

2001 SYDNEY TAYLOR MANUSCRIPT AWARD

Rachel Glasser

Rachel K. Glasser is currently the librarian at Yavneh Academy in Paramus, New Jersey, a modern Orthodox elementary day school of 825 students. She has taught cataloging classes, given professional workshops in various areas of librarianship, published bibliographies, and assisted in the revision of the Elazar and Weine cataloging schemes. She is the founding cataloger of the Central Cataloging System for Libraries of Judaica of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, California, where she worked as a Judaica reference librarian and cataloger for 13 years. She received the Dorothy Schroeder Award for Dedication to Judaic Librarianship from AJLSC. She serves on the SSC Cataloging Committee and Accreditation Committee, and is the chair of the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Committee.

The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Committee, a committee of SSC, selects the winner of the annual Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition, which seeks to encourage new, unpublished writers of fiction stories for children ages 8-11. The work should have universal appeal of Jewish content, serve to deepen the understanding of Judaism for all children, and reveal positive aspects of Jewish life. The manuscript must be from 64 to 200 pages in length.

The award is named for Sydney Taylor, author of the still popular All-of-a-Kind Family books, and is funded by her family. This year, our committee received 9 manuscripts, which met our basic criteria and were read by our members, a group of geographically and philosophically diverse SSC librarians. The current committee includes Sandra Gottesman of Lake Worth, Florida who is not at convention this year; Aileen Grossberg of Montclair, NY; Susan Pankowsky of Nashville, Tennessee who will retire from the committee this year; Marion Stein of Brooklyn, NY; Barbara Sutton of San Diego, California; and past coordinator and advisor Paula Sandfelder of Atlanta, GA. I serve as the current coordinator.

We received manuscripts covering a wide range of Jewish topics including a story about how World War II affected the Jews of England from the point of view of a young adolescent girl who was sent off to live in the countryside during the London bombings. Another focused on the relationship between the narrator and her cousin, who comes to live with the family when her parents move to California. We read the story of an observant family of five children whose lives significantly change when a child is born with cerebral palsy. We also followed eleven-year-old Molly and her family as they traveled from New York to Israel to become reacquainted with her Israeli mother's extended family, attend a cousin's wedding, and explore the land of Israel. Another author invites the reader to join on a weeklong archaeological dig in Israel with a very diverse group of teenagers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who wants to explore the land of Israel as well as their own personal history. Grandma Estelle tells her granddaughter about her family's history, from life in Russia to the move to America and success in business. An unusual manuscript tells of a family that loves to tell stories and uses them to take us on a journey through the Jewish year.

Our winning manuscript this year is "A Pickpocket's Tale" written by Karen Schwabach of Anchorage, Alaska. It is the exciting, often frightening story of Molly, a young girl who was sent to the Colonies in 1730 as punishment for a crime of which she is uncertain. We discover early on that she is Jewish and someone has paid for her to be cared for more humanely than the other

prisoners. When she arrives in the Colonies, she is sold to a Jewish family as a slave, but she is considered as one of the family and treated fairly well. She wants desperately to return to London and involves herself in a plot to accomplish this, but she seems to have trouble with actually following through with the plan. The strength of Molly's character, the strong Jewish values of hospitality, education, and community, the historical development of the slave trade and transportation of criminals during the 18th century, and the strong writing come together to provide us with an exciting, exotic, and inspirational novel. The vivid dialogue and fast-paced plot attract and keep the reader's attention while presenting challenge and intrigue in some very unusual characters.

We are extremely pleased to present Karen with the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award for 2002 and hope that we will find "A Pickpocket's Tale" on the shelves of historical fiction in our libraries in the very near future.