From the time he learned to read, Preston Lewis always wanted to be an author and tell stories. Once he mastered that skill, he fell in love with American history, particularly the century between 1849 and 1949. That period extends from the California Gold Rush to the rise of the United States as the dominant world power at the end of World War II.

His works of fiction and nonfiction over the years have combined his desire to write with his love of American history and its mother lode of human stories. In the process, he built up a varied and eclectic body of work, ranging from traditional Westerns to historical novels to comic Westerns.

Lewis’s literary accomplishments in 2025 earned him the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Will Rogers Medallion Awards and in 2021 qualified him for induction into the prestigious Texas Institute of Letters.

His nonfiction works have covered everything from lesser-known aspects of frontier history to family memoirs to artificial intelligence. He is an authority on cats in the Old West as well as the lives of frontier children.

“Once I discovered something interesting, often by accident, I always had to write about it,” Lewis said. “Even in my early traditional novels, I tried to ground them in some aspect his Old West history, often with an odd take or plot twist.”

His early works were generally set in his native west Texas or in neighboring New Mexico before he expanded his fictional horizons to other places from Indian Territory to Dakota Territory or from Arizona to Alaska. A childhood trip to Lincoln, New Mexico, spawned his fascination with the Old West and its colorful characters.

“When I was ten years old, my parents took my brother and me to Lincoln and the old county courthouse. There, I walked up stairs Billy the Kid had trod and at the foot of the stairwell saw a bullet hole believed to have been punctured during his dramatic jailhouse escape. I was hooked on Western history. To this day, Billy the Kid remains my favorite Old West character.”

Of his almost 60 books, four have featured Billy the Kid, starting with *The Demise of Billy the Kid*, the first book in his comic Western series *The Memoirs of H.H. Lomax*. The trio of books in his *Three Rivers Series*—*Rio Ruidoso*, *Rio Bonito* and *Rio Hondo*—cover the years before, during and after the Lincoln County War in which the Kid played such a pivotal role. *Rio Hondo* won the Will Rogers Gold Medallion for traditional Westerns in 2023.

Of the eight books in his comic Lomax series, seven have won national writing awards. Oddly enough only the series debut novel on his beloved Billy the Kid failed to earn any recognition. *The Redemption of Jesse James* and *Mix-Up at the O.K. Corral* were both Spur Finalists from Western Writers of America (WWA). *Bluster’s Last Stand*, *First Herd to Abilene* and *Outlaw West of the Pecos* each received a Will Rogers Gold Medallion for western humor while *North to Alaska* took a silver medallion and *Call of the Wilde* earned a bronze medallion.

In 2024 his standalone comic Western *The Fleecing of Fort Griffin* was a Western category finalist in the American Legacy Book Awards for works of literary merit published between 2014 and 2024.

“I never started out to write comic Westerns,” Lewis said, “until an editor at Bantam told me I wrote funny, which is not necessarily what you want to hear from your editor. When I inquired what he meant, he told me that my plots always had unusual twists that lent themselves to funny situations. When he offered me a contract to write three comic novels in the Lomax series, I jumped at the chance and thoroughly enjoyed working in the humorous realm.”

Even so, his first love has always been historical novels well-grounded in American history. His novel *Blood of Texas* on the Texas Revolution earned him a WWA Spur Award in 1996. In May 2025 he is scheduled to release what he calls his *magnum opus* titled *Too Much the Lion: A Novel of the Battle of Franklin*. The historical novel follows the lives of a dozen generals, soldiers, citizens and slaves in the five days leading up to the pivotal Tennessee encounter and its tragic aftermath. *Kirkus Reviews* calls *Too Much the Lion* “a fast-paced, well-researched work that will particularly appeal to military history enthusiasts.”

“As a child I became fascinated with the Civil War during the celebration of the event’s Centennial between 1961 and 1965,” Lewis said. “The Civil War remains the great American tragedy, a perpetual fount of human stories of heroism and pathos, but living in west Texas I found it easier to write about what I knew, so I focused on the Old West.”

In retirement, Lewis said he had time to develop his ideas and research the story of the Battle of Franklin before interpreting it in a fictional account. He said he might have another Civil War novel in him, once he sees the reception of *Too Much the Lion*.

He believes the Battle of Franklin is one of the great untold stories of the Civil War, and story has always been the focus of his writing.

“When I started writing Westerns back in the 1970s, I scoured the bookstores for copies of all Spur Award winners from the founding of WWA up to that time. I read them all, looking for the secret to success. Some authors wrote with a literary, almost poetic, style while others were more prosaic in their prose. I found no common ground in their technique or in their style, the only consistent quality was that they were all great stories. That’s what I’ve tried to focus on in my fiction and nonfiction writing.”

That approach fits well with Lewis’s journalism education at Baylor University. He learned from David McHam, perhaps the greatest and longest-serving journalism professor in the history of Texas, teaching at four universities in the state during his 54-year-career.

“McHam, as the students called him, was the perfect blend of the practical and the intellectual in his pedagogy and he always stressed the importance of story, whether you were writing a short obituary or a major Sunday magazine feature. He set the writing foundation for my success.”

As for a fiction-writing mentor, Lewis points to late bestselling novelist Jeanne Williams, who took him under her wing early in his novelist days as she did many other Western writers of his generation. She helped shape his fiction, but more importantly provided encouragement during some dark and frustrating times early in his career.

“Jeanne once told me she had seen a lot of talented writers over the years, but in the long run her observation was that perseverance always trumped talent.”

“We all stand on the shoulders of our writing predecessors, and McHam and Jeanne provided the tools upon which I owe my success.”