Galveston Naval Museum is home to the USS Cavalla, one of the most accomplished World War II submarines open to the public today. The destroyer escort, USS Stewart, once the presidential escort to FDR, is the last of its class in the world. Both vessels are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Taking a self-guided tour, you'll learn how sailors and submariners lived, slept and worked together as a fighting force over the Atlantic and under the Pacific. "Climb Aboard!"

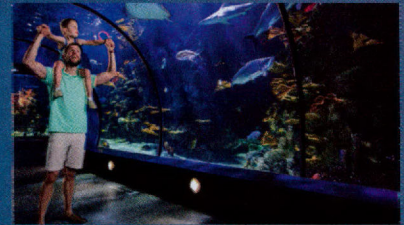
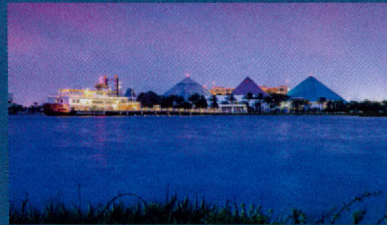


## The Grand 1894 Opera House

[TheGrand.com](http://TheGrand.com)

409.765.1894

The Grand 1894 Opera House is proud to play an important role in Galveston Island's history. One of the few remaining theatres of its era in the Lone Star State was proclaimed "The Official Opera House of Texas" in 1993. The Grand presents major stars and high-quality touring artists in theatre, music, dance, opera and children's programming.



## A Summer Texas Road Trip... Moody Gardens, Galveston Island

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

409.744.4673

Pack your bags and enjoy a summer road trip to Moody Gardens, Galveston Island where it is all about the journey. Exciting changes await the entire family as you encounter plants and animals from Asia, Africa and the Americas and new additions at *Rainforests of the World: Dynamic Dwellers*. Delve into the Aquarium Pyramid to see penguins, seals, sharks and other tropical fish. Journey back to the Jurassic at the Dinos Alive exhibit or sink your toes into the white sand and splash along the Lazy River at Palm Beach. Enjoy the thrill of the Zip Line and Ropes Course or cruise aboard the Colonel Paddlewheel Boat with more indoor fun at the MG3D, 4D and Audience Recognition theaters.

Make plans for a variety of special events with Beats on the Beach on Saturday nights; the Moody Gardens Air, Car and Boat Show August 12 - 13; the Island Rideout and Bike Expo August 26 - 28 and free fireworks every Saturday night. The Moody Gardens Hotel offers great summer packages with casual and fine dining and a fantastic spa. You can also set your tee time at the Moody Gardens Golf Course, one of the top public courses in Texas offering breathtaking island views and challenges for all levels of play.



## Find Your Beach

[GalvestonBeachInfo.com](http://GalvestonBeachInfo.com)

While Seawall beaches are open year-round, the island's largest public beach parks - Stewart Beach and East Beach are open all summer long, offering a variety of special amenities.

Visitors to the beach parks can also take advantage of restrooms, showers, beach umbrella and chair rentals, volleyball courts, children's playground, snack bars and other concessions, including sandcastle building lessons, horseback riding and helicopter tours.

SAVE UP TO 40% OFF ATTRACTIONS AT [GALVESTONISLANDPASS.COM](http://GALVESTONISLANDPASS.COM)

# EVENTS



## Desert Spirit

Marfa's Agave Festival celebrates the essential desert plant

The agave thrives in West Texas' Chihuahuan Desert. For thousands of years, inhabitants used the plant for everything from shoe- and soap-making to crafting poison arrows. From June 16-19, Marfa residents celebrate the plant at the annual Agave Festival—four days of food, films, speakers, science, and spirits.

The agave is an indicator species for the area, meaning its successes or failures show the condition of the area at large. "As I deepened my knowledge of this region, I found that agave kept coming up again and again," says Tim Johnson, the founder and director of the festival. "When you see a certain type of agave, you know you're in that specific desert."

On Thursday, Hotel Saint George starts the festivities with a pool party and specialty drinks. The rest of the weekend features an array of guest speakers, including C.J. Alvarez, author of *Borderland, Borderwater: A History of Construction on the U.S.-Mexico Divide*; and Raquel Gutierrez, a poet and essayist launching her book *Brown Neon*. Fran Hutchins of Bat Conservation International will give a talk about the role agave plays in bat migration, and Cactus Liquors is hosting two days of tastings with representatives from more than 30 brands speaking about the cultural and natural contexts of their tequilas and mezcals. El Cosmico will offer live music by country and Norteña artists.

