

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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

Judy Greenblatt
Temple B'nai Israel Library
Toledo, Ohio

AJL members, honored guests and friends, I would like to start tonight by welcoming our SSC (School, Synagogue, Center) award-winning authors, Miriam Chaikin, Amy Schwartz, and Uri Orlev—represented by Mary Ignasiak.

Next, I would like to thank the members of my very hard-working committee: Leni Albaugh, Merrily Hart, Anne Kirschenbaum, Edie Salzman, and Frances Wolf. It has been a great pleasure and honor to work with these fine people as we read our books and each other's reviews, and consulted to reach our decisions.

Our first job is finding the books to consider. Every time I see a book now, I find myself checking the date of publication and consulting my list to make sure that, if appropriate, it has not been omitted. Should you happen on a good children's book whose Jewish content is not revealed by either title or author, or whose publisher is little-known, please notify me, so that we may consider it in future competitions. It's very exciting to work on the AJL Book Award Committee. The awards are so important because of their underlying purpose: to encourage the writing and publication of excellent books that will help Jewish children understand Judaism and enrich their knowledge of and pride in their heritage. Important, too, is increasing knowledge of Judaism in the non-Jewish community, changing perceptions and raising the level of information. Our heritage is rich and complex; our values the bedrock of Western civilization; our hope, that we can encourage others to share our commitment.

* Remarks made at the Banquet of the 20th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries held in Cleveland, Ohio, June 25, 1985.

Jewish Children's Books Too Good To Miss: Selected List of 1984 Contenders

ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH LIBRARIES BOOK AWARD COMMITTEE

I. For the Youngest—Early Elementary Grades

Adler, David. *A Picture Book of Israel*. Holiday House. Many black and white pictures, brief text.

Cohen, Barbara. *Here Come the Purim Players*. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard. The Purim players of old Prague and their audience combine to tell the story of Purim. Lush Brodsky illustrations.

Greene, Jacqueline Dembar. *Butchers and Bakers, Rabbis and Kings*. Kar-Ben. The Jews of Tudela, Spain come up with a way to insure that the new king will continue to grant them the rights they are used to. Hirsh illustrations provide much detail.

Hirsh, Marilyn. *I Love Hanukkah*. Holiday House. A grandpa tells the story of Hanukkah to his small grandson.

Hutton, Warwick. *Jonah and the Great Fish*. Atheneum. Outstanding watercolor illustrations, minimal text in this retelling.

*Schwartz, Amy. *Mrs. Moskowitz and the Sabbath Candlesticks*. JPS. A pair of Sabbath candlesticks leads to a dramatic change in Mrs. Moskowitz's outlook on life.

Sherman, Eileen. *The Odd Potato, A Chanukkah Story*. Kar-Ben. When Rachel's father refuses to help her find the family menorah, Rachel uses her creativity to find other ways to celebrate Hanukkah.

Zusman, Evelyn. *The Passover Parrot*. Kar-Ben. A very funny Passover story about a parrot who learns the Mah Nishtanah.

II. For Middle Graders—Grades 3-6

Adler, David. *Our Golda: The Story of Golda Meir*. Viking. Emphasis is on Golda's childhood. Attractively illustrated with line drawings.

Burstein, Chana. *Joseph and Anna's Time Capsule: A Legacy from Old Jewish Prague*. Summit. The Precious Legacy exhibit is the take-off point for this discussion of 19th-century Prague.

*Chaikin, Miriam. *Lower, Higher, You're a Liar!* Harper & Row. In the fourth book of the Molly series, the heroine finds out that bullies have problems too.

*Chaikin, Miriam. *Shake a Palm Branch: The Story and Meaning of Sukkot*. Clarion. The third in Chaikin's holiday series is comprehensive and attractive.

Drucker, Malka. *Celebrating Life: Jewish Rites of Passage*. Holiday House. Drucker turns her attention to life cycle events. There's much information, presented in a lucid, easy-to-read style.

Levoy, Myron. *The Hanukkah of Great-Uncle Otto*. Jewish Publication Society (JPS). The relationship between Joshua and his old, arthritic great-uncle Otto is at the heart of this story, which is also a Hanukkah story.

Metter, Bert. *Bar Mitzvah, Bat Mitzvah: How Jewish Boys and Girls Come of Age*. Clarion. Explains the history, ceremony and significance of bar and bat mitzvah.

*Orlev, Uri. *The Island on Bird Street*. Houghton Mifflin. Eleven-year-old Alex survives a winter alone in an abandoned building in the ghetto, kept alive by his wits and his strong faith.

Provost, Gary and Levine-Freidus, Gail. *Good if it Goes*. Bradbury. David's troubles come to a head when his parents ask him to change his bar mitzvah date because of his grandfather's illness.

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The Sydney Taylor Awards for children's literature were established in 1984 through an endowment fund to the Association of Jewish Libraries. This has enabled AJL to make cash awards in three categories: Best Picture Book, Best Children's Book, and Body-of-Work. The award-winning books will bear a seal embossed with the names of the Association and Sydney Taylor. The awards have been established to perpetuate the memory of Sydney Taylor by encouraging the publication of quality literature for Jewish children.

AJL Book Award Acceptance Speeches

**Amy Schwartz:
Picture Book Award Winner**
Introduction by
Judy Greenblatt

When I tallied the vote for the Picture Book Award, of the five books that formed a group at the top, three were published by Kar-Ben Copies, a small, relatively new publishing house. I believe that Judyth Groner and Madeline Wikler deserve special commendation for producing books of consistently high quality. I predict a Sydney Taylor Award for Best Picture Book will go to a book published by Kar-Ben Copies very soon. The fifth book was published by the Jewish Publication Society, which also produced our winner. JPS, under the guidance of David Adler, Editor of JPS Books for Young People, has been doing an outstanding job of publishing excellent books for children.

