

Searching for Alberta's top book

BY RICHARD HELM, EDMONTONJOURNAL.COM JANUARY 23, 2011



Sharon Budnarchuk, co-owner of Edmonton's Audreys Books, is among the panellists.

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EDMONTON - An Edmonton composer, a local bookseller and a Calgary newscaster are among the panellists lined up to champion a book worthy of the 2011 Alberta Readers' Choice Award, a literary bauble worth \$10,000.

This year's champions panel consists of Sharon Budnarchuk, co-owner of Audreys Books in Edmonton; local lawyer and social commentator Ken Champman; Edmonton composer John Estacio; CBC News Calgary broadcaster and actor Kirk Heuser; and Janet Lane, the executive director of Literacy Alberta.

The five are currently pondering a list of 10 prospective books, whittled down by librarians across Alberta from an initial pool of 30 titles. Once the champions have selected their respective books, the shortlist will be announced May 1, kicking off a round of online voting by readers around the province.

The \$10,000 winner will be announced in Calgary on June 11.

That longlist of 10 titles still in the running is a mixed bag, ranging from sci-fi to detective mystery to a whole batch of memoirs. To qualify for the prize, created in 2009 in a partnership between the Edmonton Public Library and the Book Publishers Association of Alberta, books must have been published by an Alberta-based publishing house in the prior year and demonstrate "a broad appeal to the Alberta reading public."

The 10 books still vying for the award are:

- The Grizzly Manifesto by Canmore writer Jeff Gailus
- Myth of the Barrens by Bren Kolson

- Prodigal Daughter — A Journey to Byzantium by Edmonton's Myrna Kostash
- Too Bad: Sketches Towards a Self-Portrait by Robert Kroetsch
- Tangles — A Story About Alzheimer's, My Mother and Me by Sarah Leavitt
- Memory's Daughter by Alice Major, Edmonton's former poet laureate
- Cinco de Mayo, a science fiction novel by New York writer Michael J. Martineck
- Bitter Medicine, a graphic memoir by Calgary brothers Clem & Oliver Martini
- Smoked — A Detective Lane Mystery by Calgary's Garry Ryan
- Letters from the Lost — A Memoir of Discovery by Vancouver writer Helen Waldstein Wilkes

Of the 10, Sarah Leavitt's graphic memoir Tangles is the only book to have so far achieved any prior acclaim, having been earlier shortlisted for the Writers' Trust Non-Fiction Award.

The winner of the first Alberta Readers' Choice Award was Vancouver author Michael Davie for his novel Fishing for Bacon, published by Edmonton's NeWest Press.

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