An Evening to Celebrate the Images, Literature & Legends of the Southwest & Mexico

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ON MAY 27, 2006 we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Southwestern Writers Collection and the 10th anniversary of the Wittliff Gallery of Southwestern & Mexican Photography with a salute to the cultural legacy of the literature, film, music and photography preserved by these two archives. The evening also honors the vision and creativity of Bill and Sally Wittliff, who founded the collections at Texas State University—San Marcos.

The event at the Four Seasons Hotel in Austin—emceed by Evan Smith and titled, The Spirit of Place: An Evening to Celebrate the Images, Literature, and Legends of the Southwest & Mexico—includes a gourmet dinner and southwestern entertainment.

To join us at the fiesta, we have invited Sam Shepard, Larry McMurtry, Willie Nelson, Tommy Lee Jones, Bud Shrea, and Jerry Jeff Walker, among others, and are planning an extraordinary fine-art silent auction including works by Bill Wittliff, Bob “Daddy-O” Wade, Kate Brokaw, Robb Kendrick, Graciela Iturbide, Keith Carter, Julie Spred, Rocky Schenck, and Russell Lee.

We hope everyone who is passionate about the cultural arts and our rich heritage will agree that those collections deserve generous support. Funds raised from the event will be used for future acquisitions and to grow the endowment.

We would like to thank all the fabulous volunteers who were engaged in the event steering committee (see sidebar, right)—especially Mary Margaret Farabee and Janis Pimelli who are leading the way for us as co-chairs. John Graves and Ann Richards, who spoke at the dedication of the current Southwestern Writers Collection faculty in 1991, are serving as honorary co-chairs. John Graves and Ann Richards, who spoke at the dedication of the current Southwestern Writers Collection faculty in 1991, are serving as honorary co-chairs. John Graves and Ann Richards, who spoke at the dedication of the current Southwestern Writers Collection faculty in 1991, are serving as honorary co-chairs. John Graves and Ann Richards, who spoke at the dedication of the current Southwestern Writers Collection faculty in 1991, are serving as honorary co-chairs. 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celebrating TWENTY YEARS
at the Southwestern Writers Collection

Since its founding in 1986, the Southwestern Writers Collection at Texas State University has become one of the nation’s major repositories for regional culture. We are grateful for the continued support of Texas State and the magnanimity of our many donors and friends.

Larry L. King, at the Southwestern Writers Collection Dedication, October 3, 1991

...and TEN YEARS
at the Wittliff Gallery

“We are about to open formally an archive that is unique in the way it captures, preserves and reflects the heart and soul of this region,” Texas State University President Jerome J. Savitch stated ten years ago in his introductory comments at the dedication of the Wittliff Gallery of Southwestern & Mexican Photography. On October 5, 1996, he, along with former Curator of Special Collections Dick Holland, photographer Keith Carter, and founding donors Bill and Sally Wittliff, celebrated the opening at a public event marked by speeches and a ribbon-cutting.

Keith Carter was one of the first photographers whose pictures were placed in the Wittliff Gallery, and over the past ten years his collection has grown to over 850 images. The day of dedication, Carter expressed his enthusiasm for the Gallery, saying, “when I come to this collection. I’m looking for light. I’m looking for electricity. I’m looking to be just a little bit better; I’m looking to learn something.” He also reflected on the Gallery’s infancy: “It’s as if they [Bill and Sally] almost have started a new family. And if, as I have read, it’s the nature of society to raise children... You have an infant...” every time you look at it, it makes you remember the small rhythms of life. Pay attention to the small rhythms of life.

In his opening remarks, Bill Wittliff shared with the audience his optimism for the gallery as the first in a state institution devoted solely to the artistic vision of photographers from the Southwest and Mexico. He spoke of the importance of photographers such as Keith Carter and others in the collection, and the impact their work would have on aspiring artists: “To other artists, Keith’s work—and their work, I think, if they listen—whispers every time they pass a picture and it says to them, “Find your work. Find your vision. Pass it on. Pass it on.”

Bill also spoke of growing up in Gregory, Texas, and how his mother, Laura Walser, had instilled in him the unshakeable belief in the power of dreams. Looking towards her in the audience, Bill said, “The Southwestern Writers Collection started out as a dream. The Gallery started as a dream. We owe them both to you.”

