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AJL Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Competition, 1994

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Introduction by

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A popular nonfiction selection in my Temple Library this past year has been *Roots Schmoots: Journeys Among Jews*, by Howard Jacobson. This is a light-hearted look at what many times is the very serious, sometimes painful project of family research. But when that search is deadlocked by the Holocaust, the impasse seems insurmountable, especially to a sensitive young girl. How Mia brings a glimmer of happiness to her lonely mother is a story told with a smooth, clear, and deft talent in the manuscript entitled *Of Heroes, Hooks, and Heirlooms*, the 1994 Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition winner. One reviewer suggested the work needed no editing. Just print it.

The winner is Faye Silton of Albany, NY. Faye grew up in South Bend, Indiana; graduated from Stern College [of Yeshiva University]; and then attended the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and the Hebrew University in Israel. Her work schedule combines two of her principal interests: she is a journalist for the *Albany Jewish World*, and she is also the Director of the Education Center, the Religious School at Temple Israel. While this professional schedule appears hectic enough, her personal life as wife of the Rabbi of Temple Israel must surely be demanding as well.

And did I forget to mention? She has seven children.

I am proud to present to you, Faye Silton, the Ninth Annual Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition Award for your story, *Of Heroes, Hooks, and Heirlooms*.

*Remarks at the Banquet of the 29th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries, held in Atlanta, Georgia, June 21, 1994.

Acceptance Remarks by Faye Silton

Thank you very much for this honor.

In a hinged wooden box upon the top of which was carved a winged fish, my mother kept the tools of her trade. Sometimes I touched a sewing needle with my finger and reflected how such a small object, so nearly weightless, could keep our family from the poorhouse and provide us with enough food to sustain life—although there were times when we were barely sustained.

That is the first paragraph of Paula Fox's Newbery Award-winning novel, *The Slave Dancer*, and it touched something very deep inside of me when I first read it nearly 20 years ago. Much more recently, Aharon Appelfeld spoke at Columbia University about the Holocaust and reminded his audience:

The Holocaust stripped us in a single stroke of all our garments. A great community of Jews, perhaps the greatest in Jewish history, stood with no shelter, deprived of all their earthly possessions, deprived of every title and position.

Well, I had to know how my parents survived. I envisioned all kinds of scenarios; I put myself into them and could not imagine surviving even the pure animal fear that never left them. I obsessed about how little one could actually live on in terms of things, and how I had better never take so much as a rusk of bread for granted. No one told me anything. I did not dare to ask so as not to cause pain. But as the years went by, I learned that one aunt survived because she was a genius with a sewing needle. I also read articles about artists in concentration camps who managed to sketch with burnt twigs or paint with color squeezed from boiled, dyed cloth. I read about poets who penned unforgettable

verses. No one, short of murdering us, said one of my uncles, could deprive us of our ideas and our skills. Needle, twigs, and pen—all such tiny tools, yet they accomplished so much. I realized not so long ago that perhaps not every child grows up with this insight—that she need not feel limited or hopeless or frightened when conditions are difficult; that it pays to have a well-stocked mind and an openness to all sorts of possibilities.

But mostly I have always wanted to make up to my parents what they suffered in such contrast to my blessed life. To do the impossible: to bring something back—something more than *naches* from the children.

I wanted to empower the child in me and other children who might read this story, to let them know how really heroic they can be. Originally, *Of Heroes, Hooks, and Heirlooms* was a short story that I called "Amazing Lace," but a notice of your competition intrigued me and inspired me to develop it further.

Thank you for providing the challenge and the honor and, most of all, for providing proof that such small tools—so nearly weightless—like a pen and words—can accomplish a great deal.

The Jewish Publication Society will be publishing Faye Silton's book in the Fall of 1996.—L.S.

Lillian Schwartz is a graduate of the University of Rhode Island, and a Certified Judaica Librarian. She is a Past President of the New England Jewish Library Association, and has served as Librarian at Temple Emanu-El in Providence for 20 years. Ms. Schwartz has been Coordinator of the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition since 1984.