

Levinson, Nancy Smiler. *I Lift My Lamp: Emma Lazarus and the Statue of Liberty*. Lodestar/Dutton.

A parallel story of the life of Emma Lazarus and the development of the statue.

Neimark, Anne E. *One Man's Valor: Leo Baeck and the Holocaust*. Lodestar/Dutton.

Includes the outline of Leo Baeck's life, actions, and philosophy, with the focus on his heroic role in saving Jews during the Holocaust.

*Pitt, Nancy. *Beyond the High White Wall*. Charles Scribner's Sons.

An exciting story, told by 13-year-old Libby, of life and the pressures on Jews in "the old country."

Sherman, Eileen Bluestone. *Monday in Odessa*. Jewish Publication Society.

A story of a modern "refusenik" family.

Zakon, Miriam Stark. *The Floating Minyan of Pirate's Cove*. Judaica Press.

On the way to the solution of this fast-paced mystery, young readers will learn about Jewish practice, events in the Bible, and modern Jewish history.

*Award Winners.

HART

(Continued from p. 46, col. 1)

The Committee read and reviewed numerous children's books published in 1986. Each member wrote at least 40 reviews. I thank the following librarians—Leni Allbaugh, Aileen Grosberg, Geraldine Powers, Edie Salzman, and Jan Sherman—for their excellent evaluations, their well-written reviews, and their promptness! The best of the books we read are listed in "Jewish Children's Books Too Good To Miss: Selected List of 1986 Contenders."

We thank our winners for their contribution to Jewish children's literature, and to the life and education of Jewish children.

Merrily F. Hart is the Librarian at The Arthur J. Lelyveld Center For Jewish Learning, Fairmount Temple, in Cleveland, Ohio, and Chairman of the AJL Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee for Children's Literature.

Sydney Taylor Book Award Acceptance Speeches

Joseph Who Loved the Sabbath **Marilyn Hirsh, Author** **Devis Grebu, Artist** **Picture Book Award Winners**

Introduction by
Merrily F. Hart

The award for the best picture book for 1986 goes to *Joseph Who Loved The Sabbath*, written by Marilyn Hirsh, illustrated by Devis Grebu, and published by Viking-Kestrel.

Marilyn Hirsh is well known to the members of our Association. Her more than 30 books for children have encompassed many cultures. She began illustrating children's books when she was a Peace Corps volunteer in India. When she returned to the U.S., she began to write, as well as illustrate, books. The inspiration for her early books came from the stories her grandmother used to tell about Marilyn's father's boyhood. Her books include the perennial favorites: The Rabbi and the 29 Witches (1976), Ben Goes Into Business (1973), Potato Pancakes All Around (1978), and Could Anything Be Worse (1974). Her more recent holiday books, I Love Hanukkah (1984) and I Love Passover (1985), are perfect introductions to the holidays for the little ones. Marilyn Hirsh was honored for her contributions to Jewish children's literature when the AJL gave her the second Sydney Taylor Body-Of-Work Award in 1979. That turned out to be just the beginning, however, and this latest book was just too good to pass over for the 1986 Picture Book Award.

The Sydney Taylor Awards for children's literature were established in 1984 through an endowment fund to the Association of Jewish Libraries. This has enabled AJL to make cash awards in three categories: Best Picture Book, Best Children's Book, and Body-of-Work. The award-winning books will bear a seal embossed with the names of the Association and Sydney Taylor. The awards have been established to perpetuate the memory of Sydney Taylor by encouraging the publication of quality literature for Jewish children.

Joseph Who Loved the Sabbath retells the familiar midrash of the poor farmer, Joseph, who toiled ceaselessly all week for a greedy and selfish landlord. He spent his little bit of money on the finest foods and objects to celebrate Shabbat. Reward for his piety came—as it often does in folktales—in the belly of a fine fish, purchased for Shabbat. The reward, a ruby—swallowed by the fish from the turban of the evil landlord who perished in a storm at sea—allowed Joseph to purchase the land and animals that his labor had nurtured.

