

# CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

## AJL's Sydney Taylor Awards for Children's Literature\*

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### Introduction

This past year, I have had the privilege of serving once again as Chairman of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, having chaired this committee in 1983 and 1984. In the space of these few short years, I have marveled at the growth in quality of Judaica for children. Although there were certainly excellent books during my earlier stint as chairman, the 46 books that my committee and I reviewed this year showed a delightfully marked increase in quality of illustrations, uniqueness of topic, and sophistication in format. Nowhere is this change for the better more evident than in the Judaic presses: the fine woodcuts by Betsy Teutsch in Jason Aronson's publication, *Had Gadya—One Little Goat*; the excellent variety of books published by the Jewish Publication Society, including a biography of Molly Picon and a novel of immigrants settling in Kansas City, and even a surprisingly interesting new young-adult series written by Orthodox teenagers for Feldheim. And this year, one book on Kar-Ben's list, which is always a good one, made our Honor Book distinction. "Jewish Children's Books Too Good to Miss" lists the best of the bunch; our favorite 23 of the 46 books we reviewed are included in this bibliography to assist you in purchasing for your library, for yourself, or for gifts.

The hard-working committee members who read, reviewed, and handled assignments so efficiently deserve to be recognized. The members are Michlean Amir, who will be assuming the chairmanship, Hava Ben-Zvi, Sylvia Eisen, Rachel Glasser, and Annette Levy Ratkin. My thanks for a job well done.

\*Remarks at The Banquet of The 26th Annual Convention of The Association of Jewish Librarians, held in Miami Beach, June 25, 1991.

We read 23 picture books and 23 books for older children. The picture books included holiday stories (six on Hanukkah alone!), folktales, stories reflecting life in times past, explanations of *tsedakah* [charity], the meaning of a child's name, how Shabbat is celebrated at nursery school, Creation and the Bible. It was definitely a difficult decision. Two picture books are being recognized as Honor Books, runner-ups to the winner. They are *The World's Birthday*, by Barbara Diamond Goldin, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, a charming story about a young boy's desire to have a huge party to celebrate the birthday of the world, the Jewish New Year; and *Judah Who Always Said "No"*, by Harriet Feder, published by Kar-Ben Copies. In this book, the Hanukkah story is told through the eyes of Judah, who grew from a stubborn little boy who yelled "no" to a determined ruler who said "NO" to tyrants.

We also had a difficult time making a decision about the winning book for older children. We read searing Holocaust novels, interesting stories of immigrants to America, biographies of Molly Picon, Judith Resnik, and Henrietta Szold, young adult romances, family stories set in the *shtetl*, and more.

Our Honor Books—our runner-ups—are *Shadow of the Wall*, by Christa Laird (Greenwillow), a haunting novel of a youth's involvement in the Warsaw Ghetto resistance movement and his relationship with physician-humanitarian Janusz Korczak, and *The Cat Who Escaped from Steerage*, by Evelyn Wilde Mayerson, published by Scribner's. This is a fine story about the trip from Europe to America, with the immigrants cramped in the steerage section of a big boat. When nine-year-old Chanah finds a cat, she must keep it hidden, especially at Ellis Island.

We are indeed honored to have such a wonderful benefactor for our awards, Ralph Taylor. Through his generosity in

memory of his beloved wife, Sydney, author of the "All-of-a-Kind Family" series, our awards maintain prestige in the entire book world scene and provide a financial benefit to our lucky recipients. Thank you, Ralph Taylor.

*Sue Barancik, the former librarian of Temple Adath B'nai Israel, Evansville, IN, and the Evansville Public Libraries, has recently relocated to New Jersey and is Children's Librarian at the New Providence Memorial Library.*

**We are sad to report that Ralph Taylor died on June 24, 1993. Prior to his illness he made sure that the Sydney Taylor Awards would continue, by endowing them.**