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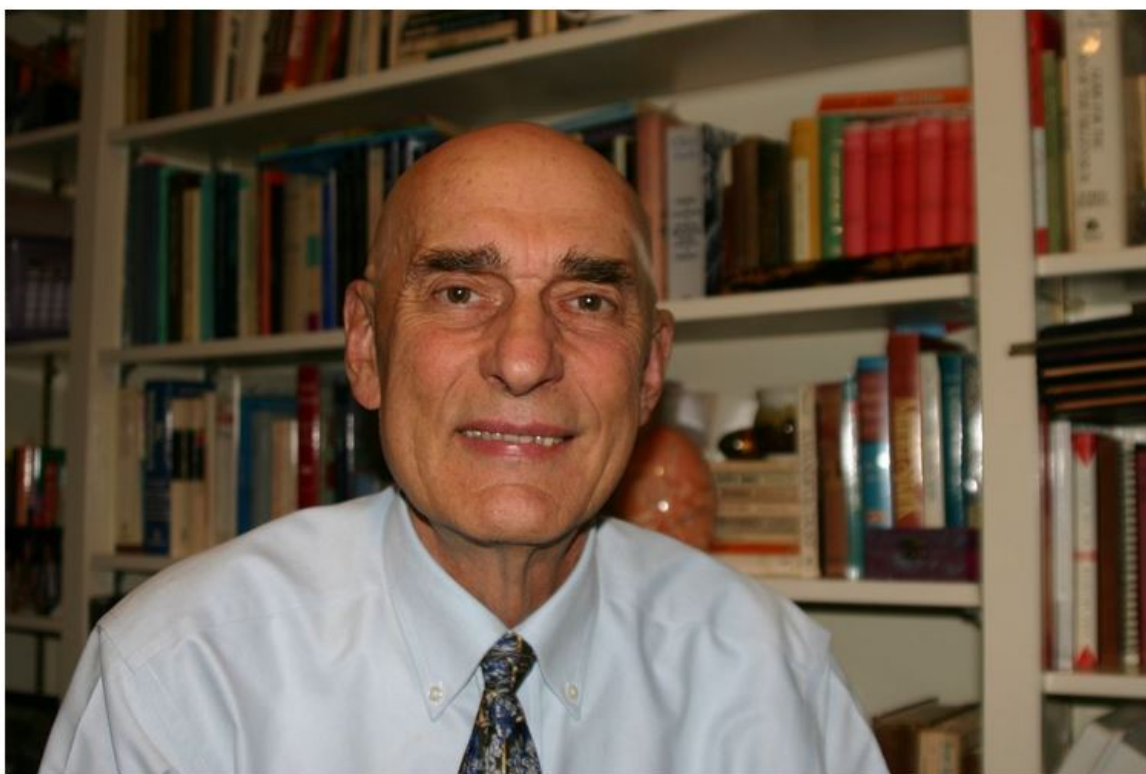
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Lynchburg resident John Guzowski to be featured at Virginia Festival of the Book

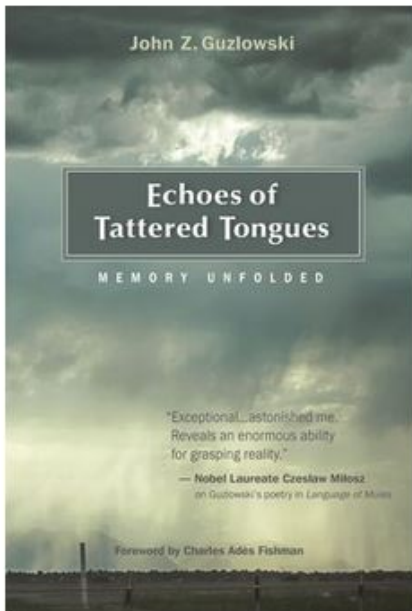


Darrell Laurant 6 hrs ago (0)



Submitted photo

Lynchburg resident John Guzowski will be reading from his latest book of poetry, "Echoes of Tattered Tongues: Memory Unfolded," on Thursday at the Virginia Festival of the Book in Charlottesville.



