

Winston Groom named 2011 Harper Lee Award recipient

Winston Groom of Point Clear, Ala., has been named the 2011 recipient of the Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer of the Year. Groom will receive the award at the Alabama Writers Symposium in Monroeville on May 6 at the annual luncheon. The conference will meet May 5-7.

"I am truly honored to be chosen for the Harper Lee Award, and look forward to the Symposium," said Groom.

The Alabama Writers' Forum, a partnership program of the Alabama State Council on the Arts, coordinates the process to select the Harper Lee Award recipient annually from nominations from the field. The honor is presented annually by Alabama Southern Community College at the Symposium. It is made possible through a generous grant from George F. Landegger.

"One of the first books my twin sons fell in love with was Winston Groom's *Only*," said Sue Brannan Walker, Alabama Writers' Forum board president and Poet Laureate of Alabama. "From his fabulous *Forrest Gump* book and film to my personal favorites, *A Storm in Flanders* and *Patriotic Fire*, Winston has impressed with his humor, his depth, his versatility, and his range of subject matter. I look forward to celebrating Winston Groom's accomplishments and hearing him in Monroeville."

"To receive the Harper Lee Award is one of the biggest honors given a writer," said Carolyn Haines, last year's recipient. "I know Winston will cherish this honor as much as I do. We are storytellers, and this award, named for one of the best known writers in America, honors the tradition of great characters and great story. My sincerest congratulations."

Groom gained literary fame when his novel *Forrest Gump* climbed to the top of The New York Times bestseller list and stayed there for 21 weeks. It has sold over 2.5 million copies in the United States alone and millions more worldwide on the heels of its blockbuster movie adaptation starring Tom Hanks. The book has also been reprinted in at least thirteen countries.

Born in 1943, Groom grew up in Mobile, Alabama, where he attended University Military School. In 1965 he graduated from the University of Alabama with a B.A. in English and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. He served in Vietnam with the Fourth Infantry Division from July 1966 to September 1967 when he was honorably discharged with the rank of captain. He then spent the next eight years working as a reporter and columnist for The Washington Star before becoming a full-time author. He holds several honorary Ph.D. degrees as a Doctor of Humane Letters.

Groom is the author of fourteen books. In addition to *Forrest Gump* (Doubleday, 1986) and *Gump & Co.* (Pocket Books, 1995), Groom's novels include *Better Times Than These* (Summit, 1978), the award-winning *As Summers Die* (Summit, 1980), which was

made into a movie starring Bette Davis, *Only* (Putnam, 1984), *Gone with the Wind* (Doubleday, 1988), and *Such a Pretty, Pretty Girl* (Random House, 1999).

He is also the author with Duncan Spencer of *Conversations with the Enemy* (Putnam, 1983), a non-fiction account of the experience of an American prisoner of war in Vietnam and a Pulitzer Prize finalist. In 2010, Groom updated *The Crimson Tide* (The University of Alabama Press, 2000), a one hundred year history of Alabama Football, to include the 2009 National Championship season.

As well as being a talented novelist, Groom is also a renowned author of history. His prize-winning *Shrouds of Glory* (Grove-Atlantic Press, 1995) was inspired by tales of his great-grandfather who fought for the Confederate Army. This book was followed by *A Storm in Flanders* (Grove-Atlantic Press, 1995), *1942: The Year That Tried Men's Souls* (Grove-Atlantic Press, 2005), and *Patriotic Fire* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), his history of Andrew Jackson and Jean Lafitte at the Battle of New Orleans. His latest book is *Vicksburg 1863* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2009). *Kearny's March: The Epic Creation of the American West 1846-1848* is forthcoming.

Groom has written for numerous publications, including *Smithsonian*, *Southern Living*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Newsweek*, *Esquire*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Wooden Boat*, *Architectural Digest*, *Garden & Gun*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Weekly Standard*, as well as op-ed pieces in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

His literary awards include a Best Fiction Award for *As Summer Dies*, Southern Library Association, 1980; an Alabama Author Award for *As Summer Dies*, Alabama Library Association, 1982; and the Clarence Cason Award in Nonfiction Writing, The University of Alabama College of Communications and Information Sciences, 2006.

For several years, Groom led a popular literary festival at the North Carolina mountain resort of High Hampton. Past guests have included Pat Conroy, William Styron, George Plimpton, Dan Jenkins, Shana Alexander, Gay Talese, Peter Mathiessen, Kaye Gibbons, Peter Maas, Willie Morris and P. J. O'Rourke.

Groom lives with his wife, Anne-Clinton, and their daughter, Carolina, in Point Clear, where he says he enjoys the public's continued warm response to his loveable, unlikely hero, Forrest Gump. He believes, as Forrest says, "Always be able to look back and say, 'At least, I didn't lead no humdrum life.'"

The Harper Lee Award is made to a living, nationally recognized Alabama writer who has made a significant, lifelong contribution to Alabama letters. It includes a cash prize and a bronze sculpture by Frank Fleming of the Monroe County Courthouse clock tower. The courthouse is a setting for Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*.