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Date: May 25, 2023

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### **Winners of the 2023 Western Canada Jewish Book Awards announced last night in celebratory event.**

Vancouver, BC - The fourth edition of the Western Canada Jewish Book Awards, presented by the Cherie Smith JCC Jewish Book Festival in Vancouver ended last night on a high-note with the announcement of the winners in 6 awards categories, in a live event. Introducing the evening, Daniella Givon, Chair of the Awards committee, proudly described the initial idea and how it came to fruition and thanked all the sponsors and participants for the incredibly high caliber and diversity of submissions. Six different presenters introduced the shortlisted authors in each category and announced the winner.

And the winners are....

**Category: Fiction – the Nancy Richler Memorial Prize for Fiction**

**SIMON CHOA-JOHNSTON: *House of Daughters***

Based on the author's own family, *The House of Daughters* is a stand-alone sequel to the Globe and Mail bestseller, *The House of Wives*. This multi-generational family saga opens when Emanuel Belilios, a wealthy Jewish opium oligarch, suddenly leaves Hong Kong, and his junior-wife, Pearl blames Semah, the senior-wife. Pearl kicks Semah out of the mansion where the polyamorous trio had lived, and shuns everyone including her daughter. With unforgettable characters and high drama, this is a masterful story of passions and regrets, wealth and survival, set in Eurasian Hong Kong's high society.

SIMON CHOA-JOHNSTON was born in Hong Kong and educated in Canada. He studied theatre in New York, and worked in Canada for over thirty years as an artistic director, director and playwright.

**Category: Non-Fiction - the Pinsky Givon Family Prize**

**ALAN TWIGG (ed.) - *Gidal: The Unusual Friendship of Yosef Wosk and Tim Gidal***

An intimate selection of letters between Tim Gidal, a pioneering force in photojournalism, and Vancouver scholar and art collector Yosef Wosk.

NACHUM TIM GIDAL, Jewish pioneer of modern photojournalism, began taking photographs in the late 1920s, at a time when technological advances made equipment more compact and affordable than ever before. With his handheld Leica, Gidal was able to travel in interwar Europe, capturing rare images of Polish Jews prior to the annihilation of the Holocaust.

YOSEF WOSK is a rabbi, philanthropist, educator, author, scholar, community leader and prominent figure in the BC arts scene. Wosk first encountered Gidal's work in the photo *Night of the Kabbalist* in a magazine in 1991 and, captivated, was determined to meet the photographer on an upcoming sabbatical in Israel. He eventually managed to meet the person who he would later consider his close friend, teacher, and confidant. On one level, the letters—selected by Twigg from the hundreds the friends exchanged over two decades— memorialize Gidal as an artist, scholar, historian of photography and “hero among the Jewish people.” However, they also capture the essence of Gidal and Wosk's friendship.

ALAN TWIGG was the founder and editor of BC BookWorld, Canada's largest-circulating publication about books. He is the author of 20 books to date, including *Out of Hiding: Holocaust Literature of British Columbia* and a recipient of the Order of Canada.

**Category: Memoir/Biography – the Cindy Roadburg Memorial Prize**

**MARSHA LEDERMAN – *Kiss the Red Stairs: The Holocaust, Once Removed***

*Kiss the Red Stairs* is a compelling, fascinating memoir of Holocaust survival, intergenerational trauma, divorce and discovery that will guide readers through several lifetimes of monumental change. Award-winning journalist Marsha Lederman delves into her parents' Holocaust stories in the wake of her own divorce, investigating how trauma migrates through generations with empathy, humour, and resilience. Marsha was five when a simple question led to a horrifying answer. Sitting in her kitchen, she asked her mother why she didn't have any grandparents. Her mother told her the truth: the Holocaust.

Decades later, her parents dead and herself a mother to a young son, Marsha begins to wonder how much history has shaped her own life. Gripped by a need to understand the trauma they suffered, she begins her own journey into the past to tell her family's stories of loss and resilience.

MARSHA LEDERMAN is a columnist with The Globe and Mail, based in Vancouver. An award-winning journalist, she was previously The Globe's Western Arts Correspondent and prior to that, she worked for CBC Radio, mostly in Toronto.

**Category: Children & Youth - the Diamond Foundation Prize**

**ROBBIE WAISMAN (with SUSAN McCLELLAND) – *Boy from Buchenwald***

It was 1945 and Romek Wajzman had just been liberated from Buchenwald, a brutal concentration camp where more than 60,000 people were killed. He was starving, tortured, and had no idea where his family was—let alone if they were alive. Along with 472 other boys, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel, these teens were dubbed “The Buchenwald Boys.” They were angry at the world for their abuse,

and turned to violence: stealing, fighting, and struggling for power. Few thought they would ever be able to lead functional lives again. But everything changed for Romek and the other boys when Albert Einstein and Rabbi Herschel Schacter brought them to a home for rehabilitation.

Romek Wajzman, now ROBBIE WAISMAN, humanitarian and Governor General award recipient, shares his remarkable story of transforming pain into resiliency and overcoming incredible loss to find incredible joy. He is a successful businessman, father, grandfather and beloved international speaker on the topics of the Holocaust, healing, reconciliation and forgiveness.

