

AJL Book Award Acceptance Speeches

Barbara Pomerantz Introduction by Sue Barancik

A child's initial encounter with death is usually a result of the death of a pet or an elderly relative. Death is a difficult concept for the child to comprehend, especially in this day of television where actors who are killed in one program reappear alive on another. The child wonders: will the dead person return later; is death sleep? What does "passed away" mean? What is heaven? What does "buried" mean? Can a secret destructive wish, a withheld kiss, or an angry "I wish you were dead!" cause someone's death?

*Barbara Pomerantz worked as a director of a day care center and as an early childhood educator in a Chicago suburb. She had been asked many times by anxious parents for ways to explain death to their children. The book *Bubby, Me and Memories* is her response. She and photographer Leon Lurie captured the love between grandmother and granddaughter.*

*Mrs. Pomerantz and her family made aliyah to Israel in January, 1984; thus she could not come to accept this award (or the award granted to her by *Present Tense* magazine) in person. Accepting for her is Stuart Benick, Director of Publications, UAHC. Mrs. Pomerantz's acceptance speech acknowledging the AJL book award for the best picture book follows:*

Remarks by Barbara Pomerantz

Some readers think that *Bubby, Me and Memories* is a book about death. But, in fact, it is a book which is meant to reaffirm the beauty of life. Through the relationship between a young girl and her grandmother, the thesis is communicated — our immortality is assured through the memories we build and in the people we touch during our lifetime. It is my hope that the book will provide parents with a guide when their children ask about that inevitable fact of life we call death. It is also my hope that *Bubby, Me and Memories* will help adults understand that children are not immune from feeling deep grief. Pushing them away, no matter how gently, does not protect them from mourning. Letting them see us cry does not make them think less of us. Children need to be comforted, and they need permission to comfort us.

For young readers, perhaps *Bubby, Me and Memories* will conjure remembrances of times spent with favorite people.

(continued in next column)

Rose Zar Introduction by Sue Barancik

*Our next honoree, Rose Zar, is a survivor of the Holocaust. She survived because of her keen intelligence, wits, sheer nerve and luck. Fortunately, her childhood sweetheart Meyer survived as well. They were reunited after the war and became involved in rescue attempts to spirit children out of Poland and into Israel. In 1951 after immigrating to America, they moved to South Bend, Indiana, and Rose attained a degree in special education from Indiana University. In addition to being a wife, mother, and grandmother, Rose is a teacher of the mentally retarded and has been a Hebrew School teacher and principal at the Sinai Synagogue for the past thirty years. It is my pleasure to welcome to the podium Rose Zar, author of *In the Mouth of the Wolf*, the winner of the AJL Book Award for Children's Literature, an absorbing account of her experiences during the Holocaust.*

Remarks by Rose Zar

I am extremely honored and delighted to accept this award from the Association of Jewish Libraries. The German poet, Heinrich Heine, said that "A book is like
(continued in next column)

Barbara Pomerantz *(continued)*

Perhaps it will help them know that life is very precious. Hopefully, it will ignite the spark for discussions at home and in the classroom so that questions and fears about death will no longer be sublimated, for it is when the deepest human emotions finally surface and are openly shared, that our young people will confront their future with greater self-esteem, insights, and compassion.

I consider it a great privilege to be able to contribute to Jewish literature. Our young people need to be reassured that their lives have significance within the Jewish context. That goal can be approached when readers see themselves in pages that communicate Jewish themes, characters and ideals.

My thanks to Leon Lurie for his beautiful photographs, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations for encouragement and support, and finally, to the Association of Jewish Libraries for this recognition.

a child and needs time to be born. A respectable woman doesn't bring a child into the world before the ninth month." This book is the product of four years' labor and is the true account of my adolescence during the years of Hitler's genocidal regime. While the story of my escape has made for the interesting book you so kindly honor here tonight, the recollection of these events was often painful and agonizing.

My remembrances of the past brought me back to the Polish city of Piotrkow in which I was born and raised. When in 1942, the Germans started the deportation of my city's Jewish population, I was able to escape from the ghetto. With the aid of a false identity card stating that I was an Aryan named Wanda Gadja, I was able to live as a Roman Catholic among the Polish population of Krakow. My first year under an assumed identity was the most treacherous. The Poles were extremely anti-Semitic and zealously aided the Germans in ferreting out hidden Jews. To preserve my anonymity, I had to stay on the run, living without family or friends, and changing jobs and addresses constantly. I watched with seeming indifference as Torah scrolls were made into boot linings. I had to escape from the house of a drunken boss whose amorous advances I refused to satisfy. I had to abandon my intellectual and religious sensibilities and adapt myself to the cruel and vulgar society within which I was living.

By 1943, I was able to achieve a measure of safety and insure my survival in the most ironic way. I secured a position as a potato peeler in an SS kitchen in Krakow, and thereafter became a nanny and nursemaid living in the household of the SS Commandant. Although I was not totally free from danger, by living in the "mouth of the wolf," I had removed from my shoulders much of the burden of suspicion and was spared the worries of "daily bread." As a fugitive, all my energies were concentrated on survival, but with the change in my living arrangement as a nanny, my life once again assumed regular patterns, which we take so much for granted in peacetime. The only links to my past were my memories, feelings, and occasional letters through the underground from the ghetto. In the new surroundings, a need emerged to keep in touch with my other life that had ended so abruptly. This could only be achieved through reading, that I now felt a desire and need for.

