



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Powerful. Intriguing and gritty. Moving and insightful. Koffler Centre of the Arts announces the winners of the 2020 Vine Awards

Honouring the best Canadian Jewish literature in four categories,  
each with a prize of \$10,000

**Toronto, ON, November 18, 2020** – The Koffler Centre of the Arts is proud to announce the winners of the 2020 [Vine Awards for Canadian Jewish Literature](#). The Awards were handed out at an online awards ceremony on November 18, 2020 on the Virtual J platform.

**The Vine Awards for Canadian Jewish Literature** is a national awards program that honours both exceptional Canadian Jewish writers and non-Jewish Canadian authors exploring Jewish subjects in Fiction, History, Non-Fiction, Young Adult/Children’s literature, and Poetry. Each winning author receives a prize of **\$10,000**. Awards in all categories are given annually, with the exception of poetry that is awarded every three years. The 2020 jury – comprised of authors **Judy Batalion**, **Allan Levine**, and **Shani Mootoo** – reviewed 55 entries to the Fiction, History, Non-Fiction and Young Adult/Children’s categories.

This year’s winning titles include **Sarah Leavitt’s** graphic novel ***Agnes, Murderess*** in the Fiction category, lauded by the Vine Awards’ jury as “a most powerful story, artfully tying together the engaging voice of her protagonist with well-timed ellipses and magical drawings.”

**Matti Friedman’s *Spies of No Country***, the History winner, “reads like a spy-thriller page-turner, replete with all the suspense of double identities and the close calls of betrayals.”

***Tiny Lights for Travellers*** by **Naomi K. Lewis** took home the Non-Fiction award. The jury wrote, “in the best tradition of the memoir form, Lewis’s explorations take her well beyond her expectations, and she finds that her initial quest is a small part of a much larger understanding of herself and her Jewishness.”

The Young Adult/Children’s Literature winner ***Broken Strings***, co-authored by **Eric Walters and Kathy Kacer**, “seamlessly blends themes of young love, artistic identity, 9/11, grief, and the Auschwitz orchestra into a moving and insightful young adult novel.”

“The Koffler Centre of the Arts is delighted to present another stellar edition of the Vine Awards, bringing the best of contemporary Jewish writing to Canadian readers and honouring exceptional literary talent, as evidenced by this year’s shortlisted and winning titles,” said Koffler Centre Executive Director, **Karen Tisch**. “We are extraordinarily grateful to our lead donors, Lillian and Norman Glowinsky, for supporting these awards, which are named in loving memory of Lillian’s parents, Helen and Stan Vine. Their generosity provides vital recognition and support to writers exploring Jewish perspectives and themes within the broader context of Canadian literature.”

### **The 2020 Vine Awards Winners**

#### FICTION

**Sarah Leavitt, *Agnes, Murderess*** (Freehand Books)

*Sarah Leavitt delivers a most powerful story, artfully tying together the engaging voice of her protagonist with well-timed ellipses and magical drawings that are the hallmark of the successful graphic novel.* – Vine Awards Jury

#### HISTORY

**Matti Friedman, *Spies of No Country*** (Signal, McClelland & Stewart)

*Spies of No Country reads like a spy-thriller page-turner, replete with all the suspense of double identities and the close calls of betrayals—except that this is not a work of fiction. Well researched, and offering up much intriguing and gritty detail, it is the unveiling of several intricately-woven true stories of the earliest days of Mossad, and the pivotal, but until now obscured, role of the four Arab Jews who laid the underground work for the imminent birth of the country of Israel.* – Vine Awards Jury

#### NON-FICTION

**Naomi K. Lewis, *Tiny Lights for Travellers*** (University of Alberta Press)

*In this memoir, Lewis appears to be on a quest to retrace the actual route of her beloved Opa’s escape from German Controlled Europe, but along the way, traveling alone from Amsterdam to Lyon, unexpected family secrets are unearthed. In the best tradition of the memoir form, Lewis’s explorations take her well beyond her expectations, and she finds that her initial quest is a small part of a much larger understanding of herself and her Jewishness.* – Vine Awards Jury

#### YOUNG ADULT/CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

**Eric Walters and Kathy Kacer, *Broken Strings*** (Penguin Random House Canada Young Readers)

*Broken Strings seamlessly blends themes of young love, artistic identity, 9/11, grief, and the Auschwitz orchestra into a moving and insightful young adult novel.* – Vine Awards Jury

**The Vine Awards for Canadian Jewish Literature** are made possible by a generous donation by the Lillian and Norman Glowinsky Family Foundation to support Canadian Jewish literature, a tradition they established with the original awards in 2004, building on the Canadian Jewish Book Awards founded in 1988 by Adam Fuerstenberg. The Vine Awards are a loving tribute to Lillian’s parents – Helen and Stan Vine – who were passionate about the arts and the Jewish community throughout their lives.

#### **ABOUT THE KOFFLER**

The Koffler Centre of the Arts is a cultural platform that explores critical ideas and concerns of our time through a year-round program of exhibitions, publications, performances, literary events, digital initiatives and arts education programs. We examine complex issues through transformative art experiences that stimulate intercultural dialogue and promote social change. Through our in-gallery and off-site programs, the Koffler engages thousands of visitors each year. From school children and teens, to newcomers and seniors, we provide vital opportunities for self-expression and community connection, including to those in greatest need.

As a Jewish organization, we value – and aim to foster – social justice and equality while nurturing a passion for learning and understanding. We position Jewish identity in conversation with diverse perspectives and global voices to examine complex issues in a respectful, constructive way. These principles support the Koffler’s engagement with the best contemporary creative minds in producing and presenting art that provides common ground for experiences shaping our shared cultural life and defining our social values.

Visit us online at [kofflerarts.org](http://kofflerarts.org)

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For further information, author and book cover images for media use, contact:

**Tony Hewer**

**Director of Marketing, Communications and Archives**

Koffler Centre of the Arts

180 Shaw Street, Suite 104-105, Toronto M6J 2W5

647.920.2398 | E-MAIL: [thewer@kofflerarts.org](mailto:thewer@kofflerarts.org) | WEB: [kofflerarts.org](http://kofflerarts.org) | [koffler.digital](http://koffler.digital)