

## ADLER

(Continued from p. 170)

I thank my editor, Aron Hirt-Manheimer for his help. And we all owe special thanks to Sigfried Halbreich. We searched for him, the grandfather in the book, for more than six months. The president of one survivors' group even suggested that we use a "real" number and paint it on someone's arm. We wouldn't do that. We approached several survivors who declined. We enlisted the help of some very prominent members of the survivor community, including Elie Weisel.

Then we found Sigfried Halbreich. He is a Polish-born Holocaust survivor, the first Polish Jew in a German concentration camp. He helped the U.S. War Crimes Branch prepare for the Nuremberg trials. He testified at the trials of Nazi criminals, including the trial of Adolf Eichmann. He is a good representative of all Holocaust survivors. He belongs in this book.

The granddaughter, Ariella Eichenbaum, belongs in this book, too. She is the granddaughter of a survivor.

**"What makes a good Jewish book?" . . . in a truly Jewish book, the Judaism is essential to the story.**

As an author and as an editor, I have been asked many times, "What makes a good Jewish book?" I have often responded that in a truly Jewish book, the Judaism is essential to the story. If the Judaism is taken out of the book, the book falls apart. This was true with my first book of Jewish interest, *The House on The Roof* and with the almost twenty Jewish books that have followed. It's also true of the books I edit at the Jewish Publication Society.

It is certainly true of *The Number on My Grandfather's Arm*. There is an effort today to deny that the Holocaust was a uniquely Jewish tragedy. It can't be done. I feel strongly that we must write and publish as many good books about the Holocaust as we can, and I feel that now is the time to do it.

I hope to write and edit many more books of Jewish interest. One of the many reasons I plan to continue is because of your encouragement and your support. Thank you for telling me and my fellow authors that what we are doing is important. And thank you for this award.

## The Sidney Taylor Manuscript Award Competition

Presentation by  
**Lillian Schwartz**

*The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition has a short history as compared to the AJL book awards, which began in 1968.*

*The first manuscript award was presented in 1986 to Ricky Fleisher, a writer living in Maryland, for her story Spirit, a narrative bursting with the independence and cultural intensity of a young boy living on a kibbutz.*

*The 1987 award was presented to Elaine Soloway (who did live on a kibbutz), for her tender and timely story of two Ethiopian children struggling to reach the haven they dream of—Eretz Yisrael; and the help they found in that land that did not fail them.*

*The high quality and positive Jewish values of Sydney Taylor's work have served as guidelines for our judges as they have for the Book Award Committee. These two manuscripts capture the highest ideals and values of Judaism in today's world.*

*There has been a recurrent theme in the manuscripts submitted for this competition, the same theme Sydney Taylor depicted in her stories of the American-Jewish immigrant family. In fact, in 1986, the runner-up was a charming story with this setting.*

*In the preface of his book How We Lived, Irving Howe notes that the "immigrant Jewish experience, significant as it was for the history of the country and crucial for the lives of most American Jews, is in danger of becoming a myth, often a sentimentalized myth, and thereby unavailable to serious understanding." Our judges are mindful of this pitfall.*

*Therefore, it is significant that the award this year (1988) is given to a writer who tells the story of an immigrant family.*

*In The Streets Are Paved With Gold, Debbie is an only daughter surrounded by four brothers. She is involved in her two worlds—home and school. During the year-long span of the novel, she develops a link between the two, as the family copes with the realities of life in America of the early 20th century.*

*One of the judges commented after her initial reading: "This is a terrific book. It has real and engaging dialogue, good plot, authentic details and values—plus menschlichkeit." The author who has merited this generous praise is Frances Weissenberg.*

*Ms. Weissenberg was raised in Brooklyn, graduated from Brooklyn College, and received a Masters in Education and her MLS (Master of Library Science) at Queens College. Her professional career was divided between the classroom and the library. She and her husband, also an educator, currently reside in Tucson, Arizona. Of particular interest to this audience is the fact that Ms. Weissenberg's only previously published work was an article on bibliotherapy.*

*I am pleased to present the Association of Jewish Libraries Third Annual Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award to Frances Weissenberg for her novel, The Streets Are Paved With Gold.*

*Lillian Schwartz has served as chairman of the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Committee since its inception.*

## Remarks by Frances Weissenberg

In the very best of my family's traditions, my grandmother told my mother, who told me, "Az men lebt, deriebt men." Translated loosely, this could mean, "If you live long enough, you get to play all the roles."

And here I am tonight in the joyful role of a winner of the Sidney Taylor award for the best unpublished manuscript. Because it is a Sidney Taylor award, I have another role—the recipient of a small miracle.

You see, when I conceived the idea of writing this book, I was working as an elementary school librarian. One of my favorite books, which I recommended to many students, was Sydney Taylor's "All-of-a-Kind Family." I, myself, read and reread it and literally hugged it to my heart, hoping that some of the classic simplicity of her writing would rub off on me. Tonight I am receiving a Sydney Taylor award and isn't that a small miracle?

The big miracle is that my manuscript, *The Streets Are Paved With Gold*, made it to this point. There was a lot of frustration, beautiful rejections, rewriting and rewriting. The last rewrite was finished on Jan. 15, 1988 and rushed to the post office to make the competition deadline.

I've been asked why I wrote this book. That's a good question. Why does a man climb a mountain? My answer may be less complex. As one friend pointed out, perhaps I was afraid to lose what I had lived through. I had this tremendous urge to recreate for today's young readers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, how it was growing up in Brooklyn, New York in the twenties. Because I wanted it to be relevant and alive, I fictionalized it.

You know the twenties was an exciting decade. Women had gotten the right to vote; prohibition, labor union activity, and, of course, the Triangle Shirtwaist Fires had occurred, just more than a decade before. I wanted to weave all that into my story.

There was also grinding poverty, but then there was Mama's warm kitchen, and all the relatives. Remember the family was a strong, closely knit unit with many cousins, uncles and *tantes*.

In my family, my mother came to this country by herself (at sixteen). She met my father and married him. With her diamond engagement ring, she brought over three sisters and one brother. How she did it is also in the book.

Since the protagonist, Debbie Gold, is almost fourteen, I was able to include the universal problems of her growing into womanhood. But there was more than that.

Debbie so wants her family to be a real American family. But Mama still refuses to speak English. Because of that, I was able to include a glossary of Yiddish words in the book.

At fourteen, Debbie had a choice. After graduating elementary school, she could go to work and attend continuation school. Her preference was to go to the regular high school. David, her brother was a math genius, and he also expected to go to college.

And as Uncle Pincus was always saying, "Women get married and have babies. Men have to work all their lives."

What about Papa? If he worked, they both could go to school. There was a problem—Papa's coughing. He coughed and coughed, and Debbie could hear him coughing at night. In the twenties, there was a dread disease whose name was never mentioned aloud, only whispered.

It is Mama who tells Debbie in the last chapter that she has been looking for the streets paved with gold in America. When she came to America, she lived in the filthy streets of the East Side, in a crowded tenement apartment. But she never stopped looking.

Now, in the midst of the turmoil the family is facing, she suddenly realizes what "the streets are paved with gold" really means. And that message is relevant today.

I will not say anymore, because I'm hoping that my dream will come true—my manuscript will stand on its own and let the light of the world shine on it. And I will be in the role of an author of a published manuscript.

I want to thank Mr. Taylor, the Association of Jewish Libraries, and all of you for this honor and for sharing with me this special moment in my life. You see, for me this is a rare moment of pure joy.

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