

Bookmarked



DAVE BARRY '69: *Swamp Story*

(SIMON & SCHUSTER)

Every now and then, **Dave Barry**—the Pulitzer Prize-winning humor columnist who's written more than 40 fiction and nonfiction books—decides that he wants to write a novel. “I sort of collect ideas over the course of time, always having to do with things going on in Miami, which is a weird city where weird things happen,” says Barry.

Florida is a favorite topic for the Miami resident, who started working at the *Miami Herald* in 1983 and stopped writing his weekly column in 2004, though he's still a contributor to the paper.

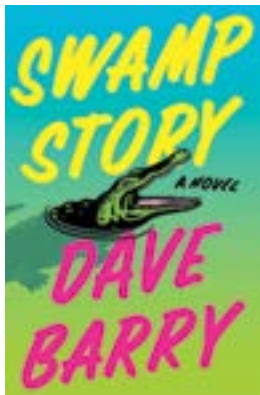
Barry's latest book is *Swamp Story*, an Everglades whodunnit with a cast of characters that includes a desperate young woman who stumbles onto hidden treasure, a couple of brothers who hatch a ridiculous scheme to lure tourists to their bait and beer shop with videos of a fake Everglades Melon Monster, along with Miami-based politicians, lawyers, and mobsters who get caught up in all of it.

Barry has worked some of his favorite, real-life Florida oddities into the book, including the Florida Python Challenge, a 10-day annual event sponsored by the state of Florida and described as “challenging participants to remove as many Burmese pythons from Florida's public lands as possible.” And which this year is promoting “increased virtual and in-person training opportunities.”

“I knew I wanted to write about the Python Challenge,” Barry says. “It's very Florida because it's ridiculous and dangerous and bizarre.” He's also fascinat-

PHOTOS: THOM CARROLL (DAVE BARRY); SYLVIE ROSOKOFF (HILARY LEICHTER)

From HUMOR and ESPIONAGE to a pair of BROOKLYN-BASED TALES interweaving FANTASY and REALITY, these NEW NOVELS from four ALUMNI AUTHORS belong on your SUMMER READING LIST. Here's a PEEK INSIDE their covers. *By Anne Stein*



ed by “sketchy roadside attractions” in the Everglades—one of his favorites is Skunk Ape Research Headquarters—so Barry created Bortle Brothers Bait and Beer shop and their Everglades Melon Monster (actually an unemployed newspaperman named Phil wearing a Dora the Explorer costume head).

The book's dedication is to the state of Florida, “which has its flaws, but is never, ever boring.”

Barry always wanted to be a writer and he was always pretty funny. “I was literally elected male class clown by the Pleasantville [New York] High School Class of 1965.” An English major at Haverford, he wrote for the campus newspaper, then edited by **Dennis Stern '69**, who went on to a long career at the *New York Times*. “He was a serious journalist at Haverford and he would assign me real stories, and I'd turn in humor columns,” Barry recalls. “Dennis just gave up and I kept writing humor, so in a way, he got me started.”

Barry went on to a small paper in Pennsylvania and wrote humor columns on the side, which led to his eventual job offer at the *Miami Herald*. Married to *Herald* sports writer Michelle Kaufman, Barry has two adult children and is currently working on a memoir. “I'm a little nervous about it,” says Barry. “I'm trying to write an unpretentious memoir. But I'm enjoying it.”



HILARY LEICHTER '07: *Terrace Story*

(ECCO/HARPERCOLLINS)

A young couple and their baby live in a cramped New York City apartment. Every time a certain friend visits, and only when that friend visits, their closet turns into a large, beautiful terrace. From there, *Terrace Story* becomes a multi-generational study of a family's past, present, and future, mixing surrealist elements with reality while examining life, death, and longing.

Based on an award-winning short story that **Hilary Leichter** wrote for *Harper's* magazine, *Terrace Story* was inspired by the tiny Brooklyn apartment Leichter and her husband lived in for seven years. (They moved in March 2020 to a larger space in Brooklyn.)

“I was claustrophobic,” says Leichter. “Maybe this is a New York City dream to have a little outdoor space. It's a particular fantasy I had, thinking how nice it would be to have room to spread out.” And in writing the book, she says, “I started to find that there are terraces and balconies everywhere in literature if you look for them.”

Leichter, who teaches creative writing and is the fiction advisor for creative writing majors at Columbia University, originally moved to New York City to pursue an acting career. An English major with a creative writing concentration at Haverford, she had always written poetry, plays, and stories, but hadn't considered writing full-time.

After going on auditions while working a variety of temp jobs and random gigs (which inspired her first



novel, *Temporary*), she decided to go to graduate school. “I was missing a community where I could write, share my work, read my peers’ work, and gush about books,” Leichter says. She earned her MFA from Columbia in 2012 and started teaching soon after.

Leichter has been adapting her first novel for television, but that’s on pause during the WGA strike. She also does freelance editing, and her essays, reviews, and short fiction have appeared in the *New Yorker*, the *New York*

Times, and other publications. “I’m closest to being a full-time writer than I ever imagined was possible, but I also love teaching,” Leichter says.

