
NEWS RELEASE

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Office of the Premier
British Columbia Achievement Foundation

FINALISTS ANNOUNCED FOR CANADIAN NON-FICTION AWARD

VANCOUVER – The 2009 shortlist for Canada’s largest literary non-fiction award, the British Columbia National Award for Canadian Non-Fiction, was announced today by Premier Gordon Campbell and BC Achievement Foundation chair Keith Mitchell.

The four finalists contending for the \$40,000 prize are:

- Daphne Bramham for “The Secret Lives of Saints: Child Brides and Lost Boys in Canada’s Polygamous Mormon Sect” (Random House Canada)
- Mary Henley Rubio for “Lucy Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings” (Doubleday Canada)
- Christopher Shulgan for “The Soviet Ambassador: The Making of the Radical Behind Perestroika” (McClelland & Stewart)
- Russell Wangersky for “Burning Down the House: Fighting Fires and Losing Myself” (Thomas Allen Publishers)

“Now in its fifth year, the B.C. National Award for Canadian Non-Fiction continues to celebrate the best non-fiction writing from across Canada and spotlights this important literary genre and its significance to all Canadians,” said Premier Campbell. “I want to congratulate all the finalists on their remarkable achievements.”

The shortlist was selected from a field of 163 nominated titles. Eligible books were authored by a Canadian citizen or permanent resident and were published between November 1, 2007 and October 31, 2008.

“Our thanks to the jury who had the challenging but richly engaging task of selecting the shortlisted titles,” said Mitchell. “The BC Achievement Foundation extends its appreciation to award jurors John Cruickshank, recently appointed publisher of the Toronto Star; Stevie Cameron, one of Canada’s foremost investigative journalists, authors and commentators; and Andreas Schroeder, author, TV and Radio host and academic.

With a prize of \$40,000 and national scope, the B.C. Award is the richest non-fiction book prize in Canada and the non-fiction counterpart to the Giller Prize for fiction and the Griffin Poetry Prize.

The winner of the B.C. National Award for Non-Fiction will be announced February 2, 2009 at a presentation ceremony in Vancouver.

The finalists are described in the following citations from the jury:

The Secret Lives of Saints: Child Brides and Lost Boys in Canada's Polygamous Mormon Sect (Daphne Bramham)

'In this uncompromising investigation into the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints community in Bountiful, B.C., the author argues that a clique of powerful men has allegedly used the Charter's protection of religious freedom to justify a litany of human rights abuses. Bramham's rigorously researched exposé reminds us that trafficking in women, the brainwashing of entire communities, and the over-reaching of religious despots aren't restricted to television movies or countries half a world away.'

Lucy Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings (Mary Henley Rubio)

Although Mary Henley Rubio has spent most of her academic career studying the life and work of Lucy Maud Montgomery, *The Gift of Wings* is no dry scholarly tome, nor, despite being an authorized biography, is it a flattering portrait of one of Canada's most successful authors. What we have here is a beautifully written yet unflinching account of Lucy Maud Montgomery's complicated life as a driven, celebrity writer – but also as the dutiful wife of a chronically depressed clergyman and as the caring mother of two sons, one a doctor and the other an incorrigible ne'er-do-well. Often unhappy, terrified the world would find out about her troubles, Montgomery destroyed private papers in an effort to control her own story. Rubio has uncovered the truth of it and in doing so has only made us admire her subject more.

Soviet Ambassador: The Making of the Radical Behind Perestroika (Christopher Shulgan)

Now called "the godfather of glasnost," former Communist hardliner Aleksandr Yakolev is hardly a household name in this country despite being the Soviet Union's ambassador in Canada for ten years during the 1970s and early 1980s. But it was here in Canada, as Christopher Shulgan tells us in his immensely readable story, that Yakolev became a close friend of Pierre Trudeau and began to understand Western democracies. And it was Trudeau who first welcomed Mikhail Gorbachev to this country where Yakolev and Gorbachev developed their own strong friendship. Their ideas and commitment would change Russia forever. The power of this lively biography lies in the evolution of Yakolev's thinking and the account of the reforms he helped to bring about to improve his own country.

Burning Down the House: Fighting Fires and Losing Myself (Russell Wangersky)

An astonishingly insightful and harrowing depiction of modern-day fire-fighting – in which fighting actual fires isn't the half of it. This account of Russell Wangersky's eight years as a volunteer firefighter responding to emergency calls ranging from car accidents to medical crises to house fires depicts his resulting post-traumatic disintegration with the slow inevitability of a toxic chemical reaction. His account's greatest strength and primary impact comes not from the predictable drama of the events themselves, but from his tendency to do his job without wearing protective mental gear. The result is an account so relentlessly lucid and visceral that the reader emerges from the experience almost as exhausted and traumatized as the writer himself.

The B.C. Award is an annual national prize established by the British Columbia Achievement Foundation, an independent foundation endowed by the Province of British Columbia in 2003 to celebrate, provincially and nationally, excellence in the arts, humanities, enterprise and community service.

For more information on the award and this year's finalists – including media copies of book covers and author photos – please visit www.bcachievement.com or contact the foundation at 604 261-9777 or info@bcachievement.com.

Media contact: Bridgitte Anderson
Press Secretary
Office of the Premier
604 207-7177

Nora Newlands
Executive Director
BC Achievement Foundation
604 618-6949

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