Half of the joy of Joseph Who Loved the Sabbath comes from the intricate lines and beautiful colors of the illustrations by Devis Grebu. Mr. Grebu, born in Rumania, is an internationally known artist, who has lived in many places: Israel, Paris, and currently—Ossining, New York. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bucharest. His paintings have been exhibited in Europe, Israel, Japan, and the U.S., and his illustrations have appeared in many major magazines—Time, Forbes, Harper's, and Business Week to name a few. You may have seen his depiction of Passover gracing the cover of the Spring 1987 issue of Reform Judaism. Our award-winning artist has illustrated over thirty books and has received awards in France and Austria for children's book illustration. He currently has numerous projects underway, and one of them is the Jewish Book Council poster for Jewish Book Month 1987, which makes its debut this evening. It is a pleasure to have Mr. Grebu accept the award for Joseph Who Loved the Sabbath.

**Remarks by Devis Grebu
(Excerpts)
Ossining, New York**

In receiving this award, I feel very honored, very proud, and touched. Honored as an artist, proud as a foreigner, touched as a Jew. Usually, I express myself with brushes and pens and . . . no audience, so I feel awkward when using words—especially the English language.

When I meet people for the first time, the first question I am generally asked is how I came to be where I am, i.e., here in America. My story starts in Bucharest, Romania, some fifty years ago. It was in the thirties, and my mother was wondering whether it was the right time to give life to a child. Is there ever a right time to be born in our world?

My first name, which was supposed to be David in memory of my late grandfather, was mistranslated by the Romanian authorities into D-E-V-I-S. Everyone asks me how my name should be pronounced, which has probably aided my career as an international artist significantly.

During my childhood, Bucharest was a beautiful and free city, and its people were in love with culture, i.e., European culture. Almost everyone could speak French, Italian, or other European languages. Literary and artistic life were at a high level. It suffices to mention such famous names of the period as Brancusi, Eliade, Ionesco, Wiesel, and Saul Steinberg, to whose style of humor I feel very close. Romanian folklore, both music and art/crafts, also helped mold me artistically. The Romanian people were witty and jovial, always ready to laugh and enjoy a good meal. In the morning, you could hear the Gypsies calling for old rags and secondhand goods, and the peasants announcing fresh produce from the country. My mother bought eggs and milk, fruit and vegetables from them. (Besides all her other exceptional qualities, she was unsurpassed in the culinary art. Every Jewish son could say the same about his mother, but let me give you evidence. A few years after we arrived in Israel, my father died and my mother felt deeply distressed. To distract her from her sorrow, some friends who knew her talent in cooking suggested that she organize banquets for Israeli high society. She became so sought-after and famous that Abba Eban, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, entrusted her with culinary responsibility for his official receptions.)

To sum up my youth in Bucharest, the city was then bright and cheerful, all lit-up at night, always wrapped in a festive at-

mosphere, and quite worthy of its nickname "Little Paris." My parents sent me to one of the best high-schools in Bucharest. When I was around thirteen years old, I started studying drawing and painting, since there was already no doubt that I was going to dedicate my life to art. Later, I studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bucharest. I also received a very strong musical education, including piano studies; I mention this for two reasons: first, music has always had a deep influence upon my painting and my search for harmonies and rhythms. The second reason relates to the time when I was constrained by circumstances to stop playing the piano. I was nineteen years old, and my father was arrested and put in jail for more than a year, for no reason; this gave me a terrible shock. After a five-year trial,

" . . . each time I am given the opportunity to work on a Jewish subject, I feel a passionate pleasure in rediscovering my Jewish roots and dreams."

he was acquitted, but we had had to provide him with support during his prison stay. In order to do so, we had to sell—for almost nothing—our valuable belongings, including the beautiful Steinway piano. I never touched a piano again, but am still in love and involved with music in general.

Regarding World War Two, what can I say? . . . It is our collective memory of persecutions and suffering; everyone carries an unforgettable wound from that era.

The aftermath of the war brought Communism to Romania. In the beginning, like all youngsters, I felt very enthusiastic about its ideals of social equality, freedom, and so on. Instead of love poems, I recited pages from Karl Marx's *Manifesto* to my fiancée. But I soon became disillusioned.

In 1950, my parents made their first application to emigrate to Israel, but we had to wait fourteen years before obtaining the right to leave the country! By then, I was already married and the father of two children. In Romania, at this time, the moment you asked for an emigration visa, you were no longer considered a good citizen, a terrible situation in one of the worst totalitarian countries.

