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A Celebration of Authors

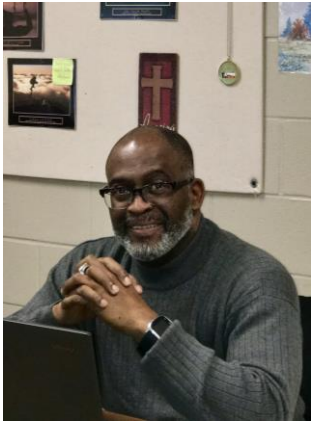
In this edition of *In The Spotlight*, we celebrate writing and writers, those in our district family who have used this art form as self-expression. We shine a light on colleagues and students who are authors in their own right, from songs to novels to research and more.

Bastrop ISD is full of amazing and talented individuals, and we appreciate them sharing their time with us so that we could share their creativity and gifts with you.

We hope you enjoy!
BISD Communications Team

Steven Brown

Bastrop Middle School ~ Devotionals



Steven Brown started writing daily devotionals to heal a broken heart.

“At first, the writing was mostly for me to help work out my feelings after being rejected,” he said.

Brown found comfort in the Bible and in devotionals, and though this helped him, he thirsted for closure. After regular prayer, he began writing his own devotionals. The issues plaguing his mind were fleshed out on paper. He took his natural gift for writing and his knowledge of the Bible to pen daily messages, sharing them with hundreds of subscribers to his email list.

“I’d pray that God would guide me. I really wanted the devotionals to have an impact on the readers. I wanted what I wrote that day to touch their life in some way,” Brown said.

His most touching devotional is titled “Pearl: Jesus, Town Meeting”.

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Jesus looks out into the crowd and says, “Those of you whose hearts have been broken raise your hands.” Then all across the room people began to raise their hands, and Jesus asked them to come unto Him and he asked, “Who or what has broken your heart?” Some said a man. Some said a woman... Jesus then says to the people “If you want to be healed I will pray for you.” Jesus began praying and laying hands on them, and the bondage of hurt was being broken from those that had come up to Jesus, and as they returned to their seats they begin praising and thanking God for what He had done for them.

Brown says writing devotionals has nourished his soul. Not only has it been a bridge to meet new people and spread the word of God, but it also has helped him close a painful chapter and begin a fresh new one.

Allison Bumsted

Cedar Creek High School ~ Research

As a teen, Allison Bumsted chose The Beatles over The Backstreet Boys. The self-described “token rock and roll girl” asked for a record player for Christmas as a child. Though that was a stark difference from what her friends had on their Christmas lists, she didn’t care. She was inclined towards rock and roll.

Years later while enrolled in “Rock ‘N Roll in Literature,” an advanced English course at Austin Community College, Bumsted realized she could combine the things she loved most: history, music, and writing. The door was opened. She later transferred to Texas State University and completed a bachelor’s degree in history and political science. She then was accepted into a program at Hope University in Liverpool, England, where she earned a master’s degree in The Beatles, Pop Music, and Society. Winning first place in a writing competition in Liverpool sparked an interest, so she began to write about rock and roll music.

“It’s easy to write about something you love!” she said.

Bumsted’s career in education began in 2010. In addition to teaching, she regularly attends academic conferences to present original research. Although her writing is extensive, she has chosen to wait on publication until she completes her doctorate in 2020. Some of her more memorable presentations happened at the International Festival of Authors in Toronto, the White Album Conference in Monmouth, and the Popular Words and Music Conference in Düsseldorf.

She credits extensive writing, researching, and presenting to how she has grown as a person and an educator. Frequent questioning and feedback from colleagues has been welcomed.

“From a researcher [writer’s] perspective, remind yourself that where you cast your line is what you will catch,” she said. “Always broaden your perspective and consider time and space. Never go out looking for something, let it find you. Otherwise, you’ll find what you WANT and that may not be what you NEED.”

