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AJL Sydney Taylor Book Award Presentations, 1993

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Introduction

I am completing my fourth year on the Sydney Taylor Awards Committee. Working on it as a reviewer and as a chairperson has truly been a labor of love. I am sure that the other five members of the committee share this feeling. Spread as we have been all over the country, ours has still been a group effort par excellence, and so I would like to recognize the committee members: Marion Stein, Claudia Fechter (the next chairperson), Etta Gold, Carol Witt, and Chava Ben Zvi.

We read and evaluated 42 books published in 1992; the number was about equally divided between picture books and those for older children. Among them were eight books on holidays, and six of those were Hanukkah books! There were ten books on the Holocaust and five on immigrant experiences. Another category which has been growing recently is that of collected stories. In 1992 five such books were submitted to the committee.

Our task, though time-consuming and demanding, has been most enjoyable, for we read many excellent books.

Jewish Children's Books Too Good to Miss: Selected List of 1992 Titles

Association of Jewish Libraries, Sydney Taylor Book Awards Committee

I. Picture Books

Eisler, Colin T. *David's Songs: His Psalms and Their Story*. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Dial Books. \$17.00. ISBN 0-8037-1058-5.

In a most beautifully illustrated book, Eisler has presented to young readers a selection of Psalms so well chosen and so skillfully arranged, adapted, and translated that they will be read and enjoyed by youngsters of all faiths who have an interest in history, poetry, and art.

Gellman, Ellie. *Jeremy's Dreidel*. Illustrated by Judith Friedman. Rockville, Maryland: Kar-Ben Copies. \$13.95. ISBN 0-929371-33-X.

A wonderful Hanukkah book, with several surprises gradually revealed. A group of children, led by a creative art teacher, prepares special dreidels to be used for games during Hanukkah. One of the children creates an environmentally friendly dreidel. Another one uses an optical illusion for his dreidel, and a third draws the letters on the dreidel in Braille! This is how his friends find out about the boy's father's blindness and learn how he and his family deal with this handicap.

**Gilman, Phoebe. *Something from Nothing*. Ontario: North Winds Press. \$14.95. ISBN 0-590-73802-X.

A charming book based on a Yiddish folktale of a favorite article wearing out and converted successfully into something smaller. The surprise is that there are two stories going on simultaneously, one above and one below.

Hautzig, Esther Rudomin. *Riches*. New York: Harper Collins. \$14.00 ISBN 0-06-022259.

This beautifully produced and sensitively written and illustrated book attempts to explain what having riches really means and what one should do with wealth to please the Almighty.

Jaffe, Nina. *In the Month of Kislev: A Story for Hanukkah*. Illustrated by Louise August. New York: Viking. \$15.00. ISBN 0-0670-82863-7.

This is a very beautifully illustrated Hanukkah tale in which a wealthy but miserly head of a family is taught an important lesson by the town's rabbi, following which he welcomes a poor family into his home so that they all can celebrate together. Through this lovely story, children will learn Hanukkah customs as well as the mitzvah of sharing with the poor.

Kimmel, Eric A. *The Spotted Pony: A Collection of Hanukkah Stories*. Illustrated by Leonard Everett Fisher. New York: Holiday House. \$14.95. ISBN 0-8234-0936-8.

Although the subtitle of this book leads one to think that it is a collection of Hanukkah stories, in fact, it is not. There are eight short "Shammes" stories, followed by eight longer ones. The stories are beautifully and skillfully told in a rich and colorful language. The morals are not always important lessons, though children will find them enjoyable to either hear or read.

Polacco, Patricia. *Mrs. Katz and Tush*. New York: Bantam. \$15.00. ISBN 0-553-08122-5.

In Ms. Polacco's tradition of excellence, this is a beautifully illustrated and sensitively written book about an old Jewish widow's growing friendship with her Black neighbor's son, Larnel. The closeness is woven through another "friend," an uninvited kitten taken in by Mrs. Katz and called Tush because she is without a tail.

*Remarks at the Banquet of the 28th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries, June 22, 1993, held at the New York Hilton Hotel.

** = Winner of Sydney Taylor Award

Rosen, Michael J. *Elijah's Angel: A Story for Chanukah and Christmas*. Illustrated by Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson. San Diego: Harcourt Brace. \$13.95. ISBN 0-15-225394-7.

Elijah is a Black barber and a wood-carver. Michael, a young Jewish boy, is befriended by him. Michael admires Elijah for his wonderful creativity, but he is well aware of the important differences between their faiths and does not know whether his parents will accept this friendship. One hopes that the book will become an example of how people of different religions and races can live together, learn from each other, and yet remain proud and knowledgeable of their differences.

