

For More Information Contact:

Aileen Grossberg, Chair
Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Committee
Association of Jewish Libraries

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STMACAJL@AOL.com

The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Committee has concluded its deliberations for the 2021 award.

Meeting for the first time ever virtually by Zoom, the committee has selected *Cats and Honey Cake* by Sonja Spear as the winning manuscript. This middle grade novel tells the story of Abby Zipperstein and her chaotic family. Abby's mother has turned the family's living room into a cat rescue facility; her stern, elderly great-aunt Gertrude has come for an extended visit; Abby struggles with friendships; and Abby's father, though loving, is distant and overly frugal.

The story unravels some family history, shows growth in most of the characters and is infused with positive Jewish values including a love for honey cake, concern for animals, appreciation of family differences, and joy in repeated Jewish rituals.

Although the setting of the story grew out of Ms. Spear's memories of growing up in the 1980s, *Cats and Honey Cake* has a very contemporary feel. In addition to writing a book that today's readers would enjoy, the author also sought to create a story where Jewish observance is both joyous and woven into daily life. This is Ms Spears first novel for young readers.

One of the committee members commented that *Cats and Honey Cake* "was full of heart, with the right amount of chaos, love and reality in all the right places. The Zipperstein family were a delight to meet, and the book is thoughtful, with all of the ends tied up. it was a delight to read."

The author, who lives in Iowa City, Iowa, has a Ph.D in religious studies from Indiana University. She has received several teaching awards and has published articles in religion centered periodicals. Ms. Spear is currently the principal of Agudas Achim Religious School in Iowa City and has served on the Religious Studies faculty at several educational institutions.

The members of the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Committee is chaired by Aileen Grossberg. Members of the committee are Debbie Steinberg, Heather Matthews, Heidi Rabinowitz, Rachel Simon, and Rebecca Fox.

The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award, established by Sydney Taylor's husband Ralph to encourage aspiring authors of Jewish children's books, was first awarded in 1985. The award is only given if the Committee deems a manuscript meets the award's criteria. The 2021 award marks the twenty-fifth time the award has been given.

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