

# From El Paso to Stanford, Islas remembered as Chicano pioneer

By Robbie Farley,  
Villalobos

Herald-Post entertainment editor

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## WRITERS HALL OF FAME



His novels have been lauded for their insights into the Chicano experience of cultural duality — and for breaking ground.

The insights the late Arturo Islas wove into his novels stemmed from his being a child of the border.



"In my experience, the **Islas** 2,000-mile-long Mexican-United States border has a cultural identity that is unique. That condition, that landscape and its people are what I write about," Islas told his students at Stanford University last year.

The native El Pasoan — who died Feb. 15 at age 52 in Palo Alto, Calif., where he'd lived and worked for 22 years — broke ground as one of the few Chicano authors to be published out of a New York publishing house.

He was among the select few Chicanos in the early '70s with doctorates in English. That's

■ **6th ANNUAL** Authors of the Pass: El Paso Herald-Post Writers Hall of Fame banquet will be held May 10.

■ **RECEPTION** will be at 6 p.m., dinner at 7 p.m.

■ **BANQUET** will be at the Westin Paso del Norte.

■ **TICKETS** cost \$25 and may be purchased by calling Carmen Lopez at 546-6364.

■ **1991 INDUCTEES** are W.H. "Bill" Timmons, Robert Skimin, Cormac McCarthy, the late Arturo Islas and the late H. Gordon Frost.

when he also joined the Stanford faculty, where he became a pioneer in teaching Chicano literature.

The El Paso High School graduate will be inducted May 10 into Authors of the Pass: Herald-Post Writers Hall of Fame, along with Robert Skimin, W.H. "Bill" Timmons, Cormac McCarthy and the

late Gordon Frost.

Islas' 1984 novel, "The Rain God," won the 1985 best-fiction prize from the Border Regional Library Association and was selected one of the three best novels of 1984 by the Bay Area Reviewers Association.

William Morrow and Co. published his second novel, "Migrant Souls," in 1990. Any pride that recognition might have brought Islas was tempered with his outrage at the reluctance of established East Coast companies to publish Chicano literature.

He called that reluctance "a willful ignorance on the part of the machines that produce the books we read."

His literary executor, Diane Middlebrook, is preparing for publication of his third novel, on which he was working at the time of his death. And Avon Books is preparing to release his first two novels in paperback.

Articles in various publications have attested to the respect he received as a writer and as a beloved professor.

"He was an extraordinary teacher," wrote Debbie Dunn, a former student, in the Peninsula Times Tribune. "I took

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Chicano literature because it fit into my schedule, but I came out with an appreciation for Mexican-American writers and writers in general. I didn't need to be an English major to learn to write like one with him."

His mother, Jovita Islas, credits her son's paternal grandmother for developing in him an interest in reading.

"We had a lilac tree in back of the house, and when we couldn't find Arturo, we'd know to look in the tree, where he'd be reading," she said.

Nancy Packer, Islas' English department colleague for 22 years, will accept the plaque at the Writers Hall of Fame banquet, just as Islas

requested.

"He was very pleased to receive this honor and that his hometown recognized him," Packer said.

He went to Stanford as an undergraduate in 1956 and remained as a student and

teacher, receiving his bachelor's degree in 1960, master's in 1963 and doctorate in English in 1971.

He returned to El Paso in 1986 for a stint as a visiting professor in UT El Paso's creative-writing department.