Zachary M. Baker, the Quintessential Judaica Librarian, is the 2020 Recipient of the Fanny Goldstein Merit Award

Elliott H. Gertel, Chair, 2020 Fanny Goldstein Merit Award Committee

For more than four decades, Zachary M. Baker has provided dedicated and scholarly service to the field of Judaica librarianship and the Association of Jewish Libraries; from 1976 to 1981, he was a cataloger of Yiddish books at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York City as well as a genealogical reference librarian from around 1978. From 1981 to 1987, he worked at the Montreal Jewish Public Library and was appointed its head of technical services circa 1983. From 1987-1999, Zachary returned to YIVO as Head Librarian.

Most recently (1999-2018), he served as Reinhard Family Curator of Judaica and Hebraica Collections in the Stanford University Libraries, a position from which he retired in January 2018. In addition, from 2010 until his retirement, Zachary was Stanford Libraries’ Assistant University Librarian for Collection Development for the Humanities and Social Sciences. He has published numerous articles and bibliographies relating to Yiddish and other areas of Jewish studies. Among others, from 1976 to 1999, he also compiled lists of newly published Yiddish books for the Jewish Book Annual.

Zachary has been a very active member of AJL for as long as any of us can remember—he attended his first AJL conference in 1976. Among his many positions in AJL, he was president of the association from 1994-1996. He was a leading member of the local AJL Annual Convention organizing committee before, during, and following this event in 2005 when it took place in Oakland, California. He was also a longtime contributing editor and subsequently, editor-in-chief of Judaica Librarianship. He presented numerous papers at AJL Conferences over the years, virtually annually, before his retirement.

Some of Zachary’s many honors include an AJL Judaica Reference honorable mention in 2018 for “Resources in Yiddish Studies” published in In Geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies and on October 9, 2018, he was presented with the Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award by Marquis Who’s Who "as a leader in the field of library science."

Zachary is not only an exemplary Judaica librarian but a leading scholar in many aspects of Judaic bibliography and is especially well-versed in Yiddish studies. His contributions to AJL and the field are so abundant, it would be a monumental task to even begin enumerating them.

Mazel-tov, yasher-koyekh/kol ha-kavod to Zachary on his receipt of the Fanny Goldstein Merit Award! A well-deserved honor.
A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

We are living in strange times indeed. As I write this note, most if not all of us are quarantined to our homes and preparing for our (Zoom) Pesach seders. I am reminded that “seder” means order, and yet the natural order of things feels disrupted right now. The relative comfort of our homes exists alongside anxiety about our safety, our families, and our futures. I hope that you are all well, that your families are well, and that our communities heal. With those thoughts in mind, I want to express gratitude to the AJL News and Reviews team for their dedication to preparing this publication during challenging times. An extra and deeply felt thank you to our contributing reviewers, without whom this publication could not exist. Kol hakavod!

In this issue, we are pleased to offer tributes to two accomplished members of our AJL community: Elliot Gertel’s tribute to Zachary M. Baker, 2020 winner of The Fanny Goldstein Merit Award, and Emily Bergman’s tribute to Heidi Rabinowitz, recipient of the 2020 Groner-Wikler Scholarship. Mazel tov to Zachary and Heidi! Two well-deserved honors.

Finally, News and Reviews’ intermittent series, “Seven Questions With…” continues with a conversation with eminent Jewish librarian, Nancy Pearl, who shares her insights about children’s literature.

As always, please feel free to reach out to me with your feedback on this issue or suggestions for contributions for future issues at generaleditor@jewishlibraries.org.

Wishing you and yours all good health,

Sally Stieglitz

Congratulations as well to the 2020 Fanny Goldstein Merit Award Committee: Jacqueline Ben-Efraim, Susan Dubin, Elana Gensler, Elliot H. Gertel, and Daniel Scheide for all their work in considering and choosing from among a number of great nominees this year.

“The Fanny Goldstein Merit Award, named for the librarian, social activist, and founder of National Jewish Book Month, is bestowed in recognition of loyal and ongoing contributions to the Association of Jewish Libraries and to the profession of Jewish librarianship.

“Born on May 15, 1895 [some sources say 1888], Fanny Goldstein devoted her life to books and community. She was the first female Judaica librarian and the first woman to direct a branch library in Massachusetts, where she was head of Boston’s West End Branch for many years. A prominent figure in the Boston Jewish community, she is best known as the founder of Jewish Book Week, which began when Goldstein organized a display of Jewish books at the Boston Public Library in 1925.”

-- From AJL Website: Fanny Goldstein Merit Award

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Wishing you and yours all good health,

Sally Stieglitz
Seven Questions with Nancy Pearl

SALLY STIEGLITZ, AJL NEWS AND REVIEWS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

AJL News and Reviews Editor-in-Chief Sally Stieglitz had the pleasure of interviewing Nancy Pearl, former Executive Director of The Washington Center for the Book at Seattle Public Library. Pearl was named “2011 Librarian of the Year” by Library Journal and is a best-selling author. Her books include Book Lust: Recommended Reading for Every Mood, Moment and Reason (Sasquatch Books, 2003), George & Lizzie: A Novel (Touchstone, 2017), and the forthcoming The Writer's Library: The Authors You Love on the Books That Changed Their Lives (Nancy Pearl and Jeff Schwager, HarperOne September 8, 2020). Pearl also has the notable distinction of inspiring the beloved Archee McFee “Librarian Action Figure.”

AJL: Nancy Pearl, thank you for speaking with us! Growing up, what role did reading play in your life and did that influence your decision to become a children’s librarian?

Pearl: It seems to me looking back that all I did as a child and adolescent was read – I was very very fortunate that I had a wonderful children’s librarian at my neighborhood library (it was the Parkman branch of the Detroit Public Library system; her name was Frances Whitehead. Miss Whitehead) who opened the world to me through the books she gave me to read. She was Canadian and therefore I grew up with all the classic British children’s books, from Enid Blyton’s mysteries to The Wind in the Willows to Mary Poppins to The Hobbit, plus all the horse and dog books I was addicted to. I knew when I was 10 years old that I wanted to be a children’s librarian just like Miss Whitehead, because I wanted to do for other children exactly what she did for me.

AJL: A touchstone for Jewish readers is the All-of-a-Kind-Family series by Sydney Taylor. Did you read those books growing up and if so, what influence did they have on you as a young Jewish girl?

Pearl: I loved and continue to love Sydney Taylor’s books. I grew up in a secular Jewish family in Detroit, without any religious observances at all, so it was that series that introduced me to a more religious Judaism. My favorite daughter was Sarah and my favorite scene is when Henny dyes Ella’s dress in tea in order to try to get the stain out. The series also influenced me in my love of historical fiction, since it was set in a place and time that was years and miles away from my own.

AJL: Of late, there is a growing interest in libraries building diverse collections for children and young adults with the idea of providing mirrors and windows into other cultures and of increasing authentic representation and diversity in children's literature-and yet Jewish writers have expressed that it’s been a struggle for Jewish kid lit to be embraced as part of this movement- why do you think that’s so?

Pearl: Hmm, I wasn’t aware that that might be the case. Because we’re in a terrible place now, with growing anti-Semitism throughout the world, there’s certainly a need for children’s books with a Jewish context, but when I was growing up that wasn’t important to me at all. I have always believed, and say this often, that children, especially, need to both find themselves and lose themselves in the pages of a book.

AJL: What makes a book hold up for an adult who loved it as a child? Can you name a few childhood favorites that you think held up for you as an adult reader?
Pearl: It’s easier to name children’s books that for one reason or another don’t hold up in today’s world – there are scenes in the Mary Poppins books that are terribly racist; in the Little House books Ma’s hatred of Indians makes for uncomfortable reading today. Here are some children’s books that I think do hold up: Mr Pudgins by Ruth Carlsen; Best Friends by Mary Bard; Family Grandstand and Family Sabbatical by Carol Ryrie Brink; Walter the Lazy Mouse by Marjorie Flack – these are all books that have been reprinted (with introductions by me) in the last few years. Other titles that have retained their goodness are The Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame and The Hobbit by JRR Tolkien. Many of the teenage novels I read and loved (all the books by Betty Cavanna and Rosamund du Jardin) have aged badly, I am sad to say.

AJL: Some children’s classics, such as the Little House books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, have been looked at through a new critical lens of contemporary values and found lacking or offensive. How do we as librarians balance maintaining collections with these concerns?

Pearl: Yes, this is a difficult conundrum. Years ago, I saw a tee shirt that I loved – it said, “There’s something in my library to offend everyone” and I would add, that’s what a library is. But I don’t want kids to read books that stereotype in any way the particular race or religion or ethnicity that they are. If I were Native American, I would hate to hear my ancestors described in the way they are in the Wilder books, even if those books are true to the way Laura’s mother felt. It’s the same way I feel now every time I reread the Georgette Heyer or Dorothy Sayers or many, many of the British novels written in the first half or so of the 20th century and come upon a line of devastating anti-Semitism or just stereotypes: big nose, swarthy complexion, money lender. But I’m an adult and I can tell myself that that casual anti-Semitism is an accurate portrayal of upper-class English society at that time. Does that give me solace? No, it makes me very sad, but it doesn’t prevent me from enjoying those books a lot. I don’t believe many kids are able to make that distinction, or if we say that it’s historically accurate, that that is meaningful to them.

AJL: What do you think about the enormous success of graphic novels in YA? Are they simply an extension of “every book, its reader,” or a trend away from traditional novels? If it’s the later, are we losing something in the art of storytelling?

Pearl: I think some graphic novels for kids and teens are great (anything by Raina Telgemeier or Gene Yuan Lang) and some are not so great, just like there are great traditionally told books for kids and teens and not so great ones. Personally, I find that reading graphic novels is harder than reading a traditionally told book – it takes a while to adjust to figuring out where to look first, at the picture or the text – sort of like seeing a subtitled movie. I think some kids love graphic novels and some don’t, and it’s fine either way.

AJL: Thank you, Nancy Pearl, for sharing your time with our AJL News and Reviews readers! One last question: there are not many Jewish women action figures out there -you, RBG, and Batwoman are the three that come to mind most easily. How does it feel to be in such esteemed company?

Pearl: Wait, is Batwoman Jewish? I didn’t know that!! I love the Librarian Action Figure in all its various incarnations – the first two, with the “amazing shushing action” were hoots, but I think the new, where the LAF has a cape, offers important messages about what our society should strive to be. Plus, I think having the LAF out there only emphasizes how important all librarians are.

“Seven Questions with…” is an occasional series of interviews with influencers in the world of Jewish books and libraries. Seven Questions with Nancy Pearl is the second in this series.
The Tycher Library Pop-Up – A Response to Change or Location, Location, Location
LINDA BLASNIK, LIBRARIAN, TYCHER LIBRARY, DALLAS, TEXAS

On October 9, 2019, on Sukkot, a powerful tornado destroyed our Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas Building at 7800 Northaven Road rendering it unusable for its 30+ employees. The Tycher Library, located at 7900 Northaven Road on the second floor of the Jewish Community Center, closed its doors to patrons in order to welcome and house the displaced federation employees. Instead of suspending service to patrons, the library began a pop-up library in the lobby of the JCC.

The Pop-up contains five items:
1. A laptop computer including Internet and catalog access;
2. A cart including a selection of fiction, non-fiction, DVDs, audiobooks and large print, all selected by patron request and interest;
3. Books for sale for the library’s Community Reads and Beyond the Book Zoom program
4. Pens and Mints to give away;
5. And, most importantly, a helpful librarian.

Lessons learned from the first months of the Tycher Library pop-up:

November through February

• At the Tycher Library pop-up, one librarian attracts more patrons than two librarians or one librarian and another volunteer. A dedicated librarian at the pop-up draws patrons old and new; the lobby location encourages people of all ages to ask questions and request information. In addition, people feel more comfortable requesting books and DVDs when the pop-up is right before them, as opposed to having to climb the steps to the location on the second floor. The second floor location was actually unknown to a large percentage of people in the lobby.

• The lobby location allowed the Tycher Library staff to service an increase of patrons as compared to the upstairs location. Before the tornado, an average of 5 patrons were serviced in the 10 am to 2 pm time slot. After the tornado, an average of 15 patrons were serviced between the hours of 10 am and 12 pm. To compare “apples to apples,” the upstairs location served approximately 1.25 patrons per hour while the lobby location served approximately 7.5 patrons per hour.

• In addition, the consistency of the face-to-face interactions allowed the library staff to stock the cart with patron requested selections. When the JCC guests walked back and forth in the lobby and saw the library pop-up, they were reminded of books they wanted to request and other library information they wanted. The pop-up library also sold books for the Beyond the Book Zoom program offered in January, February, and March of 2019 and 2020. The pop-up was also able to provide information for the JCC BookFest that featured Jewish Book Council authors. The pop-up library location truly connected Jewish Books to the Jewish Community.

