



*The Molly Ivins Library* by Karen Sigler



Molly Ivins by Alan Pogue © 1993

For decades, former *Texas Observer* editor and nationally syndicated columnist Molly Ivins (1944-2007) spoke her mind in articles about politics, Texas and anything else that struck her sharp-witted fancy. She died of breast cancer on Jan. 31, 2007, at age 62. Her obituary in the *Texas Observer* summed up the loss: "With Molly's death we have lost someone we hold dear. What she has left behind we will hold dearer still." This has become particularly true for Texas State's Wittliff Collections, which received the generous donation of her personal library from her brother Andrew Ivins.

In May 2007, Wittliff Collections staff gathered Ivins' books from her Austin home and packed them in more than 80 boxes. When the boxes were opened for inventory, it was discovered that a good number of the books bore inscriptions revealing the impact Ivins had on others and their admiration for her. Many of the authors she knew – as well as those she didn't – acknowledged her fearlessness, passion and bons mots, as well as her influence on their writing or their lives.

As the catalog librarian, I have completed the inventory of the Molly Ivins Library, and we will publish a detailed bibliography eventually. The final count of books and ephemera stands at over 3,560. We assessed each book to establish a complete listing of titles and any unique features (i.e., inscriptions, notations, commentary) contained within them. As titles were inventoried then separated and grouped into subject areas, the expansive range of Ivins' interests became apparent. The topics range from poodles to politics, with plenty of biographies, historical fiction and humor in between. One surprise was the enormous number of mysteries she accumulated – almost a thousand.

In April 2008, the Wittliff Collections opened a three-month exhibition that showcased the wide divergence of books Ivins acquired through personal purchases and as gifts from admirers, publishers and fellow writers. Selections of books from her library were presented against the backdrop of a large photo of one of her rooms as it appeared during the packing phase. Biographical information, assorted photo-

graphs, copies of her published books, a draft of a book review, and books illustrating her editing technique illuminated her career. Other highlights included Ivins' personal notations and commentary, as well as inscriptions by other authors who admired and were inspired by her ability to speak candidly and hold government accountable, while still retaining her sense of humor.

Not a passive reader, Ivins marked or notated what interested her. She bracketed specific phrases, checked or underlined certain passages, and used triple exclamation points with comments when something struck a chord. For instance,



in a passage describing Napoleon's anxiety about the death of his father, Carlos, she wrote "Wrong!" in addition to questioning another passage with "so y [sic] is this relevant? And who is this idiot?" The time Ivins spent living in France seems to have influenced her opinions on its history and its leaders.

The range of inscriptions in her books is as varied as her collection. Each one conveys the unique qualities that endeared her to so many. Of particular note is an inscription by writer Bud Shrake in a copy of his novel *The Borderland*: "Dear Molly: I have always considered you a formidable and indestructible presence. The Red Queen has picked on the wrong sailor in this saloon. May you be blessed with a quick victory." The Red

Queen Shrake refers to is cancer; in 1999, Ivins was going through her first, successful fight with the disease that finally ended her life eight years later. Perhaps ironically, Shrake himself died of cancer in May.

Once cataloged, each book will be permanently designated as part of the Molly Ivins Personal Library Collection with a memorial bookplate as well as a tracing tag in the library's online database. Books falling within the genres of the Wittliff's Southwestern Writers Collection and those with special inscriptions or markings will be housed in that collection's archives and available for reading-room use. Texas State students and others who request these

Bookshelves in Molly Ivins's Austin home, on the day of packing by Wittliff Collections staff, May 7, 2007

books may find themselves reading along with Ivins, following her notes, underlines, exclamation points, circled words and expressive margin commentary. The remainder of the collection will be incorporated into the main library stacks for the public to enjoy.

The Molly (Mary Tyler) Ivins Papers are held at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin. ★

*Karen Sigler is catalog librarian for the Wittliff Collections.*