Rose Zar (continued)

The first book I checked out of the library was an American novel translated into Polish shortly before the war, *Przeminelo z Wiatrem*, known as *Gone with the Wind*. It was the story of a strong young woman, set in a country to which I had never been. However, as I read the book, I understood the poignancy of this story of the destruction of the South and its implications for my own situation. Through the eyes of Scarlett O'Hara, I learned about the decimation of a society and its lifestyle, the death of family and friends, and the will to persevere and rebuild. I realized that the world from which I had come was irrevocably destroyed, that I had to survive, and that as I had promised my father, I had to tell the story to future generations.

When I sat down to write *In the Mouth of the Wolf*, I had two objectives in mind. The first and obvious one was to retell the story of the Holocaust. There are many history books that outline the facts and events of World War II more chronologically than this book. However, numbers and dates carry with them a certain sterility. Only through personal accounts like this do people understand why war is so awful and genocide so abhorrent. Only through personal accounts can the legacy of the past be kindled in the consciousness of the present generation.

Secondly, I wrote this book with the aim of instilling in my young readers a sense of honor and strength. The modern American Jewish adolescent is faced with very serious problems of human self-respect, of honor, of sexual responsibility and of religious commitment. I hope that in telling my wartime experiences as a young girl, I may be able to guide my young readers in their moments of difficulty in otherwise peaceful lives. I hope that my moments of courage will provide an example for them and help them live steadfastly as Jewish men and women. I also hope that the non-Jewish reader finds my story equally valid, and will arrive at the conclusion that the lesson of the Holocaust has not only Jewish but universal implications and consequences.

Although one should never be so naive as to expect literature to prevent personal problems, war or genocide, one should never underestimate the power of literature to provide strength and guidance. Who, after all, would have thought that Margaret Mitchell's story about a Southern heroine would have helped a young Jewish girl from Poland to survive the Nazi genocide. And who would have thought that this young girl from Poland would come to Atlanta as a mature woman to accept this award from you tonight. I thank you one and all.

THE CHOSEN BOOK

Recently Published Acquisition Tools

Edith Lubetski
Stern College
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This column lists new and recently published materials that may be useful as acquisition tools. If you are aware of anything that falls into this category, kindly send a brief notice to:

Prof. Edith Lubetski
Hedi Steinberg Library
Stern College for Women
245 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10016

Antiquarian Material

AB Bookman's Weekly (Formerly: *Antiquarian Bookman*) 1948- . Special Judaica Issue, March 26, 1984. Single copy \$5.00.

This is the second issue devoted specifically to Judaica. The first (dated April 18, 1983) met with such an enthusiastic response that the editors plan to make this an annual event.

The main thrust of the pamphlet is antiquarian material, although it does include some material on new and recent books. It is divided into three parts: 1) articles; 2) books for sale; 3) books wanted. The books for sale include a large number of books of Jewish interest, while there are only a few in the "want lists." A useful feature of this pamphlet is the inclusion of the names and addresses of antiquarian dealers that handle Judaica. The issue affords the librarian an opportunity to become aware of antiquarian dealers specializing in Judaica, as well as of general dealers who have ventured into this field. Further, it provides libraries with a vehicle for publishing their own want ads—for a price.

The articles, which are interesting and illuminating, cover a variety of topics: a survey of recent scholarly Judaica; the history and development of Hebrew calligraphy and typography; the Judaica auction market; parchment used by the Jewish Scribe; and book reviews (new and recent books).

This is an important tool for university and research libraries of Judaica.

Bookstore Catalog

Steimatzky Agency of North America
56 East 11th Street
New York, New York 10003

Steimatzky bookstore is a name well known in Israel; and now, Steimatzky has come to New York, more specifically, to Greenwich Village. The store sells Hebrew and English books published in Israel on all topics. It issues a catalog of Hebrew titles, as well as a catalog of English materials. The books listed in Hebrew are, for the most part, general in nature, although there is a minority of titles of Jewish interest. There is a great deal of literature in Hebrew for children and young adults. The English material is more of Judaic interest. The store advertises that it has over 1,500 titles in stock. Anything in stock is available immediately; otherwise there is a two-week wait for books, which are shipped from Israel via air mail.

[See a related letter and response from Edith Lubetski in the Commentaries section of this issue - Eds.]

Juvenile Bibliography

Schram, Peninnah, **Eeyore's Books of Jewish Interest for Children**. New York: Eeyore's Books for Children (2252 Broadway, New York, NY 10024), 1983. \$2.00

This is a bookstore catalog. Ordinarily, we would assume that as such it would be merely a list of titles with descriptive blurbs, but it is much more. Arranged by subject categories, and graded by age, this is a bibliography of in-print books and recordings annotated by a professional storyteller (who is also an Assistant Professor of Speech and Drama at Stern College for Women, Yeshiva University). Each subject section begins with a short introduction. A very useful aid in selecting children's books for a library.