• On March 9, 2020, Dallas learned of its first positive case of COVID-19 and the JCC made the decision shortly after to close its doors to the public. The Dallas Public Library stopped its innovative curbside service after only one day due to potential dangers to the public as well as to its library staff. The Tycher librarians and patrons look forward to popping up again as soon as safely possible.
Conclusions and Next Steps

The Jewish Community Center of Dallas centrally services the Greater Dallas area Jewish Community. In truth, though, Jews are clustered at distances greater than 15 miles from the 7900 Northaven Road location. Ten years ago, it was decided that a bookmobile was not a useful allocation of resources. A major lesson from three months of pop-up operations is that meeting people where they are changes everything. As a result of this simple experiment using the pop-up cart as well along with dedicated librarians, outlying areas may well be able to be serviced not too far in the future. The creative redeployment of resources in response to a devastating storm prepares the Dallas Jewish Community of readers for whatever next comes their way.

Heidi Rabinowitz Awarded 2020 Groner-Wikler Scholarship

By Emily Bergman

Heidi Rabinowitz, host at The Book of Life Podcast and librarian at Congregation B'nai Israel in Boca Raton, FL, is the winner of the 2020 Groner-Wikler Scholarship. This scholarship, generously underwritten by KarBen Publishing, is presented to an AJL member who demonstrates dedication to Jewish children's literature and library services. As AJL’s conference in Chicago had to be cancelled, the scholarship will be awarded at next year’s 2021 conference, where Heidi will give her acceptance address.

Heidi’s passion for Jewish kidlit, spreading the word far and wide using many different venues and formats, greatly impressed the Scholarship Committee. Here are some of her achievements:

- Heidi has been actively involved with AJL since 1998 in many leadership roles, including President. At each year's AJL conference, she live-blogs the event to bring our activities to the wider world. She has served on the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee and currently is a member of the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Committee.
- Heidi was on the original book selection committee for PJ Library (before they even had a name), and more recently worked for both PJ Library and PJ Our Way at the Grinspoon Foundation headquarters.
- From 2001 until about 2017, she reviewed children's books (frequently Jewish) for School Library Journal.
- Since 2005, Heidi has hosted and produced The Book of Life Podcast to promote Jewish literature, music, film, and web content, with a particular emphasis on children's literature, and in 2019 the podcast was rebranded to explicitly focus on kidlit.
- In 2010, Heidi created the Jewish Book Carnival with Marie Cloutier. This is a monthly roundup of Jewish literary links from across the blogosphere, hosted on various blogs.
- In fall 2018, Heidi spearheaded the creation of the “Love Your Neighbor” series of AJL booklists, aimed at pushing back against antisemitism by promoting Jewish childrens' books to readers of all backgrounds.
- In May 2019, Heidi created the Facebook group entitled “Jewish Kidlit Mavens” with Susan Kusel. The group has 600+ members and is a lively and active discussion forum for librarians, educators, authors, publishers, agents, booksellers, reviewers, and parents who care about Jewish children's books.
- In February 2020, Heidi created “The Sydney Taylor Shmooze” with Susan Kusel and Chava Pinchuck, a mock award blog that will encourage a wider audience to become familiar with the Sydney Taylor Book Award and to more deeply engage with the genre of Jewish children's literature. It also provides a model for student engagement.
- Heidi frequently writes articles about Jewish kidlit for other publications, including NewCAJE's The Jewish Educator, School Library Journal, and The Horn Book.

Heidi clearly deserves to win this scholarship!

We thank Joni Sussman and KarBen Publishing for their generosity in enabling our community to have extraordinary librarians like Heidi join us at our conferences.
All About Pinterest!
BY ELLEN SHARE, SSCPL VICE-PRESIDENT

Pinterest is a social media website with an enormous amount of information that can be used by librarians, teachers, parents, and administrators. There are numerous ideas for art projects, bulletin boards, library promotions and publicity, reading suggestions, lesson plans and library sayings and quotes – just to name a few areas. Pinterest is an excellent source for parents to search for ideas for crafts, cooking, and Jewish educational activities. The ideas are often easy to execute and with materials on hand. You can pass this website on to parents at home with children.

There is no charge to use Pinterest. I would suggest, however, that if you sign up you might want to use an alternative email address to avoid getting a bombardment of emails in your regular inbox. The Pinterest website is easy to navigate, and your search terms will usually come up with a hit.

I would like to see our AJL members involved in following pins and setting up pins. A website link has been posted on the site of our AJL Newsletter. You are free and encouraged to add pins related to libraries and Jewish education. Let’s all get involved; all you need is internet connection.

Two ways to access website:
- https://www.pinterest.com/AssociationofJewishLibraries/
- Instructions and a screenshot from the AJL website.

To locate AJL Pinterest:
1. Locate: https://jewishlibraries.org/members.php
2. Login
3. Scroll down to FEATURED CONTENT on left. Press AJL Pinterest.

Member News

Congratulations to Sean Boyle, Librarian at Jewish Day School of the Lehigh Valley in Allentown, PA and Chair of AJL’s SSCPL Advocacy Committee on having been selected as the New Educator Excellence Award winner by the Da Vinci Science Center! The Da Vinci Science Center is a national award-winning nonprofit organization.

The New Educator Excellence award recognizes “newer educators who show promising growth in their work. Award criteria will give priority to the teacher’s engagement in a community (or communities) of practice, progress in creating a deeply engaging, inquiry-focused classroom that supports student discourse in STEM, cross-curricular integration, and real world applications, and the teacher’s use of feedback and data to support her or his own learning and advancement.” Sean’s award recognized the STEAM work he does in his Jewish day school library. As the winner of non-librarian education award, Sean exemplifies how libraries and librarians are essential educators in their communities.

Keep Up to Date with Hasafran

Hasafran is the electronic discussion list of the Association of Jewish Libraries. It was created in 1991 to provide a forum for the discussion of Judaica librarianship. The list is moderated by Joseph (Yossi) Galron, Jewish studies librarian at The Ohio State University. The views expressed in the list are the opinions of the participants and not necessarily the views of the moderator or of AJL.

A keyword-searchable archive of Hasafran messages posted since June 12, 2003 is now available.
- To subscribe to Hasafran, please see instructions at https://lists.osu.edu/mailman/listinfo/hasafran
- To post a message to Hasafran, send your message to: hasafran@lists.osu.edu You will receive a confirmation message.
Scholarship Committee Report
Submitted by Sarah Barnard, Scholarship Committee Member

The Scholarship Fund needs help. We gratefully accept donations which can be in memory or in honor of someone. We will send a tribute card (or several). Please include the following information with your donation: your name and address, the name(s) and addresses of the recipient(s) of the tribute card, the reason for the tribute and your email address in case there are questions. Send check donations to:
Sarah M. Barnard (sarmbar68@gmail.com)
5646 Hunters Lake
Cincinnati, OH 45249

AJL Scholarship Donation Form

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Address and email of Donor:
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Donation made in honor/memory of:
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Name of person(s) to receive card:
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Address of person(s):
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Notes:

The wartime experiences of German-born Peter Feigel, who kept one step ahead of the Nazis as he fled with his parents to Czechoslovakia, Vienna, Belgium, France, and then on his own to Switzerland, are skillfully recounted. Basing their account in part on Peter’s wartime diaries and on personal interviews with him, the authors keep their focus on happenings that will speak to young readers. In this beautifully designed book (title page tinted ecru, bordered to resemble the shirred edge of an old diary), events come to life through period photographs juxtaposed with De Saix’s luminous watercolor illustrations to convey the emotions of persecuted Jews. When Peter is bullied in Vienna, two illustrations decorate the page: a photograph of Austrian Nazis forcing Jewish men to scrub the street, and a watercolor of Peter wiping his eyes with his elbow, school satchel on the pavement, two big boys looming above him. Peter’s war was a prolonged ordeal, marked by fear, flight, and longing for his parents. Mother, grandmother and Peter flee to France, only to be incarcerated in Gurs internment camp. The most dramatic moment of the book happens there, when the Nazis move in: “Peter’s mother marched right up to [the Nazi commander] and said, ‘Heil Hitler! I am a German citizen and I demand that we be released from this stinking hole.’ The astonished Nazi called them a taxi and let all three of them go.” But the family’s luck does not hold. His parents are deported (and, he learns much later, die in Auschwitz). But his mother has secured him safe haven at a summer camp, from which he is sent to a children’s home in the legendary town of Le-Chambon-sur-Lignon in south central France. He later helps the Resistance, at one point hiding in the bell tower of a church to avoid a round-up!

There’s a lot to absorb here, but the authors keep the text simple and clear, relegating the history to the backmatter; ten pages of notes provide context and document sources. The bibliography and recommended references – films, books, websites, and educational programs – will be helpful to anyone who wants to teach the story of World War II France to young people.

*Marjorie Gann, retired teacher, author of Five Thousand Years of Slavery, Toronto, Canada*


An energetic romp of a read delivers an energetic American Jewish reader proving one man can make a difference! We are in debt to Aaron Lansky for helping return Yiddish to a living language worldwide.
through his passion, determination, inspiration, and creative use of the internet. Lansky ties his personal journey to his family, starting with his grandmother, who immigrated to the United States as a teenager. Her brother throws out her Yiddish books as “old country;” she modernizes with her new country. By the time her grandson wants to study Jewish history, he discovers two things: the best references are in Yiddish and there are too few books in this language because millions of its readers perished in the Holocaust. Lansky learns Yiddish for his studies; as he does he learns that people have piles of old Yiddish books they want to throw out. He collects them. He asks leaders of Jewish communities to help. He and his friends seek out book donations by visiting families; they go on exciting chases to dumpster dive for discarded volumes. Newspaper articles convince people to donate. He moves his exploding collection from his apartment to his parents’ home, to a warehouse, to his museum. He founds the Yiddish Book Center and gets a genius award. He develops a way to scan the books to deliver their contents anywhere. Lansky’s dream of reviving Yiddish is now a reality that makes a difference to our Jewish world and the world at large. This biography of a role model teaches without pedantry and encourages young readers to try to reach their goals. Striking Chagall-based illustrations in muted tones from interesting points of view echo the energy of the text. The volume includes notes from Lansky, author Macy, illustrator Innerst, a Yiddish glossary and sources.

Ellen G. Cole, retired librarian, Temple Isaiah, Los Angeles, CA

[Editors’ Note: *The Book Rescuer: How a Mensch from Massachusetts Saved Yiddish Literature for Generations to Come* is the 2020 Sydney Taylor Book Award Winner in the Picture Book Category.]

**Masih, Tara Lynn. My Real Name is Hanna. Simsbury, CT: Mandel Vilar Press, 2018. 195 pp. $16.95. (9781942134510). Gr. 9-12.**

Hanna Slivka’s story is divided into three parts. The first describes life in rural Ukraine before World War II, and how it changes before her eyes. Both Russia and Germany have claim to her village, and she explains how each great nation squeezes its residents – particularly the Jews – in different ways. In Part 1 Hanna and her family learn about the Nazis’ invasion and worry as the German and Soviet armies approach and finally arrive in their village. Part 2 begins with the family’s escape into the nearby forest. It includes their fight for survival and their continual evasion of the Germans. Part 3 takes place in a cave complex, where they are forced to stay for over a year. The group’s isolation is reminiscent of Anne Frank’s family. But it is made more harrowing because of the darkness underground. At the end of the War, they return to the village as refugees on their way to a new life in America.

Of the recent books on the Holocaust, this short volume stands out because of its evocations: of the land and life on the family farm; the terror of learning about the Nazis; the cold of winter and the constant search for safety; the desolation and utter darkness of life underground. All through her travails Hanna grows from a protected pre-teen to a 16-year-old, fully aware of both her joys and her fears. The touching presentation of this girl, her family, and their wartime exploits made this book a National Jewish Book Award Finalist (Young Adult Literature) and makes it a worthwhile addition for all libraries.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

In The Spotlight


This graphic non-fiction book, based on an award-winning British animated documentary film series, takes an innovative, sensitive approach to telling the story of the Holocaust. The six chapters are narrated by six survivors who endured the trauma of the Holocaust as children and now reside in Leeds, England. Heinz, originally from Germany, tells of roaming the streets on Kristallnacht to avoid being arrested. When he fled to England, he was interned as an enemy alien. Trude left Czechoslovakia on a kindertransport train for England, where she was homesick for her parents and struggled to adjust to the unfamiliar food and language. Suzanne, from Paris, narrowly escaped the Gestapo’s arrest of her family thanks to a kind, quick-thinking neighbor who claimed Suzanne was her child. During the war, Suzanne remained hidden on a French countryside farm that was so remote that no one there realized the war was over until two years after it ended. These and the other first-hand testimonies are accompanied by vivid, graphic illustrations. The compelling accounts of societal upheaval, family separation, fear, and loss are likely to provoke discussions on the plight of today’s child refugees.

