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Laurier announces 2020 shortlist for Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction following pandemic postponement

WATERLOO – A trio of books have been nominated for the 2020 Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction, as Wilfrid Laurier University begins to catch up on handing out the prestigious \$10,000 award after two years of postponements due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Established and endowed by writer and award-winning journalist Edna Staebler in 1991, the Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction is administered by Laurier, the only university in Canada to bestow a nationally recognized literary award. The award recognizes a Canadian writer of a first or second published book with a Canadian locale or significance.

The presentation of the award was postponed in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic. The winner of the 2020 award will be announced in August, while the 2021 and 2022 nominees and award winners are set for later this year.

As incoming Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Sofie Lachapelle, says: “It has been an honour for me to learn about Edna Staebler and her strong connections to the Faculty of Arts and to sit on the Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction committee. After two years with the pandemic, it is a pleasure for all of us to be able to celebrate the amazing works for our three finalists for 2020.”

Bruce Gillespie, an award juror and professor in Laurier’s Digital Media and Journalism program, adds: “The finalists for the 2020 award beautifully demonstrate the breadth of work that Canadians are producing in this genre. They include: a memoir beginning in Pakistan that goes on to explore faith, art, love and queer sexuality; a food history road trip that examines the experiences of Chinese immigrants running chop suey restaurants in small towns across Canada; and an adventure story that takes readers from the library to the rainforest to try to prove the existence of sasquatch. These are stories that will surprise and delight.”

Books nominated for the 2020 Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction (listed in alphabetical order by author surname):

WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN HERE: A QUEER MUSLIM MEMOIR

By Samra Habib (Penguin Random House Canada)

Samra Habib’s engaging book begins with vivid memories of their childhood in Pakistan as a member of the minority Ahmadi Muslim community. After their family immigrates to Canada, Habib finds it increasingly difficult to accommodate the contradictions between their devout parents’ expectations and their own talents and needs. After an arranged marriage, Habib rebels and insists on divorce. Following another marriage and divorce, Habib gradually discovers their vocation as a writer and photographer, their queer identity and, ultimately, assurance that they can live as a queer Muslim. Habib’s striking account illustrates how their relationships with religion, culture, identity and family were transformed.

CHOP SUEY NATION: THE LEGION CAFE AND OTHER STORIES FROM CANADA'S CHINESE RESTAURANTS

By Ann Hui (Douglas & McIntyre)

In *Chop Suey Nation*, Ann Hui traces the experiences of Chinese immigrants through the ubiquitous small-town restaurants that specialize in the titular style of cuisine that is readily identifiable to Canadians but would be unrecognizable to most diners in China. Speaking with entrepreneurs and cooks from across the country, Hui illustrates the racism and challenges they have faced, as well as the contributions they have made to their communities and to Canadian cuisine. The work is personal for Hui, whose parents immigrated to British Columbia during the 1970s and operated a chop suey restaurant in Abbotsford before she was born. *Chop Suey Nation's* interwoven narratives mix personal and cultural to tell an engaging story about family, food and traditions.

IN THE VALLEYS OF THE NOBLE BEYOND: IN SEARCH OF THE SASQUATCH

By John Zada (Greystone Books)

A boyhood fascination with bigfoot legends resurfaced for John Zada when the writer and photographer found himself on assignment in British Columbia's Great Bear Rainforest, where stories of experiences involving the legendary giant creatures, also known as sasquatch, abound. Determined to find concrete evidence of the existence of sasquatch and not content with interviews alone, Zada set out with Indigenous guides on a series of sasquatch-seeking forays into the rainforest. Their hair-raising adventures, vividly documented in Zada's book *In the Valleys of the Noble Beyond*, appropriately leave the sasquatch mysterious – and reader's beliefs unfettered.