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ATTENTION: BOOKS, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT EDITORS

Holocaust survivor finds her voice at 80 to win 2012 Canadian Jewish Book Award for Poetry

TORONTO, April 25, 2012 – A book of poetry published under a pseudonym by an 80-year old Holocaust survivor has won the **2012 Helen and Stan Vine Canadian Jewish Book Award** in the Poetry category.

The Helen and Stan Vine Canadian Jewish Book Awards is a program of the **Koffler Centre of the Arts**.

S. Weilbach's *Singing in the Darktime: A Childhood Memoir in Poetry and Prose* retrieves fragmentary memories of the author's childhood on a dairy farm in Germany, where she formed a strong attachment to the natural world, and of her gradual ostracism by classmates and teachers as anti-Jewish laws were introduced. She remembers, all from a child's perspective, her family's flight from Germany and abortive escape from Europe aboard the refugee ship *St. Louis*, which was refused the right to land by Cuba, the United States and Canada and forced to turn back.

S. Weilbach is the pseudonym of a Vancouver-based writer, who appeared on the passenger list of the *St. Louis* as Suzanne Weil, her name as a child. The book is her first published work. The jury praised *Singing from the Darktime* for "seamlessly marrying loss with loveliness," noting that "Weilbach's painterly, rhythmic verse demonstrates what the poet herself perceived, that 'There's beauty that comes linked with pain.'"

In the Fiction category, the prize goes to *The Free World* by **David Bezmozgis**, a second win for this gifted young Toronto author who previously won the prize in 2005 for his book *Natasha and Other Stories*. Bezmozgis' debut novel, the story of three generations of a Latvian Jewish family awaiting admittance to Canada, had been shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize and the Governor General's Award. The jury lauded the author's skillful blending of the character's personal stories with the larger theme of the bitter history of Soviet Jewry.

The winner for best memoir is **Richard Marceau's** *Juif, une histoire québécoise (A Québec Jew)*. Marceau – one-time Member of Parliament for the Bloc Québécois – tells the story of his personal journey from a traditional Catholic family to his discovery of and conversion to Judaism, all played out over the backdrop of Québec politics. The book was published by Éditions du Marais last year in two versions, one in English and one in French. Marceau lives in Gatineau, Québec.

Marceau's was not the only book from Québec that the jury recognized. In the History category, it selected the story of Canada's earliest Jewish settlers, the Hart family, written by Québec City's **Denis Vaugeois**. His beautifully illustrated and thoroughly researched study *Les Premiers Juifs d'Amérique (1760-1860)* exists only in French, but the jury hopes that winning this prize will lead to its eventual English release.

Nine winners were selected from approximately 60 submissions of books with significant Jewish content by Canadian authors published in 2011. **Lesley Simpson** of Toronto won for her picture book *Yuvi's Candy Tree* in the Youth Literature category; in the Yiddish category, Ottawa-based **Rebecca Margolis** for *Jewish Roots, Canadian Soil: Yiddish Culture in Montreal 1905-1945*; Vancouver's **Fraidie Martz** and **Andrew Wilson** for *Fiery Soul: The Life and Theatrical Times of John Hirsch* for Biography; **Eli Pfefferkorn** of Toronto for *The Muselmann at the Watercooler* in the Holocaust category; and for

Scholarship, *Jewish People, Yiddish Nation: Noah Prylucki and the Folkists in Poland* by **Kalman Weiser** from Toronto.

“The Helen and Stan Vine Canadian Jewish Book Awards honour important contributions to writing on Jewish-related subjects, stimulate publishing in Canada on Jewish subjects, and advance the careers of writers of Jewish themes and content,” said **Lori Starr**, Executive Director, Koffler Centre of the Arts and Vice President for Culture, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto. “The Koffler Centre of the Arts is thrilled to present these important awards which celebrate the very best in Canadian Jewish literature.”

“This year’s nine award-winning books truly reflect the impact Jewish culture has had on all aspects of Canadian society,” added **Judy Stoffman**, writer and critic, former book review editor and publishing reporter at the *Toronto Star*. Stoffman chaired the distinguished judging panel that includes writers, academics, editors and experts in the literary field. This year’s jury members are **Barbara Berson, Adam Fuerstenberg, Marjorie Gann, Judith Ghert, Alain Goldschläger, Sara R. Horowitz, Carla Lancit, Michael Posner, and Edward Trapunski.**

The Helen and Stan Vine Canadian Jewish Book Awards is the closing night event of the **Toronto Jewish Book Festival**. The Awards ceremony takes place in Toronto on **Thursday, June 7 at 8 PM** at the **Bram & Bluma Appel Salon at the Toronto Reference Library, 789 Yonge Street.**

Winning authors will be available for a book-signing after the ceremony. The award-winning titles will all be available for purchase during the run of the Toronto Jewish Book Festival, June 4 – 7, 2012.