Robin Jacobson, Library & Literary Programs Director, Rose Freudberg/Sisterhood Library, Adas Israel Congregation, Washington, DC

[Editors’ Note: Survivors of the Holocaust: True Stories of Six Extraordinary Children was a finalist in the Children’s Literature Category of the 2019 National Jewish Book Award.]


Seven-year-old Miriam tells how she sends her baby brother floating in a basket on the Nile where Pharaoh’s daughter finds the baby and adopts him as her own. Yolen’s poetic language sets this retelling apart: “Mother has woven the basket so tightly, / it does not sink, but skips / over little schools of fish, / glossy as silver bangles.” The theme here is simple and strong: “Sometimes courage comes / from what you do, / sometimes from what you do not do.”

The full-color illustrations by Vietnamese artist, Khoa Le, are lush and generous. The artist uses mixed media like watercolors and oil colors, then takes photos of them and mixes them with her digital paintings. Her illustrations complement the text in vivid blues, greens, reds, and browns. They seem to move, just as the currents of the Nile and the wind through the water plants move. The animals (except for a menacing crocodile) that hover around the basket are curious and protective of the baby. The perspectives and layout are varied, pulling the reader’s eyes to take in the separate parts as well as the whole. An enlightening note at the end of the book includes the biblical story on which this book is based, with mention of the three times in Miriam’s life where water is significant. For other versions of this story, see Jean Marzollo’s Miriam and Her Brother Moses (Little Brown, 2004) and Jenny Koralek’s The Moses Basket (Eerdmans, 1993).

Anne Dublin, retired librarian of Holy Blossom Temple and author of A Cage Without Bars (Second Story Press, 2018), Toronto
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

BIOGRAPHY


Sephardic Jew Judah Touro was born in Newport, Rhode Island, but ended up as a prosperous businessman and philanthropist in New Orleans in the early nineteenth century. We learn about some of his hardships and challenges: seasickness and getting robbed on the ship; establishing a business; getting seriously wounded during the Battle of New Orleans during the War of 1812. As is sometimes the case, a long illness or serious injury can change one’s perspective about life. So it was with Judah Touro. After his year-long recovery, he began to donate large sums of money to Jewish, Christian, and non-denominational organizations, such as schools, hospitals, and orphanages. He also purchased the land and building for New Orleans’ first synagogue. Moreover, he “bought” slaves in order to free them, and even taught them the rudiments of trade so that they could start their own businesses. (By giving charity in secret and by giving the recipient the wherewithal to become self-supporting, Touro demonstrated the first and third highest levels of charity as expounded by Maimonides in the Mishneh Torah.) Missing are personal stories: Was he married? Did he have children? If so, did they carry on his legacy?

Illustrator Vivien Mildenberger has used a palette of mostly greys, browns, and blues to convey the “pioneer” flavor of Touro’s life. The digitally created illustrations look like colored pencils and watercolors and give the sense of the busyness (and danger) of life in early New Orleans. The end matter includes an “Author’s Note” and “Interesting Facts About Judah Touro.” For a completely different perspective about a Jew in that time and place, see Susan Goldman Rubin’s Jean Laffite: The Pirate Who Saved America (Abrams, 2012).

Anne Dublin, retired librarian of Holy Blossom Temple and author of A Cage Without Bars (Second Story Press, 2018), Toronto


Theodore Bikel (1924-2015) was an actor, folksinger, and political activist. He was born in Vienna and his family fled to Palestine after the Anschluss in 1938. While writing of bullying and genuine fear, Bikel still warmly remembers his hometown, Vienna, as the “City of Light” (a term usually associated with Paris, France) despite the terrible treatment of its Jews when native Austrian Nazis assumed power. He writes that light is in your heart, not just in lamps, even if one of those lamps is the synagogue’s eternal light. His story intends to inspire love and hope. Instead, it reads as a paean to Vienna despite the city’s nasty past. This past is further dismissed in the afterword when Bikel, then 90, returned to Austria from Israel to mark the 75th Anniversary of Kristallnacht there. He says the murderers are gone, but “I am still here singing my people’s songs of peace.”

In a world where anti-Semitism is on the rise, this rings hollow. His widow sets up a strange format. The text appears in columns because the layout is so horizontal, the illustrations appear cartoonish, and the plot promotes a celebrity unfamiliar to the children in the targeted reading audience. As Bikel sadly wrote, not everything broken can be fixed. He did survive persecution with hope and love, which is the important message buried in this text for a youthful audience.

Ellen G. Cole, retired librarian, Temple Isaiah, Los Angeles, CA


Three new biographies join the already overcrowded shelf of children’s books about Anne Frank. Similar in format to other recent offerings from educational publishers, *Anne Frank: Out of the Shadows* provides a straightforward, detailed account of Anne’s life before the war, her experiences in hiding, and the legacy she left behind through her diary. Film and theater adaptations are also discussed along with the Anne Frank Foundation and the Anne Frank House. Photographs of Anne and her family, the other occupants of the Annex, and Miep Gies as well as other archival images are included on almost every page along with text boxes. A timeline of important dates, selected bibliography, further reading recommendations, websites, and an index are appended. If any libraries need more books about Anne Frank, this is certainly an adequate purchase.

Similar information, with some of the same photographs, is presented in *Anne Frank* from the “Meet the Greats” series. However, a bright, cartoon caricature of Anne Frank, which is featured on the book’s cover and is interspersed on the pages within, is jarring. The stark images of Adolf Hitler, Nazi rallies, and Jewish prisoners at Dachau are framed by bright yellow, blue, orange, purple, and green borders and backgrounds. While this format might work with other subjects in the series like Kate Middleton, Florence Nightingale, and Barack Obama, it is a complete mismatch and in fact, further dehumanizes Anne Frank. The cheerful, friendly appearance will also likely attract readers who are too young to fully understand the content.

This is also an issue with the edition from the “Little Guides to Great Lives” series which further simplifies Anne Frank’s life. Cute, quaint cartoon drawings, using only three Pantone colors (lavender, reds, and browns), depict Anne, her family, the Annex, and even Nazi soldiers. This format, which might be effective with other subjects in the series (like Frida Kahlo and Ferdinand Magellan), diminishes the harsh reality of Anne’s life and her death, along with the millions of other lives lost in the Holocaust. The publisher describes the series as “Bright, Interesting, Relatable, Concise and Cute!” which isn’t usually what librarians and educators are looking for in a biography of Anne Frank.

*Rachel Kamin, North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL*


Intended for middle school readers, the book opens with an introductory sketch of Einstein working as a young clerk in a patent office, bored by the drudgery of his day job and dreaming of questions about the universe that occupied his mind since childhood. This relatability for young readers conveys Einstein as someone to admire, but also as a creative thinker. We are taken through Einstein’s early years, including the isolation he experienced as a result of his unique, non-verbal learning style, which made him fond of music and science, and the teacher who remarked that he “would never amount to anything.” In 1894, in response to growing antisemitism in Germany, Einstein’s family emigrated to Italy, and he eventually attended school in Switzerland, pursuing his scientific interests with zeal. We learn about his “miracle year” (1905) -- when he published four papers that would change the world of physics forever. The author includes short explanations of his most famous theories, described in a simplistic style that encourage young readers to consider them deeply without the need of advanced understanding. The remainder of the book presents Einstein’s travels, his celebrity and influence, later life, and death. Throughout, emphasis is put on his hatred of racism in America as well as antisemitism in Europe, which culminated in WWII. Einstein used his influence to convince
Churchill to help Jewish scientists escape Germany and lent his expertise to the Manhattan Project. Witnessing the destruction caused by the atomic bomb, however, led him to call this “the one of the great mistakes of his life.”

While this series is not focused solely on Jewish figures, the importance of Einstein’s German Jewish heritage is emphasized strongly. Photographs, as well as a timeline of important dates, a selected bibliography, and index provide additional information for the curious reader.

Chloe Noland, Assistant Librarian, American Jewish University, Los Angeles, CA


Beate (Bee-AH-tay), a young Jewish girl, arrives in Japan with her parents in 1929. Her father, Leo Sirota, a world-famous pianist, has accepted a teaching position in Tokyo. They are refugees, who fled to Austria to escape the pogroms in Russia only to become unemployed after WWI. For the most part, Beate loved Japan, however the patriarchal culture, where “fathers could sell daughters to strangers,” and “some wives walked three steps behind their husbands,” was an unfair side she could not abide. During WWII, Beate’s parents sent her to Mills College in Oakland, CA. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the United States entered the war, Beate was cut off from her parents, supporting herself by translating Japanese radio. After the Hiroshima bombing, Beate used her excellent Japanese language skills and knowledge of Japan to join the Army as a translator and researcher. After returning to Japan and reuniting with her parents, she set to work assisting in writing the New Japanese Constitution. As the only woman in rooms filled with men, she felt that she was the one who must speak for Japanese women. The following language was added to the Japanese constitution because of Beate’s insistence: “All of the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin.” The book opens with an accolade from the Grand Chamberlain of the Imperial Household on behalf of Empress Michiko. Japanese proverbs both nice, “onna nara-dewa yo-ga akenu…Without women, the dawn doesn’t break,” and not so nice, “onna-wa mamona…Women are devilish,” are sprinkled throughout the text.

The artwork – watercolor and pencil on paper – is beautiful, colorful and deeply expressive, portraying the power in a taiko drum concert, the fear in listening to Japanese radio, and all the other emotions that were part of that period of time. An “Author’s Note” provides some additional background, and “References,” “Bibliographic Notes,” and a “Timeline,” can also be found at the back of this beautiful and exceptional picture book.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL Vice President/President Elect, Seal Beach, CA


This basic thirty-two-page biography opens with the challenges Steven Spielberg faced while making the movie Jaws and continues with a description of his childhood growing up in a Jewish family in Cincinnati, Ohio and how he broke into Hollywood as a teenager. It then discusses Spielberg’s most popular movies like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *E.T.* The final chapter covers *Schindler’s List* and explains Spielberg’s personal connection to the Holocaust. Text boxes provide additional material including information about Spielberg’s Russian-Jewish family and his animated film *An American Tail*, and his involvement with the Shoah Foundation. Full cover photographs, “Did You Know?” facts, and definitions of terms are also included on each page and a glossary, index and “Critical Thinking Questions” are appended. Biographies of Spielberg are numerous and while this one is nicely done, it is likely an additional purchase except where demand is high. Irena Sendler, Anne Frank, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg are also included in this series.

Rachel Kamin, North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens


Life in Jerusalem was extremely difficult in the period before, during, and after World War I. The Turks and then the British ruled the country and many children and adults died from starvation, disease, lack of basic medical care, and conditions of poverty. The streets became filled with orphaned children. Rabbi Avraham Blumenthal (1877-1966) stepped up to the challenge of providing a loving and safe home for these boys in difficult times of poverty and starvation. At first, children whose parents had died were cared for by relatives, but soon even their families could not care for them. A new home was needed, and so the Zion Orphanage was created. Rabbi Blumenthal cared for them day and night making sure they had food and clothing and were safe from the dangers of war. Many miracles occurred during this period when the orphanage was saved from harm. The boys learned Torah and how to be good Jews and were truly loved. Rabbi Blumenthal and his wife, Chana, became their parents and raised many of them to adulthood. By 1947, most of the original children had moved on and now the orphanage was filled with boys whose parents just couldn’t care for them. Throughout the War of Independence, the orphanage continued to shelter homeless boys. Today the Zion Blumenthal Orphanage, located in Geula is the longest running children’s home in Jerusalem.

This is a heartwarming and well written biography which will strike a chord of empathy and love in the hearts of the readers. It is an important story in the history of the heroes of Israel. It includes a timeline of events, glossary, and bibliography, and there is a teacher’s guide available for download on the publisher’s website. An adult biography of Rabbi Blumenthal has been published in Hebrew and English based on the testimony of his daughter.

Rachel Glasser, retired librarian, Yavneh Academy, Paramus, NJ


Doreen Rappaport uses Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s own words supported by well researched facts to provide a marvelous account of this powerful person’s extraordinary life. That life has encompassed sorrow (e.g., the loss of her mother two days before her high school graduation) and triumph (e.g. appointment to the Supreme Court,) yet through it all, Justice Ginsburg has maintained her focus that “women deserve equal protection under the law.” The book ends with the following quote: “Yes, women are here to stay. And when I’m sometimes asked when there will be enough women on the Court, and I respond when there are nine, people are shocked. But the Supreme Court has had nine men for ever so long, and nobody’s ever raised a question about that.”