The Beatles enthusiast ultimately wants to be a professor.

“I always wanted to be the history teacher I didn’t have,” Bumsted recalls. “I always tell my students to question everything that’s been told to you. That’s the exciting part, possibly putting a different perspective back into the world. I absolutely love what I teach.”



“It’s easy to write about something you love!”

Mrs. Cameron's 1st Grade Class

Emile Elementary ~ Storybook



First graders are only about six years old, so did they really believe they could write and publish a book? They admit not at first, but with the encouragement of their teacher Jasmine Cameron, their excitement grew, and they began to wonder about the possibilities.

First they brainstormed topics, and because it was near Thanksgiving, they settled on a turkey as the main character. The discussion then turned to what it's like to be a turkey that's about to be eaten (Oh my!). That's when the children decided to write their book about a turkey who disguises himself in

order to escape the Thanksgiving table. Savannah chose a kitten as her disguise because no one would want to eat a cute, fluffy kitten, right?

The whole process took three to four weeks and included brainstorming, writing, revising and editing, illustrating and publishing. On the day of the interview for this story, the finished products had just arrived in class. A room full of first graders were flipping through the pages of their book, *Turkey in Disguise*, reading the words they had written and talking excitedly about their story with pure joy on their faces.

Cameron said the most challenging aspect of teaching the writing process is helping students to embrace their own ideas.

"At this age, they very much want to please their teacher," Cameron said. "But I didn't want their stories to be my words and ideas. A lot of times kids don't enjoy writing because they're told to write about 'this', and they don't want to

write about that, so giving them free choice is a good thing."

Paisley said that "doing the words" was the hardest part of working together as a class, adding, "We don't know what the other kids are writing so we don't know what we should write."

Most of the children in Mrs. Cameron's class said they love to write, but for Mychael, he said that writing also gave him an opportunity to practice his handwriting too. A bonus!

For aspiring authors, a classmate advised doing the writing first and the drawing second.

"You should do the hard part first and then the pictures," said Michael. "Mrs. Cameron makes us do four lines, or six lines, maybe even nine!"

We see your point, Michael, and we couldn't be prouder of the hard work of you and your classmates, no matter how many lines it took.



Nora Clarke

Cedar Creek Intermediate ~ Book chapter in a university textbook



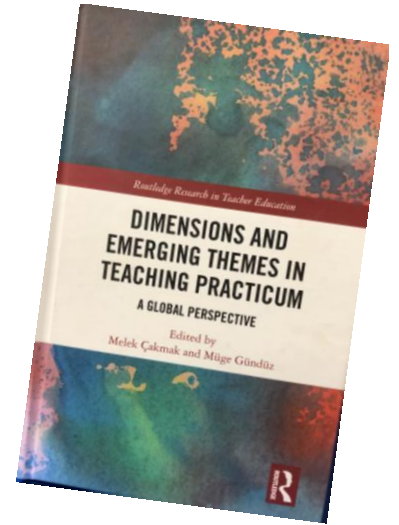
Although Nora Clarke currently teaches fifth and sixth grade inclusion at Cedar Creek Intermediate School, her four decades of experience in education includes teaching at every grade level and in multiple subjects. She also works with University of Phoenix as an instructor in both developmental English and teacher/principal preparation programs, something she started while in Wharton ISD, where she spent most of her career.

Clarke loves teaching and continues to devote her energy to helping students learn, and learning is clearly what she loves having herself earned a bachelor's degree and three master's degrees. She also loves researching and writing about topics in education.

Her most recently published work is a chapter in a textbook used in teacher preparation programs, *Dimensions and Emerging Themes in Teaching Practicum*. She and her writing partner Denese Wolff, wrote chapter 4 called "Virtual Tools for Teacher Training and Practicum Interaction." They worked together by email mostly, with Clarke as primary researcher and writer, and Wolff as editor and general sounding board. They collaborated with editors and publishers from different parts of the world and had to go through a full application process, multiple drafts, and editorial reviews before final publication. In all, it was an 18-month project. They hope to present their research at the International Learner Conference in Hawaii in 2019.

