No matter what was going on in the rest of her life, Beth told me, Shabbat was a day to relax and feel peaceful with herself. We talked about what Shabbat meant to her. I remember feeling deeply surprised, relieved, and happy that I'd found this peaceful retreat in the middle of Manhattan. Here, every week, Janet and Beth reaffirmed for themselves what was important. I thought perhaps this is why this apartment feels like a home.

Thinking about Janet and Beth and that first year in New York brought up more memories. I remembered one night when I couldn't sleep. I remembered getting out of bed and taking out my journal. I expected to write regretfully about friends I'd left in California, or of my worries about finding work. Instead, I found myself making a list similar to the list Mrs. Moskowitz makes when she is first left alone in her new apartment. "I miss my blue chair," I wrote, "I miss my sofa," and so on. When I was done, I felt comforted, and could fall asleep.

I also remembered my frequent trips back to California. I remembered returning to New York each time with a suitcase full of favorite things from home. Just as Mrs. Moskowitz begins to feel happy when she unpacks her candlesticks, as I unpack each item, I felt just a little bit more at home.

The few words I'd typed out had brought up many feelings and memories, but they did not make up a picturebook. I was stuck. I talked to my agent. We decided that I was probably not the right person to write this book. Around this time another friend of mine, Nancy, was getting married. I bought her a little handmade pillow as a wedding present. I feel privileged to have been able to speak to her for this award.

This year, among the candidates for the Children's Book Award, was one whose author clearly shared our goals. Immediately after World War II, there was a great silence on the part of survivors as they attempted to come to terms with what they had experienced. After a period of many years, they slowly began to find their tongues. Uri Orlev is one who has found an eloquent and powerful voice indeed. It was a long time before he could give expression to his experiences.

 uri orlev was born in Warsaw in 1931. His father was captured by the Russians at the start of the war, and Uri spent the years 1939–1941 hiding in the Warsaw ghetto, together with his mother and younger brother. His mother was killed, and he and his brother were sent to Bergen-Belsen.

The Island on Bird Street, winner of AJL's Sydney Taylor Best Book Award for 1984, is the story of Alex, a boy left alone in a Polish ghetto, based on Mr. Orlev's childhood experiences. The horrors of war are clear, yet the point of view maintained is optimistic. Alex, age 11, survives the winter in a ruined house in the ghetto. Not blind hope, but faith based on the words of his parents and of his father's friend, Boruch, guide him through his darkest days. The Island on Bird Street was published in Hebrew in 1981, and won the Mordechai Bernstein Award for Children's Literature, given by Haifa University.

Mr. Orlev immigrated to Israel after the war, and at first worked on a kibbutz in the lower Galilee. He is the author of an adult novel, The Lead Soldiers, but for the past five years has concentrated on writing for children.

Mr. Orlev lives with his wife and three children in Jerusalem, so you will understand that he could not be with us tonight. He has, however, sent us a letter.

Remarks by Uri Orlev

I wish to express my deep gratitude to your Association for presenting The Island on Bird Street with your Best Book Award. I feel privileged to have been able in this book to share some of my experiences in the Holocaust with others.

I feel privileged to have been able to speak in it for all those who perished. But perhaps, above all, I feel privileged to have demonstrated in it the total failure of
friends. I wanted to be an American girl, like
shake free of the stigma, I rebelled against
courage my mother to smoke.
Or wearing pointy shoes. I tried to en­
why he couldn't also have some American
Our differentness felt like a stigma to me.
They didn't stick out so much in the social
scene. Their fathers went to work on Satur­
friends' parents seemed to me more mod­

My parents, and the parents of all my
friends came from a religious home. My
friends, spoke with Jewish accents—some
looking better off by her friends. The friends
said I would try.