Justice Ginsburg has raised many questions and taken up the plight of the under-represented throughout her career. This excellent book highlights all her many accomplishments in a very real and understandable way. Important Dates, Author’s Note, Illustrator’s Note, a Selected Bibliography and Source Notes are included in the back of the book. Eric Vasquez’s detailed and engaging oil paintings accompany the text. The illustrations accurately reflect the pride, determination, in fact the entire range of emotions, experienced by Justice Ginsburg throughout her life, and genuinely support the writing. While Justice Ginsburg appears to be the current front-runner for “Jewish Biography of the Week,” with a compendium of titles that include Sydney Taylor Award Winning, Honor and Notable books, *Ruth Objects* is a worthy and extraordinary addition to the Biography collection of any library.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL Vice President/President Elect, Seal Beach, CA


This easy biography outlines the life and accomplishments of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Focusing on the barriers she broke to become the second woman to serve on the United States Supreme Court, the
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book is divided into three chapters. The first chapter covers her early life and education, a bit about her path to becoming a Supreme Court justice, and her love of music. The next chapter explains examples of discrimination she overcame: her acceptance into law school and finding a job as a lawyer at a time when few women went to law school and even fewer were employed as lawyers, helping other women gain equality in the workplace, and fighting against inequality in pay or being fired because a woman was married or became pregnant. The last chapter describes how Ginsburg sets an example as a working wife and mother, having the courage to speak out against injustice, overcoming major illnesses, and working with other justices, even when they disagree.

“Fun Facts” and interesting side bars help engage readers and provide details about Ginsburg’s personality, her sense of style with her many “jabots” or collars, and her love of opera. A timeline of her life, glossary, brief list of primary sources, websites, and videos, an index, and a short paragraph about the author compose the back matter. The chapter and section headings are attractively posted in gold, and there are numerous full-color photos with descriptive captions below each, but no sources listed. Words that appear in the glossary are bolded within the text.

Cavendish Square published another Ginsburg biography in 2018 in its “Leading Women” Series for seventh through twelfth graders. Unlike the 2018 version, this biography for younger children has no Jewish content.

Debbie Colodny, Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL. Former owner Sefer, So Good; former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee

FICTION - EARLY READERS


Through the Fresh Air Fund, twelve-year-old Dossi is sent from the Lower East Side of Manhattan to a farm in Jericho, Vermont to escape the heat of the 1910 summer with a Jewish family. But the family has an emergency, and Dossi is sent to their non-Jewish neighbors, the Meades. She keeps a diary during her two-week-stay, and she writes about the Meade family and their farm. They are very careful to serve her only vegetables and eggs on her special dishes. At first their daughter Emma, a year older than Dossi is unfriendly, unlike her bubbly younger sister Nell. When Emma forgets Dossi’s library book by the pond and it gets ruined in the rain, Dossi is distraught because she doesn’t have the dollar to replace the book. Emma’s plan is to pick berries and sell them in town. After their hard work, the money for the berries was less than expected. When Mr. Meade hears, he tells the girls that Mr. Turner wanted to do something for Dossi because she alerted everyone to the fire in Turner’s barn, so he makes up the difference. By the time Dossi has to catch the train back home, she and Emma have become friends, her sister Ruthi has become engaged, and she has many fond memories.

A reprint of a book that was originally published in 1998, it still retains its charm because the diary format allows for Dossi to record what happens as well as express her feelings. This edition has no illustrations, and the layout is perfect for early readers. The Author’s Note explains the interesting facts in the book, like that the granite used to build the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue was from Vermont. A recipe for a cake that Mrs. Meade baked is also included. Still an excellent choice for beginning readers.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens


There are shelves of books for children about Hanukkah. Not many describe the lives of the Jews during that period. This “Fun-to-Read” volume aspires to fill that gap. Bruriah and Alexander live at the time of the Maccabean War. Both of them hope to become heroes in their perilous era. While some of his friends are tempted by the Greek lifestyle, Alexander and his classmates continue to learn. When the Greeks forbid Jewish learning, their school is moved to the caves outside their town. Their hidden schoolroom is discovered, but Alexander tricks the soldiers with a home-made spinning top (the forerunner of the dreidel). Later, he convinces his friend Yaakov, who has joined the Greek army, to return to Judaism. For her part, Bruriah performs a mitzvah by saving several parchments (possibly Torahs) in a basket of laundry.

*Bold and Brave* recounts a scenario that could have been placed in many periods of Jewish history; Spain during the Inquisition, or Poland before the Nazis. The intended audience is observant, and adults should be prepared for follow-up questions.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


In her tight-knit Orthodox community of Spring Hill, MD, Bubby Karp looks after her four grandchildren, blends fruit smoothies—and solves mysteries: Who stole second grader Ezra’s class pet? Why is someone slipping sixth grader Nechama the answers to the local spelling bee? Who repeatedly vandalized Ohr Yitzchak’s school bus to keep Eli’s fourth-grade class away from the Spring Hill Museum of Soil? And who owns the valuable earring that fifth grader Naftali found in the park? In each episodic chapter, Bubby Karp tackles and solves a different mystery, a structure that lends itself well to early elementary readers just beginning to take on full-length chapter books.

Ognarov’s line drawings, while at times stiff, effectively highlight key scenes. Bubby is very much the heroine, while her grandchildren chime in with the occasional clue or observation. Most events are seen from Bubby’s perspective. It is atypical for an adult to hold so much of the agency in a contemporary children’s book, but Bubby’s nervousness as she repeatedly faces the school secretary and her genuine shock at the local crooks’ plots give her an almost childlike quality. And who doesn’t love a passionate, almost super-heroic Jewish grandmother? In almost every scenario, Bubby seeks a resolution that favors forgiveness and second chances. Hebrew and Yiddish phrases are seamlessly integrated throughout the text and are defined in a glossary at the end of the book for readers who may be new to some terms.

Rebecca Fox, Children's Librarian II, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA

**FICTION - MIDDLE GRADE**


Chernobyl, 1986. Tweens Valentina Kaplan and Oksana Savchenko wake up to a sky glowing crimson and filled with a strange, thick, blue smoke, and a city lined with police officers. Both girls’ fathers work the night shift at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, where it appears a fire has broken out. While they attend the same school, Valentina, who is Jewish, is hated by Oksana, whose father blames the Jews for his lack of promotion. Thus, begins this compelling story of government cover-ups, improbable friendships and ultimate redemption all surrounded by the tragic events in Chernobyl almost 35 years ago. In separate chapters woven through the story of Chernobyl, is a 1941 Holocaust narrative involving Rifka, whose story is set in Kiev, Ukraine, and encompasses hiding, forever friendship and eventual safety. As the Chernobyl story unfolds, Oksana is required to travel with Valentina to Leningrad, where they are welcomed into Valentina’s grandmother’s home. There, Oksana must overcome the messages
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

she learned from her abusive father about Jews and about herself and learn to accept and trust the loving kindness shown to her by Valentina’s family. Rifka is Valentina’s grandmother; she escaped from the Nazis in Kiev. The two stories come together when Rifka’s best friend, who saved her life in Uzbekistan during WWII agrees to help Oksana escape her abusive life in Russia.

Russian society in the 1980s with its culture of antisemitism and mistrust, along with details of the Chernobyl disaster and its cover-up, join with family, friendship, and trust in this page-turner based on a true story. Highly readable and compelling, this book’s powerful message is ultimately about the power of friendship to save lives, the ability of survivors to trust people who truly love them and the willingness to create a life filled with happiness despite trauma. An “Author’s Note” detailing the basis for this story, “Resources” for people experiencing emotional or physical abuse, and “Further Reading” about living in the Soviet Union in the 1940s and 1980s are all provided at the back of the book.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL Vice President/President Elect, Seal Beach, CA


Joey and Jake Bergson live on the Lower East Side of New York. It’s 1925, and they are getting ready to sell newspapers. When a bully starts up with eleven-year-old Joey, a stranger intercedes and soon becomes a friend. Danny Gold is fifteen, but he is not as knowledgeable in Jewish subjects as Joey and thirteen-year-old Jake. Although the family is struggling financially, the boys invite Danny to join them for meals and live in the stable behind their apartment building. Soon Danny is also selling papers and figuring out a way for them to make more money. He attends classes with Rabbi Isaacson, and while at first, he challenges the rabbi, soon he enjoys the classes. He helps Joey overcome his fear of heights, and he contributes his earnings to the family. One of the reasons they are poor is because Mr. Bergson will not work on Shabbos. But soon Danny’s secret is out – he is really Danny Goldenheim, the son of a wealthy textile manufacturer. Danny ran away to the Lower East Side because he hated the boarding school he was attending. He really wanted to learn and practice Judaism. Mr. Goldenheim soon understands why his son ran away, and he gives Mr. Bergson a job as a plant manager in Brooklyn.

While historical fiction about the Lower East Side (and its romanticization) abound, this one stands out. Obviously, there is a strong sense of place, and the characters are well-developed. The classes with the rabbi allow for the infusion of lots of Jewish wisdom. All the boys develop and mature over the course of the story, and although real life in that time and place was much grittier, the happy ending of this “boy” book (that everyone will enjoy) is satisfying.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee


Sixth-grader, Pakistani-American Sara, has recently transferred to public school from a small Islamic private school where she has always felt at home, comfortable, understood. Adding to her discomfort in the unfamiliar environment, her mother has taken a job in her new school as the teacher of a South Asian after-school cooking club. Several of Sara’s classmates are members of this club. Her mother speaks with an accent, wears Pakistani-style clothes, and demonstrates recipes which feel foreign and ethnic, much to Sara’s embarrassment. Elizabeth, who loves to cook, is a member of the club. Elizabeth is Jewish and wears her identity well, nevertheless she has problems of her own. Her mother is depressed, doesn’t cook for the family, and pine for her native England. Elizabeth is afraid she will desert the family to return to her former home. In addition, Elizabeth’s long-time best friend seems to be pulling away from their friendship, attracted to a confident, popular, perfect-seeming rival. Sara and Elizabeth slowly discover they have more in common than either of them would have guessed: foreign mothers who seem reluctant to take their upcoming US citizenship test, social issues which loom large, and a shared desire, each for her own reason, to win a cooking contest which will secure them an opportunity to appear on a local
television culinary show. Each one slowly reaches out and their friendship begins to blossom.

Chapters alternate between Sara’s point of view and Elizabeth’s, allowing the reader to get a glimpse of each girl’s culture. Issues faced by immigrants, even those who have been in America for years, are highlighted in a sensitive way. Universal themes of friendship, loneliness, and both classroom and family drama meld with the more singular topics of ethnicity, religion, racism, and the loss of a comforting grandparent. Nothing is more elemental than food; nothing signifies the acceptance of others better than the symbolism of separate ingredients combining and merging, resulting in the production of a tasty dish. Faruqi and Shovan have concocted a savory mix of characters and plot resulting in a story both charming and substantive. Recipes are included.

Michal Hoschander Malen, retired New York area day school librarian; current library volunteer in Efrat, Israel; editor of children’s and young adult book reviews for the Jewish Book Council


Layla is the reluctant guest of relatives she doesn’t know well in Vistaville, where she slowly—and not without conflict—forms friendships with her cousins and finds the solution to a simple mystery. Told in diary entries, the story is perhaps too easily resolved, but the breezy writing and accessible, handwriting-like font make this book a good option for reluctant readers. Judaism plays a background role, with Hebrew and Yiddish names and Shabbat observance appearing as part of the family’s fabric—giving religious, and particularly Orthodox, readers a chance to see themselves reflected in a story of everyday life.

Shoshana Flax, The Horn Book, Inc., Boston, MA


When her Ethiopian-Israeli mother is transferred to Tel Aviv for a more prestigious job, eleven-year-old Meskerem has a lot of adjusting to do. Her mother is well-integrated in Israel, having flown out of Ethiopia at age nine, well before 1991’s Operation Solomon. Meskerem’s father is a white American. Meskerem and her siblings are Israeli-born; she’s never thought of herself as anything but Israeli, and is totally unprepared for the naïve and cruel racism she confronts from the moment she steps onto the schoolground. Shocked to discover that to these kids she’s “them,” not “us,” Meskerem flails about for something to say, and comes up with, “I’m not from Ethiopia!” Her next mistake is another half-truth: “I’m from America”. Tormented by guilt for denying her mother’s heritage, Meskerem becomes sullen and withdrawn. In the end, it takes a secret visit to her beloved Ethiopian grandmother in Katsrin to restore her confidence - in her family’s Ethiopian heritage, and in her ability to take on the bullies.