Various venues across town are hosting events, but most take place at the Marfa Visitor Center. "The plants give us our own orientation in space," Johnson says. "For the festival, we entertain this idea as a function of orientation and celebration of culture." —Amanda Ogle

### Agave Festival

June 16-19  
Marfa Visitor Center,  
302 S. Highland Ave., Marfa.  
agavemarfa.com

### BIG BEND COUNTRY

#### ALPINE

##### Multicultural Festival

June 11-12

The two-day festival features music, dance, food, and vendors from different cultural traditions. Kokernot Park, 1500 Fighting Buck Ave. [visitalpinetx.com/event/alpine-multicultural-festival](http://visitalpinetx.com/event/alpine-multicultural-festival)

#### SAN ELIZARIO

##### Billy the Kid Festival

June 4-5

An Old West gunfight, a ghost tour, and performances of the play *1876: Billy the Kid* are just a few of the attractions at this two-day celebration. The event also features food, games, and dancing. San Elizario Historic Art District, 1501 Main St. 915-851-0093; [billythekidfestival.com](http://billythekidfestival.com)

#### VAN HORN

##### Frontier Days

June 25

The event features a 5K run/walk, a three-on-three basketball tournament, volleyball and cornhole matches, food, and the Best Homemade Salsa in West Texas contest. An outdoor dance concludes the celebration. Van Horn Convention Center and Okey Lucas Park, 1801 W. Broadway. 432-283-2682; [vanhorn-texas.org](http://vanhorn-texas.org)

### GULF COAST

#### EAST BERNARD

##### Czech Kolache Klobase Festival

June 11

Celebrate Texas' Czech culture with live polka music, dancing, arts and crafts, a raffle, and a cake walk. Plates of barbecue chicken, sausage, sauerkraut, and trimmings are available for lunch, as are hamburgers and kolaches. Riverside Hall, 14643 Buls Road. 979-335-7907; [kkfest.com](http://kkfest.com)

#### GALVESTON

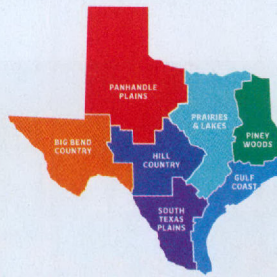
##### Juneteenth Celebrations

June 1-20

The national holiday that celebrates the end of slavery originated in Galveston. Organizations present events like fireworks, a banquet, a

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scholarship gala, a parade, a picnic, a poetry festival, history tours, reenactments, and a festival culminating with the Juneteenth Jubilee. *Various locations. visitgalveston.com/events*

### HOUSTON

#### Pride Celebration

June 25  
Houston's 44th annual Pride Celebration takes place downtown and features a parade and festival followed by an after-party. *Houston City Hall, 901 Bagby St. 713-354-9964; pridehouston.org/celebration*

### PORT ARTHUR

#### Garden Festival

June 4-5  
The festival celebrates colorful blooms including bamboo, lotus blossoms, and citrus plants. Koi ponds and Buddha statues dot the grounds. Photography is encouraged, and guests can tour the temple, shop from vendors, and attend cultural programs. *Buu Mon Buddhist Temple, 2701 Procter St. 409-985-7822; visitportarthurtx.com*

### RICHMOND

#### We Are Fort Bend

Through June 30  
This photography exhibit showcases the culture, nature, people, and places that make Fort Bend County special. *Fort Bend County Libraries, George Memorial Library, 1001 Golfview Drive. 281-633-4734; www.fortbend.lib.tx.us*

### SUGAR LAND

#### NOLA Nights

June 24  
The New Orleans Hustlers Brass Band headlines this historical concert. *Sugar Land Town Square, 2711 Plaza Drive. 281-276-6000; sugarlandtownsquare.com*

### VICTORIA

#### Bach Festival

June 4-11  
This festival celebrates the work of J.S. Bach and other composers spanning the ages. Orchestral, choral, and chamber works are performed by local and national artists in venues around Victoria. *Various locations. 361-570-5788; victoriabachfestival.org*