Remarks by Miriam Chaikin
I was raised in an Orthodox Jewish home,
in Brooklyn. The community, Borough Park,
is today totally religious-Chassidic and now
looks like an affluent Meah Shearim. Then, when I was growing up, it was mostly
general Jewish, with a sprinkling of Irish and

Though the Jews were numerically supe­
or, we Jewish children were afraid of the
tough, sometimes bullying, Gentile chil­

My parents, and the parents of all my
friends, spoke with Jewish accents—some
heavy, some heavier still. Only I among my
friends came from a religious home. My
friends' parents seemed to me more mod­

Our differentness felt like a stigma to me.
I wished my parents could be more mod­

In the early years, when I was trying to
shake free of the stigma, I rebelled against
the incomprehensible rituals that were im­
posed upon me. I wanted to be free, like my
friends. I wanted to be an American girl, like
them. And I waged war at home. As the el­
dest of five children, I took it upon myself
to blaze a trail for my siblings. I reasoned
and argued and spoke in my unblemished
American accent—no small psychological
advantage—demanding to know:
What does God care if we turn on the light
on shabbos?
Why do we have to tear toilet paper for
shabbos, it's embarrassing when my friends
come?
In time, I won a few points, with the help,
no doubt, of outside pressures. My father
shel his arba kanfot, the tzitzit, he wore, and
started wearing American undershirts. My
siblings were able to listen to Let's Pretend
on the radio on Saturday afternoons. The
shredded toilet paper also went.
The adjustment to American life was not
easy for my parents. My mother came from
Petah Tikvah, in Palestine; my father—
before a stint in the American Army—from
Tula, Russia. They did the best they could,
raising children, making ends meet, trying
to survive personally in an alien environ­
ment. They sent me to Hebrew school, to
make a good Jew of me. Hebrew school in
those days was not directed by a high de­
gree of knowledge or scholarship. The
school did the best it could. I did the best
I could.
I was happy enough to be a Jew, but I also
wanted to be in the mainstream. And so I
set out to become an American.

On my first job, I was not yet an American.
It was working for the American League for
a Free Palestine. But here I met a different
type of Jew—European intellectuals and
young Palestinian men sent by the Irgun to
mobilize American public opinion. They
were not timid about being Jews. They acted
as if they had the right to make demands
of American society.

Gradually, I entered the mainstream, work­
ing in Washington for a United States Sen­
ator, returning to New York to work in pub­
lic relations, and finally entering the field I
longed to work in—publishing. For early on
I gravitated to books and was interested in
writing.

I became editor-in-chief of children's books
and had a few children's books, short sto­
ries, and poems published. I was an editor.
I was a writer. I was in the mainstream. I had
become an American—smoking and drink­
ing martinis with the rest.

During dinner with a friend one evening,
I was thrown a curve. Edna Barth, may she
rest in peace, was also a writer and editor.
Edna said: Why don't you write a Jewish
story, something that grows out of your own
life?

Though I did not let on, I took it as an in­
sult. Did she regard the books I had written
as failures? Was she trying to tell me to write
for my own people, where I might find a
more hospitable audience? Her suggestion
made me feel expelled from the larger world
of children's books, limited, consigned to a
narrow place.

I was happy enough to squeeze out this one. I was startled, therefore, when
Charlotte Zolotow, my editor at Harper, said:
What about a second Molly book?

There have been four, and I have just fin­
ished putting the last touches on a fifth one.

Nor, having set my foot on the path of Jew­
ish life, was that the only window to open
for me.

Jim Giblin, editor-in-chief of Clarion Books,
and also, it so happens, Edna's publisher—
siz a velit mit veilelekh, the world is made
up of little worlds—approached me at a pub­
lishing meeting and said Clarion was in­
terested in adding to its holiday series by
publishing books about the Jewish holidays—Was I interested in writing one?