The inaugural exhibit was co-curated by Bill Wittliff and Mara Levy, and it featured 80 images by artists such as Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Russell Lee, Mariana Yampolsky, Graciela Iturbide, Keith Carter, Gerardo Suter, Jim Bones, Yampolsky, Graciela Iturbide, Keith Carter, Gerardo Suter, Jim Bones, and many others. The exhibit provided an impressive overview of work by artists in the collection—61 at that time. Now the collection has grown to include over 13,000 images by 150 photographers.

Since 1996, the Wittliff Gallery has mounted at least two, and sometimes three, exhibits a year, featuring influential photographers such as Rocky Schenck, Jayne Hinds Bidlack, Josephine Sacabo, and Kate Breakey, to name a few. Now hailed as the most significant collection of contemporary Mexican photography outside of Mexico, the Wittliff Gallery’s reputation is gaining momentum through its traveling exhibitions and its award-winning book series with UT Press, and through the scores of visitors and students who visit—here or online—to learn more about the photographs, to tour the exhibits, and to conduct research using our growing reserve library of books, journals, and ephemera. As we mark our 10th anniversary, we celebrate our past and look forward to the future as we keep on dreaming.

JERRY SUPPLE on the WITTLIFF GALLERY

Here we see the work of many photographers, those artists who discover rather than invent. These masters make photographs, they don’t take photographs.

—Dr. Jerome Supple, Former University President, at the Wittliff Gallery Dedication, October 5, 1996

THE FIRST PHOTOGRAPH TO BE MOUNTED IN THE WITTLIFF GALLERY WAS COSMOS, 1939, BY KEITH CARTER
THE SOUTHWESTERN WRITERS COLLECTION opens its twentieth year with J. Frank Dobie: Mr. Texas, an exhibit honoring its inaugural acquisition: the J. Frank Dobie Papers. "The Writers Collection really began in 1986 when Bill and Sally Wittliff donated an extraordinary Dobie collection," said curator Connie Todd. "And showcasing this Dobie archive is the perfect way to celebrate our 20th anniversary." 

J. Frank Dobie (1888-1964) was Texas's most famous writer and a colorful personality from the 1920s to the 1960s. Known as "Mr. Texas," Dobie helped define the state in the popular imagination. He published tales of cowboys, lost gold mines, and figures from "old-time" Texas. He also chronicled the state's natural history, writing books about longhorns, mustangs, coyotes, and rattlesnakes. Dobie was a long-time professor at the University of Texas at Austin, where he championed "Southwestern Studies" and academic freedom, noting that "only free minds ever created anything beautiful." 

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J. Frank Dobie—Mr. Texas—The Southwestern Writers Collections first exhibition of its Dobie collection—presents artifacts, photographs, and manuscripts highlighting distinct aspects of Dobie's life. Among the treasures on display are Dobie's 1914 diary kept while he was a graduate student at Columbia University, which captures the exact moment he realized his future lay in collecting the stories of Texas and the Southwest. Dobie's white linen suit, his desk, typewriter, and World War I uniform are just a few of the items that give Dobie's readers, editors, writers, and World War I uniform are just a few of the items that give Dobie's readers, editors, writers, musicians, photographers, collectors, and cultural organizations—have given multiple donations, and the total number of in-kind gifts tops 3,330! These materials enactment Special Collections' and researchers; many are also available to faculty, students, and researchers. Many are also available to a wider public through our exhibits and publications. Our success depends on our donors, and as we observe our 20th and 10th anniversaries, we also celebrate our generous spirits.

Thank you!
J. Frank Dobie, it was said, liked to write with his hat on, as we see in this informal photo of him at work in his Austin office at 702 Park Place—his and Bertha’s long-time residence—now home to UT’s Michener Center for Writers on what is now East Dean Keeton Street. Dobie had the large table in the photograph made out of mesquite boards salvaged from the Bee County courthouse, which was also the original location of the Special Collections keystone. The desk on the left was his office desk when he was a professor at the University of Texas. It is featured in our current exhibit J. Frank Dobie: Mr. Texas [on loan from Bill & Sally Wittliff]. Also on exhibit is the typewriter [donated by Kathleen Collins] Dobie is using—apparently with the “hunt and peck” method.
ON NOVEMBER 10, 2005, in support of Texas State’s Common Experience theme of “Courage,” the Southwestern Writers Collection presented a panel discussion and book signing with three award-winning writers: Celia Morris, Benjamin Arlee Saenz, and Beverly Lowry.

