

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Association of Jewish Libraries Book Award for Children's Literature*

Sue Barancik
Temple Adath B'nai Israel
Evansville, IN

It is my pleasure to present once again the AJL Book Awards for the best children's books of the year. The field of Jewish children's literature continues to grow in quality and quantity, making the task and responsibility of our committee rewardingly difficult. During the past year we reviewed thirty books: some excellent, others less so. We became so enmeshed in *Voyage* by Adele Geras, that along with the Jewish immigrants making the Atlantic crossing to America, we reviewers felt seasick. We sympathized with little Molly in *Molly's Pilgrim* by Barbara Cohen when she tries to explain an American Thanksgiving to her immigrant mother. We were numbed by Gloria Miklowitz's *Close to the Edge* where a young and beautiful Jewish teenager who seemingly has everything, finds life so empty that she contemplates suicide. We cried over the photographs of children caught in the Holocaust and Chana Abells' strikingly simple text in *The Children We Remember*. We learned from Malka Drucker's *Shabbat: A Peaceful Island* and Miriam Chaikin's *Make Noise, Make Merry: The Story of Purim*. We admired both the art and innovative

adaptation of the Daniel story in Leon Garfield and Michael Bragg's *The Writing on the Wall*. We laughed over Ike's latest problems in *Ike and Mama and Trouble at School* by Carol Snyder, and devoured the pages of activities, stories and information in *The Jewish Kids Catalog* by Chaya Burstein. These and our other favorites are listed at the end of this article.

The committee noticed the increased number of submissions from small Jewish presses and self-published authors. Although neither their physical format nor literary quality measures up to the books chosen for our list, we are encouraged by their efforts. Several editors from these small, traditional houses reported to me in our phone conversations that they were trying to improve the quality of their publications, and I am sure they will.

The fact that both of our award books come from Jewish publishing houses this year, rather than from trade houses as in past years, is another sign of the improving quality of Judaic presses. *Bubby, Me, and Memories* by Barbara Pomerantz, published by the UAHC (Union of

American Hebrew Congregations), is a departure from the curriculum-oriented books associated with this house; while publication of *In the Mouth of the Wolf* by Rose Zar by JPS (The Jewish Publication Society of America) represents a continuation of the fine juvenile book publishing of that house under the guidance of children's book editor, David Adler. We salute these two publishers and wish them much success in the future.

While we are saluting . . . there is a children's book author familiar to all of us, Sadie Rose Weilerstein, author of many books, notably the famous *K'tonton* series. Mrs. Weilerstein celebrates her ninetieth birthday this July, 1984, and the Association of Jewish Libraries is sending her a special certificate to mark the occasion.

**Remarks made at the Banquet of the 19th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries held in Atlanta, Georgia, June 26, 1984, where awards were granted for the best children's picture book and the best book for older children.*

Jewish Children's Books Too Good To Miss: Selected List of 1983 Contenders

ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH LIBRARIES BOOK AWARD COMMITTEE

I. For the Youngest - Early Elementary Grades

- Abells, Chana. *The Children We Remember*. Kar-Ben. Photographs of children enduring the Holocaust coupled with simple text. A "first" book about the Holocaust.
- Cohen, Barbara. *Molly's Pilgrim*. Lothrop. A delightful picture book story of a small Jewish immigrant child's first experience with an American Thanksgiving.
- Garfield, Leon. *The Writing on the Wall*. William Morrow. A beautifully illustrated interpretation of the Book of Daniel.
- Ginsburg, Marvell. *The Tattooed Torah*. UAHC. A true account of the seizure of Torahs by Nazis retold in an easy-to-read story.
- Medoff, Francine. *The Mouse in the Matzah Factory*. Kar-Ben. A tiny mouse witnesses the making of matzah.

*Pomerantz, Barbara. *Bubby, Me, and Memories*. UAHC. Our award winner, this photo essay delicately explores the love between grandchild and grandparent, even after the grandmother's death.

Sofer, Barbara. *Holiday Adventures of Achbar*. Kar-Ben. Short chapters center on the Jewish holidays and a resourceful mouse detective.

II. For Middle Graders - Grades 3-6

- Burstein, Chaya. *Jewish Kids Catalog*. JPS. A compendium of stories, activities, history, penpals, book lists, and crafts.
- Chaikin, Miriam. *How Yossi Beat the Evil Urge*. Harper & Row. Daydreaming is the big problem faced by a contemporary Hasidic boy. Good insights into Hasidic customs.
- Chaikin, Miriam. *Make Noise, Make Merry: The Story of Purim*. Clarion. The history and customs of Purim charmingly explained.
- Drucker, Malka. *Shabbat: A Peaceful Island*. Holiday House. A welcome addition to her holiday series.
- Naylor, Phyllis. *The Solomon System*. Atheneum. The once happy home life of two brothers comes to an abrupt end when their parents decide to divorce.
- Snyder, Carol. *Ike and Mama and Trouble at School*. Coward-McCann. Ike finds himself in lots of hot water in this fourth book of the nostalgic series.
- Sussman, Susan. *There's No Such Thing as a Chanukah Bush*, Sandy Goldstein. Albert Whitman. The

Christmas-Chanukah conflict is resolved in a low-key family story.

III. For Young Adults - Grades 7-10

- Geras, Adele. *Voyage*. Atheneum. Anticipation of America on the Atlantic crossing by old and young is described in a finely crafted novel.
- Marzollo, Jean. *Do You Love Me, Harvey Burns?* Dial. A Jewish boy creates problems of anti-Semitism.
- Miklowitz, Gloria. *Close to the Edge*. Delacorte. A pretty, smart, rich, popular girl thinks about committing suicide until she experiences a change in values.
- Schotter, Roni. *Northern Fried Chicken*. Philomel. The Jewish involvement in the Black Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s is the focus of this novel.
- Siegel, Beatrice. *Lillian Wald of Henry Street*, Macmillan. A well-researched, revealing biography of the famous settlement house nurse.
- *Zar, Rose. *In the Mouth of the Wolf*. JPS. Our award winner is a personal narrative of the author's successful attempts to survive during the Holocaust.

Sue Barancik is librarian at Temple Adath B'nai Israel, Evansville, IN, and a professional storyteller traveling to locations ranging from nursery schools to nursing homes.