The novel’s resolution is a bit pat: When Meskerem’s sensitive teacher assigns family roots projects, Meskerem comes clean with her classmates, who are intrigued by her family’s story and the beauty of Ethiopia in Meskerem’s slideshow. The book’s intrusive preachiness (“If you know for sure who you are . . . it doesn’t matter what ugly words they use,” in the words of Meskerem’s mother) actually sidesteps the broader context – how casual Israeli racism contradicts the Zionist dream of an ingathering of the exiles – all the exiles. Contrast this with America’s classic schoolyard bullying story, Eleanor Estes’ *The Hundred Dresses* (Newbery Honor Winner 1945), which juxtaposes bullying of a Polish immigrant child against Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.

Marjorie Gann, retired teacher, author of Five Thousand Years of Slavery, Toronto, Canada
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

FICTION - TEEN READERS


Aaron and Stella stay with their grandparents every summer in “the old family home by the great sea.” After a day at the beach, the family goes to their favorite sushi restaurant for dinner. The children are presented with a special sushi – one that is incredibly delicious. They close their eyes to savor the flavor, and they find themselves in a cave with Salmon Mushi, leader of the Mushi tribe in the Land of the Mind. The Black Queen has hidden the Supreme Ruler’s Book in a cave on Memory Mountain, and Aaron and Stella have been recruited to get it back. They are accompanied by Sophie, a black raven, and Cassie, Salmon’s nephew. They pass through many areas until they finally arrive at Memory Mountain. Along the way they conquer fears and make friends. At Memory Mountain, they must focus their energy to open the door. They close their eyes, and soon find themselves back in the sushi restaurant with their family.

Shyfrin meets the challenges with fantasy for a Jewish audience by making Judaism an integral part of the story and creating a credible alternate world. The invisible Supreme Ruler (God), the ten Great White Rulers (*Sefiros*), the Supreme Ruler’s Book (the Torah) and more provide an imaginative Jewish (those Mushis who do not eat shrimp sushi) basis for the story. There are references to Jewish history (Masada, the destruction of the Temple and the Jews’ exile from Israel) and quotes from the Mishnah and the Talmud. Add in the Golden Ratio (1.618), quantum physics, a character named Albert who knows where there is a wormhole, and the *Matrix*-like way the kids get to the Land of the Mind (red pill or blue pill), and the book is educational as well as entertaining. Tomic’s detailed pen and ink drawings are a perfect complement to the text – enhancing the experience without overshadowing the writing. Although the publisher recommends the book for fourth to sixth graders, both the Jewish concepts and the principles of physics are more suited to a high school audience.

*Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee*

HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II


The Edelweiss Pirates in Western Germany were not famous saboteurs or partisan fighters. Rather, they were young people who played a small but significant role in opposition to the Nazis. K.R. Gaddy’s book follows them, individually and collectively, from Hitler’s accession through the end of World War II and beyond. She explores their backgrounds -- many came from Socialist and Communist families -- and explains that some lost their parents when the children were still very young. She tells how they banded together, some by design and others by accident, and became units of the resistance. Gaddy also describes life in Cologne through the war, making the city vivid for the reader. The seven sections follow the major protagonists -- Mucki Kuhlem, Jean Julich and Fritz Theilen – but also expands our view, including the groups they created and several adults who aided them.

The result is a fascinating bit of German history, little-known until now. Along with their stories, there are spectacular photographs and translations of police documents throughout the book, giving the young people’s exploits added depth. The author notes that the Edelweiss Clubs were not organized, and the teens were considered young criminals rather than members of the Resistance. For this reason, they have not been considered part of the underground. Though they are not Jewish (there are very few Jews mentioned), their heroism should not be forgotten. The book includes source notes and a bibliography. There is strong language scattered through the text.

*Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA*

Twelve-year-old Max Hoffmann and his older sister, Greta, live a surprisingly carefree childhood in 1943 Berlin amid nightly air raids and explosions as the city goes about its business. One day their neighborhood is hit, and the siblings discover that their parents are part of a resistance cell fighting against the Nazis. Their father, Karl, is a doctor trying to save the lives of their neighbors as well as other resistance members, and their mother secretly delivers food to people. The children desperately want to help and eventually become couriers who sneak forged identification papers to Jews in hiding. This first book in a trilogy, *The Plot to Kill Hitler* is based on real events in which these two children become part of the fight for the soul of Germany and the greater world. They exhibit courage, initiative, and determination while evading capture, tricking Nazi officers, and repeatedly putting themselves in danger. Not knowing who they can trust while showing unending loyalty to their comrades, they continue to go on dangerous missions to assist in a plot whose goal is to ultimately kill Hitler and end Nazi control.

The short chapters are enticing and encouraging to readers, and the language is simple and direct. The plot moves quickly and with excitement appropriate to the story and the times. Conspiracy is an excellent World War II novel for middle grades which shows commitment, bravery, and maturity in the face of great adversity. Readers will want to follow the characters and action in the subsequent titles.

Rachel Glasser, retired librarian, Yavneh Academy, Teaneck, NJ


If the young reader isn’t daunted by the Pronunciation Guide, List of Characters, and Place Names at the front of this historical novel and can jump immediately into the action, he or she will be gripped by the suspenseful story of how the people of Les Lauzes, a small village on a high plateau in southeastern France, helped save hundreds of Jewish children and smuggle refugees to safety in Switzerland. The book is told (mostly) in chronological order, beginning in early December 1942 and ending on June 30, 1943. The main characters include Philippe, who helps smuggle the refugees across the border; Céleste, who carries messages back and forth to the maquis, the Resistance, in spite of her fears; Henni, a Jewish girl from Germany who hopes to one day be reunited with Max; Jean-Paul, who wants to study medicine but instead becomes a master forger; and Jules, a ten-year-old boy who outwits the authorities at every turn. The most intriguing character is Inspector Perdant (“Loser”), who comes to the village to “help save Europe from a terrible conspiracy and to help renew France to its former greatness through the goals championed by Marshal Pétain and the Vichy government”. As the plot moves along, Perdant begins to re-examine his motives and goals, as well as the truth underneath the lies: “these people would be sent to their deaths.” After a climactic struggle, Perdant finally comes to peace with himself and the truth—a heartening ending to a sometimes bleak novel.

For people who like to know the facts behind the novel, Preus has generously given us biographies of the people upon whom she based her characters. In addition, she offers an extensive bibliography that includes books, documentaries, and exhibits. Although the story of the rescuers of Les Lauzes has been told before, Preus brings a fresh and vibrant retelling of this story of courage that we should never forget. For another book by Preus about brave teens during World War II, see *Shadow on the Mountain* (Amulet, 2012).

Anne Dublin, retired librarian of Holy Blossom Temple and author of *A Cage Without Bars* (Second Story Press, 2018), Toronto

When the Germans run the Soviets out of her Lithuanian town, Krystia and her neighbors believe that life will return to “normal,” if not improve dramatically. However, it does not take long for that belief to be trampled, when shortly after taking over, the Nazi Commandant calls out 100 Jews during a town meeting, accuses them of murders everyone knows the Soviets were responsible for and has them all marched out of town and shot to death. Life trends dramatically downward from there as lifelong residents’ homes are seized so that native Germans can be housed; food is hoarded by the Nazis for their German citizens, allowing the townspeople to starve; and Jews are rounded up and imprisoned in a ghetto awaiting transportation to death camps. In the midst of all this, Krystia and her mother do everything they can to assist their Jewish friends and neighbors, including hiding three Jews in their home. The tragic ending to all their good deeds is brutally and graphically described.

The publisher describes this book as suitable for grades three through seven (ages eight to twelve). However, the graphic and detailed nature of the writing will make even adults squeamish. Hands rising up and out of mass graves, Krystia seeing her mother hanged in the town square for hiding Jews, and the traitorous accusations of people who are supposed to be friends are just a few of the atrocities and injustices vividly described. As a result, the book is more appropriate for junior high and high school. Based on true events described in the Author’s Note, the book is not likely to provide much unique information, rather terrors and nightmares for readers.

*Kathy Bloomfield, AJL Vice President/President Elect, Seal Beach, CA*

**ISRAEL**


Ari, a young boy living in Israel, becomes attached to a stray kitten he discovers living amidst a construction site across the street from his house. Ari can’t adopt the kitten himself because of his family’s dog and, despite his best efforts, he can’t find the kitten a home. As the construction comes to a close, a family moves into the newly built house and the kitten finds its home with them. Ari is initially despondent at the idea the kitten didn’t need him, but the family explains it was Ari’s love and care that helped the kitten become a “people cat.” This sweet story depicting the stray cat situation in Israel (as noted by the author, the country has two million stray cats), demonstrates how caring for even one of these animals can make a difference -- in the life of the adoptee, as well as the adopter. The lively, poetic language, sprinkled with Hebrew words (glossary included), and the cheerful illustrations portraying life in an Israeli neighborhood combine to make this a delightful tale. An author's note reveals the story is based on one of her own experiences feeding strays in Israel.

*Martha McMahon, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles*

**LIFECYCLE AND JEWISH VALUES**


A king looks down on his subjects in the town of Me Me Me and sees that they are not behaving nicely toward each other. The king sends his assistant, BIM (Best in Me) to the town to teach the town about “the ways of goodness.” Every night while BIM’s body rests, his soul will report back to the king and tell the king the events of the day. BIM is born, and eventually goes to kindergarten, where he grabs as many blocks as he can like the rest of his classmates. He is sad to report to the king about his selfish
behavior and sense of failure, but the king tells BIM he believes in him, and that BIM should continue his mission. The next day, BIM grabs blocks, but then shares them with a little girl who could not reach the bin. The king rewards BIM by the gift of the prayer Modeh Ani (I give thanks), to remind BIM of the king’s trust in him and that BIM’s mission is to be the best “me” he can be.

The author wrote this parable to explain spiritual concepts to children, and as in the first prayer said upon waking, God is referred to as “King.” Some of these concepts will be challenging for young readers: the idea of God and souls (illustrated as two bright lights), what happens when we sleep, and conversing with “someone” you cannot see. An illustration faces each page of text. The pictures depicting the king and BIM, with their ethereal colors and lines, work well; the pictures of ME ME ME town are somewhat static and out of proportion (especially the “little” girl). In the back of the book are “Concepts for Further Discussion,” which are very helpful in explaining the parable. Best suited to non-Orthodox readers and shared with parental or teacher direction.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee

NONFICTION


Isaac Tzvi Zlates was born in Kaminitz (Ukraine), but studied in Mir before the school moved to Vilna in the late 1930s. As the Nazis and Soviets converged on Poland, Isaac Tzvi and his fellow students received visas from the intrepid Dutch and Japanese consuls (Jan Zwartendijk and Chiune Sugihara). They escaped in groups through Moscow, spending several weeks on the train across Siberia. After some time in Japan, their applications to stay were rejected and they spent the rest of World War II among their fellow Jewish refugees in Shanghai. The book includes Isaac Tzvi’s post-war move from China through Egypt to the Holy Land, where the family lives today. In addition to the story itself, there are photos throughout the book, depicting the leaders of the Yeshiva and its saviors through the years. Backmatter includes a timeline, glossary and bibliography. There are also numerous contemporary images showing Vilna, Moscow, Shanghai and Israel, making the vivid personal history even more relatable. Regrettably, there are no pictures of Isaac Tzvi himself.

This small book may easily be overlooked, but it contains important treasures. The text is well-written, making it accessible to adults who want to understand the tenacity of Yeshiva life and the difficulties its followers faced. While Escape from Shanghai is ostensibly about one young man, it is also a fine overview of wartime survival. A solid choice for all Jewish libraries.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

PICTURE BOOKS


As older sister waits for her baby sister to awaken from her nap, she draws and paints, and thinks about what they will do. Big sister will hold the baby in her lap, help feed her oatmeal, and then take her for a walk in the stroller. Big sister also describes the baby, with her “eyelashes like tiny feathers,” hands that “open like paper fans,” and lips “like two little strawberries.” Big sister waits and waits patiently, but disappointingly, baby sister is still asleep at the end of the book.

There is no overt Jewish content in this book, but there is a Hebrew lesson: my achoti (sister), ima (mother), yadayim (hands), k’arah v’kapit (bowl and spoon), tootim (strawberries), halav (milk), einayim
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee


When the mighty Emperor Hadrian rides into town, all of the villagers hide in their houses except for one elderly man. He ventures outside to plant a fig tree. Hadrian questions the man: “the tree is so small and you are so old! Surely you won’t live long enough to eat its fruit?!” The old man explains how the tree will be a gift for many years to come and reminds the emperor how earlier generations planted similar gifts. Three years later, Hadrian returns to the village and again encounters the old man. He presents the emperor with a basket of figs from his tree. Hadrian enjoys the figs and when he returns the basket to the old man, it is filled with gold. Lively, detailed pencil drawings help to illustrate this Midrashic fable adapted by Israeli writer (and co-creator of the television drama *Shtisel!*) Ori Elon, and translated into English by Gilah Kahn-Hoffman for the Harold Grinspoon Foundation. A lovely addition to the Tu B’Shevat bookshelf that will pair nicely with *Honi’s Circle of Trees* by Phillis Gershator (JPS, 1994), but that can also be enjoyed year-round to illustrate the mitzvah (good deed) of caring for the environment and the Jewish values of generosity and optimism.

