



SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER  
2019-2020 NUMBER 1

Editor: Shirley Baugher  
Designer: Norman Baugher

# FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS CHICAGO

www.fawchicago.org

## President's Message

CHRISTINE SPATARA, *President*

Time is flying and before we know it, it will be September eleventh and we will again gather with our FAW friends to enjoy a wonderful luncheon together. We have a series of great programs for our 2019/2020



season, beginning with Rosellen Brown, a prolific writer whose novel, *Before and After*, was made into a movie starring Meryl Streep and Liam Neeson. In contrast, we have sad news of the death of George Hodgman whose book *Bettyville* was one of our award winners a few years ago. Mr. Hodgman was only sixty. It is a reminder to us all to embrace our daily lives with a positive perspective and some measure of enjoyment. We, at FAW, hope we contribute to this enjoyment and encourage you all to share us with your friends. ■■

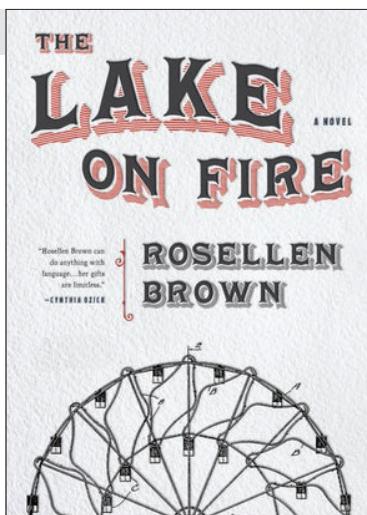
## SEPTEMBER PROGRAM

### Acclaimed Author Rosellen Brown Kicks Off FAW 2019-20 Programs

By TAMMIE BOB

On Sept. 11, 2019, Rosellen Brown, author of eleven highly regarded books, will speak about her latest, the Chicago-set *Lake on Fire*. *The Lake on Fire* is an epic narrative that begins among 19th century Jewish immigrants on a failing Wisconsin farm. Lured by the potential for new life, Chaya and her brilliant younger brother Asher flee to industrialized Chicago. Surrounded by the superficial extravagance of the Columbian Exposition, the pair depends on factory work and pickpocketing to scrape by. *The Lake on Fire* examines social class, family, love, and revolution in a historical time marked by a tumultuous social landscape. Ms. Brown will talk about how she does research for her books, particularly what she discovered about Chicago.

I first encountered Rosellen Brown's work about 35 years ago, when my book club selected her novel *Tender Mercies*. This was about what happens to a New Hampshire family after a man accidentally drives a speedboat over his swimming wife, rendering her nearly paraplegic. I found the treatment of pity, pain, and human complication remarkable in this sensitive



book; the language, beautifully wrought, explores areas of emotion normally too devastating to consider. That was her third book, and I quickly devoured the earlier two books, and later, her subsequent ones.

Her best known book is probably *Before and After*, a best-seller in 1992 adapted into a film starring Meryl Streep and Liam Neeson, which did not, to be honest, do this powerful page-turner much justice. Here, a family and their town are torn apart after a brutal crime. Like all her books, this one shows deep insight into human relationships and examines how ethical principals do or don't

play out in a crisis.

It's hard to characterize a "typical" book by this prolific writer, as they vary so greatly in plot, setting, time period, and character. What connects these books is the elegant writing, compassion towards even the most flawed of characters, and a fearless way of taking readers into disturbing territory and making it comprehensible.

Ms. Brown is as engaging a speaker as she is a writer. If you are familiar with her books, you will surely not miss this program—if her work is unknown to you, please attend the luncheon Sept. 11 to sample a new literary flavor. ■■



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Luncheon Reservations

Luncheon reservations are due by 6 PM the Sunday prior to any scheduled meeting.

No reservations will be accepted after 6 PM on the Sunday prior to the scheduled meeting. No exceptions.

To reserve, contact Peggy Kuzminski (1-773-710-8637) or Pat Adelberg (1-847-588-0911)

Permanent reservations are preferred and can be requested when making a reservation.

Regular reservations can be made month by month following the directions above.

Luncheon will be served at 12:00 noon in the main floor dining room of the Fortnightly Club of Chicago, 120 E. Bellevue Place. The cost of the luncheon is \$45 per person, payable by check (preferred) in the front lobby on the day of the meeting. For group reservations, we ask that only one person make the reservation to avoid confusion. Please note, if you

make a reservation and you cannot attend, you must cancel no later than 6:00 p.m. on the Sunday preceding the meeting. Reservations not cancelled must be paid for by the member.