### HILL COUNTRY

#### AUSTIN

##### A Million Alien Gospels

June 2-4  
Ventana Ballet and Austin Camerata present this world-premiere ballet with an original score by Michael Alec Rose performed by a string quintet. The ballet presents a vision of cosmic dialogue and explores how mindsets change when recognizing life's gifts and blessings. *KMFA Draylen Mason Music Studio at the Hatchery, 41 Navasota St. ventanaballet.com*

#### AUSTIN

##### ATX Television Festival

June 2-5  
As the first festival devoted to television's history and future, the ATX Television Festival features showings of new series, current hits, and cult favorites. The industry's leading professionals, including cast members and creators, participate in Q&As and panels. *Various locations. atxfestival.com*

#### AUSTIN

##### Maudie's Moonlight Margarita Run

June 2  
The 19th annual run brings two of Austin's favorite things together—running and margaritas. In celebration of the Butler Trail's 50th anniversary, the race features a 1970s theme, and proceeds go toward the trail. Celebrate after the race with a Tex-Mex finish-line party. *Sand Beach Park, 111 Sandra Muraida Way. 855-448-7245; thetrailfoundation.org/mmr*

#### AUSTIN

##### Cine Las Americas International Film Festival

June 8-12  
This festival showcases contemporary films and videos from Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula, as well as those made by or about Latin and Indigenous people in the rest of the world. *Various locations, Downtown Austin. 512-710-9544; cinelasamericas.org*

#### AUSTIN

##### Central Texas Juneteenth 2K

June 18  
This annual event features a

parade and a celebration with food and local vendors. *Rosewood Park, 2300 Rosewood Ave. 512-671-0873; juneteenthcentraltexas.com*

#### AUSTIN

##### Asian American Film Festival

June 23-26  
Viewers gather to watch an array of Asian American and Pacific Islander perspectives in film. Narrative and documentary features and shorts are showcased throughout the festival. *AFS Cinema, 6259 Middle Fiskville Road. aafilmfest.org*

#### BLANCO

##### Lavender Festival

June 10-12  
Food, local and regional beer and wine, and lavender products are available for purchase, and live music is performed throughout the weekend. The first commercial lavender farm in Texas, Hill Country Lavender, is open for tours. *Old Blanco County Courthouse Square, 300 Main St. 830-833-5101; biancolavenderfest.com*

#### FREDERICKSBURG

##### Hill Country Film Festival

June 2-5  
Celebrate independent film with more than 85 screenings, both short and feature-length. Attend Q&As with filmmakers and panel discussions. *Various locations. 866-224-7714; hillcountryff.com*

#### STONEWALL

##### Peach JAMBoree and Rodeo

June 16-18  
The 61st celebration of the peach crop includes peach judging, the crowning of the Peach Queen, a parade, peach-eating and pit-spitting, baking contests, food, live music, and a rodeo. *Stonewall Chamber of Commerce Grounds, 250 Peach St. 830-644-2735; stonewalltexas.com/peach-jamboree*

#### TAYLOR

##### Juneteenth Celebration and Bill Pickett Day

June 18  
Enjoy a gospel brunch in the morning, a pageant in the afternoon, and music under the stars at night. *Fannie Robinson Park, 260 Dolan St. 512-296-6109*

## Blueberries, Blue Skies and Bluegrass



There's no better way to celebrate big Texas blues than at the Texas Blueberry Festival. Revel in live music, games for the kids, great food and bushels of sweet, healthy blueberries. It all starts Friday evening with a bluegrass concert in the park. Learn more with the Visit Nac app or at [VisitNac.com](http://VisitNac.com)

Texas Blueberry Festival  
June 10 & 11

  
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[VisitHistoricTexas.com](http://VisitHistoricTexas.com)

**TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**  
REAL PLACES TELLING REAL STORIES

**TAYLOR**

**Pride Festival**

June 25

Area LGBTQ community members and allies celebrate Pride Month with bands, a street fair, and food in downtown Taylor. *Downtown Taylor*, 200 N. Main St. 832-605-6882; [taylorpride.org](http://taylorpride.org)

