

A woman with blonde hair is sitting in a chair, reading an open book. She is wearing a white turtleneck and a grey knit cardigan. A yellow maple leaf is resting on the book. The scene is lit with warm, golden light from a window with wooden panes. The background is a dark, textured wall.

Celebrating Literature

THE CANADIAN JEWISH NEWS

CJN 

The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards

WINNERS 2016

Literary award recognizes books with Jewish themes



Pictured from left, Yiddish Award winner Helen Mintz and chairman of the jury Edward Trapunski; Scholarship winner Sarah Phillips Casteel with jury member Alain Goldschlager; Jewish Thought and Culture Award winners Julia Ceet and Amira Bojadzija-Dan on either side of jury member Lesley Simpson. GARY BEECHEY PHOTOS

EDWARD TRAPUNSKI SPECIAL TO THE CJN

The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards recently marked its second year and is now firmly established as a cornerstone institution on the Canadian Jewish cultural calendar. It is growing in stature and, in my view, has become a flagship event for the Canadian Jewish community.

By recognizing the finest books with Jewish themes and subjects by Canadian authors, the awards help us to understand our collective past, our shared present, and the world of the future. By building pride in our creative achievements it keeps the Jewish community strong and vibrant. It also increases awareness of the Canadian Jewish identity in the wider community and underlines how Jewish subjects have enriched the country's literary landscape.

Books recognized by the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards last year went on to receive other major awards, including a Governor General's Literary Award for *My Shoes Are Killing Me* by Robyn Sarah, and a National Jewish Book Award in the United States for *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule* by Beverley Chalmers.

The Canadian Jewish Literary Awards are presented in eight categories: fiction,

children and youth fiction, memoir/biography, history, Holocaust literature, Yiddish, scholarship, and Jewish thought and culture.

Even in this age of Twitter and Instagram, Canadian authors are still publishing piles of books each year steeped with Jewish content. Choosing the best is not always an easy task and the challenge is to recognize only eight books. It is nice to know that there are still those who will take the time to savour a good book and will pause to consider a good idea. This year the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards jury – Judith Ghert, Prof. Alain Goldschlager, Michael Posner, Lesley Simpson, Andrea Knight, and me – recognized the accomplishments of a talented young author and an established scholar whose book summarized a lifetime of thought and insight.

To discover *Mystics of Mile End*, a first novel by Sigal Samuel, a new writer with so much talent and potential is a singular thrill. It was a thrill for her as well. "I had so much fun meeting all the writers in Toronto," she said. "It was a great day spent with such interesting people."

At the other end of the spectrum, Canadian historian Michael Marrus has been studying the Holocaust for more than 30 years. His book, *Lessons of the Holocaust*,

an examination of how historians have treated the Holocaust and the difficulty of extracting simple lessons from that singular and complex catastrophe, won in the History category. It is a personal story and is the culmination of his life's work. "I'm very glad that I got this book off my chest," Marrus told *The CJN's* Bill Gladstone.

Literature particularly helps foster a sense of community, among readers and subjects, but it also aids in intercultural, cross-cultural dialogue. Although it remains Canadian in focus, the subject matter of the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards transcends borders. In the Scholarship category, Carleton University professor, Sarah Phillips Casteel, won for her book, *Calypso Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination*. The book explores how Jews found sanctuary there since the expulsion from Spain during the Inquisition and it remained a refuge through the Holocaust.

"I am so honoured to have been in the company of such fine writers and scholars," Casteel said after the awards ceremony. "Academic life can be very isolating and it's rare for one's work to receive such a warm reception, so I am deeply grateful."

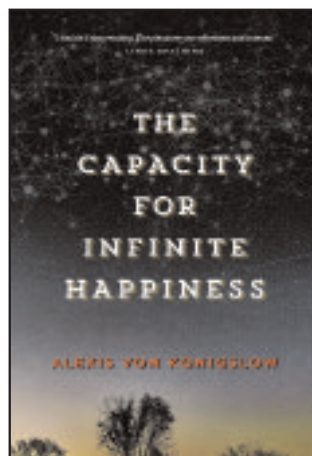
The books set in Canada give us a lens into our own world and a window into our history, our current struggles, and

our future aspirations. Howard Akler was recognized in the biography/memoir category for *Men of Action*. Anne Dublin won the youth literature prize for *44 Hours or Strike!*, a story about the Dressmakers' Strike of 1931 on Spadina Avenue in Toronto told through the eyes of two Jewish sisters.

