

Virginia Euwer Wolff Wins 2011 NSK Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature

NORMAN, OK, OCTOBER 25, 2010 – Virginia Euwer Wolff, the renowned U.S. author of young-adult literature, was announced Friday as the 2011 laureate of the NSK Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature. The NSK Prize is a \$25,000 juried award sponsored by the University of Oklahoma and *World Literature Today*, OU's award-winning magazine of international literature and culture. "Virginia Euwer Wolff's thoughtful fiction has delighted children the world over. Also a writer's writer who commands the respect of her peers, she deeply deserves the recognition of the prestigious NSK Neustadt Prize," said Robert Con Davis-Undiano, executive director of *World Literature Today*. The announcement was made at a banquet awarding Chinese poet Duo Duo the 2010 Neustadt International Prize for Literature, at which Davis-Undiano also paid tribute to Walter Neustadt Jr. (1919-2010) for his legendary generosity to the university and *WLT*.

The other nominees for the 2011 NSK Prize included Christopher Paul Curtis, Anne Fine, Mordicai Gerstein, David Macaulay, Brian Selznick, and Jacqueline Woodson. Suzanne Fisher Staples, the juror who nominated Wolff for the award, noted that "Wolff has a level of excellence in her use of pitch-perfect language, form, and imagery that is unique and fitting to each story, [in] novels that move readers with the grace of acceptance and forgiveness, the luminosity of hope." In announcing Wolff as the winner of the prize, Nancy Barcelo, one of the three Neustadt sisters who endowed the NSK Prize, commented: "If you ever want to connect or reconnect with what it was like to view the world with a child's sense of wonder, just read one of Virginia Euwer Wolff's books." Her sister Kathy Neustadt likewise noted that choosing Wolff "also speaks to the caliber of the jurors." In addition to Staples, the other members of the 2011 jury included Tobin Anderson, Rita Auerbach, Adèle Geras, Seth Lerer, Eva Mitnick, Jim Murphy, and Masha Rudman. The jury made special mention of Wolff's novel *True Believer* (2001).

Virginia Euwer Wolff was born in 1937 in Oregon. After graduating from Smith College, she taught school, reared two children, and attended graduate school in four states before beginning to write for young readers in her mid-forties. Her novels focus on a learning-disabled sixteen-year-old boy (*Probably Still Nick Swansen*, 1988); twelve-year-old violinist Allegra Leah Shapiro (*The Mozart Season*, 1991); two sixth-grade softball teams in 1949 (*Bat 6*, 1998); and an unmarried teen mother, her two children, and their babysitter (*Make Lemonade*, 1993; *True Believer*, 2001; and *This Full House*, 2009). Wolff has won the National Book Award, the Jane Addams Peace Award and Honor, two Golden Kites, the Michael L. Printz Honor, and two Oregon Book Awards. She has lived in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., but now reads, writes, and plays chamber music in Oregon.

The NSK Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature was established by Nancy Barcelo, Susan Neustadt Schwartz, and Kathy Neustadt to encourage high-quality writing for children by honoring an accomplished contemporary writer or illustrator of children's literature. The three sisters are members of a pioneer Oklahoma family whose support of the University of Oklahoma spans more than a half-century. Their grandmother, Doris Westheimer Neustadt, provided the endowment for the world-renowned Neustadt International Prize for Literature, also awarded by *World Literature Today*, which is widely considered to be the "American Nobel" and one of the most prestigious international literary prizes. Their parents, Walter Jr. and Dolores Neustadt, established an endowed chair, the Neustadt Professor of Comparative Literature, to enhance the directorship of *World Literature Today*.

This is the fifth NSK Prize to be awarded, following Mildred D. Taylor (2003), Brian Doyle (2005), Katherine Paterson (2007), and Vera B. Williams (2009). Wolff will be presented the \$25,000 prize, a silver medallion, and a certificate during official ceremonies at the University of Oklahoma in fall 2011.

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