Looking forward to seeing all of you on September 11.

### Board of Directors 2019-20 Membership Corner

IDA HAGMAN, *Membership Chair*

FAW welcomes new members to the organization. In this first newsletter issue for the 2119-2120 year, we are pleased to share a list of new members and changes in the current membership.

### New Members

**Elizabeth Beiser** 200 East Delaware Place, 19F, Chicago, Illinois, 60611  
lizbeiser@gmail.com

**Carrie Brenner** 2616 Blackhawk Road, Wilmette, Illinois, 60091, lcbren@msn.com

**Marilyn Carlson** 639 Wisner, Park Ridge, Illinois, 60068

**Jean Emeson** (jemeson@gmail.com) MaryEllen Mauro 38 Mockingbird Lane, Oakbrook, Illinois, mmauro4@comcast.net

**Sally Kowalewski** 301 Blackhawk Road, Riverside, Illinois, 60546, sallyk@ameritech.net

**Arlene Liss** 135 East Avenue, Park Ridge, Illinois, 60068, gnaliss@att.net

**Beth Prew** (beth@bethprew.com)

**Anna Marie Schuh** 1160 S. Michigan Avenue #2707, Chicago, Illinois 60605, anna@annschuh.com

### Current Member Changes

**Barbara Smith** barbarasmith01@att.net

**Karen Baker** 30825 River Crossing Street, Bingham Farms, MI, 48025 (address change only)

**Pat Schneider** (phone number change only) 312-590-2137

**Donna Margaret Eaton** 2960 North Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, 60657

# Toni Morrison

## FEATURE ARTICLE

by SHIRLEY BAUGHER

**Toni Morrison** has packed up and moved out in the night. She has taken her place among colleagues waiting to bring her into their circle, among them James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, John Steinbeck, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Harper Lee.

*But though we have lost her physical presence, her legacy remains with us and with our generation. She will not be forgotten.*



### A Life .....

Toni Morrison had the distinction of being both an ordinary and an extraordinary woman. Ordinary in that she was born in 1931 to working class parents in a working class community, Lorain, Ohio—about 30

miles west of Cleveland. Her father, George Wofford, gave her the name Chloe Ardelia. George Wofford was a shipyard welder who took such pride in his work that he put his initials on every seam he considered perfect. Her mother, Ella Ramah, was a stay-at-home mom who looked after the children. Her grandmother, well, she was something else. She told the children ghost stories. She played the numbers. And she consulted a book on dream interpretation to determine which numbers she would assemble on any given day.

When Chloe was twelve, she joined the Roman Catholic Church. She chose Anthony as her baptismal name, and thus became Chloe Anthony Wofford. A few years later, when she was a student at Howard University in Washington, she took on the nickname “Toni” because her classmates didn’t particularly like “Chloe.” From Howard, she went to Cornell, and then to Texas Southern in Houston where she joined a fiction workshop. In that workshop, she began a story about a black girl whose desire for blue eyes became an obsession. This story became the basis for her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*.

In 1958, Toni married Harold Morrison, an architect from Jamaica. It was not a happy marriage. Morrison wanted a traditional wife and mother—something Toni could never be. They divorced, and Toni moved to Syracuse with her sons. She was fortunate to be hired as an editor with a textbook division of Random House. Her time in Syracuse was difficult. Lonely and unfulfilled, she turned to writing. She went back to her story of the girl who wanted blue eyes and turned it into a novel, which became both a critical and commercial success. For the next twenty years, she worked with such well-known authors as Angela Davis, Gayle Jones, Toni Cade Bambara, and Muhammad Ali. She played a large part in changing the dynamic of black writing. Instead of writing for a white audience, black authors began addressing their work to black people. It was during this time that she got the inspiration for her best-known work, *Beloved*.

### **An American Icon Is Born . . . . .**

Toni’s career and her creative output proliferated after 1958. During her long career, she won a Pulitzer Prize, a Nobel Prize, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She taught at both Yale and Princeton. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, cemented her place in the literary world. She told the story of a young girl, Pecola Brteedlove, so obsessed with such American idols as Shirley Temple, Deanna Durbin, and the literary characters Dick and Jane, that she becomes convinced that she is ugly and worthless. She prays for the one thing she believes will save her—blue eyes. This is not a happily ever after story in which Pecola comes to a realization of her own worth. Instead, she is raped by her father, becomes pregnant, and becomes an outcast in her community. She descends into



madness and convinces herself that she has acquired blue eyes. *The New York Times* review declared the story . . .”so faithful to speech and so charged with wonder that it became poetry.”