In almost every family of Holocaust survivors, John Guzowski has observed, one person tends to emerge as the storyteller.

"With our family, that was my father," he said.

Now, with both parents gone, it is him.

"When I was growing up, I wanted to be a science fiction writer," said Guzowski, a Lynchburg resident who will be reading from his latest book of poetry, "Echoes of Tattered Tongues: Memory Unfolded," on Thursday at the Virginia Festival of the Book in Charlottesville.

"I didn't start writing about my parents' experience until after my mother died."

Guzowski and Caroline Heller ("Reading Claudius: A Memoir in Two Parts") will appear at Charlottesville's CitySpace at 2 p.m., for a program titled "Literary Memoirs of Lost Worlds."

Born in a German displaced person's camp in 1948, Guzowski grew up in Chicago, earned a Ph.D. from Purdue University and retired from Eastern Illinois University after a lengthy tenure teaching literature and poetry.

If you go

What: The Virginia Festival of the Book's "Literary Memoirs of Lost Worlds," featuring John Guzowski and Caroline Heller

When: 2 p.m. Thursday

Where: CitySpace, 100 5th St. Northeast in Charlottesville

Info: <http://vabook.org>

He and his wife, Linda Calendrillo, moved to Lynchburg two years ago when their daughter Lillian took a job as an assistant principal at E.C. Glass High School.

"There is some question about whether gentiles should use the word 'Holocaust,' so I'll use it advisedly," said Guzłowski. "My parents were not Jewish, but Polish Catholics who were taken back to Germany by the Nazis to slave labor camps."

While not created for the specific purpose of extermination, these camps were harsh in their own right, and many of the prisoners did not survive them.

"When you're out trying to conquer the world, you don't have time to milk the cows," Guzłowski has said. "Since so many of the male Germans were off fighting, they needed slave labor to work on the farms and factories. My father was at Buchenwald, assigned to a farm connected to the camp."

As the war moved into its endgame, the SS guards gathered many of the Buchenwald inmates and ordered them on a "death march" to avoid discovery by the Allies.

"These were all men," Guzłowski said, "and at one point they reached a women's camp where my mother was imprisoned. The guards there decided to run away to save themselves, leaving the prisoners behind. Seeing that, the men guarding my father's group did the same. So there was this group of men and a group of women, just staring at each other."

From that surreal first meeting, Tekla Hanczarek and Jan Guzłowski formed a relationship and were later married. It took more than six years, however, before they could find their way to the United States — first to Buffalo, New York, and then to Chicago.

"All they had when they came over was inside a wooden trunk that my father had built in Buchenwald," Guzłowski said. "Within three years, they owned a small apartment building in Chicago."

In order to accomplish that, Jan Guzłowski worked three shifts in a factory.

"He worked all the time," John Guzłowski said. "He used to sleep in a small room under the stairs at the factory, and we would bring him food."

It's not surprising, then, that John Guzowski takes exception to current anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S

"It has been shown that 40 percent of American factories are owned by immigrants," he pointed out.

His father, he said, was tormented by memories of the Buchenwald camp.

"He really had no filter about it. He would approach strangers on the street and tell his stories. He had a photograph of several men being hanged at Buchenwald, and he would walk into bars and show it to people."

Now, Guzowski feels a responsibility not only to keep alive the voices of his parents and other survivors, but to remind his reader that the ghastly net cast by the Nazis enveloped a wide range of victims.

He is, first and foremost, a storyteller, although those stories — distilled into poems — are made even more memorable by his adroit command of the English language.

"Echoes of Tattered Tongues: Memory Unfolded," published by Aquila Polonica Press, is his fourth book, following "Language of Mules," "Lightning and Ashes," and a novel, "Suitcase Charlie."

It is one of three finalists for the Benjamin Franklin Poetry Prize given by the Independent Book Publishers Association, and also a finalist for the Eric Hoffer Montaigne Prize for Thoughtful Books.

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