Rachel Kamin, North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL


Two young identical twin brothers see the world in very different ways. Simchy (whose name means happiness) experiences the positive and happy aspects of life while Shlily (whose name means negative) cannot help but see all situations as challenging, difficult and often bad. In this fourth interactive book by Ahuva Genish, the lively rhyming story tries to help children see the world in a positive light. Each situation is viewed in two ways until Shlily’s mother helps him to “reframe” and think in a whole different way to find something good at every level of interaction. When one boy changes his attitude, the benefits become quite clear. He becomes a happy, involved, and productive individual.

The colorful illustrations and large format of the book add to the reader’s feeling of involvement and inclusion. The questions in each section provide an opportunity for the reader to consider the situation, make a judgment, and decide on the best course of action. The characters are cute and appealing, and parents and educators will identify with their personalities. While the illustrations portray the characters as Orthodox, the book and its message are universal. The guide for parents at the beginning of the book sets the tone for how to approach these issues and suggests coping strategies. The text is simple enough for young children and yet fun and worthwhile for those up to age eight to benefit. It is a valuable tool for teaching positive thinking with practical real life situations.

Rachel Glasser, retired librarian, Yavneh Academy, Paramus, NJ


A recognizably Jewish family sits over its simple supper. The text never mentions the word “Jewish,” but the hints are there: the (unlit) menorah on the windowsill, and father’s beard, peaked cap, and anxious face. Quietly, the family bundles their packs, mother ties a red scarf under her daughter’s chin, and all set out into the moonlit, snow-blanketed forest. As they make their way towards a dappled mountain lake, there’s a litany of lilah tovs – “to the roosters and hens,” “to the bears in their dens,” “to the bats in their caves,” “to the beach and the waves.”

(eyes), and *agala* (stroller). The illustrations have a somewhat muted background so that adorable big sister and her artwork stand out on each page. A good pick for a story time about baby siblings or being patient, with young readers soon supplying the Hebrew words.

Rachel Kamin, North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL

Rachel Glasser, retired librarian, Yavneh Academy, Paramus, NJ


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But what is the family fleeing? The text doesn’t tell us, and the absence of context is problematic. With some knowledge of Jewish history, the adult reader understands the danger they’re in; but is this a danger we want to share with preschoolers?

The song “Lilah Tov” began as a lilting lullaby on Gundesheimer’s album Mitzvah Bus. That version doesn’t mention refugees or danger, but soothingly lulls the young child to sleep. In the version presented in the book, however, one eye seems to be on the parent, another on the child. Nothing in the exquisitely painted illustrations supports a subtext of misery or danger. In Noar Lee Naggan’s warm-toned illustrations, the little girl sports a fashionable plaid wool coat, the mother a striped apron that blends nicely with her rust-colored winter coat. Oblivious to this historical anomaly, young readers will be absorbed by the scenes the family passes through on the way to their rescue rowboat: an enormous brown bear cuddling her cubs in a cozy den, comical bats swirling in a magical bat cave, an even more magical sky studded with blue, yellow, and white stars and a few planets. For preschoolers, it’s best to park our politics and let a good lullaby sing for itself.

Marjorie Cann, retired teacher, author of Five Thousand Years of Slavery, Toronto, Canada


Before setting out for a trip, Papa gives Reuven two pieces of advice: “Always be good to others,” and, “Cast your bread upon the waters” (which Jules attributes in her author’s note to Ecclesiastes 11:1, “Cast your bread upon the waters, for you shall find it after many days”). Young Reuven heeds Papa’s advice, and so ends up sharing his bread with a talking, gold-finned fish named Nissim. Villagers gaze out their windows and rejoice in Reuven and Nissim’s friendship, until they learn that Nissim’s fins are literally gold. As each villager makes their own small, reasonable demand, Reuven watches Nissim slowly fade away Giving Tree-style. What can Reuven and the rest of the village do?

Tyrell’s dazzling watercolor illustrations bring Reuven, Nissim, and a full cast of villagers vividly to life. Every character appears ready to turn to the one beside them, and insets capture multiple contemporaneous events—one heartrending spread shows Nissim withering away while Reuven confronts a mob of villagers. At the same time, nautically-themed designs frame the illustrations, giving the story the feel of a fairy tale so that even the darkest moments are not emotionally overwhelming. An oversized typeface detracts slightly from an otherwise flawless design. Ultimately (perhaps too easily?), the villagers come to realize that they have a responsibility to care for every living creature. It is refreshing that this conservationist discovery, which Jules links to the commandment Bal Tashchit (Do Not Destroy), comes in time for a happy, life-affirming end.

Rebecca Fox, Children’s Librarian II, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA


“Have you ever zeen a ziz? Do you wonder what one iz? Is it zis? Is it zat? Is it bigger than a hat? No, a Ziz is NOT like those. It’s a bird that puts on shows as she dips from high to low with her feathers all aglow.” The cheerful rhymes continue to describe this mythological creature and explain how she works, sings, plays, and even “takes a little shluffy.” The bright colorful collage, mixed media and digital illustrations, as well as the different font styles and sizes, complement the simple, silly text. An author’s note cites the traditional Jewish sources where the Ziz is mentioned and described along with a few of the legends found in Louis Ginzberg’s Legends of the Jews. A fun introduction that pairs perfectly with the “Ziz” books by Jacqueline Jules (The Princess and the Ziz, The Ziz and the Hanukkah Miracle, Noah and the Ziz, and The Hardest Word (Kar-Ben)).

Rachel Kamin, North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL

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Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens


Mia wants one of the puppies a neighbor is giving away, but Mom says there’s no room in their apartment. With Grandma’s help, Mia commandeers various animals that just happen to need a temporary place to stay...and Grandma needs one too, and needs to host her book club, and one of the members brings her pet pig...until the idea of the apartment with just Mia, Mom, and one pet sounds downright spacious. The funny story stands on its own and has no explicit Jewish content beyond a brief note on the copyright page explaining its source material: the Yiddish folktale that was later popularized in Margot Zemach’s It Could Always Be Worse (Michael Di Capua Books, 1990). It pairs well with Zemach’s classic in a unit on folktales or adaptations, for a Jewish or general audience. Illustrations in “watercolor, pencil, bits of paper, tea bags, other sundry items and a dash of Photoshop” depict a happily raucous, and diverse, cast of friends, neighbors, and pets.

Shoshana Flax, The Horn Book, Inc., Boston, MA

SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS


Clarence the raccoon loves Shabbat and wants to prepare for and honor it in the best way he possibly can – by making his very own challah. Problems arise when Clarence goes out to purchase the necessary ingredients. But, in an Amelia Bedelia kind of way, he returns with a unique set of inappropriate ingredients. He needs flour for his challah, but instead he comes home with a “flower.” And so the craziness continues, as an outspoken narrator who tries very hard to keep Clarence on the right track. “Seriously, Clarence? WHAT are you thinking?” There is also a group of helpful odd-looking animal friends who support Clarence while adding to the silliness and delight of the story. Finally, there is a beautiful Shabbat table with delicious fresh challah for all the friends to share.

The unusual illustrations portray appealing animals including a bunny, an otter, and a beast with long, lanky bodies and pinprick eyes who exude warmth and caring for their friends. The book is fun, adorable, and totally enjoyable both as a read aloud and for individuals. Clarence is a lovable fool, and it’s so nice to have a new twist on a Shabbat story.

Rachel Glasser, retired librarian, Yavneh Academy, Teaneck, NJ


Lushly illustrated in jewel tones and written in lyrical prose, this fuzzy-warm picture book tells the story of a young boy enjoying the Passover Seder in a snug and welcoming home. A parallel tale tells of a little kitten standing outdoors hungry and forlorn. The contrast is stark: a scene of warmth, joy and celebration, the table filled with family and friends, versus a lonely existence in the chill darkness of night. Like many Jewish children, the boy’s favorite part of the Seder is opening the door to welcome Elijah the Prophet who symbolically enters each home with his message of hope and his promise of the coming of the Messiah. This year, upon opening the door, the boy finds a wonderful surprise. In walks the lonely kitten attracted by the warmth and light inside. The kitten walks right into the welcoming arms of a family who will be happy to cherish and care for him. The kitten’s name, of course, becomes Elijah.

This heart-warming story with its universal theme of adopting a pet is also very much about the holiday of Passover with its message of welcoming one and all. An extensive “Author’s Note” educates readers further about the holiday and its history. Also included is a list of “some traditional rituals of
the Passover Seder.” The family’s warmth and celebratory joy are so bountiful that a hungry, little kitten can be encompassed and brought into the fold.

Michal Hoschander Malen, retired New York area day school librarian; current library volunteer in Efrat, Israel; editor of children’s and young adult book reviews for the Jewish Book Council


The Haggada instructs us to “tell your child,” and this colorfully illustrated edition will facilitate the process. The easy-to-read text is laid out creatively, with different colors for verses and commentaries, and the Kiddush shaped like a Kiddush cup. The translation is age appropriate (no “thou”s or words like “sojourn,” or “Omnipresent” as in haggadot for adults). There are instructions, marked with an open book, to “help you understand what you need to be doing,” like covering the matzot or raising the cup of grape juice. A pointing finger alerts the Seder participant to an activity to experience, like really tasting the matzot and bitter herbs. There are thoughts and questions to discuss with family. A graphic navigation bar at the bottom of each page indicates what portion of the Seder the group is up to.

Rinat Gilboa’s illustrations are colorful and have a beautiful fluidity, particularly in the pictures of Moses with his staff/snake, the Ten Plagues, and the crossing of the Red Sea. Others are whimsical, like the four sons, from oldest to youngest, popping out of a Babushka doll that has progressively smaller dolls inside it. Noteworthy is the proliferation of females in both the modern and biblical scenes. A Parent-Educator Companion – a page-by-page guide, is available online. This one does not belong on the library shelf, but in schools and at Seders.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee


During a family Hanukkah celebration, two children notice the sparkling menorah and its bright, colorful candles and comment on its beauty. When the parents and children go into the kitchen to bring out a festive meal, the simple wooden dreidel on the table begins to lament his plainness. He tells the menorah that he is dull and unadorned and won’t be noticed on the holiday. The menorah, wanting to help, magically transforms the dreidel into brighter colors, first blue, then yellow, then red but the colorful foods and dishes on the table continue to camouflage the dreidel and he still doesn’t stand out. He reverts sadly to his original brown color. Then Daddy hands out shiny foil-wrapped Hanukkah gelt and tells the children that it can be used for playing the dreidel game. Daddy reminisces and informs the children that the dreidel was his when he was a child and that their grandfather made it especially for him. The dreidel, realizing that even simple items can be meaningful and well-loved, is happy to spin around the table and entertain them all.

Simply told and illustrated in color, this story reminds children that they don’t have to stand out in a flashy way to be appreciated. The author includes lyrics to a traditional Hanukkah song as well as the translated and transliterated words to the blessings recited while lighting the menorah. An “Author’s Note” to parents telling more about the holiday is appended.

Michal Hoschander Malen, retired New York area day school librarian; current library volunteer in Efrat, Israel; editor of children’s and young adult book reviews for the Jewish Book Council


Why is this Passover book different from other Passover books? Because the Goldberg family celebrates Passover in outer space! Asteroid Goldberg is manning the rocket that will return her family home for Passover when mission control informs her that she will have to wait to land. With the holiday
approaching quickly, what will they do? They clean the spaceship and get rid of the chametz, but where can you find kosher for Passover food in space? The Big Dipper becomes a ladle to hold Jupiter’s matzoh ball moons, Saturn’s rings are crunchy matzoh, and the red spot on Jupiter yields some spicy horseradish. Asteroid invites family who are also exploring space, and they enjoy a Seder where zero gravity makes leaning much easier. As they pop the hatch for Elijah, a voice over the radio tells them they can land, but first they must finish the Seder, with the refrain, “Next Year in Outer Space.”