When you got your approval, you had to

clean and fix up your whole apartment for the next tenant (usually someone from the secret police). When we obtained first approval in 1959, we had to do all this before receiving our visa. But to our dismay, the government suddenly changed its mind about emigration, and we had to live in our empty apartment, with neither money nor work, and without knowing if it was for one week or forever. Fortunately, some friends helped us survive this period.

Under socialist-realism, it was impossible for an artist to create freely. Almost the only things I could do were tourism and movie posters for Romania. Regarding the latter, I was one of the "chosen," allowed to view many of the best movies from abroad before they were prohibited and returned to their producers. This was one of the ways that Western culture reached us through the iron curtain. (Along with a bunch of friends, I also kept up with the best American jazz. We were fond of it, and had found a special way to follow this music: we knew a man employed in the Customs Department, who secretly informed us every time a good jazz record—sent by some ignorant aparatchiks to their snobbish children—arrived at Customs. We had only one night to make our clandestine tapes before returning the material to our accomplice.)

Finally, at the end of 1964, I was able to leave Romania with my family. All my artwork had to be left behind. Our first stop on the way to Israel was Napoli. For a man coming from such a dull country as Romania, it was like a second birth. I felt dizzy in this bubbling, shifting world, its hooting traffic, its streets crawling with people, its shops' windows crammed with all sorts of goods and foods.

Immediately, I received interesting offers to work in Italy, especially from the well-known Mondadori publishing house; it would have been easy to settle there since I spoke perfect Italian. "Why do you want to leave?", an Italian I encountered asked me. "Because you are a Jew? That's not a good reason. Italians or Jews, we all are Catholics, aren't we?" I was determined to go to Israel and have the experience of being a citizen to the full extent of the word, no longer "somebody's Jew." I never really had any religious or Zionist background, and my arrival in Israel was a revelation. After a while, however, I started feeling a little bit disappointed. While I had been the Jew in Romania, now in Israel I was the Romanian, the same way I was going to be an Israeli in France, and a Frenchman in the U.S.; there was always a pejorative sense to these terms, except here in America where being French gives you a kind of prestige as long as you are

an intellectual or a cheese. . . . This supports my reputation as an international artist.

During the ten years I spent in Israel, I had time to enlist in the army and take part in two wars. Professionally, I did some important work. I had my own graphic-design studio in Tel-Aviv. For a while, I was art director of *Israel Magazine*. Two series of postage stamps I designed for Israel were awarded the International Prize in Italy in 1969 and 1973. I also created the Israeli pavilion of exhibit stands for the first International Fair in Bucharest (which gave me the opportunity to return to Romania six years after leaving and to be received, this time, with all honors. . . .)

Friends of mine advised me to go to Europe to broaden my career; however, I remain strongly bound to Israel with emotional and family ties.

It was in France that my professional development received a real impetus in all directions. I started working with most of the major European publishers, magazines, and newspapers such as *The International Herald Tribune*, Gallimard, Hachette, Flammarion, Dent, Jungbrunnen, *L'Express*, and *Le Figaro*, to cite only a few. Also during this time, I had several one-man-shows in Israel, Switzerland, West Germany, and France.

Then, some friends told me that the only place where I could work at the top level and have an opportunity to become internationally well-known was America. From 1976, I began visiting the States about twice a year. These last few years, I was spending half the year in New York, and since things were developing for the best, I decided to come and settle here. This too-long story explains how I came to be here tonight—here in America—where I wish to remain a while—before somebody advises me to leave and try my luck elsewhere—maybe on the moon. . . .

Besides being a regular contributor to the *New York Times*, I have worked for *Time Magazine*, *Psychology Today*, *Harper's*, *AT&T*, *Life*, *Forbes*, Random House, Dial, Doubleday, Harper and Row, Viking Penguin, Schocken, Franklin Library, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Jewish Book Council, *Jewish Exponent*, *Inside Magazine*, and others. Rizzoli International is preparing to publish a monograph about my artwork and life.

