

In Memory of Tom Doyal

1945 to 2025

In the pages that follow, we are republishing a few articles about Tom from past issues of *Momentum*, the newsletter for Austin Prime Timers.

From the March 2017 *Momentum*

Tom Doyal, Storyteller

Tom Doyal will present our program on March 12th, reading from his award-winning short story collection entitled *Mambo Panties & Other Stories*. Tom is a long-time member of Prime Timers Austin. He says he is proudest of being the founder of Liberty Books, the first gay and lesbian bookstore in Austin, which opened on April 11, 1986.

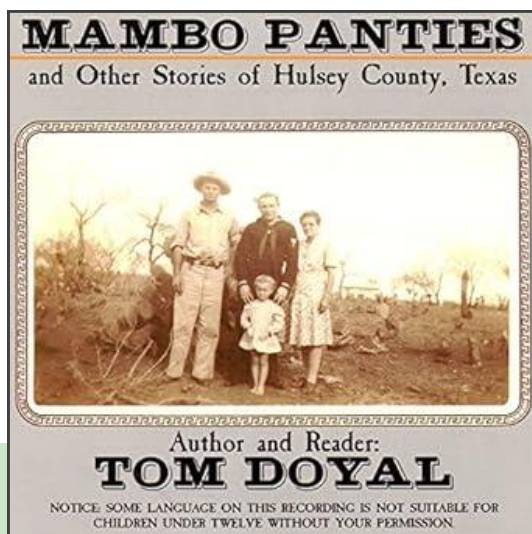
Tom has won second prize twice in the annual Chronicle short story contest and he has been a guest artist at the Dallas Museum of Art's annual Arts and Letters Live series on seven occasions.

His short story collection displays the voices he heard in his childhood in rural south Texas among working class people. The stories span Texas experience from the 1920s to 1983. In that time Texas went from being a rurally defined food and fiber producer to having three of the most populous cities in the US.

Tom holds a degree in Radio-Television-Film and a law degree from UT Austin.

He was one of the plaintiffs in the 21.06 case in 1989, trying to get the sodomy law declared unconstitutional. That case was lost in 1992, only to be reversed by the US Supreme Court in 2003 in a separate case styled *Lawrence v. State of Texas* out of Houston.

Tom is now at work on a novel.



The CD is no longer in production, but we have the CD audio files archived on our APT Google Drive at [Mambo Panties](#).



Tom's Story

by Leo Guerrero

It was early November 1965 when Tommy Royce Doyal signed up to get his military obligation out of the way. Bob Dylan's "Like A Rolling Stone" ruled the airwaves and changed popular music. Lester E. Palmer was mayor of Austin. President Johnson had two competing priorities occupying his time: his dream of a Great Society and his nightmare of the Vietnam War. This was the backdrop in America when Tom arrived at Fort Polk, Louisiana, for basic training.

You joined the Army because? I wanted to make the best of a bad situation. I was going to school in the daytime (U.T.) and worked the night shift at the Austin State Hospital. I was worn out. Plus, I wanted to visit Europe.

What did you learn the first few months in the Army? That sometimes the duties that were reported to be the worst, like KP or scrubbing toilets, weren't all that bad. Nobody screwed with you as long as you did your work.

Was it easy adjusting to military life? Mostly. I was tired of the hustle on the outside, and it was a relief not to have to think. All I had to do was what I was told.

You were a full-time college student and worked full-time. So, looking back, was the Army like a vacation? In a way, it was a vacation. It'd been a hustle living in a big college and big city. (Tom grew up in a small Texas town.) It was new and strange. I worked 11-7 at night. Then I went to school in the daytime. I would sleep in the evening as much as I could. I was exhausted. Then suddenly I had a job

with three hots and a cot. (He smiles.)

Did you have fun in Europe? YES! It was a dream come true. I had read about Europe. The history. I wanted to see it. When I went to Germany, I became a traveler. (Tom was stationed at Augsburg, Germany, for 40 months. This was during the Cold War, and Germany was divided East and West.) I visited Poland, France, Austria, Spain, Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic, Luxemburg, and Russia during the 50th anniversary of the Russian revolution.

The look on Tom's face as he sits in the corner of his home sofa underneath a lighted lampshade says he would very much enjoy seeing those places in Europe again. He talks nostalgically about it. But that is a whole other story.

One of Tom's hobbies is creative writing. He has written *Mambo Panties*, a collection of short stories. And, *A Lily in a Hostile Field*, a novel he hopes to publish someday. Currently, he is interested in writing an autobiography.

Why do you want to write an autobiography? I have a 76-year narrative to look back on, and I learn from looking at it closely from this vantage point. And maybe someone else can get some benefit out of it, too.

How long have you been in Prime Timers? Since about 1991.