Reflecting upon what she loves most about writing, Clarke says it's that it has broadened her scope of education. Working with people from around the world has helped Clarke understand that every educational system experiences similar challenges, including retaining teachers and adequately preparing them for the real world experience of a classroom.

"When you research, you may change your mind about something that you thought you had the answers to before."



Currently, she is researching the best ways to retain teachers in the profession and plans to write a book of practical tips and strategies for teachers just entering the profession. This is where her current passion lies.

"In education, we sort of throw them to the wolves. We need to give them lots of support."

When asked what advice she would give to a teacher who aspired to write, she said, "Write about what you know and what you're passionate about. And don't bring biases to the writing. You have to stay open."

What are Clarke's next steps? She smiles and says, "I just want to keep teaching-- keep teaching students, and keep teaching teachers."





Mark Collins

Cedar Creek Middle School ~ Online picture books

Mark Collins is no stranger to Bastrop ISD given that he's dedicated 20 of his 23 years in education to the district.

"Being an educator feels like the only way to remain a lifelong learner, which is what education needs," said Collins, who currently serves at Cedar Creek Middle School teaching students about digital media, programming, and exploring 21st Century technology. Collins' favorite authors include Judy Schachner, author of the Skippyjon Jones series and Kate di Camillo, author of *The Tale of Despereaux*.

Writers find their inspiration from a myriad of avenues, and loss is Collins' primary driving force in his writing. Storybird is an online portal that allows authors the opportunity to create stories using images, the final form of which can be shared with others. Two of his picture books were inspired by retirements in the BISD family, and what he could not muster to say aloud, was put into text and imagery. The third story came out of a loss in morale, and the Storybird accompanied many other attempts to reveal the awesome staff he saw each day.

"Loss drives me to see the silver lining and the hidden gems that complacency dulls," he stated. Collins' stories are on Storybird: [The Life and Times of Pat Tips](#), [It's 10 pm! Do You Know Where Our Saenz Is?](#), and [Nowhere at CCM Does the Lonely Leaf Fall](#).

Beverly Crocker

Red Rock Elementary ~ Music & Lyrics

Red Rock Elementary has a hidden gem of a singer and songwriter in dyslexia teacher Beverly Crocker. Although it's her first year with Red Rock Elementary, she's a 17-year veteran educator. Her other passion is ministering through music, something she's done for more than 20 years. She has memories of a house full of music since as young as three years old. She would dance and sing while her maternal grandfather played various musical instruments. No wonder her music roots run deep since her grandfather and early influence was Red Copeland (former fiddle player with Bob Wills).

"The thing that drives me most to write are my life experiences," said Crocker. "Most of my songs have been emotional."

In 2013, Crocker had two songs become hits on various charts throughout the United States, which she says was an honor and a blessing. The first was "I'm Not Alone", which landed at number five on *Cashbox Magazine* for two consecutive months. She wrote that song when facing possible lung cancer. The other was "Move On", hitting number 35. Crocker finds ministry through songwriting as an avenue to help others.

"I've learned that God, Jesus, is my source for comfort, strength, peace, etc. Without my constant reliance on my Heavenly Father,

I would not be able to do what I do, which is ministering in song to those that are facing many different issues."

She has had the opportunity to perform in countless states and has graced the stages of Rodeo Opry, Wylie Opry, Gibson Showcase, Stars Over Texas, Doug Gabriel Theatre in Branson, and Bluebird Cafe in Nashville. She also has been featured on Gospel Music Network and INSP Network in North Carolina. Although she loves music, Crocker also loves teaching and she loves where she's teaching now. It feels like a family.



"Although this is my first year at Red Rock, the students, parents and staff are an amazing school community," she said.

