

Sydney Taylor Body-of-Work Award Address

By: Eric Kimmel

Shehechyanu, v'kiyamanu, v'higianu la'zman hazeh. This is the big one. I cannot tell you how much it means to me. To the Association of Jewish Libraries, my friends and supporters for the past decade, and the members of the committee, I want to express my gratitude and thanks.

Sir Isaac Newton's words are the most appropriate ones I can think of for an occasion like this. "If I have seen farther than others, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." Like Dr. Seuss' Yertle the Turtle, I've had lots of shoulders to stand on.

First, the outstanding editors and publishers to whom I owe my career. Marianne Carus and Debby Vetter of the Cricket Magazine group; Kate and John Briggs of Holiday House, Margery Cuyler, formerly of Holiday House and now editor-in-chief at Marshall Cavendish; and my dear friend Dianne Hess of Scholastic Books, who is here tonight. Dianne is one of the great editors of our time. She pushes me to excel. She was the driving force behind How Mindy Saved Hanukkah, Gershon's Monster, and the spectacular Wonders & Miracles.

I had great parents and great teachers, both in public and religious school, and in college, who taught me how to read and write and think. To name each and every one would take up far more than the ten minutes I've been allotted. So I'll focus on three.

At the top of the list is my wife and best friend, Doris, who really does make the best seders, and who told me flat out, "The king of the goblins wouldn't say that." My name may be on the cover, but her hand is all over these stories.

Then there are the great ones, the long line of Jewish children's writers that leads from

Sydney Taylor, Sadie Weilerstein, and I.B. Singer back to the true giants, I.L. Peretz and Sholom Aleichem.

And one truly gigantic figure, who rises up from the waters of my memory like Gershon's monster. I had a bubbeh. She went by the English name of Clara Kerker, but her real name was Chaya Etil bas Reb Layzer Yancov from the town of Kolomey in Galicia. She taught me joy. The old life in Europe wasn't all tears. There was beauty, delight, laughter. No school, no books, no shoes. The old photographs are black and white, but it was a technicolor world of high mountains, rushing rivers, deep forests, fields of golden grain, gardens bursting with flowers, horses in a meadow, cows coming home at evening, a hawk overhead in the blue sky, a peacock screeching in a nobleman's yard, and friendly peasants—*unser goyim, di Ukrainer*—putting down their scythes to chat over a fence.

And stories. Endless stories: rabbis, witches, kings, clever Hershele, and the “challenged” people of Chelm. And eerie things in the shadows that come out at night. I heard those stories from the time I was born until the day she died, when I was 18.

I don't know where I'd be if I hadn't known her. But I do know this: I wouldn't be here.

And one more. Sometimes, if you're lucky, you'll meet someone in the course of your life of whom you can truly say ‘This must be one of the *lamed-vav*; the 36 people for whose sake God keeps the world in existence.’ For me, that person will always be Trina Hyman, whom we lost this year. My bubbe use to tell me, “The heart makes the Jew, not the beard.” Trina had a true Jewish heart: fierce, wise, ruthlessly honest, and uncompromising when it came to what she knew to be right, whether it was the design of a page or how people ought to treat each other. Trina took joy from her art and from the way she lived her life. She passed that joy to everyone

who crossed her path.

Shlomo Carlebach, another giant of our time, used to say, “Here’s to you, top friend.”

I accept this award in Trina’s honor and in her memory.

“Here’s to you, top friend. I’ll never forget you.”