"We writers often work in isolation – hopefully not in a garret, but still alone in our thoughts – agonizing over words, phrases, sentences, chapters, and of course, the totality of the book," Dublin says. "Once in a while, we come up for air and mingle with readers and lovers of Jewish books. Such was the CJLA event. To share my stories with like-minded people and to hear the presenters and the other honorees was a *mechayah* (a pleasure)."

A Family History of Fear, a personal story by one of the world's foremost cultural historians, Agata Tuszynska, who discovers that she is secretly Jewish won in the Holocaust Literature category; *Vilna, My Vilna*, a translation of stories by Abraham Karpinowitz by Helen Mintz won in the Yiddish category; and *H.G. Adler: Life, Legacy*, edited by Julia Creet, Sara Horowitz and Amira Bojadzija-Dan won for Jewish Thought and Culture.

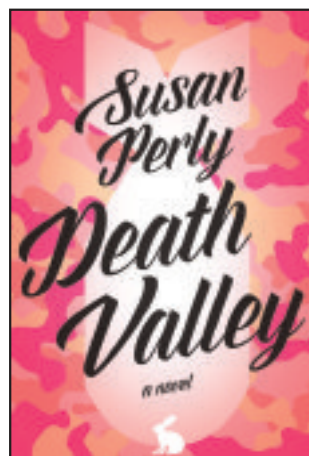
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The Capacity for Infinite Happiness

Alexis von Konigslow

"The writing is gorgeous, the narrative engaging – how can you not want to read a book with Harpo Marx as the heroic lead?"
– Carolyn Smart



Death Valley

Susan Perly

"A lush fever dream of power, politics, betrayal and revenge. With scenes so vivid and unflinching and downright bizarre, this novel gets under your skin like the desert sand at its core."
– Jennifer LoveGrove



A Sparrow Came Down Resplendent

Stuart Ross

"One of Canada's most inventive and overlooked poets in fine form."
– Winnipeg Free Press



WOLSAK & WYNN

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Writing...is essential to any successful society

MP Michael Levitt

It is the scope of the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards subject matter that strikes you. Books are still the way we transmit knowledge and culture. The authors were so articulate when they talked about their work and their craft, and they inspire a curious and appreciative audience.

“Writing, whether creative, scholarly or journalistic, is essential to any successful society,” Michael Levitt, member of Parliament for York Centre, told the audience at the awards ceremony.

“What a great batch of books you celebrated this year,” said Nora Gold, last year’s Canadian Jewish Literary Award fiction winner for *Fields of Exile*, “and thank you from all of us book lovers and writers.”

“My husband and I attended the award ceremonies today for the first time,” said awards attendee Jocelyn Cooper. “All the books seem so worthy and interesting.” ■



Jewish thought and culture prize

The book *H. G. Adler: Life, Literature, Legacy* is the first collection of essays in English dedicated to the life and work of the German-language author.

Among the international scholars of German, Jewish, and Holocaust literature and history who reveal the range of Adler’s legacy across genres are Adler’s son, Jeremy Adler, and Peter Filkins, translator of Adler’s trilogy, *Panorama (The Journey)*.

Together, the essays examine Adler’s

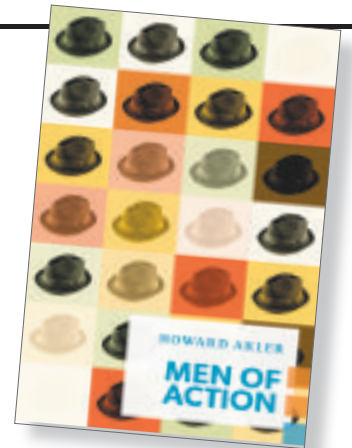
writing in relation to his life, especially his memory as a survivor of the Nazi death camps and his posthumous recognition for having produced a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, an esthetic synthesis of the Shoah. The book carries the moral charge of Adler’s work, moving beyond testimony to a complex dialectic between fact and fiction, exploring Adler’s experiments with voice and the ethical work of literary engagement with the Shoah. ■

Biography/memoir winner

After his father, Saul, undergoes brain surgery and slips into a coma, Howard Akler begins to reflect on Saul’s life, the complicated texture of consciousness, and Akler’s struggles with writing and his own unpredictable mind. With echoes of Paul Auster’s *The Invention of Solitude* and Philip Roth’s *Patrimony*, *Men of Action* treads the line between memoir and meditation, and is at once elegiac, spare, and profoundly intimate. ■



Howard Akler



Competition closes in 1 week!