Jewish Children's Books (continued)

Spero, Moshe Halevi. *Zedyeh*. Simcha. An excellent book about dealing with death, with a very traditional outlook.

Wolitzer, Hilma. *Wish You Were Here*. Farrar, Straus, Giroux. Bernie Segal, desperately lonely after the death of his father, has a secret plan to visit his grandfather in Florida.

III. For Young Adults — Grades 7-10

Bober, Natalie S. *Breaking Tradition: The Story of Louise Nevelson*. Atheneum. The remarkable story of one of America's foremost sculptors; includes much on the development of Nevelson's art.

Cowan, Ida and Gunter, Irene. *A Spy for Freedom: The Story of Sarah Aaronsohn*. Lodestar. Sarah Aaronsohn grew up in Palestine and led a spy ring against the Turks during World War I.

Isaacman, Clara. *Clara's Story*, as told to Joan Adess Grossman. JPS. Another dimension is added to our knowledge of the Holocaust as we read Clara's story of survival in Antwerp.

Kresh, Paul. *Isaac Bashevis Singer: The Story of a Storyteller*. Lodestar. Emphasis on Singer's childhood in Poland.

Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Stories for Children*. Farrar, Straus, Giroux. Its title notwithstanding, this is a wonderful book for teenagers, containing many of the elements present in Singer's writing for adults.

Tamar, Erika. *Good-Bye Glamour Girl*. Lippincott. Star-struck Liesl, a refugee from Vienna, finds out that growing up means not running away.

* Award winners

Judy Greenblatt is Librarian of Temple B'nai Israel in Toledo, Ohio and Chairman of the AJL Book Award Committee for Children's Literature.

Of the five at the top, one book stood way above the rest. Each of us found the criteria of excellence were best met by Mrs. Moskowitz and the Sabbath Candlesticks. Excellent writing, charming illustrations, and clear and positive Jewish values combine to produce a warm and delightful picture of the joys of Shabbat and of the value of observing mitzvot. Mrs. Moskowitz' problem is that she must give up the home in which she has spent the major portion of her adulthood. It is not a problem that is limited to Jewish grandmothers. Mrs. Moskowitz therefore has wide appeal beyond the Jewish community, which bespeaks the universality of the themes touched on. Thus many people outside the Jewish community will learn about our Shabbat and about Jewish values.

The author of Mrs. Moskowitz and the Sabbath Candlesticks, Amy Schwartz, is a delightful Californian, who has taught art in her native state. Her home is now New York, where she has worked in the production department of a major publishing house. Ms. Schwartz has illustrated books, including one published this year written by Amy Hest, called The Crack of Dawn Walkers. She has also done illustrations for magazines and greeting cards. Her first book, Bea and Mrs. Jones, was widely acclaimed. It was a selection of public TV's Reading Rainbow, and was listed in the New York Times and in School Library Journal as one of the best picture books of the year. Ms. Schwartz's next book will be titled Begin at the Beginning.

Mrs. Moskowitz was the first of Amy Schwartz's works to be published by the Jewish Publication Society; the next, a Chelm tale, is due out in the fall. I hope these two will be the first of many. It gives me great pleasure to present to you the winner of AJL's Sydney Taylor Award for Best Picture Book, Amy Schwartz.

Remarks by Amy Schwartz

I'd like to thank the Association of Jewish Libraries for giving me this award. It is quite an honor.

In *Mrs. Moskowitz and the Sabbath Candlesticks*, I wanted to express some of my feelings about the importance of a sense of home, and the idea that the holiday of Shabbat celebrates these feelings.

The book is about an older woman who moves into a new apartment. She desperately misses her old home. Mrs. Moskowitz feels so unhappy in her new apartment that

she cannot even bring herself to unpack. Then her son comes by with a box that was overlooked in the move. The box contains a pair of tarnished Sabbath candlesticks. These candlesticks bring up strong feelings and memories for Mrs. Moskowitz. They serve as catalysts that lead her into unpacking, cleaning, and, most important, feeling again. Mrs. Moskowitz sets up her apartment and prepares for Shabbat. She makes her apartment into a home.

The book began with a meeting with the juvenile book editor at the Jewish Publication Society, David Adler. My agent had shown David my artwork. David phoned me and invited me to come in and talk. He told me that he was interested in doing a picture-book about the Sabbath. I listened, and responded that, Oh yes, I was very interested. I'd have something to show him soon. I never tell a potential employer that I don't know how to do something.

It is an understatement to say that I was worried when I got home. I knew very little about Shabbat. And I'd never written anything from someone's suggestion. Nevertheless, I bravely put a sheet of paper in my typewriter. I typed out the word "Shabbat." Then I sat there. Then I typed two names, "Janet," and "Beth."

Janet Seckel and Beth Pearson were neighbors of mine when I moved to New York six years ago. They lived upstairs from me in a huge, impersonal, apartment building on the Upper West Side. Janet was working, Beth was a student, and they both were observant Jews.

I met them during what was a difficult time for me. I was new in New York. I had come looking for work illustrating children's books. Manhattan seemed to me to be a city of twenty-one-year-olds working in advertising, living in studio apartments, thinking only of window offices and how to dress for success. I desperately missed California. I missed my way of life there. I missed my home.

Then I met Janet and Beth. I loved visiting them. Their apartment felt different from any other apartment I'd been in in Manhattan. Something was usually cooking on the stove. We talked about feelings, friends, and family. Their apartment felt like a home.

I clearly remember the first time I visited on Shabbat. I remember finding Beth, who was in the middle of a difficult college semester, lying on her sofa, reading a novel. She explained to me that she kept the Sabbath.