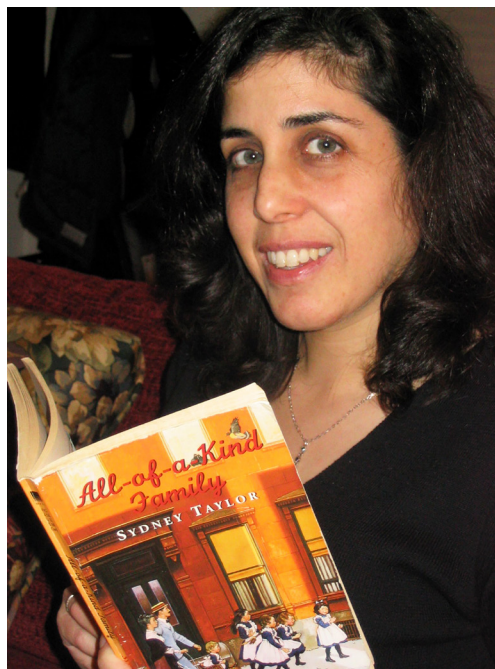


## June Cummins: A Tribute

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Dr. June Cummins, faculty member in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at San Diego State University from 1998 to 2018 and graduate director for over a decade, died February 22, 2018 after a rapid decline from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). A native of San Diego, June completed an English BA at University of California, Berkeley in 1985, and an English MA, M.Phil., and Ph.D. at Columbia University in 1986, 1989, and 1998, respectively. A dedicated scholar of Jewish children's literature, June served from 2001 to 2007 and 2013 to 2015 on the Board of Directors for the Children's Literature Association (ChLA) and was also an inaugural member of the Diversity Committee of ChLA—a committee that remains at the forefront of ChLA's success in diversifying both the membership and the scholarship of the organization. Those of us who served with June on the board remember her as tenacious, outspoken, and committed to fairness and equity for all, especially for those who have been marginalized and excluded within the profession. When June felt strongly about an issue that came before the board, she would not back down; she was a force to be reckoned with.



June Cummins, 1963–2018

A scan of some of Dr. Cummins's scholarly contributions points to her wide-ranging interests, her commitment to inclusion, and even her sense of humor. These include "The Still Almost All-White World of Children's Books: Theory, Practice, and Identity-Based Children's Book Awards," published in Kenneth Kidd and Joseph Thomas's anthology, *Prizing Children's Literature: The Cultural Politics of Children's Book Awards* (2017); "From Overlooked to Looking Over: Lesbians in Children's and Young Adult Literature," published in *Journal of Lesbian Studies* (2015); "'Where in America Are You, God?' Judy Blume, Margaret Simon, and American National Identity," published in the *Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature* (2011), edited by Lynne Vallone and Julia Mickenberg; The "Marketing" entry in *Keywords for Children's Literature* (2011), edited by Philip Nel and Lissa Paul; and "What Are Jewish Boys and Girls Made

Of? Gender in Contemporary Jewish Teen and Tween Fiction,” which appeared in the *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* (2011). June refereed for a wide range of journals including *Jeunesse*, *Children’s Literature*, PMLA, *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, and *Woolf Studies Annual*. Both the particularities of her expertise and the diversity of her areas of interest made June a highly sought-after referee by many a journal editor.

An award-winning teacher and an amazing mentor, June advocated tirelessly for women and minorities in the academy, and she mentored students in an up-close and persistent way that helped them to know that they, too, belonged in academic spaces. June continually took students to ChLA and other conferences, submitted their papers for student essay awards (which they often won!), welcomed students into the profession, and kept up with them after they graduated. It therefore came as no surprise when June was the third recipient of ChLA’s Mentoring Award in 2017—a well-deserved honor.

On a more personal note, June Cummins was not just an amazing scholar, mentor, and colleague, but she was one of my very best friends. And for the better part of two decades, she was also my “conference wife”: we roomed together at ChLA and other conferences for the better part of two decades, having become friends as Ph.D. students while I was earning my Ph.D. at Illinois State University and she was ABD at Columbia University. For twenty years, June lived in Skokie and taught at San Diego State University, commuting back and forth weekly, while her husband, Jonathan, a physicist, looked after their three sons, Jacob, Noah, and Ethan, who attended Jewish day schools. June managed this commute weekly from 1998 until she could no longer travel. My last visit with June was in June 2017, a few months before her death. By this time, June had lost all mobility and communicated with me using eye track on her computer. As heartbreaking as it was to see her so diminished, June’s vivacious spirit was still evident. And her determination was clear; she was finishing her book on Sydney Taylor and her *All-of-a-Kind Family* books, a project to which June had dedicated years of research and travel. She finished the book, using eye track, with the help of Alix Dunietz, a historian, friend, and neighbor. *From Sarah to Sydney: The Woman Behind “All-of-a-Kind Family”* is forthcoming soon from Yale University Press. June’s *magnum opus*, a scholarly biography of this well-loved, widely-read Jewish children’s author, promises to be both an enjoyable read and a fascinating analysis of the life and work of this important Jewish author, by a beloved and learned Jewish scholar of children’s literature.