



# AUTHOR RICHARD FORD TO ACCEPT 2017 HELMERICH AWARD

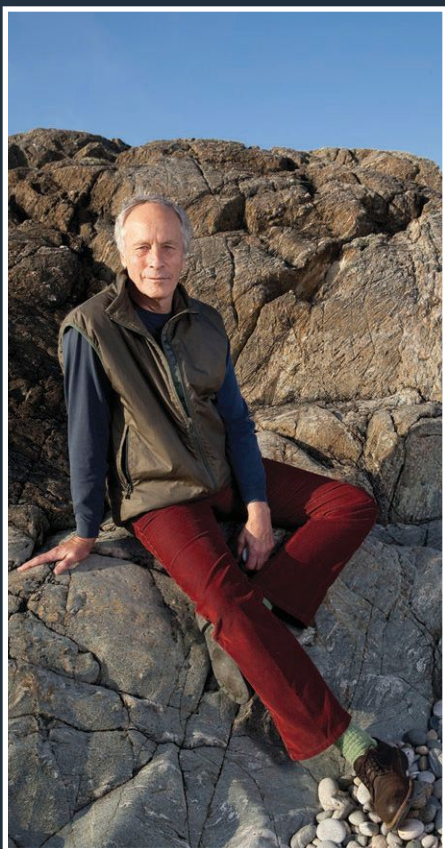
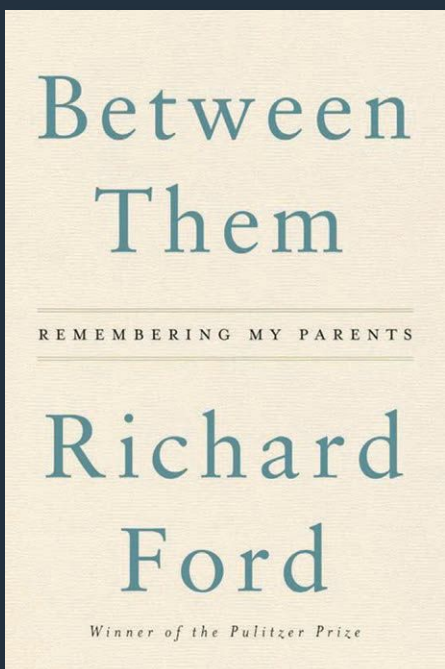


Photo courtesy of Karen Robinson-eyevine-Redux



The Pulitzer Prize-winning fiction writer tells what he knows of the marriage of his loving parents – and what he can never know, as the only child who came between them.

C.S. Lewis once said that “failures are finger posts on the road to achievement.” Internationally renowned author Richard Ford knows firsthand the importance of failing as he credits failures as the impetus for his career.

“What influenced me to become a writer was unquestionably failing at everything I attempted,” says the 73-year-old novelist and short-story writer. “If I could’ve stayed in the Marines; if I’d stayed in law school; if I kept teaching grammar school in Flint, Michigan; if I’d gotten that job at ‘Sports Illustrated,’ or with ‘The Arkansas Gazette,’ or with ‘Newsweek,’ or with the Arkansas state police – I didn’t get any of them, or if I’d taken that job with the CIA, I never would’ve written anything.”

Fortunately, Ford’s “haphazard decision to try writing” was a huge home run as this Pulitzer Prize-winning author has delighted readers around the world for the past 40 years with his portrayal of everyday contemporary middle-class American life in such works as the critically acclaimed “The Sportswriter,” “Independence Day,” “The Lay of the Land” and “Let Me Be Frank With You.”

For his distinguished body of work and major contribution to the field of literature and letters, the Tulsa City-County Library and Tulsa Library Trust will honor Ford in December with the 33rd annual Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award, which consists of a \$40,000 cash prize and engraved crystal book.

As a Helmerich award winner, Ford joins such greats as Billy Collins, Ann Patchett, John Grisham, Shelby Foote, Margaret Atwood, Neil Simon, David McCullough, Ray Bradbury, Eudora Welty, Toni Morrison and John Updike, to name a few.

“As the winner, I choose to think I’m basically a representative of my writer colleagues,” says Ford. “One writer’s good luck and accomplishment bespeaks a lot of other accomplishments standing just out of the frame – awaiting its moment. In this way, the

Helmerich award – whether I’m distinguished or not – encourages the whole lot of us. Which seems like the point of it. As with literature itself, it’s not about the writer, it’s about the writing.”

Since May, Ford has traveled the world promoting his first nonfiction work, “Between Them: Remembering My Parents,” a memoir which has received many favorable reviews. According to “Publisher’s Weekly,” “Every page teems with Ford’s luxuriant prose, his moving and tender longing for his parents, and his affecting and intimate portrait of two people simply living life as best they can.”

“This summer, I was in Italy, Colombia, Peru, Greece, England and Ireland. This autumn, in Scotland and Sweden,” he says. “Books tours are generally not vacations; they’re more akin to what my father did as a traveling salesman, only my stops are not seven Southern states, but 30-plus countries. And what I mostly come home with is an enhanced view of my own country. There’re few better ways to ‘see America’ than to travel abroad and to notice and hear what other countries’ citizens think and are saying about the U.S., and to observe what I myself say and feel when I talk about it.”

Currently, Ford has taken a hiatus from writing. “I have, in note form, two pretty well-developed schemes for novels, which have been accumulating over the past three or four years; and I have five short stories written toward a book of stories. But at the moment, I’m just being. It’s always been normal for me to allow the whole machinery of book writing simply to halt and go cold in between large projects. I want to have the chance to assess the whole vocation anew – whether it’s a good idea to continue – or to determine if I have the enthusiasm, stamina, curiosity and material to do what’s required. The world doesn’t need me just to write another book. It needs of me what it needs of all writers – to write a masterpiece.”

*by Jackie Hill,  
Tulsa City County Library*



## 2017

### PEGGY V. HELMERICH DISTINGUISHED AUTHOR AWARD

#### AWARD PRESENTATION AT BLACK-TIE GALA

Friday, December 1 • 6:30 p.m.  
Central Library • 400 Civic Center, Tulsa

#### FREE PUBLIC PRESENTATION

Saturday, December 2 • 10:30 a.m.  
Central Library • 400 Civic Center, Tulsa

For more information or to purchase tickets to the dinner, visit [www.helmerichaward.org](http://www.helmerichaward.org) or call (918) 549-7323.