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*Modern Living in the Old South*

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## MY SOUTHERN ROOTS

*Bestselling young adult writers from Charleston's YALLFest share how Dixie is ingrained in their art*

Every autumn for the last three years, 50 bestselling young adult writers from across the country have converged on the streets of Charleston to celebrate the annual YALLFest book festival, a grassroots effort led by Jonathan Sanchez, local author and owner of Upper King Street's Blue Bicycle Books, to promote literacy and love of the written word. The largest festival in the South for Young Adult (YA) literature, thousands of fans and bibliophiles, young and old, have the opportunity to meet their favorite authors, attend panels and talks, and get connected with literary vendors and literacy groups.

Most impressive of all? The entire event is nearly free. Only the "Smackdown" finale and the keynote talk—this year featuring *New York Times* bestselling author, Veronica Roth (*Divergent*)—require a ticket. Both events sold out.

While they were here, we asked some of the South's rising literary stars to share with us how their Southern roots influence their writing. Here's what they had to say:



### CARRIE RYAN

Growing up in South Carolina I learned that setting is as much a character in any story as people, and what makes a setting stand out is the details. There's such a sensory richness to draw from in the South—the details that make a scene feel fuller and rounder, such as the sound of cicadas in a humid summer evening, the smell of the marsh on a fall afternoon, or the taste of she-crab soup during a Sunday brunch. There's an old adage that a writer should write what she knows, and for me this means drawing on the things that surrounded me growing up to make a story feel more authentic. My first short story was inspired by a crab shell from Pawleys Island painted to look like an angel, and I set my first novel in the woods I'd grown up exploring as a kid. To me, these are the things that ground a story and give it a history that extends beyond the pages; these are the things that make a story feel real, even when you know it's not. [www.carrieryan.com](http://www.carrieryan.com)

*"There's such a sensory richness to draw from in the South."*



### DAVID MACINNIS GILL

My southern roots can be seen best in the dialogue of my characters, as well as their sense of justice. My first published short stories were in Southern literary magazines, and my characters were drawn from many of the stories that I heard as a child growing up in Tennessee. Later, my novels featured Southern characters, notably Bug from my debut novel, *Soul Enchilada*. Bug was drawn from a compilation of the interesting and flamboyant students that I used to teach when I was a high school teacher. She is the embodiment of everything Southern that I can think of. The influence of my roots is still seen in the characters from my science fiction series, *Blackhole Sun*. The characters, even though they are on Mars, had the same sense of justice that I grew up with in the South. They also have a heaping helping of the humor that was common in my family growing up. [www.davidmacinnisgill.com](http://www.davidmacinnisgill.com)

*"...my characters were drawn from many of the stories that I heard as a child growing up in Tennessee."*

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# Field Guide



## BRENDAN REICHS

Everything I've ever written has been set in the South. I grew up in Charlotte; I went to college in Winston-Salem; and I never moved farther north than a six-year stint in Washington, DC. Though I have family in the lovely city of Chicago, and visit frequently, I just can't imagine living anywhere so far north, so cold, or so big. I confess to having married a Massachusetts girl, but she came down here first. I'm back in Charlotte now, where I belong. In the *Virals* novels, we've tried very hard to make the city of Charleston itself a major character in the series, using its various historical, tropical, and unique real-world settings as indispensable components of the stories we are trying to tell. One of my favorite things to do in the books is to expose our main character, Tory Brennan—a girl born in Massachusetts, but recently relocated to South Carolina—to something new and distinctly Lowcountry. It's a great way to share a distinctly Southern style of living with our audience—both the good things and the not-so-great. I've always been told to "write what you know." Well, I know the South, and it permeates the *Virals* series through and through. [www.brendanreichs.com](http://www.brendanreichs.com)

*"I just can't imagine living anywhere so far north."*



## STEPHANIE PERKINS

Only one of my characters—*Anna from Anna and the French Kiss*—is from the South, but I try to write that special brand of open Southern kindness into every one of them. Especially the heroes! In romantic fiction, kindness is often undervalued as a desirable or sexy trait. What a shame! I love that about our part of the country.

[www.stephanieperkins.com](http://www.stephanieperkins.com)

*"I try to write that special brand of open Southern kindness into every one of them[characters]."*



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