Elizabeth “Liz” Eagan

Emile Elementary ~ Blog posts and articles

For someone who has had her work published online and in books, Elizabeth “Liz” Eagan will tell you it’s the books she creates for her students that mean the most. A certified teacher for the visually impaired, Eagan has worked with Bastrop ISD for the past five years, 27 years total in education.

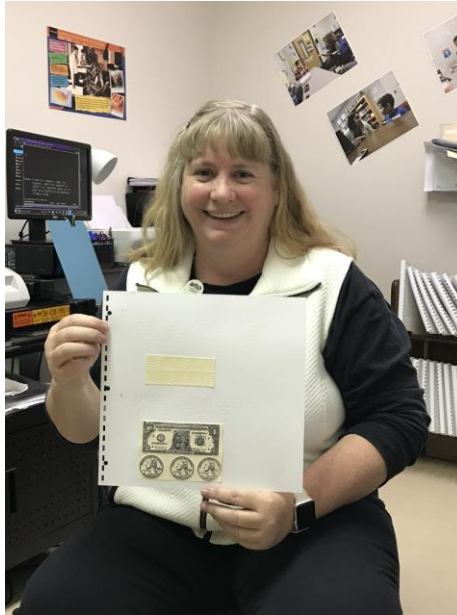
“I love what I do, and I couldn’t imagine doing anything else,” Eagan said.

And that’s apparent as her face brightens to show off the amazing interviews one of her students has done. He has interviewed Ms. Elle in the cafeteria, Ms. Renae in the office, the Mayor of Bastrop, and even the Superintendent.

Bastrop ISD currently has 21 visually impaired students who attend campuses across the district. Eagan works daily to translate everything from worksheets to district assessments to posters in braille to help them be successful. She credits her inspiration to high school history teacher, Ms. Mueller. As a student who

got in a little bit of trouble, Eagan appreciated that Mueller saw potential in her and took her under her wing.

“She handed me back a paper that had an “F” on it and told me she knew that I could do better, and from then on in her class, I made better grades because I didn’t like how that made me feel.”



With a little more inspiration, Eagan turned her grades around, graduated college, and followed in Mueller’s footsteps to become a teacher. In fact, in 2008, Eagan was one of 12 teacher ambassadors who traveled to Vietnam and Cambodia in a people-to-people program.

Eagan’s writing can be found on the Paths to Literacy where she made her first post in 2013. The website allows teachers and others to search for a specific topic or name and utilize the resources that have been uploaded there. She also has work published in the ECC Essentials curriculum materials wherein she collaborated with colleague Karen Wolffe and supplied the activities for chapter 11 on career education. Eagan has numerous other articles published on topics such as going to college, transitioning from high school to college, and staying organized.

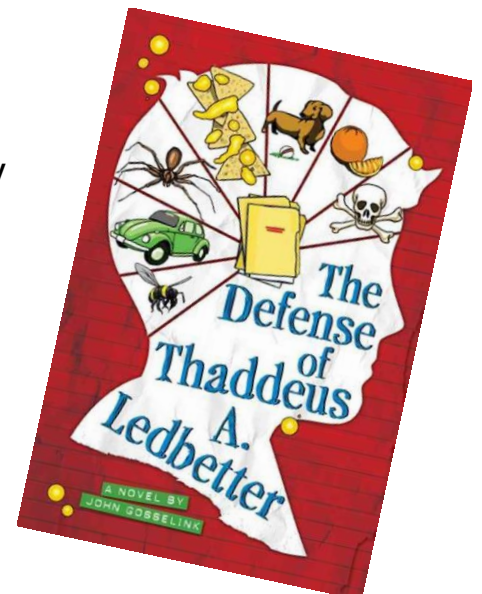
John Gosselink

Bastrop High School ~ Young adult fiction & humor commentary

Unassumingly funny, Bastrop High School Assistant Principal John Gosselink has a storied past as a prolific writer. In addition to his career in education, Gosselink has moonlighted as a humorist for the Bastrop Advertiser/Austin-American Statesman. The articles are his take on everything from “Heat Advisory for the Inept” to “Stumbling Forward: Our Christmas Tradition”.

