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First Annual BOOKS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE FESTIVAL Running Now Through February 28 At the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan

Partnership with Jewish Book Council Includes Announcement of 72nd National Jewish Book Award Winners

Jai Chakrabarti, Chef Claudia Fleming, Allegra Goodman & David Levithan join lineup alongside previously announced festival guests Chelsea Clinton; Cynthia Nixon; Emma Straub; Stephen J. Dubner & A.J. Jacobs

New York, NY (January 5, 2023) – The first annual **Books That Changed My Life Festival** opens today Thursday, January 5, and runs through Tuesday, February 28 at the **Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan (MMJCCM)**. The two month long celebration of literature and culture features events inspired by or adapted from beloved literary works, including author conversations, weekly storytime, a gallery exhibit, musical, theatrical and film events, new 76West podcast episodes, and more. The festival will also feature the announcement of Jewish Book Council's **72nd National Jewish Book Awards** live from the Books That Changed My Life Pop-Up Library in the MMJCCM lobby.

Books That Changed My Life is a new initiative, hosted by the JCC's Lambert Center for Arts + Ideas, that celebrates the transformational role books play in our lives. Cozy up with a book from the pop-up library in The Laurie M. Tisch Gallery and attend a conversation with notable minds on the topic of their most impactful reads. The Jewish people are often described as "people of the book," and in this interactive celebration of all types of reads, the MMJCCM will honor the ways in which storytelling, documenting, and exploring other worlds allow all of us to live more connected and meaningful lives. Additional information is available at book-festival.mmjccm.org.

The MMJCCM is partnering with Jewish Book Council on the festival, which will include the announcement of the **72nd National Jewish Book Awards**. This first ever live stream announcement of the awards will

take place from the pop-up library in the MMJCCM lobby on **Wednesday, January 18 at 8:45 AM**. Press members who wish to attend and cover the announcement should contact Imagy@mmjccm.org.

“Jewish Book Council is thrilled to announce the winners of the 72nd National Jewish Book Awards live—for the first time ever—in partnership with Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan as part of their inaugural Books That Changed My Life Festival,” shares **Naomi Firestone-Teeter, Executive Director, Jewish Book Council**. “JBC is an organization dedicated to the support and celebration of Jewish literature and its power to impact both the individual and community, and so it’s particularly fitting to collaborate with an institution like MMJCCM that champions Jewish culture and literature, putting it front and center as well.”

Firestone-Teeter continues: “This past year, over 100 judges considered over 700 submissions of Jewish-interest books in order to select some of the most outstanding 2022 books in the field, with winners and finalists selected across over 20 categories. We’re looking forward to celebrating both current and past winners of the National Jewish Book Awards throughout the festival.”

The Jewish Book Council partnership will also include events centered on past and upcoming National Jewish Book Award (NJBA) winners, including a conversation with 2021 NJBA winner Jai Chakrabarti (*A Play for the End of the World*); lobby storytime with the 2022 NJBA-winning picture book; and a February book club with a 2022 NJBA-winning book.

Additional events will be added to the line-up throughout the festival. Newly announced events as of Thursday, January 5 include author **Allegra Goodman** (*Sam, Kaaterskill Falls, Intuition*) in conversation with literary agent and host of the JCC’s Authors in Quarantine series **Julie Barer** on Monday, February 6; author **Jai Chakrabarti** (*A Play for the End of the World*) in conversation with Jewish Book Council’s **Becca Kantor** about a book that changed his life on Wednesday, February 22; acclaimed pastry **chef Claudia Fleming**, the executive culinary director for Daily Provisions, in conversation about her latest book *Delectable: Sweet & Savory Baking* on Monday, February 27; and prolific YA author **David Levithan** (*Boy Meets Boy, Nick and Nora’s Infinite Playlist, Dash & Lily*) will join the Banned Books Panel with PEN America on Thursday, February 8, with additional guests to be named.

As previously announced, the JCC will welcome esteemed authors for live conversations surrounding their latest book releases, including **Chelsea Clinton** in conversation with **Abigail Pogrebin**, **A.J. Jacobs** in conversation with **Stephen J. Dubner**, **Cynthia Nixon** in conversation with **Felicia Kornbluh**, and **Emma Straub** in conversation with **Vanessa Kroll Bennett**. The festival will also include a film screening of Tribeca Film Festival 2022 Official Selection of the documentary *Butterfly in the Sky* telling the story of the beloved PBS children’s series *Reading Rainbow* and iconic host LeVar Burton, as well as two family-friendly theater productions in partnership with TheaterWorksUSA: the first preview production of the new musical *Dot Dot Dot* adapted from *The Dot, Ish, and Sky Color* by Peter H. Reynolds; and *Warriors Don’t Cry*, inspired by Dr. Melba Pattillo Beals’s Little Rock Nine memoir.

The **Books That Changed My Life Pop-Up Library** and cover art gallery installation is now open to the public for free during MMJCCM building hours. On the shelves in the pop-up library, books that have changed the lives of community members will be available for guests to take home, read, and bring back to the pop-up library shelves. The cover art installation, a patchwork of book cover adaptations inspired by the canon of literature, is curated by Studio Special Edition, and features 25+ artists including Manuja Waldia, Jessica Hische, Noma Bar, and more.

In celebration of the Books That Changed My Life Festival, this season of the JCC’s 76West podcast will feature a behind-the-scenes look at the literary industry. Upcoming guests include vice president and executive editor at Alfred A. Knopf and author of the highly anticipated *Pineapple Street*, **Jenny Jackson**; Audie Award-winning audiobook narrator **Michael Crouch**; book cover designer and animator **Elizabeth Yaffe**; and Caldecott Medal winner, illustrator, author, and graphic novelist **Dan Santat**. New 76West episodes will be released bi-weekly starting Wednesday, January 11, and can be streamed online at mmjccm.org/76-west, and anywhere podcasts may be available.

For the Books That Changed My Life Festival line-up and to purchase tickets, visit book-festival.mmjccm.org.

The Books That Changed My Life Festival is presented in partnership with organizations across the country, including Books Are Magic, Jewish Book Council, PEN America, TheaterWorksUSA, WonderSpark Puppets, and Jewish Food Society.

The Books That Changed My Life Festival is made possible thanks to The Harold Anfang Foundation and the Israel Office of Cultural Affairs, Consulate General of Israel New York, and PJ Library. Gallery exhibits and programs are made possible with the generous support of the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund. Additional support is provided by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and the generosity of individual donors.

Shop the festival books with our partner, Books Are Magic, a family-owned independent bookstore in Brooklyn, committed to being a welcoming, friendly, and inclusive space for all people. Purchase books online at: booksaremagic.net/books-that-changed-my-life-fest.

ABOUT THE MARLENE MEYERSON JCC MANHATTAN

Together with its community, the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan creates opportunities for people to connect, grow, and learn within an ever-changing Jewish landscape. Located on 76th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, the JCC is a vibrant non-profit community center on the Upper West Side. It also presents a robust slate of virtual programming, serving an even wider community. The JCC serves over 55,000 people annually through 1,200 programs each season that educate, inspire, and transform participants' minds, bodies, and spirits. Throughout COVID-19, the JCC has pivoted to meet the community online, exceeding 102,000 registrations to over 3,000 virtual classes and programs in the earliest part of the pandemic. Since its inception, the JCC has been committed to serving the community by offering programs, classes, and events that extend beyond neighborhood boundaries, reaching people at all stages of their lives.

Learn more at mmjccm.org

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