(Continued on p. 50, col. 3)

Beyond the High White Wall **Nancy Pitt**

Children's Book Award Winner
Introduction by
Merrily F. Hart

In contrast to Joseph Who Loved the Sabbath, written and illustrated by a pair of "old hands," our second award winner, *Beyond The High White Wall*, published by Scribner's, is written by a newcomer to the field, Nancy Pitt; this is Ms. Pitt's first novel. Set in the Ukraine in 1903, the story follows 13-year-old Libby, from the hot summer morning when she witnesses a murder in the cornfield, till the day her family sets sail for America. From the first line, the reader feels the heat of that extraordinary summer and becomes a part of Libby's life—wondering about Papa's decision not to report the crime, agonizing as Mama and Papa argue over emigration, entertaining the mysterious Serbian royalty (gypsies?) who visit when Mama and Papa are away, and enjoying the pleasures of life in the family of a comfortable, suddenly not-so-comfortable, Jewish farmer/businessman in Dmitrovka.

Ms. Pitt, who lives in Tucson, received her B.A. from the University of Arizona. *Beyond the High White Wall* is based on her aunt's childhood memories. After I called and wrote the winners, I received a letter from Ms. Pitt, and I shall read part of it.

"Even after the tenth (at least) reading, your letter seems unreal. When I'm sitting alone in a quiet room, scribbling on a yellow pad or tapping my Macintosh, the last thing on my mind is winning an award. The first thing is writing my story; the second, finishing it; the third, finding a publisher, and so on. I dare not dream of prizes, especially the first time out. So it is with wonder and amazement, gratitude and more gratitude that I accept the Sydney Taylor Award. The award is especially precious because it comes from librarians who know and love books. To further the cause of libraries and librarians, I plan on donating half the award to the library at Temple Emanuel in Tucson, and the other half to the library at the Tucson Jewish Community Center."

Remarks by Nancy Pitt
Tucson, AZ

Thank you for the miraculous honor you've given me. Miraculous, because *Beyond the High White Wall* is my first book; because the award is from librarians, who, as a librarian friend reminded me, actually read the books; and because it's a miracle to be rewarded in a public way for something done in private—in secret, almost.

When the pencil hits the yellow pad with the first thoughts, or when the Macintosh lights up with revisions, it's a solitary act, except in my case for Lilli, my Hungarian sheep dog, who thinks I can't write without her and who, I might add, barks at the study door every morning until I go in to sit at my desk. Talk about Jewish guilt!

Actually, I'm grateful for Lilli's nagging. The solitude of writing pushes as well as pulls, and instead of slaving at your desk, you can find yourself pinching the petunias or arranging your shirts in order of color and sleeve length.

Every writer has to be a little in love with loneliness, with listening to silent voices: her characters and her own critical voice. She listens in an interior way. It's half the craft—the half that can't be taught at the Iowa or University of Arizona writing programs—this private listening.



Nancy Pitt
Photo credit: Tracy Pitt

Someone might legitimately ask: If this is such an important part of writing, where can you learn it? I believe you learn it in a place all of us have been, and everyone in this country goes to: first grade. We learn it when we learn to read. Reading makes one a private listener. Sitting with Virginia Lee Burton's *The Little House* (a book I still can't read without crying), a child hears the elevated train as it rumbles by the city-locked Little House, or curled up with Maurice Sendak's *Wild Things*, he shudders at their terrible roars. We learn the joy of stories—a princess's life, a spider's life, the romance of times long past—or to come, the lure of places across the ocean or across town, all pressed onto thin pieces of paper bound by the spine of imagination. What a discovery! What a secret to get in on. The secret of living in the mind. The secret that can, if you're not careful, lead to writing.

Now I'm not saying that everyone who reads will become a writer. At least I hope not. It's hard enough to get published without every man, woman, and child in the United States dashing off a manuscript. But reading *does* lead to writing and other even more desirable things—like hours spent in a secret garden, and higher S.A.T. scores. I know I'm preaching to believers here, but I want to *encourage* you, *exhort* you and *applaud* you people who help make readers of our children. You and elementary school teachers are doing the most important job in our society with, needless to say, the worst remuneration. I, for one, couldn't have made it through my childhood without books and libraries. As a lonely only child who avoided the company of adults—especially those I was related to—books were where I lived, libraries where I went to change lodgings. As librarians, you hold the keys to those living quarters. Even if the locks are rusty from too much TV, keep on opening the doors. We need you. Our kids need you.

