

Paying it forward: The Tony Hillerman Prize

Do you have an unfinished mystery in your desk drawer?

A novel on your computer awaiting another rewrite?

A dream of being done with that who-done-it?

A vision of a contract for publication and an advance?

Well, read on.



ANNE HILLERMAN

Provided your debut mystery unfolds in Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada or elsewhere in the Southwest, the Tony Hillerman Prize competition wants your manuscript.

If the name Tony Hillerman (1925-2008) sounds familiar that's because Tony wrote mysteries set in the Southwest for more than 30 years. Over the decades, Tony received two Spur Awards and WWA's prestigious Owen Wister Award for lifetime contributions to Western literature. The mystery world honored him with nearly every award in its arsenal.

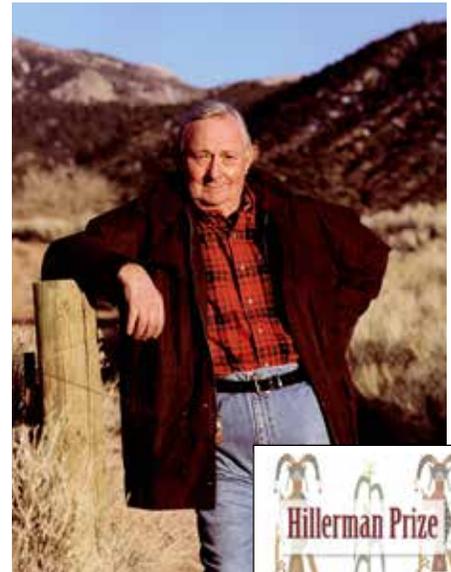
My happiest duty as Tony's eldest child and literary trustee involved making an informal inventory of the thousands of volumes my parents had collected and treasured over their long lives. I spent weeks sorting through mysteries, thrillers, Westerns, classic fiction, histories, books about the natural world, anthropology and archaeology, memoirs, poetry and more. I found books and more books in every room except the guest bathroom.

Among the volumes that touched me most were the scores of novels that included a statement on the cover from Dad recommending the book. Most of these books were by authors I had never heard of. They spoke to the hundreds of contacts Dad made during his years at the University of New Mexico teaching journalism and creative writing. In his classes or over coffee, he mentored and supported would-be

authors with the dream of someday publishing a book.

A few years before my father died, we launched a contest to give authors like those whom he had personally encouraged an opportunity for publication. In collaboration with St. Martin's Press and with Dad's consent, we started the Tony Hillerman Prize in 2006. We made the first award in 2007 at the Tony Hillerman Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with Dad present. In a wonderful coincidence, our winner, Christine Barber, had been an editor at the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, the last newspaper for which Dad worked. Seven more great debut mysteries followed. In addition to a setting in the Southwest, these prize-winning books have in common their authors' fine storytelling skill. Otherwise, they form a diverse group including police procedurals, historical mysteries, amateur detectives, murders that include supernatural elements and even a story with Las Vegas gangsters.

The competition welcomes any writer, amateur or professional, who has never been the author of a published mystery. The winner receives a contract with Macmillan/St. Martin's Press for publication of the novel under St. Martin's Minotaur imprint, a \$10,000 advance and the opportunity to work with a professional editorial and production staff. The contest charges no entry fee, and the rules allow room for creativity. And even if you don't win, deciding to enter provides a fine incentive to get the darn book finished!



Things change. Dad died in 2008, but the prize continues. We put the Tony Hillerman Writer's Conference on hold in 2015 after celebrating what would have been Dad's 90th birthday year. WWA graciously agreed to award the prize in Dad's honor. *Hearts of the Missing* by New Mexican author Carol Potenza received the award at the Western Writers 2017 conference. No winners were chosen in 2018 or 2019. This year's verdict awaits.



Carol Potenza

I know Dad would be delighted to see a book by a fellow WWA writer win the award. So get going! For the complete rules see us.macmillan.com/minotaurbooks/tonyhillermanprize.

Tony Hillerman Prize winners

Christine Barber: *The Replacement Child* (2007)
 Roy Chaney: *The Ragged End of Nowhere* (2008)
 Tricia Field: *The Territory* (2010)
 Andrew Hunt: *City of Saints* (2011)
 CB McKenzie: *Bad Country* (2013)
 John Fortunato: *Dark Reservations* (2014)
 Kevin Wolf: *The Homeplace* (2015)
 Carol Potenza: *Hearts of the Missing* (2017)