Moderator Steve Davis, Assistant Curator of the SWWC, introduced each panelist and noted that courageous writing “challenges peoples’ assumptions, and the three terrific writers we have here today are excellent examples of that.” Celia Morris pointed out that the subject of her first book, Fanny Wright, “made me into a feminist…She was the first woman to say that women were men’s equals and she was the first woman to tour as a public speaker, so I was the first woman to say that women were men’s equals and they ought to act like it and be treated like it.” Morris added, “I’ve gotten courage in my personal life just by writing about people who were heroines.”

Benjamin Arlee Saenz said, “My characters are always much more virtuous than I am…There is such a thing in writing as courage. But I think it is in having the discipline to make it art in our work. I have to be a good enough writer to fool my politics to my art…It has taken me a long time to arrive at a politics I can live with and embrace, and I am not going to leave that behind just for the sake of publishing a novel at Harper-Collins.”

Beverly Lowry discussed her recent book on Madame C. J. Walker, her forthcoming biography of Harriet Tubman, and the Mississippi roots that drew her to such subjects. Lowry seemed to sum up the feelings of each writer when she said, “The people I’ve written about have shown a lot more courage than I have in writing about them.”

at the SOUTHWESTERN WRITERS COLLECTION

The Collection currently comprises over 5,220 linear feet of materials from the region’s authors, screenwriters, and songwriters. Recent acquisitions listed below represent additions to the Collection from August through December 2005.

**THOMAS (DOC) HAMILTON** donated an extensive collection of audiocassettes containing recordings of live bluegrass performances and jam sessions from artists such as Bill Monroe, the Stanley Brothers, the Nashville Bluegrass Band, Doyle Lawson, Lynn Morris, Ricky Skaggs, Alison Krauss, Flatt and Scruggs, and Del McCoury.

**[Gift of Hamilton]** Additional materials relating to the writing career of DICK REAVIS (above right) include newspaper clippings and photographs documenting his Kennedy assassination and subsequent investigation, as well as correspondence, notes, and material related to both published and unpublished articles for Marivelle and New West/California magazines. Also in this gift are various personal artifacts such as eyeglasses, press passes, audio cassettes, and a 1979 pocket diary. **[Gift of Rae Lewis]** Several additions to the LARRY L. KING archives feature correspondence with family members and friends documenting political matters, King’s publishing career, and personal interests. **[Gift of David Richards]** Additional papers include official records, correspondence, photographs, and ephemera documenting his military career and various organizational affiliations. Also included are research materials, posters, drawings, and printed items relating to his civil rights activities, newsletters, articles, and writing samples. (See sidebar, right). **[Gift of Reavis]** Materials relating to BUD SHRAKE and GARY CARTERBRIGHT’s legal suit against Clift Robertson. Items include legal files in reference to the film, J. W. Coop. **[Gift of David Richards]**

Admissions to the Wittliff Gallery

Holdings now include more than 13,000 photographs and over 150 artists. Recent acquisitions include works by AYE RONAR, KATE BREAKLY, JAMES EVANS, and HECTOR GARCIA. **FRED LINDLEY** is a new artist in the collection, with the purchase of two images including Canyon de Chelly, Arizona (1993/2005). Also purchased: two photographs by LARRY CLARK from his Tulsa series taken in the 1980s and 70s. **[Gift of King]** 87 BOBBY BENDICK photographs published in his latest book, Revealing Chac- uer, Texas Tintype (Bright Sky Press, 2005) and 70 works by GRACIELA ITURBIDE.