Authors from Among Us, The Sequel

Excerpt from the program description:

...The accomplished presenters for this second edition will be Tom Doyal and Toby Johnson. Here's a prelude of what's in store for you from them:

APT member Tom Doyal presented for us a few years back, when he entertained us with some of his short stories. Since then, he has published a compilation of 22 of his very Texas tales in a book titled, *Mambo Panties & Other Stories*, which represent the sometimes funny, and other times poignant or even strange voices from his childhood. Of this work, the Literary Director of the Texas Book Festival wrote: "It's easy to tell that he is a

writer whose affection for his hardscrabble subject matter is boundless, contagious, and true to the patch of earth he knows so much about."

Tom also has an as yet unpublished novel titled, *A Lily in the Hostile Field*, which is about a gay man from a prosperous north Texas family who enrolls in the University of Texas in 1939 and gets caught up in the 1940s gay purge there (a little known fact of actual history). Tom plans to perform some of his work for us, as well as share his reasons for writing.



Austin Prime Timers Liberty Award

The following is the text of the presentation of the Liberty Award presented to Tom at the Thirty-fifth Austin Prime Timers Anniversary Dinner in 2023.



Many words have been spoken tonight to honor those who have received well-deserved awards for their contributions. But now, we turn our attention to a man of few spoken words yet an abundance of written words that weave captivating tales of South Texas folk wisdom. He is known for his quiet demeanor, dry humor, and unforgettable South Texas fictional characters who speak with a Texas twang that can make your horse giddy-up and happily pull your wagon to market.

All of this is wrapped in an unassuming façade, which, when we least expect it opens a fresh window on a conversation with one of his witticisms that leaves you saying, "Why the hell didn't I think of saying something so damn humorous and wise?"

This gentleman once described himself as one who imparts *'sexual mysteries to the exceptionally gullible, [who] dabbles in short story writing'*, and who once *"had a secret desire for "Sarah Bird to be his girlfriend,"* thus shucking all pretense of any sexual stereotype someone might try to pin on him.

But not content with a multidimensional description of himself, and wanting the world to know that he is no ordinary being who would fit in a box the world might fashion for him, he wanted the world to know that he was actually a *'Romanian princeling abandoned by gypsies on a doorstep of South Texas white trash.'*

So now you think you might know the man I'm talking about. But maybe you don't. Because what most of us do not know about him is his historic

contribution to the LGBTQ community.

This inaugural award we present tonight bears a name as unique as the man receiving it. This unique, one-time-only *Austin Prime Timers Liberty Award* is given in recognition of the contributions of the remarkably talented Mr. Tom Doyal, Esq.

The title of this award was chosen in recognition of his life and work and echoes back to 1986 when Tom founded the *Liberty Book Store* here in Austin. That bookstore's shelves not only held a treasury of books containing LGBTQ material, it also provided fellowship and a sense of belonging not easily experienced by the LGBTQ community in Austin 37 years ago.

Tom, we take immense pride tonight in bestowing this honor upon you in recognition of your monumental contributions to the LGBTQ Community. Your tireless work, both personally and legally, in the landmark 1994 *Morales v. Texas* sodomy law challenge that paved the way for the U.S. Supreme Court's historic 2003 decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*, overturning archaic sodomy laws in Texas and eventually extending this vital change to the sodomy laws of other states.

1. The sodomy statute became part of the Texas Penal Code in 1860, branding as criminal the "abominable and detestable crime against nature" with sentences ranging from five to fifteen years.

2. Over the years, the statute underwent minor adjustments until 1943, when it was expanded to outlaw oral and anal sex for both heterosexual and homosexual couples, even including a reference to "man and beast."
3. In 1974, heterosexual couples were [finally] liberated from the constraints of the sodomy law in their bedrooms, but the same freedom was denied to gay and lesbian couples.
4. In 1993, the legislative conversation around anal sex reached absurdity when Texas Representative Danburg asked Rep Warren Chisum, "If my husband and I were having sex and it touched my anus, do I need to go turn myself in to some health official?" Chisum wittily responded, "I suggest your husband go see a doctor about his aim." (Though we laugh now, it was a different story back then for men and women, gay and straight).

Tom, your life-altering contribution to the LGBTQ community, alongside other passionate advocates for sexual freedom, paved the way for the Supreme Court's landmark decision that now shapes our daily lives. The historic Supreme Court decision in which you were a participant now enables us to freely embrace our identity at pool parties, in bowling leagues, during coffee gatherings, monthly speaker presentations, dinners out, and other social expressions and lets us simply be ourselves.

Tom Doyal, Esq., we extend our heartfelt thanks for your unwavering tenacity, courage, and dedication in securing for us and for future generations the **Liberty** to express our sexuality in harmony with our fundamental nature.



Tom in 2000, from [Is It Curtains for the 140-Year-Old Sodomy Statute? - The Austin Chronicle](#)