

Farewell, Kibbutzim & Pioneers: Bringing Israel to Today's Kids and Families Through Children's Books

Diane Rauchwerger

Description: Learning about Israel is not about the kibbutz anymore. How do we foster a love of Israel and a connection to the Jewish state through children's books in challenging political times? Join Kar-Ben Publisher Joni Sussman and the panelists as they discuss the current state of children's books about Israel. They'll discuss how topics and story-lines are selected, how they're different from past stories about Israel, what inspires the authors to write their stories, the research that goes into them, as well as the illustration process and marketing of the books. In a world where virtually every aspect of Israel is political - ask Joni how she handles maps of Israel in Kar-Ben books! - picture books are a wonderful non-political way to bring the joys and wonders of Israel to children and families, showing us all that American and Israeli Jews have in common as well as celebrating the ways we are different. Joni attended the Jerusalem International Book fair in February and will talk a bit about the Israeli children's book market as well.

Diane Levin Rauchwerger is Chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee for AJL and is the author of the "Dinosaur" series of children's picture books, including *Dinosaur Goes to Israel*, delightfully illustrated by Jason Wolff, published by Kar-Ben Publishing. Since 1990, Diane has been the librarian at Congregation Beth Am, Los Altos Hills, CA and was a children's librarian in the Sunnyvale Public Library. She has a Bachelor's degree in Education from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, a California Teaching Credential and a Masters of Library Science from San Jose State University.

Growing up, I don't remember hearing anything about Israel. All my grandparents came to America in the early 1900s. Both my parents were born in America. I was 6 years old when Israel declared independence and went through Sunday school and Confirmation in a very Reform synagogue. Now I know that historically, the Reform movement was very anti-Zionist.

It wasn't until I met and married my husband that I learned about Israel. George was born in Czechoslovakia in 1938. His parents left with him on the next-to-the-last boat to South America when he was nine months old. When we met, he had two uncles and their wives and families living in Israel and one set of grandparents living with one uncle.

In 1976, we took our first trip to Israel. We met the family for the first time. They were all living in the Haifa area. Now there were cousins, but the grand parents had passed away. We toured for two weeks and saw as much as we could from Jerusalem to the Golan Heights, to Masada, the Dead Sea and Eilat.

Since then, I have been back three more times. I am always amazed at how much more there is to see each time.

I have been the librarian at Congregation Beth Am in Los Altos hills, since 1990. In the early 2000s I started a Mother Goose program for families with infants and toddlers. We sang songs, did finger plays and I read stories. We sang the Dinosaur on Shabbat song and I changed the words for each holiday. When we got to Yom Haatzmaut, I changed the song like this: Please forgive my croaky voice!

“There’s a dinosaur knocking on my door,
Knocking one, two three,
There’s a dinosaur knocking on my door
‘Cause he wants to go to Israel with me.

He wants to go to Jerusalem
Put a message in the wall,
His message will be way up high,
He is so very tall.

He wants to go to Tel Aviv
He wants to play in sand
Before we even see the beach
His bucket’s in his hand

He wants to climb Masada
See the fishies in Eilat.
He wants to meet a camel,
Likes those animals a lot.

And when we’re home with memories,
Our pictures in a book,
He’ll sit with everyone who comes
And make them take a look.
And if they say they want to go
He’ll start wiggling his tail

And begging them to take him back
To Eretz Yisrael.”

Writing **Dinosaur Goes to Israel**, I imagined the Dinosaur like an overgrown two year old. I wanted young families to see what fun a young child could have in Israel, how many interesting places there are to see and things to do.

When I read the book to families with young children, I always sing the song and use props before reading the book. I have a suitcase or backpack and ask what we need to pack for our trip to Israel. I pull out sandals, sunglasses, a sun hat, camera, a bottle of water, a bathing suit, a map of Israel and a little bag of shekles.

A couple of years ago I had an author visit at Shalom School, in Sacramento, California. The Librarian, Ben Pastcan did a great job of organizing the event. The gym was set up with different learning centers.

1. One corner was set up like an El Al airplane. On each chair was something a tourist would need: camera, backpack, etc.
2. In another area, there was a beach with sand, and toys and plastic fish.
3. Another area was a café where the children could order falafel and drinks.
4. I don't remember there being a Western Wall, but that could be another activity where the children could write notes to put in the wall.
5. My station was the middle of the room, where I sang the Dinosaur song, pulled my props out of the suitcase and read the book.

My current projects are for much older readers. I am currently working on a manuscript for a picture book about the early life of David Ben -Gurion. He had such an interesting life. Since he was three years old, his grandfather would set him on his knee, teach him Hebrew and tell him stories from the bible. From then on, David wanted to live in the land of Eretz Yisrael. He got his wish when he was nineteen years old.

One of the last trips I took to Israel was with a group that went on the March of the Living. We spent one week in Poland then went to Israel for Yom Ha Zikaron and Yom Ha Atzmaut. I have since written a story

for young teens based on the experiences of a group of teens from Saratoga and San Diego, California, who went on the March of the Living and while in Poland one of the chaperones found a charred Torah in a second hand store. The story is from the perspective of one of the teens, Rachel, who was not sure she wanted to be on the trip, but was moved by her experiences. The only way she could deal with her emotions was to get up in the middle of the night and write down a poem. That was what happened to me on my trip. I had planned on keeping a journal, but couldn't write a word. Instead, I woke up in the middle of the night and a poem seemed to write itself. This happened almost every night of the trip. My poems are incorporated into the story.

I hope that this story will inspire other teens to make the trip, participate in the March of the Living and Be inspired by the contrast when they get to Israel.