

Press Release

Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect
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Author Jack J. Hersch Honored at 23rd Annual Spirit of Anne Frank Awards for *Death March Escape*

National Poet Laureate Natasha Trethewey to present 2019 Human "Writes" Award to Hersch for his memoir chronicling his father's escape from two Nazi death marches

April 18, 2019

Jack J. Hersch grew up on stories about his father's time in one of the most notoriously brutal concentration camps of the Holocaust, KZ Mauthausen, considered by the Nazis as the cruelest camp in the Reich. Like many Holocaust survivors, Jack's father, Dave, kept much of his experiences close to the heart, although he sometimes recounted not only the horrors of his internment—when, at 18, over the course of a year his body wasted to less than 80 pounds—but also how he escaped from two separate death marches, each a seemingly impossible task.

Yet it wasn't until six years after his father's death that Jack learned untold truths about those family tales; discoveries that led him through a deep exploration of his father's history. His resulting memoir, *Death March Escape: The Remarkable Story of a Man Who Twice Escaped the Nazi Holocaust*, chronicles this journey, ultimately answering the question of how, against all odds, his father survived.

The Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect will honor Jack for his work with the "Human Writes Award" at the 23rd Annual Spirit of Anne Frank Awards on Monday, June 17. Presented this year by former U.S. Poet Laureate Natasha Trethewey, the Human Writes Award is periodically bestowed by the Anne Frank Center to authors who have proven themselves through their writing to be exceptional leaders in combatting the sort of intolerance, prejudice, and injustice Anne Frank and so many others faced. Past award winners include Jud Newborn, Robert M. Edsel, Steve Berry, Joseph Kanon, and Arthur Miller (posthumously).

Death March Escape tells a powerful story, but it is perhaps most remarkable in its ability to tap into the same optimism that helped shepherd Anne Frank through some of her darkest days, to remind us that defeat—and its inverse, hope—is grounded less in the body than it is the spirit.

"Jack Hersch has brilliantly accomplished that [optimism] with his memoir about his father's experience in the Death March from Auschwitz," says Sharon Douglas, CEO of the Anne Frank Center. "Despite horrifying conditions, he stayed focused. His uplifting attitude helped carry him through unimaginable obstacles. This is a message that resonates with people still today, as they struggle and worry about basic necessities, yet somehow carry on. As Anne Frank said, 'Think of all the beauty still left around you and be happy.' It might not be that simple, yet this is what propels us forward. In his very first book, Jack has beautifully captured that universal human spirit of perseverance, and it's our honor to recognize this effort with our 2019 Spirit of Anne Frank Human Writes Award."

“It is immensely meaningful to me to be honored this way,” Jack says. “My father would have been thrilled.”

The 23rd Annual Spirit of Anne Frank Awards will be held in New York City at the Edison Ballroom on Monday, June 17. To register, volunteer, or make a contribution in honor of Jack J. Hersch, visit www.annefrank.com/safa. Holocaust survivors attend free of charge.

What is done cannot be undone, but one can prevent it happening again.
—Anne Frank

About the Anne Frank Center:

The Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect offers educational programs, traveling exhibits, and theatrical performances to share the impact of the message of Anne Frank's diary by promoting respect for all humanity.

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