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AJL Sydney Taylor Award Presentations, 1994

Claudia Z. Fechter

The Temple-Tifereth Israel Library, Cleveland, Ohio

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Introduction

The Sydney Taylor Awards were established in 1968 to honor the memory of one of the favorite and finest of all children's literature providers. Sydney Taylor, herself, set the standard of teaching about Jewish values and a Jewish way of life through stories. In her memory, her husband, Ralph Taylor, of blessed memory, and now her daughter, Jo Marshall, have provided a handsome prize for the outstanding writers and illustrators of new Jewish juvenile literature. No children's collection should be without these wonderful works.

We have commemorated the Year of the Child and the Year of the Woman and have celebrated many, many other worthy people and causes. There is no doubt in my mind that 1993–1994 should be dedicated as the Year of the Sydney Taylor Award Reviewers. As early as January 17th, the Los Angeles earthquake struck—affecting the homes and Temple libraries of Helene Gersuk and Ellen Cole. These valiant librarians telephoned within hours to assure me that there would be only a slight delay in the preparation of their reviews and that no matter what, they would carry through on their assignments. On the East coast a bitter cold struck with accompanying ice storms, with which Marion Stein of New York City had to cope while adjusting to a new professional position.

Back in Cleveland, my home mailbox was literally buried under a six-foot high snow-drift, not to emerge until spring. Etta Gold of Miami and Carol Witt of Maryland, both committee veterans, kept our work going on an even keel. Each of the six reviewers gave her very best work; each produced 44 reviews.

The final product [a bound collection] contains 20 reviews of picture books, 12 reviews of older children's books, and 3 sets of reviews that defied our pre-designated categories. This final group of books should better be described as texts, materials more suitable for adults than children. There was even one book with overt anti-Semitic overtones. In summary, the selection for awards was extremely difficult—not for lack of superb books, but for the challenge of selection of one over another.

For all this work, I wish to publicly express my personal appreciation and admiration to each and every committee member. I know that I speak for the leadership of the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) and this composite body in thanking Marion Stein, Carol Witt, Etta Gold, Helene Gersuk, and Ellen Cole.

As we speak, new books are being produced and sent to us for consideration. The new Sydney Taylor Committee is eagerly looking forward to the task of review and evaluation, and to the pleasure of sharing our work with all of you.

Claudia Z. Fechter has been a reviewer on the Sydney Taylor Awards Committee since 1991. In 1993 and 1994, she served as chairman of the Committee. Mrs. Fechter has been Director of The Temple—Tifereth Israel Library and The Temple Museum of Religious Art since 1984. Prior to holding that position, she worked as librarian of Suburban Temple and the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland. Mrs. Fechter is a graduate of Case Western Reserve University and Columbia University. She has served as President of the Greater Cleveland Area Chapter of the Association of Jewish Libraries, as well as on the Steering Committee and as coeditor of the newsletter of the Council of American Jewish Museums, since 1992.

*Remarks at the Banquet of the Association of Jewish Libraries Convention, held in Atlanta, GA, June 21, 1994.

Jewish Children's Books Too Good to Miss: Selected List of 1993 Titles

**Association of Jewish Libraries,
Sydney Taylor Book Awards
Committee**

I. Picture Books

Aroner, Miriam. *The Kingdom of the Singing Birds*. Illustrated by Shelly O. Haas. Rockville, Md.: Kar-Ben Copies. \$15. ISBN 0-929371-43-7.

A beautifully illustrated story of Rabbi Zusya, wise in the ways of nature, and of a young king who did not understand that birds must be free in order to sing. A Hasidic tale teaching honesty and courage.

Brodmann, Aliana. *The Gift*. Illustrated by Anthony Carnabuci. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers. \$14. ISBN 0-671-75110-7.

Through tender, muted illustrations and carefully chosen descriptive text, the joy of giving tzedakah (charity) is beautifully taught for first through third grades.

+ Dolphin, Laurie. *Neve Shalom Wahat Al'salam: Oasis of Peace*. Photos by Ben Dolphin. New York: Scholastic. \$14.95. ISBN 0-590-45799-3.

A timely book of two boys and their families living in Israel. One is an Arab; the other is Jewish. Appealing personal photos enhance the text.

+ = Honorable Mention

** = Winner of Sydney Taylor Award

Edwards, Michelle. *Blessed Are You*. Illustrated by the author. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard. \$15. ISBN 0-688-10759.