**UVALDE**

**Honey Festival**

June 10-11

As the Honey Capital of the World, Uvalde promotes bee conservation and celebrates its honey history with vendors, food, shopping, and live music. *Downtown Plaza*, 830-279-8825; [facebook.com/ualdehoneyfestival](https://facebook.com/ualdehoneyfestival)

**PANHANDLE PLAINS**

**ABILENE**

**Children's Art and Literacy Festival**

June 9-11

This three-day festival celebrates the picture books of illustrator Sophie Blackall. The event kicks off with a storybook parade followed by an artist talk. Book readings, art activities, animals, skits, movies, and a special art exhibit on display at the National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature are also included. *T&P Depot*, 1101 N. First St. 325-677-1161; [abilenecalf.com](http://abilenecalf.com)

**CANADIAN**

**Canadian River Music Festival**

June 11

Seven bands perform over two days at this music festival. Bring lawn chairs and enjoy food from vendors and primitive camping spots. *Jones Pavilion*, 1101 N. Sixth St. 940-256-0435; [canadianrivermusicfestival.com](http://canadianrivermusicfestival.com)

**GRAHAM**

**Food Truck Championship of Texas**

June 4

Food trucks compete for the title of Grand Champion and a \$16,000 prize. An evening concert at the Young County Arena finishes the day. *Graham Downtown Square*, 608 Elm St. 940-549-0401; [foodtruckchampionshipoftexas.com](http://foodtruckchampionshipoftexas.com)

**SWEETWATER**

**Rattlesnake Gravel Grind**

June 18

This biking event takes riders on a tour of the scenic areas around Sweetwater. Route distances range from 32 to 111 miles. After the event, enjoy free beer, food, and live music. *Lake Sweetwater*, County Road 264. 325-721-5454; [rattlesnakegravelgrind.bike](http://rattlesnakegravelgrind.bike)

## PINEY WOODS

### JACKSONVILLE

#### Tomato Fest

June 11

The 38th annual festival boasts five blocks of vendors; a farmers market; fried green tomatoes; eating, peeling, packing, and salsa-making contests; live music; a talent show; and a street dance. *Downtown Jacksonville. 903-586-2217; jacksonvilletexas.com/tomato-fest*

### LONGVIEW

#### Great Texas Balloon Race

June 17-19

Competitive balloon flights are scheduled for the mornings of Friday through Sunday, and non-competition flights are planned for Friday and Saturday afternoon. *Longview Convention Complex, 100 Grand Blvd. 903-753-3281; greattexasballoonrace.com*

### NACOGDOCHES

#### Texas Blueberry Festival

June 11

This celebration of the blueberry harvest features live music, blueberry picking, a car show, and vendors. *Downtown Nacogdoches, 200 E. Main St. 936-564-7351; texasblueberryfestival.com*

### NACOGDOCHES

#### Juneteenth Celebration

June 18

Celebrate African American culture with a parade, bounce houses, and delicious food. *Festival Park, 507 S. Pecan St. 936-564-7351*

## PRAIRIES AND LAKES

### BRYAN

#### Brazos Bluebonnet Quilt Show

June 17-18

This year's theme for the judged quilt show is "World of Color." Quilt categories include everything from traditional to art quilts, and the show features vendor booths, and quilts for sale. *Brazos County Expo Complex, 5827 Leonard Road. 979-823-3976; bbquiltguild.org*

### ELGIN

#### Juneteenth Festival Street Dance and Parade

June 10-11

The event kicks off Friday with vendors in Veterans' Memorial Park and a street dance at night. Saturday brings the Grand Parade that runs through historic downtown Elgin. *Historic Downtown Elgin, Veterans' Memorial Park. 512-963-2721; elgintx.com/194/juneteenth-festival*

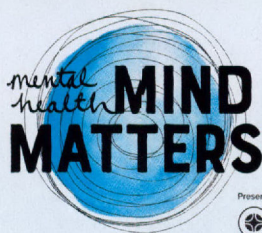
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The Bullock Museum, a division of the Texas State Preservation Board, is funded by Museum members, donors, and patrons, the Texas State History Museum Foundation, and the State of Texas.

