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**ASTRAEA LESBIAN FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE
HONORS EXTRAORDINARY
LESBIAN FICTION AND POETRY WRITERS**

NEW YORK, NY, FEBURARY 23, 2007 — Today, the Astraea Lesbian Foundation For Justice announced the winners of its *2006 Lesbian Writers Fund Awards*. Leslie Larson, of Berkeley, California was awarded the \$10,000 fiction prize and Chelsea Jennings, of Kenmore, Washington was awarded the \$10,000 poetry prize.

The only lesbian-led foundation in the world, Astraea's grantmaking and philanthropic advocacy programs help lesbians and allied communities challenge oppression and claim their human rights. This past year, Astraea awarded more than \$1.3 million to organizations in 93 cities and 42 countries around the globe.

Launched in 1991, Astraea's Lesbian Writers Fund provides grants to emerging lesbian poets and fiction writers across the U.S. This year, the Fund awarded a total of \$26,000 to twelve women whose work shows extraordinary promise.

"We're honored to shine a spotlight on these remarkably talented women," said Katherine Acey, Astraea's Executive Director. "Each year," she continued, "we introduce the progressive community to a unique and distinct cadre of voices; voices that quite likely, they would never come across if it were not for Astraea."

The awards are determined by a distinguished panel of judges. This year, the panel included several former Astraea Lesbian Writer awardees. Elena Georgiou (*1998 Awardee in Poetry*) and Janice Gould (*1992 Awardee in Poetry*) served as poetry judges and Nina Revoyr (*1998 Awardee in Fiction*) and Sheila Ortiz-Taylor judged the Fiction contest.

Chelsea Jennings' poetry has appeared in *Poet Lore* and the *GW Review*. She is currently working on an MFA at the University of Washington, where she also teaches composition. A former middle school teacher, ESL instructor, editor, grantwriter, and intern at the Lambda Literary Foundation, Chelsea lived for several months in Dakar, Senegal. The Astraea Lesbian Writer's Fund Award will enable Chelsea to spend this summer working full-time on a manuscript of a first book of poems.

"I remain amazed that such an award—attached to such a substantial amount of money—exists! The amount of the grant and its lack of stipulations indicate to me that Astraea understands the complicated ways that money and art interact.

Many prizes reward writers for finished manuscripts or books, but those finished products often represent several years of intensive unpaid work. Support during the writing process—the kind Astraea provides— can be the deciding factor in whether a writing project is completed. I originally planned to work full time during the summer in order to offset my living expenses for the coming school year. But this grant will enable me to focus on making art instead of making money." – Chelsea Jennings

Leslie Larson's novel, *Slipstream*, was published by Crown Books in 2006. Dorothy Allison describes it as, "A genuinely startling novel that caught me up in the lives of people used to being looked past, over, or beyond." Leslie's creative writing has appeared in publications including *Faultline*, the *East Bay Express*, and the *Women's Review of Books*. She is a former instructor at Macondo, the master writers' workshop led by Sandra Cisneros. Additionally, Leslie has been a freelance writer who has worked for small, independent publishers all her life. She received a degree in English/American Literature from the University of California, San Diego.
www.leslielarson.com

“I am overjoyed to accept this award, and I’m so grateful to Astraea, the judges, and all the donors for this tremendous support. While small, independent presses have historically been the ones who’ve largely published and promoted books by queers and people of color, I’m happy for any opportunity to expand what’s considered “mainstream” for big publishers.

I’m glad that there’s room—both with Astraea and with Crown—for a portrayal of a lesbian character whose sexuality isn’t under scrutiny; it’s just taken for granted. I’m hoping that some of my award can go to promoting the book to queer audiences that might not know it’s a book for them, as well as to suggest to publishers that the mainstream, like so much else in this life, is fluid and open to interpretation.”

–Leslie Larson

Also honored were finalists (\$1,500 each). In Poetry: Lilah Hegnauer, of Charlottesville, VA, and Kate Lynn Hibbard, of Charlottesville, VA. In Fiction: Marybeth Caschetta, of Northampton, MA, and Barbra Johnson, of New Orleans, LA.

Honorable Mentions (\$100 each) In Poetry: Melanie Hope, Brooklyn, NY; Mariel Masque, Tuscon, AZ; and Mary Meriam, Eagle Rock, MO. In Fiction: Nona Caspers, San Francisco, CA; Rebecca Chekouras, El Cerrito, CA; Sharon Wachsler, Shelbourne Falls, MA.

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***The Astraea Lesbian Foundation For Justice** works for social, racial and economic justice in the U.S. and internationally. Our grantmaking and philanthropic advocacy programs help lesbians and allied communities challenge oppression and claim their human rights.*

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