It had never crossed my mind to write non­
fiction. Fiction—a story—was something I
always dabbled in, even as a child. But
nonfiction? Researching, assembling facts,
organizing information to make it accessible
and palatable? I didn't think I had the
background for it. I didn't think I could do
it. By some miracle, I held my tongue and
said I would try.
What a world I came across in my research! I knew there had been a Jewish Temple in the distant past, but nothing of the drama that surrounded it in the thousand years that it stood. Or that lavish ceremonies led by priests, singers and musicians had taken place there. I knew the Maccabees had put up a fight, but not that it was a historic battle against a world power. I knew that God had promised Canaan to the Israelites, but not that the land was not a vacant piece of real estate, waiting for the Jews to arrive. I knew that Israel was a land of milk and honey, but not of the wheat, barley, grapes, pomegranates, figs, olives and dates that grew there, and that required cultivation, and that were joyously offered in their seasons. The breadth and sweep and depth of the man, Moses, was a revelation to me as well.

I learned of Hillel and Shammai and of the enlightened Jewish attitudes of the first centuries. I learned that when my ancestors were reading and writing, the barbarian ancestors of today's Europeans were living in caves. And Yehudah Halevi. And Maimonides. And the other physician-philosophers. How many people in their religious history have tales of the Sambatyon River, which throws up sand and stones during the week and comes to a rest on the Sabbath? And the false messiahs, even them. Even Sabbatai Zevi. How many people had a false messiah who stood under the chuppah and in a public ceremony married the Torah? How many people's ancestors invented whole new languages—Yiddish and Ladino—and cultures and literature to go with them?

But I am getting ahead of my story. I presented Jim with the manuscript I had written, Light Another Candle, the Story and Meaning of Hanukkah. Jim read the manuscript and discussed it with me. It was skimpy in its first incarnation. Being a Christian and unfamiliar with Jewish history, he had many bona fide questions to ask. What exactly does this mean? Can you say more about that? What did the Jews in concentration camps do during the Holocaust? I had to amplify and say more and say it better.

The format for my holiday books has been established. And Ann Troy, my Clarion editor, also asks, to the enhancement of the text—What exactly does this mean? And, Can you say more about that? There are now books for every major Jewish holiday. Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur will come out next year.

And what of the wonderful Baal Shem Tov, and the riches of Chassidic literature? An artist friend I was walking with said one day, “Look at that Jewish rabbi!” I looked and saw a Chassid. My friend may be pardoned. He was a Gentile. But I found that many Jews knew little more. They were ignorant of the contribution to Jewish literature made by this strand of Judaism. They saw in Chasidim simply men in dark suits, with beards.

I wanted to share with these “outsiders” the ideas that stimulated me: It is forbidden for a Jew to be depressed. Sing to God. God likes to see you having a good time. So I wrote How Yossi Beat the Evil Urge and Yossi Asks the Angels for Help. Next year, Yossi Gives God a Hand will be published.

My writing—the subjects of my writing—greatly enrich my own life. So do my readers. One little girl wrote me that she, too, wants to become a writer. What she did not know was that she already was a writer. She had grasped the essentials of the craft. She wrote: “The main problem I have is when I start to write I don’t know where to begin.”

How many people’s ancestors invented whole new languages—Yiddish and Ladino—and cultures and literature to go with them?

Another little girl had already mastered the complexity of reality. She wrote: “I really liked Finders Keepers. It tells things that are true like the part about telling the truth. People can’t help lying sometimes, though.”

A third reader taught me something about the mystery of writing. The return envelope bore an address in New York’s Chinatown. The little girl’s name was Chinese. Intrigued, I opened the envelope. She wrote about I Should Worry saying, “I liked your book because the same thing happened to me.” What, I wondered, could have happened to a little girl growing up today in Chinatown that also happened to Molly, a little Jewish girl growing up in Brooklyn so many years ago? I read on: “My best friend lived in the same house too.” That was the thread that linked Molly’s story to hers.

I realized that she was my collaborator. I brought the story. She brought the crayons. My text, her pictures. A book doesn’t exist if it has no reader. Not in the Zen sense where the question is asked: If a tree falls in the forest and there’s no one to hear it, is there sound? The writing effort is not complete until a reader supplies pictures.

You have all supplied pictures for my books. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the Sidney Taylor Award—and I also share it with you.