

Linda Heller, Upon Accepting the AJL Book Award for Best Jewish Children's Picture Book of 1982

The Jewish Publication Society and I are very pleased and proud that you chose *The Castle on Hester Street* for your award; and that eighty years after my grandparents and many other Jews came to America in steerage, we are here on the Queen Mary.

My grandparents died before I was born,
But as a child I loved to hear about them —
How they came to America in steerage . . .
(Although, of course, I didn't love that!)
How they waited anxiously on Ellis Island . . .
(I recommend going there. It's very moving;
Walking down the same corridors;
Sitting on the same benches;
Then, leaving the building and seeing
New York City.)

I liked to hear about my grandfather having a pushcart —
And how he kept it in a garage . . .
And then bought the garage . . .
And many others . . .
And became successful.

I liked to hear about my grandmother learning English
From a tutor,
And studying side by side
With my mother.
In Russia, my grandmother sewed for the Czarina!
(People tell me that's impossible,
But I believe it.)

One day several years ago
I wondered
How would my grandparents tell me
Their story?
And wrote
The Castle on Hester Street
To find out.

One of the best things about writing and illustrating children's books is that you can follow your interests and learn so much. I have done five Jewish children's books and learned so much doing them, that I feel lucky to have had the chance. I also like the fact that I can transform my childhood experiences and memories into books for children I don't even know; and that they, too, can now know about my grandparents. Thank you.

Books by Linda Heller

Lily at the Table, Macmillan, 1979.
Alexis and the Golden Ring, Macmillan, 1980.
Horace Morris, Macmillan, 1980.
Trouble at Goodwoode Manor, Macmillan, 1981.
The Castle on Hester Street, Jewish Publication Society, 1982.

Books illustrated by Linda Heller

A Picture Book of Jewish Holidays, by David A. Adler, Holiday House, 1981.
A Picture Book of Passover, by David A. Adler, Holiday House, 1982.
A Picture Book of Hanukkah, by David A. Adler, Holiday House, 1982.
The Magic Stove, by Mirra Ginsburg, Coward-McCann, 1983.
Elijah's Violin & Other Jewish Fairy Tales, retold by Howard Schwartz, Harper & Row, 1983.

Linda Heller was born in New York City, but grew up in Great Neck, Long Island. Always an avid reader who frequented both her school and public libraries, and usually read a book a day, Linda constantly drew pictures fueled by her imagination. When she was eleven, her father retired from business and brought home "boxes and boxes" of stationery which Linda promptly put to use making books and experimenting with bindings. Continuing her interest in art, Linda attended the Rhode Island School of Design, where she studied illustration and made several animated films. Although she never met her grandparents, she knew that one day she would write a book about them.

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