An imaginative take on the traditional preparation for and rituals of Passover, the lively illustrations are perfect for the story. The rhyming text works well for the most part, and the space theme is consistent throughout the book, including matzoh balls that are lighter than air (the way Asteroid likes them). A glossary and a link for “more creative Seder ideas” are included at the end of the book. All the male characters are wearing head coverings, and Asteroid’s mother is wearing a tichel (headscarf). Young readers who have some understanding of the holiday and of space travel will have a blast with this one.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee


This clever, colorful, double-sided book helps young children learn about the basic customs and observances of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Told in short, fun rhymes, the story highlights an Orthodox Jewish family of seven as they celebrate the holidays with commitment and joy. Children can read the clues and lift the flaps to find the appropriate answers and information. Included are many terms transliterated from the Hebrew. All are in English as well, and there is a glossary which provides simple explanations.

The customs of the family and bright illustrations portray a traditional Orthodox family which may be difficult for some more modern families to understand. There are also some terms, such as kapporos (ritual chicken slaughter) which will be unfamiliar. But the lively tone, bright illustrations, appealing rhymes and flaps will provide all children with a basic understanding of these two holidays and encourage them to experience their beauty and importance.

Rachel Glasser, retired librarian, Yavneh Academy, Teaneck, NJ


At sunrise the morning before Passover, when the observant Jews in Rivka’s village are convinced that they have completed their searches for chometz (leavened bread), a little white mouse races through Rivka’s house and snatches a piece of bread from the pile of chometz waiting to be burned. Much to the villagers’ dismay, the white mouse enters the cobbler’s house, only to be replaced by a black mouse, also wielding bread, on the way out. And the black mouse enters the matchmaker’s house, but a bread-chewing cat emerges. Does everyone need to search their homes for chometz again? With Passover getting closer by the second, a repeat search requires teamwork.

The old-fashioned village setting, the cheery but muted illustrations, and the gripping refrain of “A mouse! A mouse! Brought bread into our house!” give this story the feel of a fairy tale. While the mouse chase scenes may call to mind The Gingerbread Man, this is ultimately the tale of a community coming together and welcoming guests to their seders. Rivka, widowed and usually alone, winds up with a cottage full of visitors, and even the little white mouse earns some matzah in the end. In-text explanations of terms like chometz slow the pace a bit at the start but effectively make the story accessible to a broad readership. An author’s note explains that the story of the chometz-carrying creatures comes straight from the Talmud, adding depth to a tale that could otherwise feel goofy but simplistic.

Rebecca Fox, Children’s Librarian II, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA
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In *Reading Israel, Reading America: The Politics of Translation Between Jews*, Omri Asscher seeks to explain the diverse and complex relationship between Israeli and American Jews through the politics of translation in both communities. Asscher has examined the various ways in which Israeli and American Jews have constructed their relationship over time, and how the field of translation has contributed towards shaping their connection, particularly in the literary realm. The author shows how literary translations across varying geographical locations and cultures have served as a bridge, but also sometimes as a point of conflict. A timely book; the relationship between Israel and America continues to resonate in 2020, perhaps even more so than it has in the past.

*Moshe Weisblum, Wantagh, NY*


The papers in this volume spring from a conference convened by the Melton Coalition for Creative Interaction at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem in December 2014. Conference participants considered the relationship between the oral and the textual modes of discourse in Jewish history and contemporary education. Their essays ask, in part, “How does Jewish education achieve the perfect balance pedagogically between silence, speaking, and writing?” For example, the Haggadah is a written text, but each Seder is always uniquely different due to the oral nature of the discussion surrounding it. A student’s relationship to pedagogical materials is also a relationship to the author or to the teacher imparting its contents, as the Rabbinic adage holds: *oseh likhah rav* (attain for yourself a teacher), underpinning the importance of personal interaction in Jewish education. All the essays in this volume articulate patterns of oral and written discourse that can greatly enrich one’s knowledge of both the history of Jewish culture and the theory and practice of Jewish education.

*David B Levy, Lander College for Women, NY*


The Dutchman Arnold Douwes was a recognized horticulturist who, during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, actively operated a rescue mission for his Jewish compatriots. He left his wartime impressions in the form of 25 notes, kept in jam jars in his brother’s house in Dedemsvaart. After the war, this historic collection was edited by two history professors, organized chronologically, and given additional meaning by placing the comments in context. The diary covers the Dutch resistance’s rescue activities to shelter Dutch Jews around Nieuwlande. The foremost contribution of the Douwes diary is in detailing the nature of sheltering networks in the Netherlands and providing a picture of the role of the Dutch Reformed and Orthodox Calvinist pastors and schoolteachers to protect Dutch Jews. Also covered is the manner of German occupation policies towards the Jewish population as a basis for comparison purposes. The diary will enhance Holocaust studies in general, but more importantly it will add to our understanding of how Jews were protected in the Netherlands.

*Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC*

Zev Eleff is emerging as one of the freshest and most knowledgeable historians of American Jewish Orthodoxy. His new book includes essays that examine incidents of the interaction between American Orthodox Jews and the contemporary American culture in which they find themselves. Each case study focuses less on the grand narrative of communal shifts (to the right or left), the historical arch that has moved from less observant to more observant communities, or the surprising rise of Haredi Judaism. Instead, Eleff focuses on case studies that can exemplify tensions, as well the decisions that actors had to make when faced with those tensions and points of disagreement between different actors. Authentically Orthodox is particularly interested in day-to-day life and the seemingly insignificant moments that are the stuff of life.

For example, chapters on Yeshiva University do not focus on the ideology of Torah U’madda or the institution’s transition from a traditional yeshiva to a modern university. Instead, it examines how students and faculty negotiated the desire for or fear of mixed-gender meetings and social events. It includes chapters on toys and games, on participation in game shows, on how peanut oil gradually lost its status as kosher for Passover, on wearing a yarmulke during school basketball games, on competition between local Jewish day schools in Baltimore, and on the celebration of bat mitzvah. The book is clearly written and exhibits a mastery of a diverse and rich collection of sources.

With that, the notion of “authenticity” raises more methodological problems than it solves. It is not clear how historians can distinguish between the authentic and inauthentic in events or trends in the past, and Authentically Orthodox never quite explains what authenticity is and how one goes about looking for it.

Nevertheless, these case studies are each rich enough to stand on their own as snapshots of the ongoing mutual influences between Orthodox Jewish communities and non-Jewish American culture.

Yoel Finkelman, National Library of Israel


Support for the underdog has long been an identifying factor of the ideological Left. Progressives after World War II strongly supported the creation of Israel as recompense for how European Jewry was devastated. Once Israel firmly established itself, largely with foreign aid and assistance from the United States, a hyper-sensitive focus on the plight of the Palestinian Arab population under Israeli domination arose soon after. Under the direction of Fischbach, an historian at Randolph-Macon College, this work demonstrates that the major turning point in the alteration of public opinion on the Left came after the display of Israeli military prowess in the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict. With the overwhelming display of Israeli power, the Palestinian position became the subject for Palestinian activism on American campuses and the Liberal-Left came under its sway. The once overwhelming support for Jews and their connection to Israel was now diminished by Israel which overturned the old stereotype of the Jews being unable to defend themselves. This book is certainly a contribution to American political theory, the country’s social and political movements, and a commentary on political activism.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


Rabbi Shefa Gold is one of the most popular exponents of Renewal Judaism. This short book, her fourth, is both an autobiography and a description of her philosophy of life. Gold is a constant traveler, embracing life on the road; she is curious and welcoming, open to new experiences and people. Her story is non-linear, moving from place to place by way of a succession of invitations, serendipitous encounters.
and mystic (magical?) intervention. Through it all, she finds inspiration and awe. A meeting in a café turns into a counseling session; a spirit quest in the desert reminds her of the awe in nature. Through it all, she reminds herself—and her reader—of the wonder in each encounter and all of life.

The stories she recounts are, at times, curious and, at others, quietly powerful. They serve to remind us to remain aware of our surroundings, and to be ready to respond to the world at every moment. The message is simple, as is the prose here. The book will appeal to all seekers, even those who do not know they are on the derecho (path).

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Hever’s collection of essays dealing with Israel’s 1948 War of Independence focuses on the writings of highly respected Israeli poets and writers of that generation, including Avot Yeshurun, S. Yizhar, Nathan Alterman, Abba Kovner, Yehuda Amichai, Yizhak Laor, and Amos Oz, among others. Their works deal with the creation of the State of Israel and the complex issue of its resulting sovereignty. The central question in each chapter is whether or how the effects of the war on the native Arab population are a part of these works. In the sense that the volume includes criticism of Israeli nationalism, it may be seen as controversial.

The essays are all interesting but very dense and would not be accessible to the general reader. They would be of interest only to scholars who study the canon of Israeli literature and its place in the politics of the Middle East. It is recommended, therefore, only to academic libraries with extensive collections of Israeli literature and works about this seminal period in the history of the State of Israel.

Michlean L. Amir, retired Reference Archivist, USHMM, Washington, DC

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If you have any connection to the world of Jewish education, you’ve heard the phrase ‘Jewish Identity’ thrown about. However, it is rarely and inconsistently defined. Is it a tool towards a specific outcome or a goal unto itself? What assumptions are Jewish educators making and what are their blind spots? This excellent collection of studies tackles these questions and presents several ways of reframing priorities for Jewish education. Some overlap in the content occurs in some chapters, but not overly so. Highly recommended.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University


This is the tortuous story of the American policy toward the perilous situation of European Jewry during the time of Nazi domination in Germany. As the author points out, Franklin D. Roosevelt, U.S. President at the time, was a master manipulator of public opinion and had strong congressional support for his agenda. Medoff is an historian with a strong publication record on the Holocaust. Here he employs his access to newly available archival material and a host of personal interviews to accurately document how Roosevelt suppressed Jewish immigration. *The Jews Should Keep Quiet* also shows how President Roosevelt outwitted Rabbi Stephen Wise, the recognized leader of American Jewry during the two decades that preceded World War II, pressuring him to suppress the demand for opening the quota for European Jews to enter the United States. The author finds parallels between the President’s sentiments towards the Jews and their predicament in Europe and his actions to relocate Japanese Americans to internment camps. This is an outstanding contribution not only to Holocaust Studies but also Jewish-American history.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


*Wissenschaft des Judentums* is the scholarly study of Judaism (religion) and Jewish history. It began in Germany in the 1820s as a challenge to the traditional ways of understanding Jewish history. Many of the early proponents were accused of being anti-religion and assimilationists. Others regarded the movement as the supreme form of German-Jewish self-expression. Today’s academic Jewish studies programs, Jewish scholarship, and Jewish texts are the living legacy of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Yet sadly, if you would ask a college student in Jewish studies today what that term means, most would not be able to respond.

However, this book is not aimed at that audience, for while the subject matter examined across the various engaging essays in this work is fascinating, the presentation is deeply scholarly. Thus, this book is ideal for scholars of Jewish studies and those who want to understand some of the theory and history behind the scientific study of the history of Judaism. It is highly recommended for academic collections and for those personal collections where scholarly studies of historiography are important.

Daniel Stuhlman, City College of Chicago; Temple Sholom
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

Yale UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Jews and the Reformation
Kenneth Austin

Having the Spirit of Christ
Spirit Possession and Exorcism in the Early Christ Groups
Giovanni B. Bazzana

What Are Biblical Values?
What the Bible Says on Key Ethical Issues
John J. Collins

The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization, Volume 8
Crisis and Creativity between World Wars, 1918–1939
Edited by Todd M. Endelman and Zvi Gitelman
Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization

Job
A New Translation
Edward L. Greenstein

Jewish Christianity
The Making of the Christianity-Judaism Divide
Matt Jackson-McCabe
The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library

Hitler’s Jewish Refugees
Hope and Anxiety in Portugal
Marion Kaplan

Well Worth Saving
American Universities’ Life-and-Death Decisions on Refugees from Nazi Europe
Laurel Leff

The Lions’ Den
Zionism and the Left from Hannah Arendt to Noam Chomsky
Susie Linfield
Now in paperback

How the Gospels Became History
Jesus and Mediterranean Myths
M. David Litwa

The Jews of Eighteenth-Century Jamaica
A Testamentary History of a Diaspora in Transition
Stanley Mirvis

God’s Library
The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts
Brent Nongbri
Now in paperback

The Christians Who Became Jews
Acts of the Apostles and Ethnicity in the Roman City
Christopher Stroup

Becoming Diaspora Jews
Behind the Story of Elephantine
Karel van der Toorn
The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library

JEWISH LIVES

Houdini
The Elusive American
Adam Begley

Ben Hecht
Fighting Words, Moving Pictures
Adina Hoffman

Stan Lee
A Life in Comics
Liel Leibovitz

Theodor Herzl
The Charismatic Leader
Derek Penslar

Moses
A Human Life
Avivah Gottlieb Zornbe

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Jewish ritual and identity communication tend to be overwhelmingly focused around heterosexual men. Milligan takes an interdisciplinary approach in examining how female and LGBTQ Jews re-conceptualize these religious and cultural symbols. Specifically, she looks at upsherin, a custom traditionally practiced by Orthodox boys, being practiced by girls as a feminist gesture. She looks at the re-appropriation of the Nazi Rosa Winkel symbol by queer Jews and other ways the LGBTQ community conveys their Jewishness through clothing. Another focus is rituals of Jewish Renewal that involve body movement. Other ritual practices are examined through the lenses of bodylore, feminism, and queer theory. It is a short book and one would be interested in more content for the price of an academic monograph; nevertheless, recommended for academic collections.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University


*Secularizing the Sacred* is Mishory’s first major publication in English. How does an ancient people—a nation, a religion, and a cultural group—create a visual identity for a nation-state that is both new and historic at the same time? Mishory’s book endeavors to answer the question of how the Zionist movement prior to the birth of the State of Israel and then the State itself—officially and unofficially—created and utilized images and symbols to forge a modern identity.

