

Alberta readers can choose a winner

Jurors picked to whittle list for lucrative award

BY RICHARD HELM, EDMONTON JOURNAL JANUARY 29, 2010 6:44 AM



Myrna Kostash structures her account of events at Frog Lake in 1885 as a series of dialogues, both fictional and real.

Photograph by: Larry Wong, The Journal , File, Freelance

The numbers are starting to line up for the inaugural Alberta Readers' Choice Award, a prize that comes with a prodigious number of its own. The \$10,000 purse equals that of the annual Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction.

Five jurors are now in place to keep this bookish beauty pageant in order. They are Senator and jazz great Tommy Banks; broadcaster and author Fil Fraser; Red Deer Mayor Morris Flewwelling; Calgary bookstore owner Simone Lee; and local literary advocate Laurie Greenwood.

The five now have 10 books before them to consider, whittled down from an initial list of some 225 titles released by Alberta-based publishers in 2009. The jury's job is to trim that roster of contenders by half, then release the short list of five titles for a public vote, during March and April, to determine the winner. Each of the jurors has also been encouraged to choose a title to champion during the public voting

phase.

Do not be surprised if you've never heard of any of these books, dear readers. That's sort of the reason the Edmonton Public Library and the Book Publishers Association of Alberta decided to create this award in the first place. The stated goal is to promote the work of Alberta authors and publishers and encourage Alberta readers to support literary works published in Alberta. Here's hoping the ultimate choice skews somewhat closer to an actual good read, for want of a better phrase, than something of the other variety.

Here are the top 10 titles, as selected by Alberta librarians:

- - The Frog Lake Reader, a re-examination of the Frog Lake Massacre of 1885, by Edmonton author Myrna Kostash, published by NeWest Press
- - Crossing the Swell, an account by Devon native Tori Holmes of her experiences in the 2005/06 Trans-Atlantic Race, published by Rocky Mountain Books
- - In Bed with the Word, an examination of "Reading, Spirituality, and Cultural Politics" by McMaster literature Prof. Daniel Coleman, published by University of Alberta Press
- - 100 Years of Anne With an "E", a scholarly history of Anne of Green Gables edited by Holly Blackford, published by University of Calgary Press
- - The Forgotten Explorer, an account of Samuel Prescott Fay's 1914 expedition to the Northern Rockies, published by Rocky Mountain Books
- - The Weekender Effect, an examination of "hyperdevelopment in mountain towns" by ecologist Robert Sandford, published by Rocky Mountain Books
- - Fishing for Bacon, the debut novel from Calgary's Michael Davie, published by NeWest Press
- - Bomb Canada and Other Unkind Remarks in the American Media by former CBC Radio reporter Chantal Allan, published by AU Press
- - Fifth World Drum, a poetry collection by Edmonton's Anna Marie Sewell, published by Frontenac House
- - Buying Cigarettes for the Dog, a collection of short stories by Ontario's Stuart Ross, published by Freehand Books.

The five jurors will chop these 10 down to five finalists, based on "a range of criteria from readability and literary merit to potential consumer appeal," according to a news release this week from the Edmonton Public Library.

Following the public vote, the winner will be revealed at the annual Alberta Book Publishing Awards gala in Edmonton in May.

Annabel Lyon, a recent frontliner at the Artery Literary Saloon here in town, is one step closer to the sequel to her acclaimed debut novel of last year, *The Golden Mean*.

The Vancouver writer has signed a deal with Random House Canada for her followup novel, *The Sweet Girl*.

Shortlisted for all three of Canada's top literary awards, *The Golden Mean* went on to win the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize.

Set in the ancient world, it told the story of the philosopher Aristotle retained as tutor for the young Alexander the Great.

The Sweet Girl will turn to the story of Aristotle's daughter Pythias, and her fierce resistance to his attempt at the end of his life to arrange her marriage before he died. The book will be published in 2013.

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