“My sense of humor can be very dry,” he claimed. “I enjoy writing. It’s a way to capture time, tell a story, and be funny.”

Though he has written what would amount to hundreds of articles over the past 20 years, his writing feat came in the form of a 240-page novel, *The Defense of Thaddeus A. Ledbetter*, published in October 2010. The novel chronicles a middle-grade student named Thaddeus who argues why he should be released from his in-school suspension.



"From start to finish, writing the very first word to it being published, it took me 18 months," Gosselink recounted. "I was really lucky. I had the same publisher as the woman who wrote the Twilight books. It was a huge moment for me. I got the publisher's attention by writing to them as Thaddeus and why they should publish the book. It was a risk, but they liked it."

With more than 100,000 copies sold, the novel was a hit, and there was potential for a sequel. Confusion was created for readers, however, when the publisher chose to retitle his original book to *Free Thaddeus*. Fans who purchased that book were unhappy that they got the original instead of a sequel.

Though the publisher's snafu may have paused his professional writing career, it didn't sour his taste for writing.

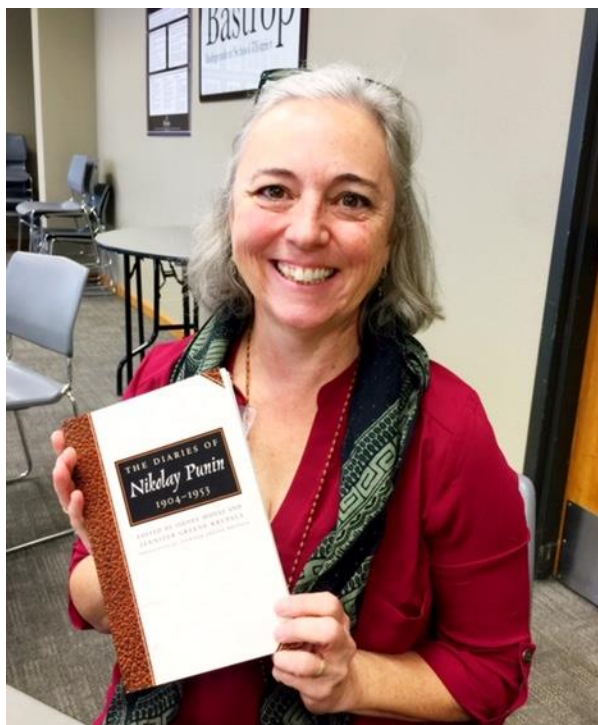
"I enjoy the craft. It's a fantastic way to be creative," he said. "If there are any aspiring writers out there, I would just say don't emulate, create! Get your own voice. Create characters and stories that have life."



*"If there are any aspiring writers out there,
I would just say don't emulate, create!"*

Jennifer Greene-Gast

Service Center ~ Translations of Russian literature



Jennifer Greene-Gast was a student at the University of Texas in the Russian Studies program when the university purchased some very special diaries by Nikolay Punin, a Russian art critic. A professor asked if she would assist with the translation of the diaries, including the introduction and annotations of their historical importance. She jumped at the chance, and the experience began!

"I had to translate every word on every page and even had to wear gloves when touching them," said Greene-Gast. "They were not even allowed to be removed from the center. When I finished the translation, we had to get permission from the family to publish it, so I traveled to Russia to meet with them."

While in Russia, Punin's family surprised her with a confession. Because her love of the work was so evident to them, the family offered more diaries that hadn't been made public previously. She was able to secure copies of the additional diaries before leaving Russia and brought them back to the university.