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El Paso

Austin

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San Antonio

SCAN ME

**ELGIN**

**Western Days Parade and Festival**

June 23-25

The multiday affair includes a parade, a carnival, live music, a vendor marketplace, and sports tournaments. The grand finale is held on Saturday with artisan and craft vendors and live entertainment. Various locations. 512-285-4515; [elgintxchamber.com/western-days](http://elgintxchamber.com/western-days)

**FAIRFIELD**

**Freestone County Fair and Rodeo**

June 13-18

The 100th annual fair and rodeo features a parade, a livestock show, a carnival, and a rodeo. There is live music every night of the fair week. W.L. Moody Reunion Grounds, 843 E. Commerce St. 903-644-0606; [fcfar.org](http://fcfar.org)

**LITTLE ELM**

**TexasFest Dallas**

June 18

Enjoy concerts, work from 200 artists, swimming, classic cars, cowboy shows, and dozens of Texas-themed rides and games. A food garden offers local cuisine and domestic and craft beers. Musicians perform on the main stage, while contemporary visual artists present works inspired by the city. Little Elm Park, 701 W. Eldorado Parkway. [texasfestdallas.com](http://texasfestdallas.com)

**LULING**

**Watermelon Thump**

June 23-26

The celebration features live music all weekend, an exhibitors' market, a carnival, world champion seed spitting, the crowning of the Thump Queen, a car show, kids' entertainment, a grand parade, an arts and crafts show, and various contests. Watermelon Thump Pavilion and Spitway, 319 E. Davis St. 830-875-3214; [watermelonthump.com](http://watermelonthump.com)

**MCKINNEY**

**Wine and Walls MuralFest**

June 18-19

Watch muralists paint original designs on the historic cotton mill. Wine from local wineries, dishes from food vendors, and art, jewelry, and handmade products are available for purchase. MillHouse McKinney at the Cotton Mill, 610 Elm St., Suite 1000. 202-810-2101; [millhousefoundation.org/muralfest](http://millhousefoundation.org/muralfest)

**TERRELL FREEDOMFEST**

July 3 & 4, 2022  
Terrell Municipal Airport

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Hot Air Balloon Glow  
Live Music Stage  
July 3 Concert  
Food Trucks  
Arts & Crafts Vendors

[www.terrelltexas.com](http://www.terrelltexas.com)

Discover TERRELL, TEXAS

**SALADO**

**Salado Springs Craft Beer Festival**

June 18

On the banks of Salado Creek, this craft beer festival features tastings from microbreweries around the state. Barrow Brewing Company, 108 Royal St. 254-947-3544; barrowbrewing.com/salado-springs-beer-fest

**STEPHENVILLE**

**Moo-La Fest**

June 3-4

The festival honors Stephenville's rich dairy heritage. Take a tethered hot air balloon ride; enjoy dairy activities, live music, a carnival, a kids zone; and enjoy dining options from the food trucks and beverage tent. Stephenville City Park, 709 Riverside Drive. 254-552-1222; visitstephenville.com

**TEMPLE**

**Texas State Square and Round Dance Festival**

June 9-12

The event, now in its 60th year, kicks off with the Trail End Dance presented by Texas State Callers' Association. Mayborn Convention Center, 3303 N. Third St. 254-224-2484; squaredancetx.com

**YOAKUM**

**Tom Tom Festival**

June 2-4

One of the oldest festivals in Texas honors the tomato heritage of Yoakum with the Miss Yoakum Pageant, a carnival, a parade, arts and crafts vendors, barbecue and bean cookoffs, a car show, softball, and live music. Yoakum City Park, Kvinta Drive. 361-293-2309; yoakumareachamber.com

**SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS**

**SAN ANTONIO**

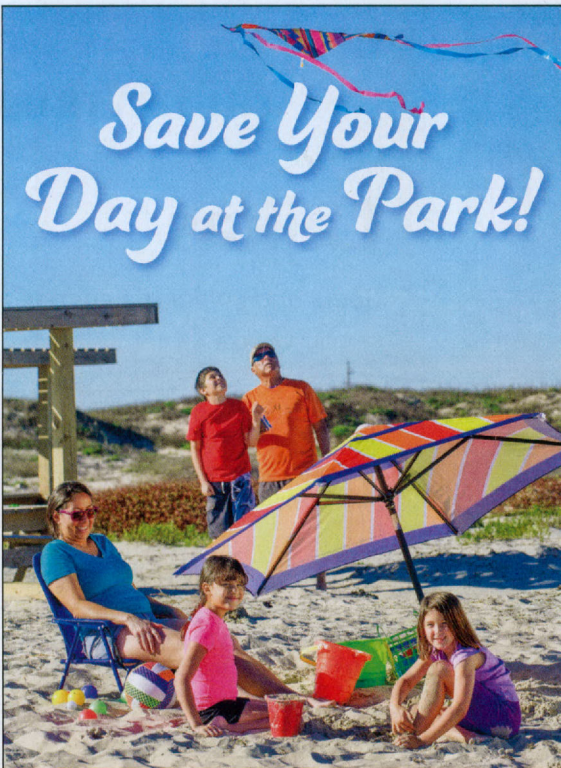
**Fiesta Noche del Rio**

June 10-Aug. 6

The oldest outdoor dance performance of its kind in the U.S., Fiesta Noche del Rio is a musical variety show of Mexican, Spanish, and Texas songs and dances performed by local professionals. Arneson River Theatre, 418 Villita St. 210-226-4651; fiestanochesa.com

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Every weekend there's something going on including Gingerbread Trail Home Tour, Crape Myrtle Festival and much more.

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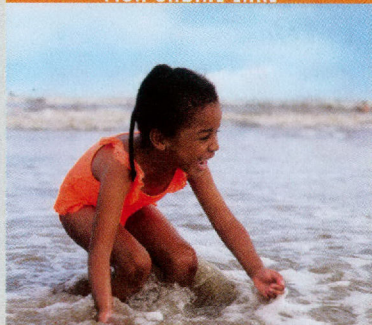
[visitwaxahachie.com](http://visitwaxahachie.com) | 469-309-4040



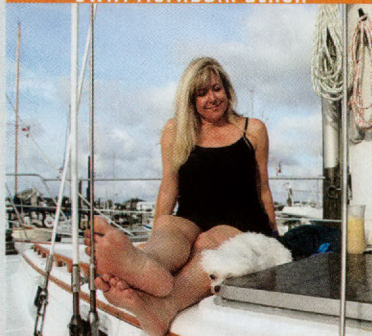
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FISH SABINE LAKE



SWIM MCFADDIN BEACH



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## THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5



# Lajitas

*Goats and golf at the edge of nowhere*

BY CHET GARNER

If you head west and keep going, you'll end up in one of the roughest parts of Texas. But Lajitas, at the far-out reaches of the Big Bend region, offers amenities for a cozy day trip. This small outpost of rocks and dust is an oasis in the Chihuahuan Desert.

### Mayor Clay Henry

All travelers to this destination should stop and pay homage to Clay Henry, the city's mayor—who also happens to be a goat. He's the fourth "Clay Henry" to hold the seat; a descendant of the first—now taxidermied—sits inside Terlingua's Starlight Theatre. Henry's "office" is located next to the Lajitas General Store, the only gas station and convenience store in town, where travelers can cast a vote to continue his term.

### Lajitas Golf Resort

The resort occupies an old trading post with lots of modern amenities, including well-appointed rooms and outdoor spaces to enjoy the big skies. Some of the amenities are open to non-guests as well. Start the day with fresh cinnamon rolls from Boardwalk Bakery and Pizzeria; get an adrenaline rush on a zip line tour; and play a round on the Black Jack's Crossing golf course that hugs the Rio Grande and is consistently ranked one of the best courses in the country. Watch your slice, or else you'll land a ball in Mexico.

### Big Bend Ranch State Park

The little brother of Big Bend National Park boasts over 300,000 acres of desert landscape and river corridor. Plan your route at the Barton Warnock Visitor Center and learn about the animals and plants of this wild area. If you have limited time, don't miss the sights along Farm-to-Market Road 170, aka River Road. Hikers can explore the area between the towering walls of Closed Canyon and beside the windswept rock formations of the Hoodoos Trail. Catch incredible views from the Big Hill, which contains the "DOM" rock made famous by the 1985 film *Fandango* starring Kevin Costner.

### Lajitas Stables

If hiking on foot isn't your thing, let a trusty steed do all the work. This stable hosts picturesque horseback riding trips through the desert and into Big Bend Ranch State Park. A three-hour ride can take you to the top of Contrabando Mesa with breathtaking views of Mexico. But if you've got time for more than a day trip, hop on a multiday journey complete with camping gear and campfire cooking.