Rosenblum, Richard. *Journey to the Golden Land*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society. \$14.95. ISBN 0-8276-0405-X.

The story of a family's travels from a small village and from the hopelessness of Czarist Russia, to the Land of Freedom, the *Goldene Medine*. The highly detailed illustrations are beautifully executed and reflect the thorough research done for this publication.

Schwartz, Howard; Rush, Barbara. *The Sabbath Lion: A Jewish Folktale from Algeria*. Illustrated by Stephen Fieser. New York: Harper Collins. \$14.00. ISBN 0-06-020853-8.

A folktale retold skillfully by two master storytellers: A boy who chooses to keep the Sabbath even though it puts him in danger is guarded by the "Sabbath lion." As in all tales, there is a main lesson to be learned: the faithful are justly rewarded. And so we have a perfect Sabbath story which will be enjoyed by children and relished by adults, teachers, or parents reading it.

Segal, Sheila F. *Joshua's Dream*. Rev. ed. Illustrated by Joel Iskowitz. New York: UAHC Press. \$10.95. ISBN 0-8074-0476-4.

What a refreshing little book! Just when we were told that Zionism was dead, UAHC reissues and updates a beautiful book for young children about the essence of Zionism, the love for the Land of Israel. When little Joshua comes for his first visit to Israel, he learns about a family member who was a famous pioneer. As he plants a seedling (Jerusalem Pine) in the desert, so his love for the land is gently sown to grow and flourish to maturity. Beautifully illustrated and written.

II. Books for Older Children

Cormier, Robert. *Tunes for Bears to Dance to*. New York: Delacorte Press. \$15.00. ISBN 0-385-30818-3.

An extremely well-written book—a true page-turner. One feels for Henry, who lost a brother and has a very ill, depressed father. He goes to work in order to help the family finances, but meets a very disturbed person in the grocer who employs him. The grocer manipulates his daughter and wife, and attempts to do the same to Henry.

A chance meeting at a city-run arts-and-crafts studio brings Henry together with Mr. Levine, a Holocaust survivor. The short description of the Holocaust is well done, but above all there is an excellent study of the kind of tests humans can be put to.

Dillon, Eilis. *Children of Bach*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company. \$13.95. ISBN 0-684-19440-6.

A sensitively written book about the escape of three children of a musical Hungarian family from the onslaught of the Nazis toward the end of the war. Cowardice and bravery and all the feelings in between surface as the group of six escapees lives in very close quarters. Though the members of this group never lost their human dignity completely, many situations occurred in which they were tested to the extreme.

**Hesse, Karen. *Letters from Rifka*. New York: Henry Holt. \$14.95. ISBN 0-08050-1964-2.

A novel in the form of letters to Rifka's cousin back home in Russia of 1919. The letters describe the family's escapes, frightening encounters, bouts with typhus, and the ringworm which keeps Rifka in Belgium and, a year later, almost gets her sent back to Russia from Ellis Island.

Lehrman, Robert. *The Store That Mama Built*. New York: Macmillan. \$12.95. ISBN 0-02-754632-2.

A moving book that tells the story of a large immigrant family's adjustment to life in America, the move from New York City to a small Pennsylvania town, the loss of a father, and the struggle of the mother of six to keep a grocery store going and thus make a living for her brood.

Many Yiddish words and expressions are used throughout the book. Attempts are made to include Jewish traditions and to explain Jewish customs. Some of the social problems of the era are exposed.

Nixon, Joan Lowery. *Ellis Island: Land of Hope*. New York: Bantam Books. \$16.00. ISBN 0-553-08110-1.

One of several books written recently on the subject of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States. Many feelings are explored in this book: the pains of separation from loved ones and from the familiar, the fear of the new, the difficult trip by land and sea, and finally the possibility of not being allowed into the U.S. through Ellis Island.

Rossel, Seymour. *The Holocaust: The World and the Jews, 1933-1945*. West Orange, New Jersey: Behrman House. \$7.95. ISBN 0-87441-529-2.

A very well-done text for teaching the Holocaust. The use of photographs, official documents, memoirs, diaries, and journals as well as the clear arrangement of these materials is superb. Teachers and students alike will benefit greatly from this book.

Shalant, Phyllis. *Shalom, Geneva Peace*. New York: Dutton. \$15.00. ISBN 0-525-44868-3.

A story about the pains and difficulties of growing up: loneliness, the need for friends, peer pressure, alienation from parents, the search for attention and, mainly, learning to care, to love, and to understand. Both fifteen-year-old Andi and Geneva change in the course of the novel. The author is certainly in touch with adolescent feelings and behavior.