Full details on the event and all the winners are available at www.kofflerarts.org

Interviews with Executive Director Lori Star, Jury Chair Judy Stoffman, and/or any of the winning authors can be arranged through the Koffler Centre of the Arts. Media contact information is below.

The 2012 winners are:

BIOGRAPHY

Fraidie Martz and Andrew Wilson, *A Fiery Soul: The Life and Theatrical Times of John Hirsch* (Véhicule Press)

FICTION

David Bezmozgis, *The Free World* (HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.)

HISTORY

Denis Vaugeois, *Les Premiers Juifs D’Amérique 1760-1860: L’extraordinaire histoire de la famille Hart* (Septentrion)

HOLOCAUST LITERATURE

Eli Pfefferkorn, *The Muselmann at the Water Cooler* (Academic Studies Press)

MEMOIR

Richard Marceau, *Juif, Une Histoire Québécoise* (Éditions Du Marais)

Also published in English as *A Quebec Jew*, adapted and translated by Lori Beckerman and Richard Marceau

POETRY

S. Weilbach, *Singing in the Darktime: A Childhood Memoir in Poetry and Prose* (McGill-Queen’s University Press)

SCHOLARSHIP

Kalman Weiser, *Jewish People, Yiddish Nation: Noah Prylucki and the Folkists in Poland* (University of Toronto Press)

YIDDISH

Rebecca Margolis, *Jewish Roots, Canadian Soil: Yiddish Culture in Montreal, 1905-1945* (McGill-Queen's University Press)

YOUTH LITERATURE

Lesley Simpson, *Yuvi's Candy Tree* (Kar-Ben Publishing)

Support for the Helen and Stan Vine Canadian Jewish Book Awards is provided by the **Jewish Foundation of Greater Toronto**.

Author biographies, winning book descriptions, citations, jury list and biographies are posted on the Koffler website at www.kofflerarts.org

About the Koffler Centre of the Arts

Koffler Centre of the Arts is Canada's only cutting-edge contemporary, multidisciplinary Jewish cultural institution. It has a broad mandate to serve all, and present a wide range of artistic programs through a global lens in a specifically Canadian context.

The Koffler Centre of the Arts is an agency of the **UJA Federation of Greater Toronto**.

Planning is underway on a brand new, architecturally innovative Koffler Centre of the Arts on the Sherman Campus at Bathurst and Sheppard. In July 2009, the Koffler's administrative offices and all classes opened in the Prosserman JCC on the Sherman Campus. Starting in early 2013, Koffler Gallery exhibitions and related programs will be based at Artscape YOUNGplace in downtown Toronto. Koffler programs will continue at the Prosserman JCC on Sherman Campus and will debut at the new Schwartz/Reisman Centre on Lebovic Campus in Vaughan also in fall 2012.

Koffler Centre of the Arts acknowledges the support of Cultural Season Sponsor **CIBC Wood Gundy**, Media Partner **National Post**, the **Ontario Arts Council** through the Community and Multidisciplinary Arts Organizations Program, our patrons and members. The Koffler Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support the City of Toronto through the **Toronto Arts Council**, the **Ontario Arts Council** and the **Canada Council for the Arts**.

KOFFLER ON THE ROAD!

Watch for Koffler programs off-site around Toronto! As it prepares for its new facility to be completed, the Koffler Centre of the Arts continues to program exhibitions, events, performances, classes and workshops at the Prosserman JCC on Sherman Campus, the Schwartz/Reisman Centre on Lebovic Campus and at various downtown sites in Toronto. Go to www.kofflerarts.org for details and watch for Koffler events in *your* neighbourhood!

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Media Contact

Tony Hewer, Head of Communications and Marketing
Koffler Centre of the Arts
4588 Bathurst Street | Toronto | ON | M2R 1W6
t: 416.638.1881 x 4228 | f: 416.636.5813
e: thewer@kofflerarts.org | w: www.kofflerarts.org