Terrace Story is the first novel in a two-book deal, and Leichter’s working on the next one. It’s about a downtown New York City restaurant that appears once every 25 years, for just one night. “It’s kind of a love letter to New York, the places we love, and how they seem to vanish over time. It’s historical fiction with a twist.”

ANDREW LIPSTEIN '10: *The Vegan*

(FARRAR, STRAUS ANDGIROUX/MACMILLAN)

A Brooklyn hedge fund manager on the brink of earning millions starts questioning nearly everything in his life, which starts to unravel after a deadly mistake he makes during a dinner party—a gathering meant to impress his wealthy next-door neighbors. His regret leads to a number of odd actions, including bonding with animals in the neighborhood, declaring himself vegan, and blowing up relationships with family and friends. It’s a fascinating story combining fantasy and reality while examining the role of regret, guilt, and longing.

“I wanted to create a character that has to deal with a moral debt,” says **Andrew Lipstein**, about his second novel, *The Vegan*, which is based in the same Brooklyn neighborhood, Cobble Hill, where he lives with his wife and son. “This book is about contemporary morality, how we tend to look at goodness and how society defines that, and how we make up for misdeeds in one part of our lives with extra virtue elsewhere ... that if we do something wrong, intentionally or unintentionally, we feel like we’re in debt.”

A mathematics major at Haverford, Lipstein took his first creative writing class in his senior year. “I really loved it and it opened the door for me. Before that, I didn’t think I could be creative in that way.” For the next decade, while working in advertising, the financial tech world, and now in product design, he wrote five novels, all of which failed to get published. Then his highly praised first novel, *Last Resort* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux/Macmillan), came out in 2022.

“I think of those [earlier] novels as an alternative MFA,” says Lipstein, who has a third book coming out

in 2025. “You’re learning about structure and plot as well as writing, and they were my education.”

While his first two published novels focus on morality, the next book looks at culture—but with a twist—in a story about a couple that takes parental leave from their jobs and goes to Copenhagen. “It’s a lot about masculinity and cross-cultural ideas about masculinity—a lot to do with my own experience,” says Lipstein, whose wife is Danish.

Now that he has a two-year-old son, writing’s become a bit harder, but he likes the work-family balance. Lipstein still works a day job that he loves—he’s a product designer for the brokerage app Robinhood. “I spend about three to four hours a day, very early or after work, writing. I don’t think I’d change a thing.”



PHOTOS: METTE LÜTZHÖFT JENSEN (ANDREW LIPSTEIN); RICHARD BERRY (J.S. BERRY)

I.S. BERRY '98: *The Peacock and the Sparrow*

(ATRIA BOOKS/SIMON & SCHUSTER)

Long after **Ilana (Greenstein) Berry** resigned from the CIA in 2008, her days as a spy haunted her. “It was very dark and it stayed with me,” admits Berry, who served six years with the agency, including a posting in a chaotic Baghdad station a year after the U.S. invasion. After alerting superiors to the problems she saw—and got little response—she decided that spying was not a good fit for her.

Berry got married, returned to northern Virginia and wrote a memoir, but when she submitted her book to the CIA for review, it was so heavily redacted that it was unpublishable. (The story of her struggles with that memoir appeared in the Spring 2010 issue of *Haverford* magazine.) Though she did eventually get most redactions lifted, she decided that a memoir was too personal—that fiction was a better route. Says Berry, “I subscribe to author Tim O’Brien’s adage that ‘fiction is the lie that helps us understand the truth.’”

In 2013, after returning from a year in Bahrain for her husband’s job, Berry, began writing the novel that would become *The Peacock and the Sparrow*. When her agent pitched the book to publishers, Berry set her sights on one editor in particular at Simon & Schuster, because he’d edited Joseph Kanon, a literary spy novelist she admired.

That editor was **Peter Borland '89**, who she didn’t know was a fellow Ford. “And then I read in Peter’s bio that he’d gone to Haverford, so I felt even more sure he’d be a great fit,” she says. “I was right!”

Her book is the fictional account of an aging spy whose final tour in Bahrain grows increasingly complicated as he becomes embroiled in murder, love, and the brewing Arab

Spring. On a larger level, says Berry, “It’s about the elusiveness of truth, the weight of unanswered questions, and the power and perils of belief.”

Berry’s goal was to write “an unflinchingly realistic



look at spying,” combining authentic tradecraft with fictional operations. “I applied the reality of my experience spying elsewhere to Bahrain. Much of [the novel] is based on my firsthand observations while living there of the insurrection, protests, and clashes between government forces and insurgents.”

“I tried to capture the essence of what it felt like to be a spy, which for me wasn’t pleasant,” she says. “In so many ways, writing fiction allowed me to explore and process the issues I’d faced as a spy better than the way nonfiction would,” she says. “The profession is based so much on manipulation and it really takes a toll on you after a while.”

Anything Berry writes has to be cleared by the CIA, and the new book, complete with boozy embassy parties and infidelity, breezed through with minimal changes.

Berry’s working on her next book, a spy novel with a female protagonist. “I had toyed with different genres but I fit into the groove of the spy novel,” she says. “I think that will be my lane for the time being.”

Anne Stein is a Chicago-based journalist and a regular contributor to Haverford’s alumni magazine. She is also a voracious reader and enjoyed kick-starting her summer reading with early releases of the four featured books.