**Category: Poetry - the Betty Averbach Foundation Prize**

**TOM WAYMAN – *Watching a Man Break a Dog’s Back: Poems for a Dark Time***

*Watching a Man Break a Dog’s Back* explores the question of how to live in a natural landscape that offers beauty while being consumed by industry, and in an economy that offers material benefits while denying dignity, meaning and a voice to many in order to satisfy the outsized appetites of the few. A *cri de coeur* from a poet who has long celebrated the voices of working people, the collection also grapples with why “anyone, in this era so profoundly lacking in grace, might want to make poems—or any kind of art.” The poet brings the perspective of age to our current troubled existence, with the reminder that as a society and as individuals we’ve faced perilous times before, and that our shared mortality links us more than circumstances and politics divide us.

TOM WAYMAN was named a Vancouver, BC Literary Landmark in 2015. He has published nearly two dozens books of poems, four collections of critical essays and four books of prose fiction. He was the recipient of the Western Canada Jewish Book Award for Fiction in the 2016 inaugural edition.

**Category: Holocaust - the Kahn Family Foundation Prize**

**CHARLOTTE SCHALLIÉ (ed.) with Miriam Libicki, Barbara Yelin, Gilad Seliktar (ill.)**  
***But I Live: Three Stories of Child Survivors of the Holocaust***

Touted as “the most powerful collection of non-fiction graphic novellas of the Holocaust since Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*” - *But I Live* is an intimate co-creation of three graphic novelists and four Holocaust survivors.

David Schaffer and his family survived in Romania due to their refusal to obey Nazi collaborators. In the Netherlands, brothers Nico and Rolf Kamp were hidden by the Dutch resistance in 13 different places. Through the story of Emmie Arbel, a child survivor of the Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps, we see the lifelong trauma inflicted by the Holocaust. To complement these hauntingly beautiful visual depictions, the book includes historical essays, a postscript from the artists, and words of the survivors.

CHARLOTTE SCHALLIÉ (editor) is a professor and chair in the Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies at the University of Victoria.

MIRIAM LIBICKI (Vancouver) holds an MFA in Creative Writing and is an award-winning graphic novelist. She is the author of *Towards a Hot Jew* (2017 Vine Award for Canadian Jewish Literature) and many nonfiction comics.

BARBARA YELIN (Munich) studied illustration and has worked as a comics artist for newspapers and international anthologies. She published the award-winning graphic novel *Irmina*.

GILAD SELIKTAR (Israel) is an acclaimed graphic novelist and children’s book illustrator whose works are published in Israel and throughout the world.

Each category in the 2023 Western Canada Jewish Book Awards was assessed by 5 jurors, in different configurations, from the following wonderful professionals:

**Linda Bonder** is a retired Librarian who worked in a Hebrew day school for 27 years, and concurrently in a public Library for 25 years.

**Susanna Egan** is Professor Emeritus of literatures in English from UBC, with research focused on autobiography and a particular interest in Jewish and Holocaust memoir.

**Dave Margoshes** writes fiction, short and long, and poetry on a farm west of Saskatoon. Amongst his latest publications is his collection of linked short stories *A Book of Great Worth*, and the book of poetry *A Calendar of Reckoning*.

**Norman Ravvin** is a writer, teacher and critic living in Montreal. His titles include *Lola by Night*, *The Joyful Child* and *The Girl Who Stole Everything*. For 12 years he chaired the Concordia University Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies.

**Rhea Tregobov** is the author of fiction, poetry and children's picture books and a retired professor in the UBC Creative Writing Program. Her first novel, *The Knife Sharpener's Bell*, won the J.I. Segal Award. Her novel *Rue des Rosiers* won the 2020 Nancy Richler Prize for Fiction in the WCJB Awards.

**Elisabeth Kushner** is a librarian and writer living in Vancouver. She is the author of *The Purim Superhero*, published by Kar-Ben and winner of the Keshet contest for the first LGBTQ and Jewish-themed picture book.

**Karen Corrin** is the former head librarian of the Isaac Waldman Jewish Public Library at the JCC.

**Nicole Nozick** is the former Executive Director of the Vancouver Writers Fest and previously Director of the JCC Jewish Book Festival.

**Anita Brown** is a library professional working with the Isaac Waldman Jewish Public Library at the JCC.

After moving acceptance speeches and readings from the authors, Dana Camil Hewitt, Director of the JCC Jewish Book Festival concluded the evening thanking the sponsors, the judges, the awards committee and the extended hybrid audience and inviting everyone to purchase and enjoy the books.

#### BACKGROUND

The Western Canada Jewish Book Awards are part of the Cherie Smith JCC Jewish Book Festival in Vancouver. This initiative is designed to celebrate excellence in writing on Jewish themes / subjects and showcase the achievements of authors who reside West of the Ontario/Manitoba border, including the Northern regions. For the 2023 awards, books published in 2020, 2021 and 2022 were accepted. Submissions were invited in the categories: Fiction, Non-Fiction, Memoir/Biography, Poetry, Children/Youth, Holocaust.

#### ABOUT THE CHERIE SMITH JCC JEWISH BOOK FESTIVAL

The Cherie Smith JCC Jewish Book Festival is one of Vancouver's leading cultural and literary events, attracting a large and varied audience of over 4,000 people of all ages. This highly popular community-

wide event brings together prominent and emerging Jewish writers as well as non-Jewish writers with Jewish interest themes in literature, the arts, philosophy, history and current events over 5-6 days in February. The 39th annual Cherie Smith JCC Jewish Book Festival will take place between February 10-15, 2024.