

# SaskBooks Reviews

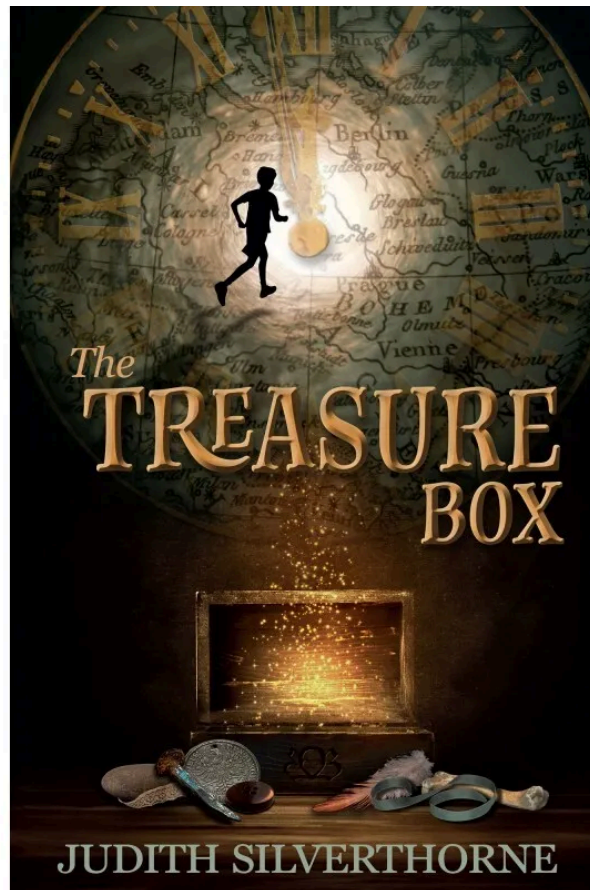
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## Treasure Box, The

27 FEBRUARY 2024

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### The Treasure Box

by Judith Silverthorne

Published by Your Nickel's Worth Publishing

Review by Shelley A. Leedahl  
\$19.95 ISBN 9781988783888

*The Treasure Box* is the fourth Judith Silverthorne novel I've read during my decades as a book reviewer, and again, this Regina-based writer has mesmerized me. I reviewed Silverthorne's middle years' novel, *Convictions*, in 2016, and must reiterate what I wrote about that novel, as it absolutely also applies to *The Treasure Box*: "This is extremely competent writing, and what's more, it's a story that's hard to put down."

Silverthorne's credible and likeable ten-year-old narrator, Augustus Ludwig (aka Gus), has just reluctantly moved from Calgary to Regina after his parents' split. Now Gus, sister Hannah and Mom have moved in with Grandad, who is suffering from intermittent memory loss, and will soon be transitioning into a seniors' home. It's a lot, but there's more. At school Gus becomes the target of "serious bonehead" Connor and his gang of "top dogs," who mock his name and make school miserable, but their teacher, Mrs. Redmar, has given the class a family history assignment that may change everything for empathetic Gus ... his curiosity about his own ancestors, his acceptance of the move, and even his thoughts about his unusual name.

Initially Gus feels that his family history will be "lame," as Grandad's the only relative he knows, but in the first chapter he finds himself in the attic, where "The bare dim bulb cast spooky shadows across the slope-ceilinged space" and inside a "scarred, wooden drop-leaf desk," he uncovers a carved wooden box—the treasure box. The disparate items inside, ie: a "snippet of faded blue ribbon," a coin, and a scrap of a map possess the ability to transport him back to World War II, and even much further back, to the 1600s. Each time he dares handle the objects in the treasure box, he is briefly but viscerally transported to life-and-death scenes involving his ancestors. But who *were* these people, and how were they connected to the yellowed, German baptism certificate from 1944 that only cookie-baking Mrs. Kramer ("Vhat do you vant?") down the street can translate?

There are numerous topical threads in this novel, and I hope the book's incorporated into classrooms across the country. There's multiculturalism and racism (Gus befriends Yussuf, whose family fled Syria, and First Nations'

Issac, who shares his lunch with a classmate who's often hungry); aging; divorce; and war. The fascinating historical elements include The Thirty Years War and the Great Frost of 1709, when birds froze "like tiny marble statues" in trees and in mid-air. Silverthorne evokes both a prairie homestead ("A clump of tall aspens grew out of the foundation of the collapsing, grey-and-weathered barn") and WW2 trenches (that "heaved with rats") with equal success.

Though history's a major element, the author consistently keeps us current, as well. Grandad says the war *his* father fought in (for the Germans) was "More real than video games," and expressions like "No can do" and "Sounds like a plan" maintain the novel's present feel.

And the conclusion: mastery. Congratulations, Judith Silverthorne. You've slayed it again.

THIS BOOK IS AVAILABLE AT YOUR LOCAL BOOKSTORE OR FROM [WWW.SKBOOKS.COM](http://WWW.SKBOOKS.COM)

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Tags: [Judith Silverthorne](#), [Juvenile Fiction](#), [Shelley A. Leedahl](#)

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