The CJN Prize for Young Writers

Are you an accomplished or aspiring writer between the ages of 18 and 29? Then we want to hear from you!

Enter to win this prize for excellence in Jewish writing.

The first-prize winner will receive **\$1,800**.

Ten runners up will each receive **\$180**.

All winners will be published by the award-winning CJN.

Rules:

- Open to Canadian citizens and residents of Canada
- Participants must be between the ages of 18 and 29
- Essays must be
 - Written in English and be between 500 and 1,000 words
 - An original work on a Jewish theme of your choice
 - Submitted by **Nov. 30, 2016** to contest@thecjn.ca

Essays will be judged by an independent panel of experts.

Questions? Contact contest@thecjn.ca

*Winners will be notified January 2017. The CJN Prize Awards Ceremony will be held on February 22, 2017 at York University in Toronto.

THE CANADIAN JEWISH NEWS

CJN



Anne Dublin



Youth literature prize

In Anne Dublin's *44 Hours or Strike!* The Toronto Dressmakers' Strike of 1931 brings young sisters Sophie and Rose together in their fight for better working conditions, decent wages, and for their union. It's a tough battle as distrust and resentment of immigrants is growing, with many people blaming their poverty and difficulties on these workers. Sophie and Rose are faced with unexpected and sometimes violent – barriers, and they quickly find that a strike is more than just a march.

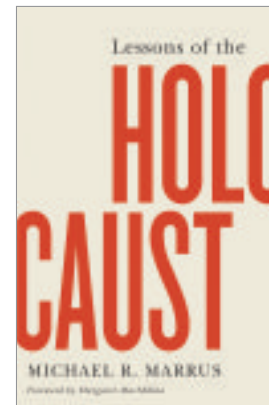
Barely into the strike, Rose is imprisoned after a fight in a picket line, leaving 14-year-old Sophie to take care of their ailing mother at night and spend her days protesting in the freezing winter. Rose's isolation in prison weakens her resolve for change. Will they be able to continue to fight for what they once so strongly believed in?

In the midst of anti-Semitism and the Great Depression, Sophie, Rose, and their union come together to try to make a lasting change. ■

History prize



Michael Marrus



Part memoir, part analysis and part historiography, *Lessons of the Holocaust* by Michael Marrus examines the author's career-long experience with Holocaust history, and offers a comprehensive survey of how that field has evolved, as well as a thought-provoking critique of the uses to which it has frequently been put.

Although difficult to imagine, 60 years ago the Holocaust had practically no visibility in examinations of World War II. Yet today it is understood to be not only one of the defining moments of the 20th century but also a touchstone in a quest for directions on how to avoid such catastrophes.

In *Lessons of the Holocaust*, Marrus challenges the notion that there are definitive lessons to be deduced from the destruction of European Jewry. Instead, drawing on decades of studying, writing about, and teaching the Holocaust, he shows how its "lessons" are constantly challenged, debated, altered, and reinterpreted.

A succinct, stimulating analysis by a world-renowned historian, *Lessons of the Holocaust* is the perfect guide for the general reader to the historical and moral controversies that infuse the interpretation of the Holocaust and its significance. ■

Congratulations Daniella Silver & Norene Gilletz on another magnificent cookbook!

**Over 160 recipes each
with a stunning photo:**

Easy to prepare.

And gorgeous to serve!

Norene's Notes: Every recipe includes techniques, tips, and advice from bestselling cookbook author **Norene Gilletz**

Many gluten-free options

Full nutritional analysis for every recipe

Each dish indicates if it's freezer-friendly for make-ahead cooking



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in the Silver
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Indigo, Amazon, or at www.artscroll.com

Emotional book wins Holocaust prize

Every family has its own history. Many families carry a tragic past. Like the author's mother, many Poles did not tell their children a complete story of their wartime exploits – of the underground Home Army, the tragedy of the Warsaw Uprising, the civil war against the Communists. Years had to pass before the stories of suffering and heroism could be told.