"We would only have had half of the information had the family not given us access to the additional diaries. We were able to make connections and new discoveries!" It took quite some time to translate, revise, and edit three diaries into one volume, but it was a task she loved. Later, she would be asked to fill in for a teacher of Russian who left unexpectedly. She discovered a love for teaching and writing during this time.

“The writing process is recursive, and it takes a lot of perseverance,” she said. “Sometimes you have to put it away and come back and look at it with fresh eyes.”

Her advice to aspiring writers is simple.

“To be a good writer, you must be an avid reader,” she said. “It doesn’t have to be an actual book—you could be reading blogs online. Writing is a skill just like running. You have to put time into it and practice.”

Professionally, she has considered writing articles on differentiation in the classroom and the importance of using mentor text. A children’s book and a mystery might be in the pipeline as well. There may even be a collaboration with her mother who is a retired artist.

“So many people think of writing as sitting in a library surrounded by dusty old books. That’s not true. Write about something that fascinates you. Write anywhere, constantly add to your collection of ideas. It doesn’t have to be a novel. Your book could be a video game guide!”

Greene-Gast is grateful that her affection for Russian literature led her on a trip of a lifetime and a domino effect of open doors and opportunities.

Kären Linam

Cedar Creek High School ~ Personal blog

Karen Linam likes to laugh and tell stories. It’s written in her DNA passed down from her mother who also loved to write and tell stories.

“I was raised in a family where reading and writing was valued. My mother was quite the writer. Writing was always a great outlet,” she said.

When it came time for Linam to deal with her father’s diagnosis of dementia, she turned to writing as a creative outlet and a way to find peace. Watching her father deteriorate mentally has been painful, and there are moments when she feels an overwhelming sense of guilt.

“There are some things you say when you’re a teenager that years later you feel guilty about. What I’m seeing him go through right now, I wouldn’t wish on my worst enemy. It’s really difficult. There was a lot of emotional healing I had to go through, and the only way I knew was through writing,” she said.

Linam created the blog, *Dementia in Linamville*. It details her ups and downs, her struggles, and her father’s struggles. It is the story of their journey together through dementia.

“When I first started writing, it was through tears and ramblings, incomplete sentences,” she remembered. “Trying to make sense out of all of this. Honestly, it was like therapy.”



As she wrote about her thoughts, her feelings, and her father, she found that her stories touched people. They were relatable to other families going through the same thing. The blog’s audience grew.

“I had strangers writing to thank me and to tell me that what I wrote had helped them and given them permission to move forward,” she said. “It’s comforting to know you’re not alone, and when you’re going through something like this, people can feel alone. I think my blog, my stories, have helped people realize they are not the only ones who are feeling a certain way.”

Sometimes what she writes is optimistic or uplifting, and other days it’s sad, but she hopes it always serves a greater purpose.

On Veterans Day this year, Linam posted a message in honor of her father, who devoted his life to the Air Force ...

Dear Dad, It is time to celebrate our veterans. When I see you in the morning, I hope you will recognize your life when I say thank you for your undying love of our country and for giving 24 years to the Air Force. You have a new shirt with the American flag and the printed words of your oath of enlistment where you swore to protect and serve the United States of America. I will read those words to you and hope that they flow from your lips again. Love, K

Alethea Maldonado's Newcomers

Cedar Creek High School ~ Personal narratives



Alethea Maldonado's classes are filled with teens from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. Her passion for helping them learn and master the English language is obvious, and their genuine affection for their teacher is too. Last year Maldonado (pictured far left) received a grant that allowed her students' writing to be published into hardbound books and displayed at the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center in Austin.

Recently we sat down to talk about writing as well as the students' hopes

and dreams for the future. Some said they want to be doctors or pilots, another wants to serve in the military, and yet another hopes to be a veterinarian. The only senior in the class, Gabriel—a bright, funny, and articulate student—hopes to attend Texas State University next fall to study international business.