A collection of colorfully illustrated Jewish blessings that express joy, grief, and praise.

Fisher, Leonard. *David and Goliath*. Illustrated by the author. New York: Holiday House. \$15.95. ISBN 0-8234-0997.

Well-detailed, sensitively handled text of this dramatic confrontation. Suitable for both Jewish and non-Jewish children of a very young age.

Goldin, Barbara Diamond. *The Magician's Visit*. Illustrated by Robert Andrew Parker. New York: Viking. \$14.95. ISBN 0-670-84840.

An artistic version of a well-known Peretz tale. Simple text is harmoniously united with Chagall-like illustrations of Elijah's visit to a poor *shtetl* couple at Passover.

**Jaffe, Nina. *The Uninvited Guest and Other Jewish Holiday Tales*. Illustrated by Elivia. New York: Scholastic. \$15.95. ISBN 0-590-44653-3.

A well-researched collection of Jewish folk tales, enhanced by introductory holiday material. The sources for the material are included.

Snyder, Carol. *God Must Like Cookies, Too*. Illustrated by Beth Glick. Philadelphia, Pa.: Jewish Publication Society. \$16.95. ISBN 0-8276-0423-8.

A little girl spends an entire Friday with her grandmother. This is a sweet account of a Reform Sabbath service; for very young children.

+ Techner, David; Techner, Judith. *A Candle for Grandpa*. Illustrated by Joel Iskowitz. New York: UAHC Press. \$15.95. ISBN 0-8074-0507-8.

In a most comprehensive, sensitive manner, children are taught about traditional Jewish burial. The participation of each family member is included, along with questions most frequently asked—and then answered for both children and parents.

+ = Honorable Mention

** = Winner of Sydney Taylor Award

Tobias, Tobi. *Pot Luck*. Illustrated by Nola Langer Malone. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard. \$15. ISBN 0-15-220870-4.

Grandmother spends a day with granddaughter Rachel, preparing a "pot luck" dinner for a lifelong friend from Poland. The flashback illustrations and those of shopping, cleaning, baking, and cooking account for a large part of the pleasure in reading this book.

Waldman, Sarah. *Light*. Illustrated by Neil Waldman. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. \$14.95. ISBN 0-15-220870-4.

The six days of Creation unfold in simple, well-chosen words and a mosaic of colorful paintings. An excellent book for sharing with a group of small children.

Wax, Wendy (compiler). *Hanukkah, Oh Hanukkah*. Illustrated by John Speirs. New York: Bantam Books. \$12.95. ISBN 0-533-09551-X.

A scrapbook of how-to information covering holiday history, food, games, prayers, stories, songs, poetry, and four wonderful memoirs geared for the modern family.

Weiss, Nicki. *Stone Men*. Illustrated by the author. New York: Greenwillow Books. \$14. ISBN 0-688-11016-9.

A tale of a mute Jewish peddler who finds a unique way to save a *shtetl* from attack. The story has fine, descriptive vocabulary—suitable for storytelling.

II. Books for Older Children

Drucker, Malka; Halperin, Michael. *Jacob's Rescue*. New York: Doubleday. \$15. ISBN 0-533-0897605.

Based on a real-life situation, this is a story about the Jews during the Holocaust and their Polish protectors. Proper honor is paid to the Righteous Gentiles.

Levinson, Nancy Smiler. *Sweet Notes, Sour Notes*. New York: Lodestar Books. \$12.99. ISBN 0-525-67379-2.

David's close relationship with his zayde (grandfather) and their shared love of music provide a nostalgic look at life in the 1920s. Positive values are given without preaching.

Levitin, Sonia. *The Golem & the Dragon Girl*. New York: Dial Books. \$14.99. ISBN 0-8037-1281-2.

A teenage daughter of Chinese immigrants meets Jonathan, a Jewish teenager living with his mom and a new stepfather. Two cultures come together comfortably in a series of ghostly happenings: a serious accident and a reconciliation of dilemmas. A book for teenage boys and girls to read for fun as well as to acquire unusual information.

+ Linnea, Sharon. *Raoul Wallenberg: The Man Who Stopped Death*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Jewish Publication Society. \$9.95. ISBN 0-553-08326-0.

The life and deeds of this Righteous Gentile give us the finest of role models for our time. The book includes intriguing and factual information about the Wallenberg family and the Holocaust in Hungary; it demonstrates how one person can make a difference.