In *Family History of Fear*, Agata Tuszynska, one of Poland's most admired poets and cultural historians, writes of the stories she heard from her mother about her secret past.

Tuszynska, author of *Vera Gran* ("a book of extraordinary depth and power" – Richard Eder, *The Boston Globe*; "captivating" – *Newsweek*; "darkly absorbing, shrewd, and sharply etched" – *Publishers Weekly*), has written a powerful memoir about growing up after World War II in Communist Poland – blonde, blue-eyed, and Catholic.

The author was 19 and living in Warsaw when her mother told her the truth – that she was Jewish – and began to tell her stories of the family's secret past in

Poland. Tuszynska, who grew up in a country beset by anti-Semitism, rarely hearing the word "Jew" (only from her Polish Catholic father, and then, always in derision), was unhinged, ashamed, and humiliated. The author writes of how she skillfully erased the truth within herself, refusing to admit the existence of her other half.

In this profoundly moving and resonant book, Tuszynska investigates her past and writes of her journey to uncover her family's history during World War II—of her mother at age eight and her grandmother, entering the Warsaw Ghetto for two years as conditions grew more desperate, and finally escaping just before the uprising, and then living "hidden on the other side."

She writes of her grandfather, one of 5,000 Polish soldiers taken prisoner in 1939, becoming, later, the country's most famous radio sports announcer; and of her relatives and their mysterious pasts, as she tries to make sense of the hatred of Jews in her country. She writes of her discoveries and of her willingness to accept a radically different definition of



Agata Tuszynska

self, reading the works of Isaac Bashevis Singer, opening up for her a world of Polish Jewry as he became her guide, and then writing about his life and work, circling her Jewish self in *Lost Landscapes: In Search of Isaac Bashevis Singer and the Jews of Poland*.

A beautiful and affecting book of discovery and acceptance; a searing, insightful portrait of Polish Jewish life, lived before and after Hitler's Third Reich. ■

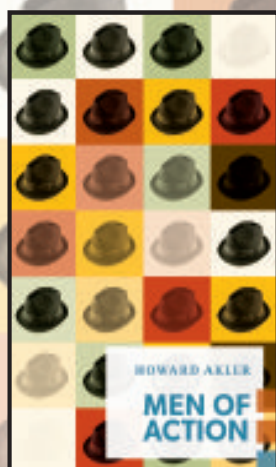


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Tuszynska writes of her journey to uncover her family's history during World War II

HATS OFF TO MEN OF ACTION!

Winner of the 2016 Canadian Jewish Literary Award for Memoir



'Men of Action is an insightful and heartbreaking exploration of consciousness, familial relationships and the sense of self.'

– 2016 Toronto Book Awards Jury Citation

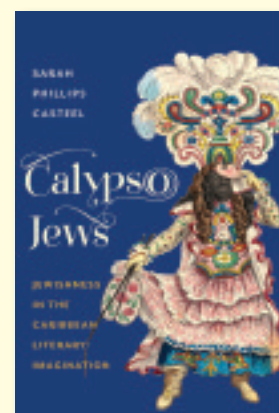
'Like Harley J. Spiller's *Keep the Change*, Howard Akler's *Men of Action* similarly compresses a great deal – whole lives – into very few pages.'

– *The New York Times* Holiday 2015 Gift Guide



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Calypso Jews

Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination

SARAH PHILLIPS CASTEEL

Winner of the 2016 Canadian Jewish Literary Award
in the Scholarship Category

"Throughout *Calypso Jews*, Casteel makes a case for how hidden Sephardism has captured the imagination of culturally diverse authors post-slavery. The fullness and novelty of her research opens a fascinating dialogue on the intersections of black and Jewish relationships as revealed through Caribbean literature."

—Jewish Book Council



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Debut novel wins fiction prize



Sigal Samuel CRYSTAL SIKMA PHOTO

“

The Mystics of Mile End is told from four perspectives

In their citation for Sigal Samuel's *The Mystics of Mile End*, the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards jury says that the novel “captures the spirit of the duality of one of the world's most vibrant neighbourhoods. At once an exploration of Kabbalah, queer culture and physics, the book is a family saga that grapples with the tensions between science and faith. To discover a new writer with so much talent and potential is a singular thrill.”

