

Presentation of Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award to Susan Krawitz

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Chair, Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Competition

Good evening.

We've all been sitting for a long time. If this were a library storytime, I'd ask you to stand and stretch. But it isn't so I'll get right to the point.

I know you're all dying to find out what's happening in the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition world.

Thank you to the committee members whose names are listed in tonight's program for their thoughtful evaluations of this year's manuscripts. Sadly we are saying farewell to Lisa and Marcia, but I'm happy to welcome Toby Harris and Jill Ratzan to the team.

A special thank you goes to literary agent Anna Olswanger who's been providing the special perk of critiquing the winning manuscript.

Every year I get excited when The STMA committee finishes its deliberations. Will we or won't we have a winning manuscript? Have we discovered the next great children's book? It's a difficult decision. Sometimes we don't even choose a winner. Our standards are high and our judges can be merciless but constructive.

Our criteria are the normal ones. But we add a special piece: positive Jewish values and universal appeal. We don't just want **Jewish** kids from 8 to 13 to read these books when they get published. We want **all** kids to read them in order to deepen their understanding and appreciation of Jewish culture and experience.

The STMA Competition impacts every writer who enters, even those whose manuscripts don't win.

Since we don't usually know what happens when a contest is over, this year I contacted some of the past entrants and winners and asked how the competition impacted them. This is what they had to say...in alphabetical order, of course

One of our 2012 entrants whose manuscript was considered a manuscript of merit that year gets many rejections. However, our comments have been helpful in shaping her many revisions and developing characters.

An entrant from 2010 has a picture book coming from Kar-Ben in 2016. Entering the manuscript competition inspired this writer to keep writing although she did not win that year's award.

Nechama Liss-Levinson received the award in 2009 for **When the Hurricane Came to New Orleans**. The published book, a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award for Children,

is part of PJ Library's pilot program for older readers. The Manuscript Award has given Nechama additional validation that the book was something worth working for.

Jose Patterson's **Dear Mama** did not receive the award, but she didn't despair. Instead Jose took the book to a respected independent publisher in England when she lives. The book was published. Now Jose is working on a new book and also has a website. As Jose says, not bad for an "oldie" who is 85 going on 86.

Karen Propp was the 2013 winner for **Freestyle**. Based on Anna Olswanger's critique. Karen is now rewriting her story, originally historical fiction, as a non-fiction narrative.

Susan Ross' 2011 winning entry **Searching for Lottie** is still unpublished. But in the fall Holiday House is publishing her middle grade novel **Kiki and Jacques**. Set in Maine, it's the story of a Somali refugee girl and a local boy and draws upon Susan's childhood in a small Jewish community in Maine. The book is very much in the spirit of Sydney Taylor and the values of cultural understanding and diversity.

Joan Schoettler is still looking for a publisher for 2010's **On the Run**. However, her picture book, **Good Fortune in a Wrapping Cloth** won the Asian Pacific American Literature Award for best picture book of 2013. Joan credits AJL's recognition of her work for convincing her to carry on with her writing even when the rejections come.

The current manuscripts are written in the same spirit as previous ones: they show the creativity and variety we've come to expect and provide a welcome relief from the Holocaust, History and Holiday diet that so many Jewish children's books give young readers.

Many of the submissions seemed to be riffs on various themes tied to b'nai mitzvot. They included time travel, historical fiction, and contemporary stories, with settings from ancient Israel to present day suburbs and characters as diverse as a rebellious teenager, a Texas captive, a Jewish farmer, a dyslexic bat mitzvah and a social outsider. The Beatles-or at least one of their albums- even featured prominently in one manuscript.

The winning manuscript is truly unique. Set in El Paso, Texas in 1915, it's the tale of Rose Solomon who is accidentally kidnapped by Pancho Villa's band of revolutionaries. Inspired by family stories, **Viva, Rose!** by Susan Krawitz is a story of adventure, coming of age and Jewish identification.

Susan is a freelance writer, editor and ghostwriter. Her many articles, essays and book reviews have appeared in a variety of media. She's has been honored by **Scholastic**, **Highlights Magazine**, the National League of American Pen Women Literary Competition and the Blue Cat screenplay contest ... and now also by AJL. **Viva, Rose** is Susan's first novel for young readers.

I'm delighted to present the 2015 Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award to Susan Krawitz.