

NEWS RELEASE



For Immediate Release
Sept. 8, 2011 | 121-11

CONTACT

Kevin Crowley, Director, Communications & Public Affairs
Wilfrid Laurier University
519-884-0710 ext. 3070 or kcrowley@wlu.ca

Helen Waldstein Wilkes wins 2011 Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction

WATERLOO – Helen Waldstein Wilkes has won the 2011 Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction for *Letters from the Lost: A Memoir of Discovery*.

The Edna Staebler Award is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, coinciding with Laurier's centennial. A special centennial ceremony for Waldstein Wilkes will take place Oct. 4 at **7:30 p.m. in the Senate and Board Chamber** on the Waterloo campus, with author readings planned for the **Brantford campus** and **Toronto office**.

At age 60, Waldstein Wilkes opens a small box that was left by her father in their southern Ontario home. The box holds “letters from the lost” – letters from family members left behind in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia. The author follows the letters’ trail back to Europe to discover that “the lost” – homeland, past and family – are part of her self. *Letters from the Lost* weaves letters, imaginary conversations and one woman’s search for answers into a compelling narrative of what it means to be a Jew, a survivor and a family member without a family.

Speaking on behalf of this year’s jury, Laurier associate professor Tanis MacDonald said, “*Letters from the Lost* is a ‘memoir of discovery’ as its subtitle promises, and it is also a memoir about the pain of knowing some stories can never be fully discovered. It is a testament that ranges across continents and decades to affirm what one family lost to atrocity and what the survivor in Waldstein Wilkes finds in her family, past and present.”

After receiving her PhD in French literature, Waldstein Wilkes spent 30 years teaching in Canada and the United States. Her research interests include cross-cultural understanding, language acquisition and neurolinguistics. Now retired and living in Vancouver, she is actively examining her own cultural inheritance and its impact.

In addition to *Letters from the Lost* (Athabasca University Press) the shortlist for the 2011 Edna Staebler Award also included: *Jew and Improved: How Choosing to be Chosen Made Me a Better Man* (HarperCollins Canada) by Benjamin Errett and *Adventures in Solitude* (Harbour Publishing) by Grant Lawrence.

The Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction was launched in 1991 and is administered by Wilfrid Laurier University, the only university in Canada to bestow a nationally recognized literary award. The \$10,000 award encourages and recognizes Canadian writers of a first or second work of creative non-fiction that includes a Canadian locale and/or significance. Winning books are distinguished by first-hand research, well-crafted interpretive writing and a creative use of language or approach to the subject matter. Previous winners include authors Linden MacIntyre, Wayson Choy and Elizabeth Hay.