AJL Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Competition, 1993

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Introduction by
Lillian Schwartz

Just as I was deeply thrilled to expect Ralph Taylor to be here with us to participate in this evening’s awards, I am deeply disappointed and saddened that he is not here. He established this program as a pathway to encourage unpublished fiction writers in the field of children’s literature. He knew they were out there ... struggling, disappointed, creative people aching to know that their talents ... what they have to say ... could be appreciated.

As noted in JL vol. 7, p. 87, Ralph Taylor died on June 24, 1993. —Ed.

The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition has found its own special niche in this maze of publishing. This year I received 258 letters requesting the rules; 21 manuscripts were accepted. At least that number were returned as ineligible. The criteria are clearly outlined, but the writers send along their work regardless ... desperate to find a sympathetic heart. The award winner this year is Lilian Fox Ducharme, who presents an adventure from a rarely mined locale...the Galveston Project.

Ms. Ducharme is known by the nickname Dede. She lives in The Woodlands, Texas, and has devoted her professional life to teaching. She is currently in the Language Arts For the Gifted Program for grades 3 to 5. Her special interest is, of course, writing, and she has won several awards: a Rice University Workshop Scholarship, Honorable Mention by the Golden Triangle Writers Guild Writers Conference, and the Southwest Writers Conference Golden Pen Award.

In a letter to me she wrote, “The Treasure in the Tiny Blue Tin” is not my family’s story, but creating this story gave me an opportunity to express my love for my family and my pride in being a Jewish Texan. I tried to tell this story in a way that all children could understand and appreciate.”

Dede, you have succeeded. I am delighted to present to you the Association of Jewish Libraries’ Eighth Annual Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition Award.

Acceptance Remarks by Lilian “Dede” Fox Ducharme

One day when my great-uncle was fishing on Pelican Island near Galveston, his friend turned to him and said, “Did you know this island used to be a detention center for immigrants?” My uncle just baited his hook and said, “You don’t say!” What my uncle didn’t say was that in 1914 he had spent his very first night in America on that very island.

From 1900 until 1917, the Jewish population of Texas more than doubled, from 15,000 to over 31,000. Many who immigrated through the Port of Galveston had an opportunity to bypass the difficult tenement experiences of the East, but a new life in the American West offered its own challenges.

My story, “The Treasure in the Tiny Blue Tin,” is about a fictional character, Max Miller, a recent Texas immigrant whose family lives above his uncle’s store. When Max’s father, a peddler, fails to return home in time for their first American Passover, Max takes a bike and runs away from Houston to find him.

Max is not your typical Texas hero. He’s rather go to school than fish. He doesn’t know how to swim, and he’s afraid of horses. He’s completely different from his enemy Joe, the blacksmith’s son, who follows him out of town and joins him on his journey.

Together the boys face Texas at its worst. They encounter thieves, storms, floods, snakes, and even death. Along the route north, however, Max finds more than his father. He finds himself, new friends, and a lot about what it means to be an American Jew.

“The Treasure in the Tiny Blue Tin” is not my family’s story, but creating it gave me an opportunity to express my love for my grandparents—my grandma, who grew up in an All-of-a-Kind New York family, and my grandpa, who as part of the Galveston Plan became a Jewish Texan at age 22.

Thank you so much for this award. As one of only a handful of Jews in my community, it means a lot to me that this award comes from the Association of Jewish Libraries and that the award honors one of my favorite children’s authors, Sydney Taylor.

A special thank you to Lilian Schwartz, contest coordinator, who is consistently kind and helpful, and to my husband Chuck, who always reads what I write even when he’d rather be reading a computer manual.


GILMAN

(Continued from p. 113)