** Matas, Carol. *Sworn Enemies*. New York: Bantam Books—Div. Doubleday Dell. \$16. ISBN 0-553-08326-0.

The horror of Russian-Jewish history in the 19th century is captured for junior high readers. This tale of two Jewish boys taken into the Czar's army against their will includes religious, moral, political, and social dilemmas.

Orlev, Uri. *Lydia, Queen of Palestine*. Translated from Hebrew by Hillel Halkin. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin. \$13.95. ISBN 0-395-65660-5.

Lydia is bright, talented, and exasperating. This is the story of her adventure, from Romania to life on an Israeli kibbutz. The narrative is fast-paced and humorous; for readers aged ten to fourteen.

Siegel, Danny. *Tell Me a Mitzvah*. Rockville, Md.: Kar-Ben Copies. \$7.95. ISBN 0-929371-78-X. (Available only in soft cover.)

A collection of inspiring vignettes about performing *mitzvot*. Included is a "What can I do" series, consisting of pages of ideas for parents and children, so that they can make a difference.

Toll, Nelly S. *Behind the Secret Window*. New York: Dial—Div. Penguin. \$17. ISBN 0-8037-1362-2.

A personal Holocaust account, told in breathless chronology from 1941 through 1944. The story is enriched by remarkable watercolor artwork done behind the secret window. This is a fine companion piece to *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

Van der Rol, Ruud; Verhoeven, Rian. *Anne Frank Beyond the Diary*. Translated by Tony Langham and Plym Peters. New York: Viking Children's Books. \$17. ISBN 0-670-84932-4.

This photo-biography presents Anne's life through the family's photo album, in addition to selections from the famous diary. The book can serve well as a supplementary text for beginning Holocaust study.

Vos, Ida. *Anna Is Still Here*. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin. \$13.95. ISBN 0-395-65368-1.

Set in northern Holland, this is a disturbing account of a traumatized thirteen-year-old girl. The deep meaning of the Sabbath celebration and Anna's love of books offset the uncomfortable feelings young teens may experience when reading this compelling story.

Zeinert, Karen. *The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. Brookfield, Conn.: Millbrook Press. \$14.95. ISBN 1-56294-282-4.

An excellent basic text for the study of Jewish resistance during World War II. Written in simple language, the book is so carefully researched that it is suitable for students in upper high school grades and even for those on the college level.

Sydney Taylor Book Award Acceptance Speeches Picture Book Award Winner

Introduction of the Author

Claudia Z. Fechter

In the spirit and standard of Sydney Taylor I am pleased and proud to announce that the Award for the outstanding Picture Book of 1993 is given to Nina Jaffe, author, and Elivia Savadier, illustrator, of *The Uninvited Guest and Other Jewish Holiday Tales*, published by Scholastic Books.

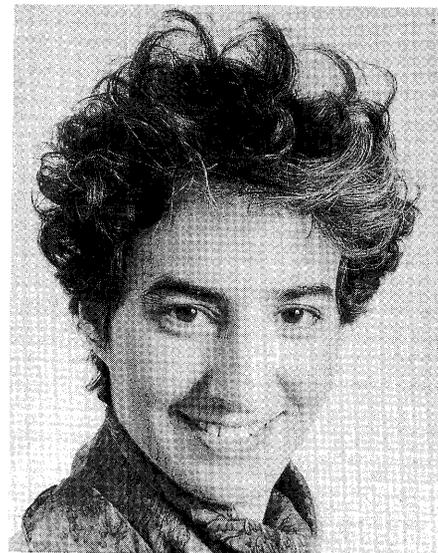
Nina Jaffe lives in New York City with her husband and young son. She is a renowned storyteller, author, and educator who draws upon a rich background of languages, music, and dance movement. An accomplished musician, she enhances her performances with songs in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Ladino while accompanying herself on guitar, dumbek, and small percussion instruments. Ms. Jaffe holds a B.A. in World Music from Wesleyan University and an M.S. in Bilingual Education from the Bank Street College of Education, where she is now a member of the graduate faculty.

In 1990, Nina was the recipient of the Fifth Annual Creative Jewish Arts Award, sponsored by the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue of New York. In 1993 she was awarded a major grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Tonight she joins us to receive the Sydney Taylor Award for authoring the best picture book of Judaica published in 1993.

Remarks by Nina Jaffe

I wish to thank the Association of Jewish Libraries for this very deep *kavod*, the honor of receiving the Sydney Taylor Award for *The Uninvited Guest*.