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Legends of the Fall
2092–La vida brinca
Wittliff
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(above) Life Jumps / La vida brinca, 2002 (middle) The Girl in the
Mask / La chica enmascarada, 2003 (right) The Mariachi
Francisco / El mariachi
Francisco, 1999

DARKENED CHAMBER, a tiny hole on one side to let in the sun’s light, an image of the world outside suddenly, magically appearing within. That is a camera. This simple instrument for duplicating what the eye sees has been known since the early fifteenth century, but solving the mystery of how to chemically fix and preserve that transient image—how to make a photograph—took another three hundred years. There is something about the La Vida Brinca pictures, however, that leaves you with the haunting impression that those three hundred years never took place. The images projected into Bill Wittliff’s pinhole camera are still fleeting; the search for a way to capture light does not yet seem to have been entirely successful. All that can be recorded are ambiguous-shapes and ghostly tracks of light, faces distorted into eerie power and prominence, patterns suggesting things we know we have seen but cannot quite remember. Everything is familiar but nothing is clear. The world seems to be dissolving in front of us to offer a view of another world that is far less fixed, that will not sit still to have its picture taken. The yearning to break through to this hidden world is so strong in Wittliff’s work that looking at these photographs sometimes feels like attending a séance. There is a conjuring magic at work here, for which the sophisticated camera technology of the twenty-first century would be useless. By profession, Bill Wittliff is an A-list screenwriter whose many indelible credits include The Black Stallion, Lonesome Dove, Legends of the Fall, and The Perfect Storm. It is impossible to operate in his particular tier of the movie-making arena without a real-world knowingness, a cagey understanding of career leverage and status anxiety and gross points–versus–net points. But as anyone who has ever gone water-witching with Wittliff on his Plum Creek Ranch can testify, he has a mystical and divining sense as well. So it’s no great surprise that he would eventually find his way, in his photography, to the pinhole camera. It is as simple a tool as the copper rods he holds in his hands to find water, with no f–stops or flash attachments or digital storage cards to distract from the primal wonder of an image trapped in a box.

Wittliff’s characteristically numinous name for his pinhole cameras is tragaluzes—light swallowers. He makes them himself. His first camera was a cut-down tin pin with a needle hole punched into its center that he duct-taped to a cardboard box with a piece of photo paper inside. Over the years he has gotten more sophisticated, scavenging in junk shops and thrift stores for old camera bodies so that he can use roll film instead of photo paper, and knocking out their lenses so he can use the shutters . . . . The pinhole itself is not a lens, it’s a portal—patiently open, steadily absorbing. During the long exposures—sometimes up to thirty seconds or even more—images register inside the camera with the same sort of spooky neutrality with which dreams appear in a sleeping mind . . . .

As technically primitive as Bill Wittliff’s tragaluz photographs are, they are as penetrating in their way as an electron microscope, seeing what human eyes can’t, revealing ever-deeper layers of reality. La Vida Brinca means, literally, “life jumps.” Life shuffles and skitters, it won’t stay in place. And the life that Bill Wittliff wants us to consider in these pictures is one where many worlds are possible at once, where reassessing touchstones are likely to dissolve, and where the unseen is always startlingly on view. *

—Excerpt from the essay, “Bill Wittliff’s Hidden World” by Stephen Harrigan, from La Vida Brinca (University of Texas Press, February 2006)
IN AUGUST OF 2005, Curator Connie Todd received a call from Jim Davis, a good friend and donor to the Southwestern Writers Collection, and a writer/producer on the Fox Studios animated television series, King of the Hill, co-created by Mike Judge and Greg Daniels. The much beloved and award-winning show had been cancelled by Fox and the production offices were to be closed. The staff had only a few short months to vacate the Century City suite they’d occupied since the show’s debut in 1997. Happily, Fox has recently requested 20 more episodes.)

As one might imagine, moves are a common motivating factor for materials to be deposited in an archives, regardless of whether they comprise someone’s personal papers or the records of a company or institution. If they are not donated in conjunction with a move, they are often lost for good, relegated to the shredder, or parcelled out willy-nilly. This would likely have been the fate of the King of the Hill archives if it hadn’t been for Jim’s belief in the historical and literary value of the show’s records, and his determination that these papers find a permanent home.

Having begun donating his own papers in 1999, Jim had first-hand knowledge of the scope of our collections and the unique contribution that the King of the Hill archives would make to the “spirit of place.” Although Arlen is a fictional Texas town, its locale, characters, and culture are easily recognizable and have earned a place in television history.