*The Bluest Eye* was followed by *Sula*, the story of a young black woman who returned to her Midwestern hometown only to be ostracized by the residents. Then came the book that cemented Morrison’s reputation, *Song of Solomon*.” The work centered on the literal and spiritual journey of Macon Dead III, familiarly known as “Milkman.” Macon’s journey takes him through rural Pennsylvania in search of a cache of gold said to belong to his family.

The story is really Macon’s search for himself. Read the novel and find what he discovers. This book really took off and was chosen as the main selection of the Book of the Month Club—the first novel by a black author to be so honored since Richard Wright’s *Native Son* in 1940.

### **A Star is Born . . . . .**

While Toni Morrison’s reputation as an author was already secure in the annals of American literature, it was the publication of her masterwork in 1987 that made her a household name. *Beloved* was based on the true story of Sethe, a slave who had escaped from Kentucky to Ohio with her two-year old daughter. Morrison wrote, . . .”Sethe had twenty-eight days—the travel of one whole moon—of unslaved life. From the pure clear stream of spit that the little girl dribbled into her face to her oily blood was twenty-eight days. Days of healing ease, and real talk. Days of company: knowing the names of forty, fifty other negroes, their views, habits; where they had been and what done; of feeling their fun and sorrow along with her own which made it better. One taught her the alphabet; another a stitch. All taught her how it felt to wake up at dawn and decide what to do with the day.”

Then a slave catcher tracks Sethe down. She cuts her daughter’s throat rather than let her returned to a life of slavery. Ordinarily Sethe would have been hanged but some white abolitionists saved her from the gallows, and she was imprisoned for eighteen years.

One day a stranger appears at Sethe’s door. She moves in and becomes part of the family’s daily life. She is known only as “Beloved.” Sethe believes she is her dead daughter come back to her, understanding that Sethe did what she had to do to keep her safe.

The book became a popular and critical success. Jonathan Demme made it into a feature film in 1998 starring Oprah Winfrey. The book was notable for many reasons: it depicted a world in which white people were largely absent—rare for a work of fiction at that time. The setting also was distinctive in that it was neither plantation nor ghetto, but a small Midwestern town, the world of Morrison’s childhood. The *Times* book

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**SHIRLEY BAUGHER**  
1710 N. Crilly Court  
Chicago, IL 60614

review published an open letter signed by two dozen prominent black writers in praise of the book. It won the Pulitzer Prize in April and was named one of the best books of the twentieth century.

One book followed another. Toni Morrison became an American icon—beloved by the literary world. John Warner wrote of her, “To me, Morrison’s central subject was love: love of self, love of others, the power of love to transform and destroy and heal simultaneously. Morrison also wrote about the love of some white people for their whiteness above all else. In an interview with Charlie Rose she said, “If you can only be tall because somebody is on their knees, then you have a serious problem. And my feeling is white people have a very, very serious problem, and they should start thinking about it.”

**Envoi** .....

While all of Toni Morrison’s works are worth reading, if you are just starting out with her, read *Sula*. If you plan to read only one of her works, it has to be *Beloved*. But do yourself a favor, open her books. Read them. Absorb them. And let her light shine on you. ■■

**FAW MEETINGS 2019-20**

A reminder of the FAW meetings for 2019-20. Be sure to mark your calendars. You won’t want to miss a single one!

**September 11, 2019**

Rosellen Brown  
Award-winning author of  
*Before and After*

**October 9, 2019**

“Confessions of a Literary Translator: The Prose and the Cons”  
Ann Fisher

**November 13, 2019**

“Flappers, Cocktails, and Temperance: True Stories of Prohibition”  
Susanna Caulkins, author of  
*The Speakeasy Murders*

**December 11, 2019**

Jenny Riddle brings to life  
“The Bouvier Sisters”

**January 8, 2020**

“All About Pork”  
Cynthia Clampett

**February 12, 2020**

“Meet the Vanishing Woman”  
Doug Peterson and Ellen Craft

**March 11, 2020**

“Growing up Jewish and Surviving in Nazi Germany”  
Eric Blaustein, Holocaust Survivor

**April 8, 2020**

Jane Hamilton  
Award-winning author of  
*The Book of Ruth*.

**May 1, 2020:**

Literature Awards Program