### Candelilla Café

Finish off the day on this café's patio with a cold margarita as the stars begin to shine overhead. This restaurant is part of the golf resort and brings the same class to its menu, mixed with a heaping portion of country cooking. The massive steaks are excellent, but I recommend the Tex-Mex plates such as the fajitas and queso blanco.

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 Lajitas episode visit [thedaytripper.com](http://thedaytripper.com).  
Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chetripper.





# Line to Line

Author and Texas Humor founder Jay B. Saucedo reminds Texans of their common ground

By Clayton Maxwell

**A**s a photographer, pilot, author, and entrepreneur, Jay B. Saucedo has ruminated upon the Texas identity from many angles. In 2013, the La Porte native and his wife, Priscilla Saucedo, launched Texas Humor, a company that makes T-shirts and hats he calls “clothing for the Texan state of mind.” In 2016, Saucedo dished out more Lone Star insight in *Y’all: The Definitive Guide to Being a Texan*, a field manual for aspiring Texans that sells big every holiday season.

Saucedo has also taken his Lone Star fascination to the sky, piloting his single-engine Cessna around the state’s entire 3,822-mile perimeter and taking photographs along the way. The images resulting from the six-day voyage—published in a 2016 book titled *A Mile Above Texas*—capture the vermilion ribbon of the Red River, the snaky Sabine cutting a border with Louisiana, the rugged flow of the Rio Grande, and the invisible state lines of the Panhandle.

**“Between being on the ground and being 10,000 feet up in the air, I have yet to find a reason why two Texans should hate each other. There are plenty of reasons to disagree with people, but there are very few reasons to hate.”**

Since its founding, Texas Humor has expanded from an apparel line based in the Saucedos’ Austin garage into a shipping and fulfillment company with more than 120 employees. Saucedo sold the fulfillment business last year but retained the Texas Humor line and its social media fan base of nearly 2 million. While he and Priscilla raise their two young children, Saucedo works in corporate communications and plans to expand Texas Humor’s offerings to include gear for camping and the outdoors. “Texas pride is an oil well that’ll never run dry,” he says.

**TH:** *You’re a fifth-generation Texan. Does that change anything about the way you feel about living here?*

**JBS:** The idea that Texas is a mentality and approach to life, in my mind, has always been way more important than how many generations back someone goes. Sure, it’s fun to have that connective tissue to something that

is historically very important to me. But I think what's more important is, while I'm here, what is my mark? I can't lay claim to the accomplishments of the people who came before me. I love the association with them, but I hope the things I do while I'm here are impactful enough that the people who come after me think, "I'm related to somebody who was here, and they made a mark on the state."

**TH:** *Your first T-shirt design for Texas Humor was a map of the U.S. with the words "Ain't Texas" on the rest of the country. Can you tell me more about that design?*

**JBS:** Texas Humor, and that design in particular, was never meant to be political at all. It's more about the fact that when you travel with a Texan outside of the state, they spend a lot of time either complaining or comparing things to Texas, like "Well, when we're at H-E-B back home ..." or whatever. So that's where the idea came from. And it just turned out that it was a unifying flag for people to self-emphasize the things they love about the state.

**TH:** *How does it feel to linger in the sky over the state lines rather than just zoom past them?*

**JBS:** About 200 years ago, with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, a group of people got together and decided the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo would be the border between Texas and Mexico. And henceforth, there is this visual identity that we have for Texas. So, the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo shape is now this thing people have tattooed on their bodies. You can go anywhere around the world, and people you meet can probably draw the shape of Texas more easily than they could the United States. It's amazing to me that it is so distinctive in that way. Yet, I remember when I flew out of Dalhart and made a point to fly up to the north-west most point in the state—well, there's nothing there. That super sharp, very defined border is irrelevant in the place that it exists.

**TH:** *How did you take photos while flying a plane by yourself?*

**JBS:** The short of it is, in an ideal world, you configure the plane in a way that it can fly itself once it's flying. Equilibrium is the name of the game, right? So, there were a couple of cameras on the wings and then I had two cameras on my lap. And if I saw something really cool, I'd put it on autopilot and shoot out the window quickly and then grab the yoke back. The high-wing Cessna that I flew is designed to be like a Cadillac in the sky. It was pretty steady.