The Meyer family – 11-year-old Lev, his older sister Samara, and their single father, David – lives in Montreal's Mile End, a neighbourhood that's home to a mashup of hipsters and chassidic Jews. Trendy pubs and art spots co-exist with yeshivas and Yiddish; down the street, eccentric Mr. Katz is building a tree out of plucked leaves, toilet paper rolls, and dental floss.

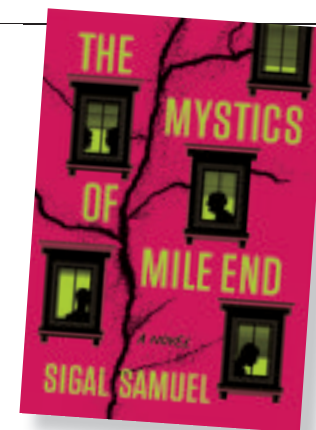
At school, Lev and his best friend Alex are fascinated with science, in particular SETI – the search for extraterrestrial intelligence – and embark on a science fair project of radio communication with astronauts. But Lev also enjoys Hebrew school and ends up spending more and more time with his teacher and next-door neighbour, Holocaust survivor Mr.

Glassman, who, through their afterschool lessons on the Talmud, uncovers whole new worlds for Lev.

David, a formerly devout Jew turned atheist professor of religion, has been convinced of the meaninglessness of life since even before his wife died randomly and unexpectedly when their children were young. But, years later, when his children are grown and he is diagnosed with an unusual heart murmur, he becomes convinced that his heart is whispering divine secrets – that God is speaking to him.

Samara had abruptly abandoned religion as a young teenager. But she, too, becomes obsessed with the secrets of Jewish mysticism, with the complexities of the Tree of Life. Hiding her interest from all those who love her most, she is overcome with reaching the Tree's highest heights. It is up to the neighbours of Mile End to try to reach through to her in time.

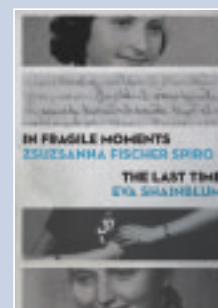
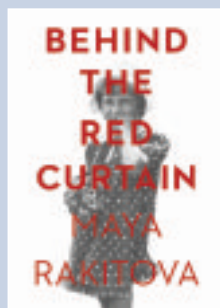
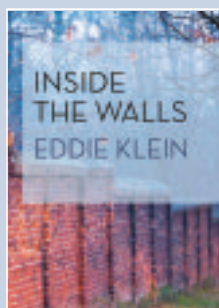
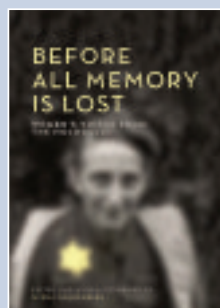
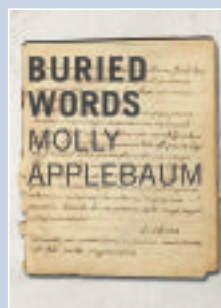
The Mystics of Mile End is told from four perspectives. The first section is narrated by Lev, an endearing and honest child narrator; the second by David; the third by a college-aged Samara; and the fourth from the perspective of the neighbour-



hood itself. Together, the diverse voices in the book weave together not just a family saga, but a neighbourhood saga, which challenges our perspectives of religion and science, secularity and tradition, family and faith.

Samuel is originally from Montreal. She now lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she is a writer and editor for *The Jewish Daily Forward*. She has also published work in the *Daily Beast*, the *Rumpus*, *BuzzFeed*, *Electric Literature* and the *Wallrus*. She has appeared on NPR, BBC, and Huffington Post Live. Her six plays have been produced in theatres from Vancouver to New York. *The Mystics of Mile End*, her debut novel, also won the Alberta Trade Fiction Book of the Year. ■

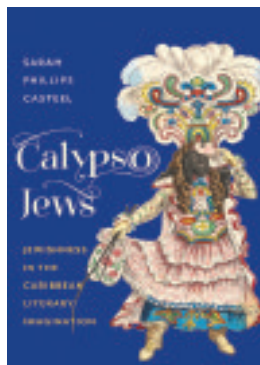
THE AZRIELI FOUNDATION'S HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR MEMOIRS PROGRAM CELEBRATES OUR 2016 AUTHORS



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Sarah Phillips Casteel JOHNNY ALAM PHOTO

Winner in the scholarship category

In original and insightful ways, Caribbean writers have turned to Jewish experiences of exodus and reinvention, from the Sephardim expelled from Iberia in the 1490s to the Calypso Jews who fled Europe for Trinidad in the 1930s.