It is said that we are currently experiencing a renaissance in Jewish children's literature. Certainly when I was growing up in New York City, I never saw the range of picture books, fiction, and nonfiction with Jewish content that is currently available today. Yes, there were the family stories—the history of my grandparents' immigration from Bialystok, Zbledov, and Odessa. There were the readings at Seders and holiday gatherings. But I never saw the Jewish world reflected in the many books I read as a child.



Nina Jaffe

It was only later, as a young adult, through my studies in folklore and ethnomusicology, when I began to seriously explore the world of storytelling, that I learned that we, too, have an oral tradition. I was drawn to the mystical tales of the Hasidim, the rich store of Midrash, the folktales from Eastern Europe, Morocco, Yemen—tales from the Diaspora and from Israel.

And so, I began to tell these stories—in synagogues, Hebrew schools, libraries, museums, community centers. *The Uninvited Guest* is a book that grew directly out of these experiences. During these programs, I was always struck by the look on children's faces. It was as if we were discovering together the magic, wonder, and humor in our shared heritage.

One incident has always stayed with me. At a suburban Sunday school I was telling a story about a destitute widow who goes down to the river, hoping to find what she needs to celebrate Hanukkah with her children (Rush & Marcus, 1980).

"... Suddenly there appeared before her an old man with a long white beard and shining robes. . . ." And at that moment in the story, a little boy cried out, "Santa Claus!!".

His response encapsulated for me the critical importance of folklore in Jewish education. It is what Dov Noy calls the fourth leg (the other three being religion, history, and Hebrew language), without which the table cannot stand firm. Because at almost any other time or place in Jewish history, every child would have known that the figure in the shining robe could be none other than the prophet Elijah.

Last fall, during Jewish Book Month, it was my pleasure to be a guest author at the Jewish Public Library of Montreal. On my first day there, a group of children ran up to me and said, "Tell us about Hannah! Tell us about Avram and Sarah from *The Uninvited Guest!*" That's when I knew that the stories had truly come to life—in the imagination of these children.

There is a rabbinic saying, "Halachah, law, is bread. Aggadah, story and legend, is wine. And by bread alone we cannot live" (Ausubel, 1976). It is because of the work of librarians and teachers that both the bread and the wine, and all the other tastes of Jewish literature, are nourishing the minds and hearts of children and their families today, and in future generations.

References

Ausubel, Nathan. *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1976.

Rush, Barbara; Marcus, Eliezer. *Seventy and One Tales for the Jewish Holidays and Festivals*. New York: American Zionist Youth Foundation, 1980.

Introduction of the Illustrator

Claudia Z. Fechter

A beautiful blending of text and exquisite illustration completes the picture book award winner of 1993. It has been made possible by the fine artwork of Elivia Savadier, who is known professionally as Elivia. She lives with her husband and three-year-old daughter in Brookline, Mass. Elivia grew up in South Africa, and we are indeed fortunate that she has been settled in the U.S. for the last nine years. She studied graphic design at Cape Town University and has worked in educational illustration for a number of years, the last four of which have been dedicated to picture books. This young artist has been published in the Society of Illustrators Humour Annual of 1987 and has exhibited at the Museum of American Illustration.

I am most pleased that the Sydney Taylor Award is her first major award, which I am quite certain will head up a distinguished art career.

Remarks by Elivia Savadier

(Abridged by Claudia Fechter)

This is my first honor of this kind, and I thank you. Your award feels appropriate. I am Jewish and grew up surrounded by a large Jewish community in South Africa, and also by many other cultures and religions, which added considerably to the texture of my life there.

I started illustrating professionally at the Jewish Education Board there, when I was nineteen years old. I illustrated stories for audiovisual presentation, for children's Hebrew language learning. I worked in their library, surrounded by a collection of wonderful old books on Judaism, with photos and prints that I used continuously as reference material. This first job taught me to see as a cinematographer, to create drama and continuity in these enlarged screen images.

A lost boy passes through seven doors of wisdom, to find himself and his relationship to God. A medieval family loses their wealth and is given the opportunity to experience their faith in a fresh way. A peasant finds his wishes granted, but risks losing what is most valuable to him, his family.

Strange to say, I thought of none of this on receiving Nina's beautiful texts. Twenty-one years had passed. But I was drawn into the tales, with a familiar and dream-like ease.

Another recollection is about *Bobba's Matzah Balls*. My aunt wrote and self-published this children's story in 1978, and I drew the pictures. She gave me my first chance at picture-book form. It was to be 14 years before I illustrated my next picture book, for Houghton Mifflin.