**TH:** *It's remarkable that three of Texas' borders are defined by rivers. Do you think that plays a role in Texans' identity?*

**JBS:** I mean, the cocky Texan in me would say it's because we just have a more lush history than everybody else, and maybe the lushness comes from the fact that we have so many damn rivers and so much of Texas lifestyle is defined by the rivers. From the air, I would say the Rio Grande border is more distinct than the Sabine, mostly because the Sabine is hidden by tall pines. The pine curtain is so dense that the water features aren't as obvious as they are for the Red River or the Canadian in the Panhandle. You see the whole river on the Red River—it is a vein in shape and color.

**TH:** *How did this project change your feelings about the border?*

**JBS:** It started out as an idea that was purely visual in nature. And it ended in sort of an appreciation for the geology, the history, and the people. I met so many people. I had a long conversation with the woman who ran the airport in Marshall. I met a guy who flew this 40-year-old plane super low over the oil pipelines of East Texas, looking for leaks every day. And I just kind of stumbled upon him because I was having coffee in the airport before I took off. I ran into the lawyer Dick DeGuerin one Sunday morning in Marfa and helped him gas up his plane because I didn't want him to get his khakis all dirty. My intent was to do an art project, and it ended in a ton of vignettes about the history of Texas and teaching people about aviation and so much more than I ever thought it was going to be.

**TH:** *What could Texans learn from circumnavigating our state in the air?*

**JBS:** My hope is that it would create a little bit of self-awareness that if you live here, there's a pretty good reason you do. And that reason is probably not far away from the reasons of every other person here. And there is far more in common between the people at opposite ends of the political spectrum than there are things that divide us. And from that big point of view, the things that truly divide us are about as silly to argue over as whether you like sweet or spicy barbecue sauce, right? For me, every time I've been lucky to go out and work on a project, I'm just like, "Man, I got a lot in common with this person." So, between being on the ground and being 10,000 feet up in the air, I have yet to find a reason why two Texans should hate each other. There are plenty of reasons to disagree with people, but there are very few reasons to hate.

**TH:** *What is one of the most important nuggets of wisdom you shared with aspiring Texans in Y'all: The Definitive Guide to Being a Texan?*

**JBS:** If there is a nugget that I want aspiring Texans to take away, it'd be that Texas is a lot of things to a lot of different people, and the best way to fit in if you're new here is to remember that you got two ears and one mouth. So, listen more than you speak because there are a lot of really great stories. So let them talk; ask them questions. You'll likely find you have more in common than you thought. **L**

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Keep up with Jay B. Saucedá's latest projects at his website, [jaybsauceda.com](http://jaybsauceda.com). Find Texas Humor at [txhumor.com](http://txhumor.com) and on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.

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# VINTAGE

BY JAC DARSNEK, TRACES OF TEXAS



Cock Fight, Mercedes, Texas.

## Blood Sport of Old

MERCEDES, 1907

**C**ockfighting goes back to ancient times when cultures including the Greeks and Persians pitted roosters against one another for entertainment. European immigrants brought the blood sport to the New World, and the activity proliferated across Texas. In this photo, which was printed on a 1907 postcard from Mercedes in the Rio Grande Valley, the gamecocks are a blur of feathers and motion in the middle of the ring. Lawmakers in all 50 states have since outlawed cockfighting because of its cruelty, most recently Louisiana in 2007. In Texas, making roosters fight has been illegal for decades, and in 2011 the Texas Legislature strengthened the ban by making it a felony to raise fighting gamecocks and a misdemeanor to attend cockfights or possess paraphernalia like the razor-blade gaffs strapped to the birds' legs. Nevertheless, underground cockfighting persists. In 2021, authorities in Rusk, San Jacinto, Kimble, and Tarrant counties busted cockfighting rings and seized large amounts of cash and hundreds of gamecocks, some valued as high as \$10,000. 🐓

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

A man with a beard, wearing a blue short-sleeved button-down shirt and a white cowboy hat, is shown in profile, working on another white cowboy hat. He is in a workshop setting with various tools and materials visible in the background. The lighting is warm and focused on the man and his work.

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