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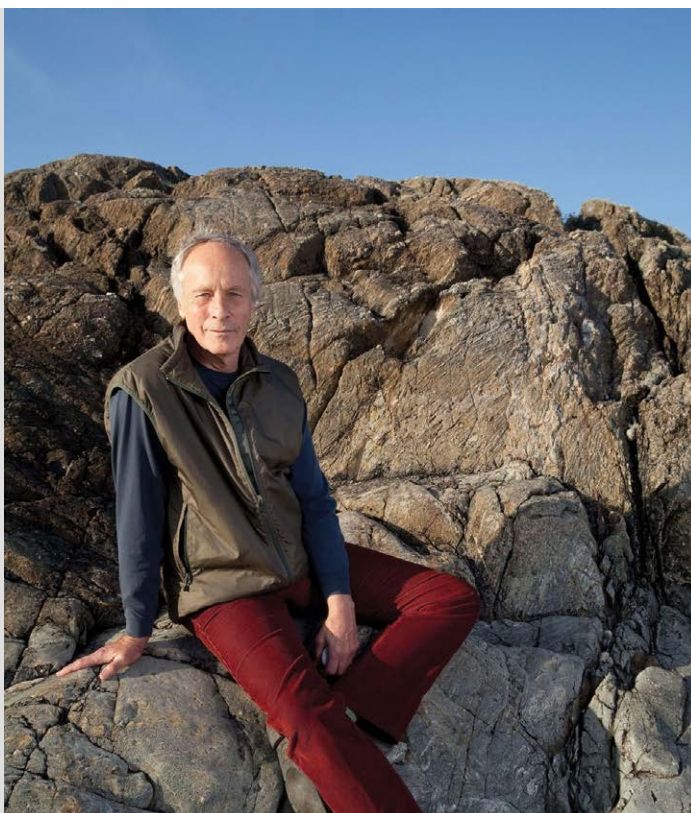


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## Novelist Richard Ford wins 2017 Helmerich Award

By James D. Watts Jr. Tulsa World Apr 30, 2017 1





Novelist Richard Ford has never been to Tulsa, but the state is very much a part of his past.

“My parents are both from western Arkansas, pretty close to Oklahoma,” Ford said. “My mother attended a convent school, St. Anne’s, in Fort Smith. My grandfather ran a hotel in Oklahoma City, and I’ve got cousins there and in Anadarko. So while Oklahoma may not be a part of my recent past, it does figure in my far past.”

Ford will be making his first trip to Tulsa in December to receive the 2017 Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award.

Ford, whose novels include “Wildlife,” “Canada,” “A Piece of My Heart” and the Pulitzer Prize-winning “Independence Day,” is the 32nd recipient of this award, presented by the Tulsa Library Trust.

Previous winners have ranged from Nobel Prize recipients such as Saul Bellow and Toni Morrison, former U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins, best-selling novelists including John le Carre, Ian McEwan, John Grisham and Larry McMurtry, historians David McCullough and William Manchester, and icons of American literature including Eudora Welty, Norman Mailer, John Updike and Joyce Carol Oates.

The prize — a \$40,000 cash prize and an engraved crystal book — will be presented at a black-tie event at Central Library on Dec. 1. Ford will give a free public presentation Dec. 2 at Central Library.

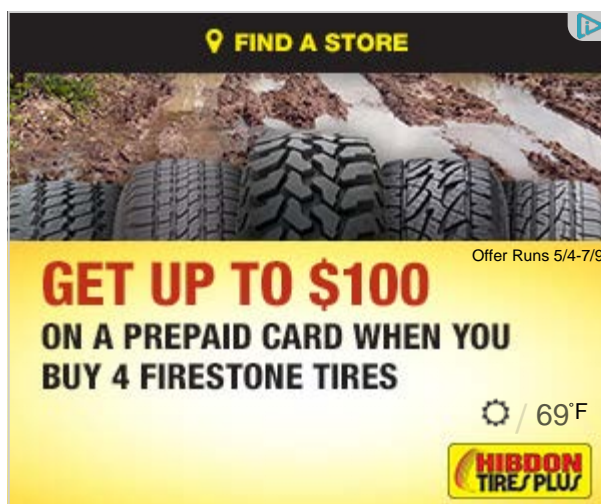
“I’m very honored by this and thrilled to be coming to Tulsa,” Ford said.

Adrian Alexander, chairman of the selection committee for the Helmerich Award, said, “The selection committee is very excited that Mr. Ford has accepted the Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award for 2017. He has been writing about the ‘American Experience’ for over 40 years. He

has won both the Pulitzer Prize and the PEN/Faulkner Award, among others. The fact that he was a finalist for the Pulitzer again in 2015, 20 years after that first prize, says a lot about the enduring quality of his work.”

Ford is best known for the quartet of novels about a character named Frank Bascombe, who first appeared in “The Sportswriter” (1986), which proved to be Ford’s breakthrough novel. The Bascombe novels include “Independence Day” (1995), which won the Pulitzer Prize and the PEN/Faulkner Award, the only novel to win both prizes; “The Lay of the Land” (2006) and “Let Me Be Frank With You” (2014), a collection of novellas that was a Pulitzer finalist.

Ford said he has been working on an idea for another story about Bascombe, who over the course of the series has gone from a failed novelist-turned-sportswriter to a successful real estate agent, while dealing with the large calamities and small but intense joys of everyday life.



“I’m continually making notes about it and think I have it all keyed up and worked out, but it remains to be seen if I have the urge to write it,” Ford said. “But the idea of sitting down and addressing this mass of stuff I’ve accumulated is right now not that attractive to me.

“Age is a factor,” he said. “It’s been a year since I completed my last book, and I’ve spent that time writing essays and a couple of short stories. And it’s been pleasurable to work in these short forms. I guess I just don’t want to die midway through a book.” Ford laughed, and said, “It sounds kind of selfish, but there it is.”

Ford’s latest book, which will be published Tuesday, is “Between Them,” a memoir about his parents.

“I wrote the part about my mother not long after she died,” Ford said. “I had a very close relationship

with her, and I missed her intensely. I miss my father, too — he was a traveling salesman, and while he was rarely home, he was a good father, who died in 1968.

“As I myself have gotten old, I realized that the thing I remembered most about my parents was their departure from this life,” he said. “You don’t want to think about death when it comes to your parents, because what made them your parents was the lives they lived. My parents were not people of consequence in the normal sense — they didn’t make great things happen — but I thought it was worthwhile to find some sense of virtue in their lives. Writing about them was a way to draw them closer to me.”



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## (1) comment



**Cindy Keith** Apr 30, 2017 9:02am

I read both "The Sportswriter" and "Independence Day" several years ago and was pleasantly surprised. Stumbling upon greatness now and then is an essential part of what drives my reading habit.

Congratulations, Mr. Ford.

## Welcome to the discussion.

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