

# **Kostash wins \$20,000 lifetime achievement prize**

**Richard Helm, Edmonton Journal**

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Edmonton author Myrna Kostash is the winner of this year's Matt Cohen Award for lifetime achievement in writing.

"I'm still quite disbelieving," Kostash said over the phone from her hotel room in Toronto, where her \$20,000 prize was one of several announced Tuesday by the Writers' Trust of Canada.

"I knew Matt. He was a friend very early on when I came to Toronto in the late '60s to do my master's degree. We both became writers at the same time, so that connection with him actually means something to me through this award. ... Matt and I and all the others who have been awarded with this are being acknowledged for the fact we had nothing but a writing life. That day job that you're not supposed to quit? Well, I've never had it.

"So I think that's what it's meant to honour. That as hard and tough and as discouraging as it can be, there are still some of us who pull it off."

Kostash, 66, is the author of 10 books, starting with her multicultural classic, *All of Baba's Children*, published in 1978, and continuing through *The Frog Lake Reader*, released just last year. Kostash will launch her latest book, *Prodigal Daughter: A Journey to Byzantium*, next week.

In its award citation, the Matt Cohen jury (Patsy Aldana, Graeme Gibson and Wayne Grady) credited Kostash with writing "some of the most powerfully evocative works of non-fiction in our literature," while tackling difficult subjects, "from the struggles of teenage girls to the conflicts of eastern Europeans in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union."

Kostash takes considerable pride in the fact that she's done it all from her hometown.

"I found my voice, my community, my stories, my identity, all of that, in Edmonton."

Kostash has said she is inspired in her work by her childhood in the local Ukrainian-Canadian community; her rites of passage through the '60s in the U.S., Canada and Europe; her discovery of the new journalism and feminism in the 1970s and her rediscovery of her western Canadian roots in the 1980s; and most recently, by her return to her spiritual sources in Byzantium and the Eastern Christian Orthodox Church.

It's that latter inspiration that propels her newest book, *Prodigal Daughter*, just published by University of Alberta Press, which is being billed as a blend of travel writing, memoir, historical and political narrative, art history and spiritual reflection.

Kostash will launch the new book Nov. 11 at the ARTery (9535 Jasper Ave.), with the event starting at 7 p.m.

As is her pattern, the writer has reverted from work on an Old World story to one grounded in the new. On Monday, Kostash was tinkering with revisions to a new play, *The Gallows Tree*, based on a story from her *Frog Lake Reader* anthology. A collaborative project with director Vern Thiessen, the play is to be presented in a stage reading Nov. 20 as part of the University of Alberta's Festival of Ideas.

Kostash is the 10th winner of the Matt Cohen prize, awarded to a Canadian writer "whose life has been dedicated to writing as a primary pursuit, in honour of a body of distinguished work in poetry or prose, in English or French."