As Jewish librarians, you have a special charge—to see that children read books that define their Jewish culture and history and, I think, books that deal in a positive way with morality. It is an accident of birth that *Beyond the High White Wall* has a Jewish subject, but it is by *choice* that it proposes moral questions. I didn't set out to write a morality tale; I just wanted to tell a story. But as I sorted and stretched the material given to me by my Aunt Belle (the book is based on her family history), it began to be clear to me that the dramatic interest lay in a moral dilemma.

As she relates it, one Ukrainian summer morning before anyone else was up, she stepped into the family cornfield in search of the perfect ear for her favorite breakfast. She heard a terrible moaning noise and, in-

stead of running away, she moved quietly toward it. A brave seven-year-old. Squatting, she parted the stalks to see a peasant being beaten to death with an iron rod. After it was over, she sneaked back to the house and told her father. She continues: "Of course a Jew never went to the Russian police, and Papa was afraid to tell them what I saw; life went on as though no one was killed."

I thought, yes, this is it; I'll hang my story here. My protagonist, transformed from seven-year-old Belle to thirteen-year-old Libby, begins to question and to doubt even her own father whom she adores. "The Abraham Kagan I knew was a man of justice who should try to find a way to turn the killer in." But there is no help from that quarter. So with the hard-hearted clarity of purpose that children possess, she exposes the murderer as well as the accommodations grown-ups make to preserve their places in the world. Along the way, she comes to realize the meanness of life under the Tsar, and decides her father has been right in wanting to move the family to America, a move she had heretofore opposed. She asks: "What *wouldn't* I get to be if we stayed in Dmitrovka? We had to leave, to go to America. I didn't want to, but we had to." And so somewhere in the middle of my first draft, after being nudged by my story and my tough-minded childhood heroines, Jo in *Little Women*, Sarah Crewe in *Little Princess*, and Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, I decided to attempt to do what John Gardner speaks of in his "On Moral Fiction"—"to write a book that has a clear, positive moral effect, to present valid models for imitation, and to incite human beings toward life affirmation as opposed to destruction or indifference."

I'm old-fashioned or maybe new-fashioned enough to think these are valuable goals in literature for adults as well as children. There's nothing wrong with shining a light in the face of iniquity, a light bright enough to make it squirm. And to beam the same lamp onto virtue makes our confusing walk through life a little clearer. I'm not advocating the return of Pollyanna with her gooey gladness and flaxen braids that every right-thinking child yearned to yank, but to keep presenting children with positive role models, with life-affirming stories—and that's not the same as happy endings.

I don't think there's more evil in the world than there used to be. It's just that 1900 in sepia photographs seems pastoral and pacific, and, of course, noticeably unelectronic. Modern news-gathering allows us no blissful unawareness. It roots up persecution, greed, and murder from every desert and mountain range, every rice paddy and street corner of the world, and beams them to us

with our morning coffee. Our children, drinking their milk, take it all in. It's those children, encouraged to drink milk to make strong bones, who need to read about heroes and heroines to make strong hearts. To hear stories of people who strive, who don't necessarily win their battles, but find the winning in the trying.

There are lots of juvenile books written today where being well-adjusted seems to be what the characters, and, by inference, the readers, strive for. These books have their place. They can help, but to me, well-adjusted is what you should be after you leave the therapist. Stirred, moved, inspired, is what you should be after reading a book. As writers and librarians, the providers of the books, we must answer that need.

GREBU

(Continued from p. 49, col. 1)

I have just completed the illustrations for the *Book of the Miracles*—about Jewish spirituality—and two posters for Jewish Book Month 1987. Currently, I am working on an old Indian story for a children's book to be published by Dial.

Like my compatriot, Saul Steinberg, I am not an artist specializing only in Jewish matters, and I like to diversify my creations. But each time I am given the opportunity to work on a Jewish subject, I feel a passionate pleasure in rediscovering my Jewish roots and dreams. I am proud to say that, from that point of view, I have been very lucky during these last years.

I hope that this book which you have honored has allowed me to show you, with my brushes and pens—but no audience—my special love for Joseph, who loved the Sabbath. Again, I thank you for this award.