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Jewish Children's Books Too Good to Miss: Selected List of 1991 Titles

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Association of Jewish Libraries, Sydney Taylor Book Awards Committee

I. Picture Books

Edwards, Michelle. *A Baker's Portrait*. Lothrop.

The same funny, colorful illustrations that delighted readers in *Chicken Man* now create a story that entertains on several different levels. Michelin is an artist who is compelled to draw only what she sees and finds herself in the uncomfortable position of having to reconcile her honesty with the reality of her subjects. Even young children unfamiliar with the concept of metaphors can appreciate Michelin's brilliant solution.

Feinberg, Miriam. *Just Enough Room*. Illustrated by Marlene L. Ruthen. United Synagogue of America, Commission on Jewish Education.

In this lovely story for young children, the tiny, dark house of an older couple expands and grows cheerful on Shabbat as more and more guests arrive for dinner. There is always "just enough room." The magic of Shabbat and the joy of hospitality are attractively demonstrated and aided by Ms. Ruthen's graphic illustrations.

**Goldin, Barbara Diamond. *Cakes and Miracles: A Purim Tale*. Illustrated by Erika Weihs. Viking.

A beautifully illustrated Purim story about Hershel, a blind boy, who wishes that he could be of help to his poor mother upon whom rests their well-being in the shtetl. In a dream he realizes how he can help by shaping unique hamentaschen, and so his wish comes true.

**Lanton, Sandy. *Daddy's Chair*. Illustrated by Shelly O. Haas. Kar-Ben Copies.

A sensitively written and handsomely illustrated book about a young boy struggling to cope with his father's death from cancer. The story touches upon the child's strong emotions, including anger and denial. The father's favorite chair is the catalyst to his expressions of grief, as well as the site of his eventual comfort and his gradual acceptance of the inevitable changes in his life.

Levine, Arthur A. *All the Lights of the Night*. Illustrated by James Ransom. Tamarine Press.

A charming addition to the extensive picture book literature on Hanukkah, it

is the tale of two boys who travel from Russia to Palestine with tickets sent by their older brother. The family's Hanukkah lamp becomes their own private miracle lamp.

Oppenheim, Shulamith. *Appleblossom*. Illustrated by Joanna Yardley. Harcourt, Brace.

A delightful new Passover story about a talking cat who is well versed in Jewish customs and traditions. Appleblossom utilizes her extensive knowledge of Jewish holiday lore to serve her "cat-ty" needs, and those of the little boy who loves her. The large-size, gentle, and colorful illustrations suit the subject and age level well.

Pushker, Gloria Teles. *Toby Belfer Never Had a Christmas Tree*. Illustrated by Judith Hierstein. Pelican.

A charming memoir by a little Louisiana girl who joins her friends at their homes to celebrate Christmas; at Hanukkah they join her to light the candles, eat latkes, play dreidel, and hear the story of Hanukkah. This sharing prevents Toby from feeling that she is being denied an attractive celebration. The language is simple and the illustrations particularly lovely.

Ross, Lillian Hammer. *Buba Leah and Her Paper Children*. Illustrated by Mary Morgan. Jewish Publication Society.

The author manages to portray sensitively the isolation of an immigrant family. Their separation from the colorful yet difficult life of the shtetl left a void in their lives and in the lives of those left behind as well. The story explores the balance achieved between successful settlement in the New World and the cost of this newfound happiness.

Wild, Margaret. *Let the Celebration Begin!* Orchard.

This moving book tells the story of making toys for child survivors of the Belsen concentration camp. The illustrations depict realistically the conditions of the inmates, while preserving their humanity. The accompanying text allows the book to be enjoyed by an older age group than the picture-book format might suggest.

II. Books for Older Children

Bober, Natalie S. *Marc Chagall, Painter of Dreams*. Illustrated by Vera Rosenberry. Jewish Publication Society.

The painter Marc Chagall is transformed into the man Marc Chagall in this skillfully executed "JPS Young Biography." The warm family life he experienced while growing up and his warm relationship with his first wife, Bella, help the reader to understand the themes of many of his works. The tale of his odyssey from Vitebsk to New York is an especially intriguing section of the book. Rosenberry's illustrations complement the text well.

Kaye, Marilyn. *The Atonement of Mindy Wise*. Harcourt Brace.

A well-written book for and about the teenage audience; it addresses their problems and concerns. The author connects Yom Kippur and its significance in a comprehensible and enjoyable manner. This book is an excellent educational tool from which children can effortlessly learn about a difficult subject.

Morpurgo, Michael. *Waiting for Anya*. Viking.

A realistic World War II novel set in Vichy, France, at the time of the German occupation. A teenaged boy, Jo, participates in a courageous plan to save Jewish children despite the obvious danger. The suspense and human drama—a father hopes to find his daughter in each new group of rescued children—provides exciting and interesting reading.

Orlev, Uri. *The Man From the Other Side*, translated from the Hebrew by Hillel Halkin. Houghton Mifflin.

Another fine work on the Holocaust, this book tells of a Polish boy who lived in Warsaw during the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. The realistic presentation of his experiences will give readers insight into the many facets of life under both normal and trying circumstances.

Sanfield, Steve. *The Feather Merchants and Other Tales of the Fools of Chelm*. Illustrated by Michail Magaril. Orchard Books.

This version of the well-known Chelm stories is rich with *tam* (flavor) and punctuated with the customs of the Jews of Central Europe. This is not just a book of humorous tales, but a valuable resource for librarians and teachers; the afterword alone is a notable treasure. Sanfield states, "A simple research trip became a journey of the" (Continued on p. 108, col. 3)

** = Winner of Sydney Taylor Award