No one will easily forget Hank’s dedication to propane and propane accessories, Peggy’s passion for substitute teaching and Boggle®, and Bobby’s driving desire to become a prop comic. The supporting characters in the show are equally memorable: conspiracy theory-plagued bug exterminator, Dale, Bill, the unhappily-divorced army barber, and unintelligible lady’s man, Boomhauer.

And now, with the opportunity to discover these characters and perhaps learn a little bit about what (animated) suburban life in Texas was like at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Along with all the scripts and production documents recording the show, there were a few other items Jim thought we’d be interested in: a number of four-foot by six-foot whiteboards that had hung in the writer’s room and contained text and sketches documenting the show’s production history.

Archival repositories have always collected ephemera, items created for a specific purpose and meant to be discarded after use. Typically, these rarities include ticket stubs, receipts, programs, and broadside posters, and they are generally collected in archives because of some association to a person, event, or subject. There is nothing, except perhaps a chalkboard or writing slate, that is by definition as ephemeral as a whiteboard.

Developed as a writing surface for the writer’s room and contained text and images on the boards tell as much about their creative process as they do the production of the show. We immediately agreed with Jim that they were worth holding on to. It was just a matter of figuring out how to get them to Los Angeles to San Marcos without erasing them! I asked incredulously, clearly at a loss. Finally, a conservator we’d been referred to suggested using a fine-art varnish to build cruts for the boards and pack them in the same way one might a fragile charcoal drawing. We settled on that approach, deciding we could use the crates for the whiteboards’ permanent storage. So, having begun donating his own papers in 1999, Jim had first-hand knowledge of the scope of our collections and the unique contribution that the King of the Hill archives would make to the “spirit of place.” Although Arlen is a fictional Texas town, its locale, characters, and culture are easily recognizable and have earned a place in television history.

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Archival repositories have always collected ephemera, items created for a specific purpose and meant to be discarded after use. Typically, these rarities include ticket stubs, receipts, programs, and broadside posters, and they are generally collected in archives because of some association to a person, event, or subject. There is nothing, except perhaps a chalkboard or writing slate, that is by definition as ephemeral as a whiteboard.

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## March

**25** RECEPTION & BOOK LAUNCH FOR LA VIDA BRINCA / LIFE JUMPS Always evocative, often revelatory, Bill Wittliff's exhibition of pinhole-camera photographs coincides with his second book with the University of Texas Press. (See p. 12) Reception & Book Launch March 23.

**29** Readings by MICHAEL JAIME-BECERRA, CHRISTINE GRANADOS, & ALEJANDRO ESPINOZA. Q&A to follow. Sponsored by the English Dept. 3:30 pm

**4** MARJORIE PERLOFF lectures for the English Dept's Therese Kayser Lindsey/Katherine Anne Porter Series. Book signing to follow. 3:30 pm

**8** “DOBIE DAY” Presentations on J. Frank Dobie & an interview with Bill Wittliff about the Dobie he knew, & why the folkslorist remains important to Texas. (Sidebar, p. 6)

**13** TIM O'BRIEN, Texas State Mitte Chair in Creative Writing, reads and hosts a Q&A. Book signing to follow. 3:30 pm

**20** ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI reads for the English Dept's Therese Kayser Lindsey/Katherine Anne Porter Series. Q&A + book signing to follow. 5 pm

**27** MARK GIMENEZ, Texas State graduate, reads from his well-received first book, The Color of Law. Co-sponsored by the SWRHC. Book signing after. 3 pm

## April

**4** MFA Students Poetry & Fiction Reading. 5 pm

**27** The “SPIRIT OF PLACE” GALA at the Four Seasons in Austin celebrates the 20th & 10th anniversaries of the Southwestern Writers Collection & the Wittliff Gallery. Celebrity guests & a not-to-be-missed silent auction. (See p. 3) Call for ticket information: 512-243-0038

## May

**27** The “SOUTH TEXAS SABINO” GALA celebrates the 25th anniversaries of the Southwestern Writers Collection & the Wittliff Gallery. Celebrity guests & a not-to-be-missed silent auction. (See p. 3) Call for ticket information: 512-243-0038

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Reception & Discussion: Mar. 25

**Wittliff Gallery**

January 28 – May 28, 2006

**OBSESSIONS: Photographing the American West**

March 28 – May 28, 2006

**J. FRANK DOBIE: MR. TEXAS**

Program on April 8.

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