The students' writing covered a myriad of topics, including family life, culture, sports, food, and celebrations. No matter the topic, they agreed that the process

of writing in a language that was not native was the hardest part. But they enjoyed the project and especially liked choosing photos and artwork to illustrate the emotions they wanted to convey.

Lesly, who is from Honduras, wrote about the Day of the Indian Lempira, a celebration of a Honduran patriotic hero. She wrote her book almost entirely in English. "For me he is an example to continue fighting for more independent, stronger, richer and more respect." During the interview, she shared her beautiful voice with a song in her native Spanish.

Antonio wrote about El Salvador, with descriptions of foods, celebrations, and architecture that is so vivid it makes one want to visit and explore. Elias also talked about food with a longing that was unmistakable, saying, "I never tasted anything like the food of Mexico."

Most students agreed that this project made them want to write more. For Francisco, his effort will go to music. He's a songwriter who shared a portion of one of the songs he had penned recently, a love song.

*Una más otra noche tienes que llorar
No soporto sufrir y quizás del amor
Te quieras escapar pero yo estoy aquí*

Ryan Ricks

Cedar Creek High School ~ Music reviews and events

By day, Ryan Ricks engages his English 3 and English 4 students with riveting material. And by night, he helps locals discover emerging bands and bridges the gap between artist and audience with his enlightening online music reviews.

No stranger to the music scene, Ricks was in bands in high school and co-wrote with a friend two music blogs, *The Endless Bummer* and *Surfing Saxophone*, until his junior year of college.

After graduating early from Oklahoma State University, Ricks returned to Austin and substitute taught part time. He also secured an internship at Do512.com - a local event listings website featuring concerts, bands, and all things Austin. His talent for writing and ear for good music got noticed, and he was offered a position as a freelance writer for the company. He now writes several times a week, spotlighting local bands.

"If you're interested in that type of career, I would start a blog and a Twitter about the artists you're writing about. That experience was very helpful when

getting my internship." He also stresses the importance of growing your network.

"Meet and befriend as many people as you can. Take internships, immerse yourself in the culture. It's all about who you know."

In the Volume 17 edition of Do512, Ricks reviewed local pop artist Kady Rain, writing:

"Unapologetic in her dedication to pop music, Kady Rain makes sugar-sweet anthems that are catchy, emotive, and spectacular. In 2016, the singer released her debut EP *All I Ever Wanted*, an addicting collection of songs that would fit comfortably alongside pop giants like Taylor Swift or Katy Perry in a Spotify playlist. Like a great Friday night, Kady Rain transports listeners to a more cheerful, carefree world where dancing is a requirement and love is an obligation."



Even though his musical appetite and tastes are diverse, and he has reviewed hundreds of bands from 90's grunge bands to black metal to country, Ricks says he thoroughly enjoys teaching.

"I like writing about music, but to be honest, I'd much rather teach."

Is writing a book on the horizon for Ryan Ricks? Maybe. Applying to graduate school to study 19th Century British lit? Possibly. One thing's for sure, whether he's teaching in his classroom or producing music reviews on his laptop, Ricks will be demonstrating his talent and love for both.



Maria Segundo

Cedar Creek Elementary ~ Autobiography

"My culture is special, and I want to show people who I am and where I come from," Maria Segundo shared when asked what inspired her to write her first book, *Lola haciendo Historia*.

The book is the first in a series that she hopes to complete about her life. *Lola haciendo Historia* is about the first part of her life up until about the age of 20. She writes about the hardships she faced, her culture, and her family. Her grandfather, Antonino Tello, was a soldier in Pancho Villa's army.

"Everything comes from my grandfather," she said. "We lived in the country, and he taught me to love nature, to see everything."

The first book also shows off some of her poetry, which is what she most loves to write. Each chapter begins with a short poem to give the readers a hint of what is to come. Segundo has completed the first book and would love to have it published, but in the meantime has begun

writing the sequel about the latter part of her life. She is also working on having *Lola haciendo Historia* translated into English but has found some difficulty in making sure the true meaning is the same in translation.