Examining these historical migrations through the lens of postwar Caribbean fiction and poetry, Sarah Phillips Casteel presents the first major study of representations of Jewishness in Caribbean literature. Bridging the gap between post-colonial and Jewish studies, *Calypso Jews* enriches cross-cultural investigations of Caribbean creolization.

Caribbean writers invoke both the 1492

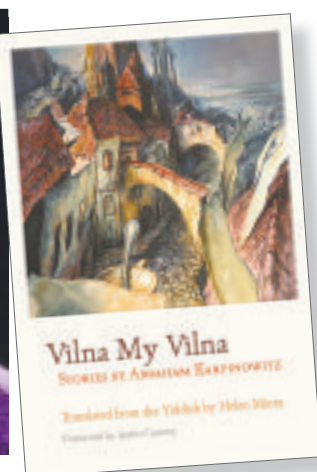
expulsion and the Holocaust as part of their literary archeology of slavery and its legacies. Despite the unequal and sometimes fraught relations between blacks and Jews in the Caribbean before and after emancipation, black-Jewish literary encounters reflect sympathy and identification more than antagonism and competition.

Providing an alternative to U.S.-based critical narratives of black-Jewish relations, Casteel reads Derek Walcott, Maryse Condé, Michelle Cliff, Jamaica Kincaid, Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen, and Paul Gilroy, among others, to reveal a distinctive interdiasporic literature. ■

Winner in Yiddish category



Translator Helen Mintz



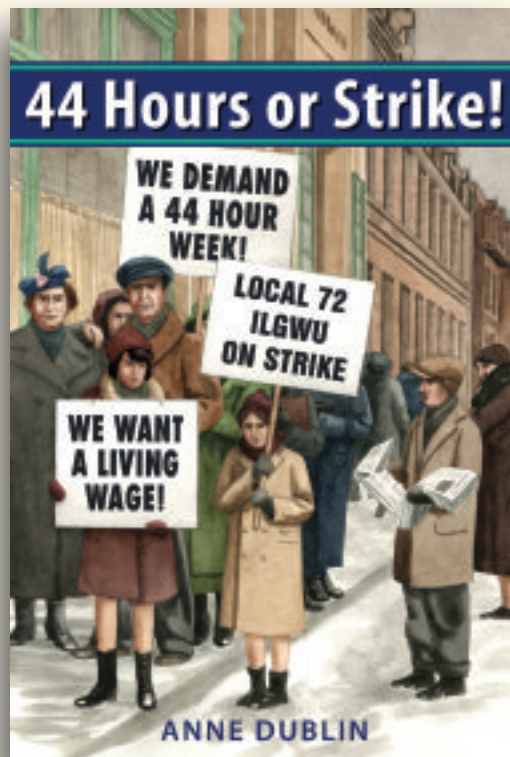
In *Vilna My Vilna*, Abraham Karpinowitz portrays, with compassion and intimacy, the dreams and struggles of the poor and disenfranchised Jews of his native city before the Holocaust.

His stories provide an affectionate and vivid portrait of poor working women and men, like fishwives, cobblers, and barbers, and people who made their living outside the law, like thieves and prostitutes. This collection also includes two

stories that function as intimate memoirs of Karpinowitz's childhood growing up in his father's Vilna Yiddish theatre. Karpinowitz wrote his stories and memoirs in Yiddish, preserving the particular language of Vilna's lower classes. In this graceful translation, Helen Mintz deftly preserves this colourful, often idiomatic Yiddish, capturing Karpinowitz's unique voice and rendering a long-vanished world for English language readers. ■

Congratulations to Anne Dublin

On winning the Canadian Jewish Literary Award for Children & Youth Literature!



In *44 Hours or Strike!* the 1931 Toronto Dressmakers' Strike serves as the dramatic backdrop to the story of two young sisters, Sophie and Rose, who in the midst of anti-Semitism and the Great Depression join the struggle for workers rights and try to make lasting change.