I felt that *The Uninvited Guest*, with its content of rich religious myth and fable, needed illustrations larger than life, the pages barely containing their energy, yet drawing the reader back deeply into the images. Thus "The Never Ending Song" became a mandala-like meditative circle of the Earth newly formed, spinning in Heaven, with its fabulous creatures and angels, forming the Earth's sphere. "Miracles on the Sea," about a storm and near extinction, bursts



Elivia Savadier

out of that dream-like form and rages across the page, spraying foam against the text. "The Two Brothers," although appearing to be one of the most complicated illustrations, developed spontaneously, like a tale unfolding on old parchment as it unraveled. The river, the climax of this tale, bursts out and runs off the page.

The illustration for the actual story "The Uninvited Guest" was slow in developing. Two people seated at a Shabbat table was the main theme, which I painted, but with obvious limitations of dramatic impact! It was my first illustration, and my publisher disliked it! The style was too heavy and traditional. I decided to leave it until I'd completed all the other illustrations.

Coming back to it later, I introduced the Shabbat Queen and had the three of them join hands around a table. A circle had again been created, a symbol of continuity through birth, aging, and death, through joys and sorrows. Then the table and chairs didn't matter anymore, and I left them out!

Nina Jaffe, you've given me the opportunity to be the painter of seven great themes, and I thank you.

Association of Jewish Libraries, I thank you so much for your recognition; also for your generosity and hospitality in thus honoring us both in the city of Atlanta, Georgia.

Older Children's Book Award Winner

Introduction by
Claudia Z. Fechter

The Award for the Outstanding Older Children's Book of 1993 goes to Carol Matas for *Sworn Enemies*, published by Bantam Doubleday Dell Books.

The name of Carol Matas is familiar to us and is most popular among our "middle aged" readers for her titles *Daniel's Story* and *Lisa's War*. In 1993 Ms. Matas presented us with a book dealing with such sensitive issues as hate, war, and prejudice. The story is set in czarist Russia, but clearly draws parallels to governments around the world today. People are still being punished for their religious beliefs; perhaps this is in part due to perceived differences by the majority.

Ms. Matas lives in Winnipeg, Canada, with her husband and two children. She holds a degree in English Literature from the University of Western Ontario and is a full-time writer. She enjoys visiting schools and conducting workshops. We are grateful to Bantam Doubleday Dell for bringing Carol all the way from Canada to us, and to Carol for creating this exceptional book, *Sworn Enemies*.

Editor's note: Ms. Matas' acceptance remarks were not submitted for publication. Excerpts from the Publisher's Book Notes follow.

Sworn Enemies
by Carol Matas

About the Book

Aaron and Zev are both spared from serving in the czar's army—but for very different reasons. Aaron's father pays for his scholarly son's freedom; Zev serves as a *khapper* and kidnaps poor boys when the military quota demands it. When Zev learns that Aaron is betrothed to the woman he loves, he turns him over to serve in the czar's army. Fate brings the two boys together, compelling them to depend on each other in order to survive the brutality suffered as they are forced to convert to Christianity. Each must examine the meanings of the Jewish faith, values, and customs as they grapple with hatred, rage, and vengeance for each other.

Issues to Explore

- *Sworn Enemies* deals with sensitive issues such as hate, war, and prejudice. These issues are often uppermost in the



Carol Matas

minds of young students. Some students may make parallels between the czar's government and governments that exist around the world today. *Sworn Enemies* can be used as a basis for these discussions.

- Many people in the world today are punished for their religious beliefs. *Sworn Enemies* enables readers to feel the consequences of such prejudice. Stu-

dents can have a discussion on groups that have been persecuted throughout history due to their religious practices, or perhaps due to their "differences" perceived by the "majority."

- The choices that people make in life often play a vital role in the type of people they become. This is an issue that many young adults are exploring and making decisions about. *Sworn Enemies* can enable students to think about the issue of choice in their lives.
- In *Sworn Enemies*, Aaron is betrothed to a young woman, as was the custom of the time. Students might like to research countries in which it is common for pre-arranged marriages to take place, as well as the reasons for this practice.
- Many students not familiar with a yeshiva education might be curious to find out exactly what it involves. Students might like to interview a rabbi or perhaps someone who has attended a yeshiva to compare a yeshiva education with their own educational experiences. They might discuss some of the Jewish customs and holidays and their importance.

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