Maria's favorite authors include Isabel Allende, an award-winning Chilean author most known for *The House of the Spirits* and *City of the Beasts*, and Gabriel García Márquez, a Nobel Prize winner and author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*.

"I still have a lot to share about my ancestry, my heritage, the food and history," Segundo added. "I just want to show people you can make a difference and impact people."

Segundo has been with Bastrop ISD for seven years and is currently on staff at Cedar Creek Elementary.

Brooke Westbrook

Student at Bastrop High School ~ Online fiction

Brooke Westbrook is a sophomore at Bastrop High School, and she's a writer of young adult fiction. Her friend and former classmate Jalisa first encouraged her to write, and she continues to be a source of inspiration today. They bounce ideas off of each other and spark one another's imagination for storytelling.

Westbrook uses an online publishing portal called Wattpad to put her stories out there for others to read. People can comment on her stories, "like" them, or give her feedback.

"Mostly I write teen fiction set in high schools. I think it's really fun to write," she said.

Westbrook has published two of her stories on Wattpad, but there are many more she's written that have gone unpublished. When she was little, she was into fantasy stories and would often pretend her dolls were characters in a movie. It's the movie world that helped her learn to craft her story world.

"Some people are dreamers, and others are more realists," Westbrook said. "I see characters in my head and want to make them come to life. I like to craft characters that I hope to meet one day in real life."

Sometimes she feels confident about her writing and thinks she's a strong writer, and other times she questions herself. All in all though, she values the critique that she gets from pal Jalisa, online readers, and her teachers at BHS.

"It makes me a better writer. If there are other teens who want to write, I would just tell them to put it down on paper and don't filter. And definitely don't destroy what you write even if you think it's bad. You might use that later so just write it down and file it away for someday."

Westbrook is currently working on a mystery about a girl, Ava-Mae, who has graduated high school in Seattle and moved out of her parents' home to the other side of town. It's a story in its infancy and is tentatively titled *Kidnapped*. This is her first story with a character who is beyond high school age.

"It's a work in progress."



Catina White Higgins

Bastrop High School ~ Non-fiction



Catina White Higgins is the in-school suspension proctor at Bastrop High School, a job she relishes. However, the title of “Mom” is the position she loves most. The mother of five has overcome many obstacles in life but none more challenging than the tragic accident that nearly killed her son, Camryn.

When he was seven, Camryn was severely burned when he accidentally fell into a barbecue pit. He was rushed to the hospital where doctors told Catina her little boy had burns on more than 65% on his body and may not survive. In fact, they told her to plan his funeral.

“I wasn’t giving up on him,” she said matter of factly. “I just looked up and prayed. I begged God to help. I knew a part of me was being selfish because we weren’t sure what kind of life he would have yet. But after spending three months in Shriners’ Hospital in Galveston, he could see and hear me. He was taking steps, but he had such a long road ahead of him,” she said.

Though her son was making progress, the emotional and financial stress was taking its toll.

“I was broken, angry, I was a mess,” she said. “One night, I just started to write down everything I was feeling. When I was able to write, I was able to heal. When I put it on paper, I could move on. Every time I wrote, it gave me enlightenment,” she recounts with a sense of peace that is obvious.

She didn’t intend to write a book, but when she was finished writing, she had one.

“The book is emotionally driven. There’s a lot of anger there. I wanted people to see where I was coming from in my emotional state. Then the healing began. When I knew it was going to be published, I really wanted a part of the book to be about overcoming obstacles, about healing from hurt—that when bad things happen, good things can too,” she said.

Today Camryn is 19 years old and a student at Blinn College. His goal is to become a doctor at the same burn unit that took care of him and helped him survive. His mother is grateful. She says the art of writing has taught her to embrace every moment.

“It changes the way you cherish things. Take nothing for granted.”