"Intense, dramatic descriptions bring out the hardships of sweatshop life in the early 1930s... A realistic look at a hard-fought fight."

—Kirkus Reviews

"Historical events and characters are woven in among the fictional characters providing a context for the events that unfold. The story is fraught with difficult decisions that no young person should have to make, but it provides interesting historical insights for the youth of today."

—Jewish Book Council

Small Press. **Important Books.**

Second Story Press

"John Syrtash's new book, A Calendar of Northern Fables, is a joy to read."

Rabbi Daniel Korobkin, Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation



A Calendar of Northern Fables

By John Tibor Syrtash B.A. (Hon.) LL.B.

A Calendar of Northern Fables is a nostalgic collection of short stories about Jewish immigrants who settled in North America after the War. It's also about their children and grandchildren. Based in Toronto, Canada the stories follow many of the Jewish Holidays and poke gentle fun at the lifestyle, rituals and mythologies brought over from the old country.

Meet Mendel, the much-loved Pharmacist and find out why he feels compelled to sin right before Yom Kippur, the holiday of atonement.

The book gives you a rare glimpse inside the homes and synagogues of observant Jews and explains some of the customs followed by this close-knit community. What is the reason for the knotted strings dangling from the hips of religious men? How do observant young people date without ever touching each other?

A Calendar of Northern Fables is a charming and humorous look at Jewish immigrants in the 1950s and the lives of their descendants today.

About the Author:

John Syrtash is currently Counsel to the law firm of Garfin Zeidenberg LLP, Toronto, Canada practicing as one of Canada's most Senior Family Law trial Lawyers.



www.acalendarofnorthernfables.com

"A Delight to Read!"

"A Calendar of Northern Fables is a delight to read! Reminiscent of the style of Sholem Aleichem, John Syrtash recreates for the reader a world circumscribed by Toronto's Jewish community – a world of observant Jewry with its beliefs, its traditions and its foibles. Told with empathy and gentle humour, Syrtash's stories introduce the reader to Yiddish expressions, Jewish history, wise, Rabbis and adoring but not always wise parents, and the need to celebrate each day. The collection is rightly titled "Fables" as each of the stories imparts an important lesson about life and living, not just for Jews but for people of all faiths."

*Joan O'Callaghan, Author and Seasonal Instructor
– OISE, University of Toronto,
English Curriculum*

"A Most Delightful Success"

"John's Syrtash's first venture into fiction and humour is a most delightful success. It brings to life a bygone era and makes one nostalgic for yesteryear."

*Frank Dimant, Professor of Modern
Israel Studies, and former Executive
Vice President of B'nai Brith Canada*

"A Joy to Read!"

"John Syrtash's new book, A Calendar of Northern Fables, is a joy to read. Although a lawyer by profession, Mr. Syrtash has a penchant for creating vivid images of the modern Jewish shtetl. He weaves his personalities and communal structures from his experiences living in the Jewish community of Toronto. His love for his fellow Jew – despite the often quirky nature of our brothers and sisters – is quite evident in each story he lovingly details and in the warmth and kindness that he imbues into his characters. With his stories revolving around the Jewish calendar, you'll find yourself reliving those special holy days with family and friends, since John's characters hearken back to so many of our loved ones..."

*Rabbi Daniel Korobkin, Beth Avraham
Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

"The book is really terrific and a fabulous read!"

"Having growing up in Forest Hill (A prominent Jewish community in Toronto) John Syrtash's Northern Fables book struck many chords that are still resonating after reading it several days ago. He captures beautifully the hysteria of growing up in a Jewish household, the madness of the Passover Sedars and the absolute truth and absurdity of the "Mason Dixon" line when one crosses Bathurst and Steeles. As someone who tells stories on stage for a living I was thrilled to see the detail John creates with each of his characters. I laughed out loud several times and had felt the pain of several characters who I identified with perhaps a little too closely. A fabulous read!"

*Sam Rosenthal - Artistic Director/Founder of the
Hogtown Experience / actor based in Toronto*

For more information: 416-642-5410

or www.acalendarofnorthernfables.com

Available for sale at Israel's Judaicas,

Indigo on Yonge Street (Richmond Hill, Ontario) and on Amazon.