The lavishly illustrated book is divided into three primary sections. The first division, “Before Statehood,” consists of four chapters which focus on pre-state Israel and the creation of Jewish imagery by artists such as E.M. Lilien, Boris Schatz, and Ze’ev Raban. The second part, “Objects and Conceptions of Sovereignty,” consists of eight chapters; each chapter examines or discusses different aspects of symbols of nationality, such as the decision to turn the pre-State Zionist flag into the Israeli flag. The final section, “Sculptural Commemoration within the Israeli Sphere,” includes four chapters which address topics such non-governmental efforts to build memorials for the Holocaust and Israeli heroism. A primary theme which runs throughout Mishory’s book is the issue of the Second Commandment and “Jewish Orthodox Laws” and its interpretation, and how the Israeli government has endeavored in many cases over the years to follow a fairly strict interpretation of the law, while some of the memorials which were commissioned privately have representations of human figures.

The index is short and not extensive; for example, there is no entry for Jewish holidays (in general or specific holidays) though numerous holidays are mentioned throughout the text. Presumably, the electronic book is searchable and perhaps that explains the brief index.

The book is a fascinating and illuminating addition to a subject which has not yet been adequately examined, particularly in English. Recommended for academic Jewish libraries or libraries with a specialty in Israeli culture. Unfortunately, the cost is prohibitive and will preclude most libraries from purchasing the book.

Shulamith Z. Berger, Yeshiva University, NY


Cary Nelson offers a caustic look at the fashionable Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement on Western campuses, an arena which he believes has become an ideological battleground armed by professors of dubious credentials in the field of politics and with wild imaginations. He analyzes their writings on Middle East issues and he reveals a poor understanding of the conflict underpinned by an overall aim to deny “Israel’s moral and political legitimacy,” or simply its right to exist. Their rhetoric,
he finds, is filled with left-wing “weaponized rage,” jargon, and lack of evidence, style, or argumentation. Examples of such flawed logic include false equivalents (Zionism and Nazism); historical inaccuracies (ancient Palestinian nationhood); faulty inferences (racism because of separatism); and far-out nonsense (Israel is harvesting organs from Palestinians). Even queer theory is somehow used to fit into the victim narrative. The sloppy scholarship Nelson exposes hints at the confusion, as well as the mediocrity, of those now sitting in the faculty chairs. He also uses his analysis of the BDS movement as a springboard for discussion of other general, disturbing trends in academia, particularly in the humanities, where the anti-white “colonization” or “oppression” slant is given free rein and anyone who dares go against the grain is either threatened or silenced.

The book’s mordant wit alleviates an overall depressing subject matter. Although hardly unbiased, the author maintains political balance by offering solutions to Israeli withdrawal from the territories and a peaceable dual state, as well as better, more nuanced ways to teach about the Middle East (e.g. through poetry) and gain empathy for the Palestinians without resorting to demonizing the “occupiers.” This book is a timely addition to Middle East or Zionist studies collections.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY


On the morning following *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, Jews across Germany woke to the realization that their world would not soon return to its former condition and they would have to seek refuge elsewhere. Unfortunately, they were confronted with the further reality that few countries were willing to admit them. The West Indies initially offered to accept some of the refugees, and it is these refugees who are the focus of this first comprehensive study of their migration and settlement.

Newman investigates a situation of continuous strife between the priorities of the British Colonial office and those of other British government departments. In addition to describing the politicking and bartering, Newman filters the experience through the lives of refugee families. She begins by providing the political and social context for the changing realities that were to mean life and death for many refugees. Each subsequent chapter deals with one period in the fraught saga of denial, despair, and attempts at flight that characterized European Jewry in the 1930s. In the years prior to 1938, a mere trickle of immigrants came to the Caribbean, but by 1939 the number had grown to more than 200 families, mainly from Eastern Europe. With the crisis at the end of 1939, however, immigration to the Caribbean spiked dramatically as Jews panicked, seeking sanctuary anywhere.

Sadly, the hope of immigration to the West Indies was extremely short-lived. Just two weeks after the arrival of the Goldfisch family in Trinidad on New Year’s Day, 1939, Britain barred immigration to the entire region. Jewish agencies like the Joint Distribution Committee, played a vital role in helping the refugees who had managed to make it over there. They provided food and housing for short term relief and they tried to negotiate with other nations willing to assist the immigrants. Few of the new arrivals could find jobs outside the camps, and many, especially the young adults, were extremely frustrated with nothing to do. When at last the war ended, the few who managed to set up businesses on the islands were the only ones to remain.

In her introduction, Newman draws parallels to 21st century refugees faced with xenophobia and manipulation by governments across the world. With an extensive bibliography and footnotes, this work is a crucial read for Jews seeking to learn from the past to face the future.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante

The idea of collective victimhood exists in many cultures, but the idea has made a particularly strong impression on Israeli politics. These studies take a close look at how victimhood has (or has not) impacted the history of Zionism and the rhetoric of various Israeli prime ministers both internally and externally. There are also crucial ramifications connected with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the treatment of refugees. Highly recommended for academic collections.

*Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University*

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Hashgacha Peratis (or Hashgacha Pratis), God’s “intimate involvement in a Jew’s life,” is a topic that has been debated and discussed for thousands of years. In a memorial volume in his father’s memory (Yisrael Chaim ben Ephraim, z”l), Pinczower urges readers to “internalize the understanding that Hashem is involved in our daily lives” by learning about the subject and applying it to their daily lives.

After a short introduction, the author presents the many primary sources that discuss Divine Providence. Chapter Two discusses two of Ramban’s (Nachmanides) statements that seem to conflict, but “with deeper analysis lead to better understanding of the nuances” of the concept. Chapter Three presents the commentaries of the Seforno (the Italian commentator, Ovadia ben Yaacov, 1475-1550), while the following chapter discusses God’s involvement in the lives of animals. Further chapters examine whether negligence affects Hashgacha Peratis and Hashgacha Peratis in regard to dating and marriage. The appendices include the full text of some of the sources that were footnoted in the original text and there is an index of all the sources and biographical sketches of the sources cited.

Most books about Hashgacha Peratis are collections of vignettes or stories, so this volume is a much-welcome compilation of sources that show Divine Providence’s importance in Jewish belief. With many rabbinic approbations, meticulously referenced, and written clearly and concisely, Pinczower’s book is a worthy addition to all Jewish libraries and serves well as an *aliyas neshama* (ascent of the soul) for his father.

*Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel*

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Keeping track of Jewish time during the Holocaust was a difficult task. In a first study of Jewish calendars produced during the Holocaust, Alan Rosen researches the challenges and risks that Jews took in producing calendars in ghettos, in hiding places, and in labor, transit, and concentration camps. Rosen examines in detail about forty calendars and a few diaries that have survived in archives and family hands, detailing the creation and survival of these calendars. He also relates heroic attempts to observe Jewish rituals with these calendars as guides.

Calendars were produced by rabbis as well as lay persons and young people. Large ghettos like Theresienstadt had more resources for composing calendars. In hiding or in concentration camps, creators relied on their own calculations or memory, in some cases leading to mistakes. With resources scarce, some calendars were crafted from old secular calendars, adding Jewish dates. Some were composed on draft paper and scrap paper. Many were small and hidden at great risk, with copies lost to theft or confiscation. Some were simple while others listed full halachic times. Some left off summer fast days, fasting then being too difficult. In other calendars, days like Tisha Ba’Av were stressed, with Rosen intuiting that the creator of the calendar pictured the calendar itself observing the ritual. Many calendars listed both secular and Jewish days, but a few, even those composed by secular Jews, used only Jewish dates and Hebrew, making a deliberate statement.
Rosen, a student of Elie Wiesel and long-time teacher of Holocaust studies, corrects Holocaust historiography that downplayed Jewish concern for Jewish time, demonstrating that the Jewish calendar and weekly and holiday cycle was the first frame of reference for Jews, and the calendars they crafted helped them observe some ritual in horrific conditions. This book is highly recommended for academic libraries.

Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library


This is an outstanding memoir of a Lithuanian Jew who had a bucolic childhood, an astounding escape from the Nazis, did meritorious service in the Soviet army, and then had a lengthy career as an expert tailor and faithful Communist in postwar Vilna. This eventful life history is described in supple, engaging prose, with modesty and thoughtfulness. The author provides a wealth of detail about his prewar life in Telz, a major Jewish center in Lithuania. When the Nazis invaded, he actually saved himself by riding into the heart of Russia on a bicycle. He provides thorough descriptions of his dangerous duties as an intelligence operative fighting with the Russian army on the eastern front, as well as a meticulous portrayal of how Communism dominated life in Lithuania after the war.

The result is an autobiography that is a masterful blend of the personal with the historic. Skillfully drawn maps delineate the author’s escape route and the paths of the Nazi invasion. Included in this volume are a number of family photographs and notes relating to the translation, as well as a foreword by historian Samuel Kassow. Highly recommended for Holocaust and historical collections.

Beth Dwoskin, Cataloger, International Studies, Hatcher Graduate Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI


The paraliturgical song is an important part of the culture of Mizrahi Jews. It dates back to ancient Babylon, combining Hebrew poetry with Arabic music. The songs, also known as piyutim, are used in celebrations in the synagogue and the home. The author, a musicologist specializing in Middle Eastern cultures, uses the two major collections of these songs, Mishaf al-Shbahoth, compiled in 1906 and 1954 to demonstrate the interweaving of Jewish and Arabo-Islamic elements in creating the songs. They come from eras when Jews and Muslims lived together in harmony and they exist today in Mizrahi communities around the world.

The book offers a detailed history of the Mishaf as a holy book of songs. It also analyzes the poetic and musical tropes that appear in the written sources and the melodies, which come from popular Arabic songs. Both written and oral transmission of the songs show how they relate to the time of their composition. A series of appendices provide lists of religious occasions, biblical sources, and poets found in the Mishaf. They also offer the Hebrew text of Dror Yiqra, Yihu Kemots, Baruch El Hay, and Merim Lero’shi. A bibliography, discography, list of online songs, and online interviews provide sources for further exploration. This is a fascinating book for students of liturgy, sacred music, and Jewish culture.

Barbara Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA


Ron Rubin is a retired political science professor and well-published author. Peri Devaney is an editorial consultant. The book begins with an introduction describing the coverage of Jews by the news media in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The book continues with twelve brief chapters, all of which include facsimiles of actual newspaper articles related to aspects of Jewish life in the colonies and later the United States. The array of topics include the participation of Jews in society (chapter 1),
the role of Jews in education and publishing (chapter 3), the participation of Jews in politics (chapter 6), stereotypes (chapter 7), the importance of Mordecai Noah (chapter 8), the Civil War (chapter 10), and interest in Israel as a Jewish homeland (chapter 11). Most of the text provides abstracts of the articles reproduced with little commentary, allowing the reader to draw conclusions and appreciate the historical value of the research presented. Recommended as general non-fiction reading for adolescents and adults.

Arthur G. Quinn, St. Vincent de Paul Seminary, Boynton Beach, FL


The author conducted a study from 2003 to 2006 of “forty-eight Jewish men and women in the United States who were raised in relatively secular Jewish homes and later became (Orthodox (baalei teshuvah)),” with the thesis that “the spiritual-religious transformation of Jews who become Orthodox is an all-embracing, protracted, open-ended process that gives rise to a radical revision of one’s internal being and external environment.” After an introduction that describes the study, its participants, and the methods of compiling data, nine chapters detail “Beginnings,” how the survey participants came to making a commitment, their different paths as they became Orthodox, some of their challenges, family relations, “Spiritual and Religious Struggles,” and how becoming Orthodox affected their social interactions, social groups, and their everyday lives. The chapters cite observations and statistics from other studies, books, and articles, as well as the personal experiences of the survey participants. The backmatter includes appendices with the individual interview questions, focus group questions, key informants (ten people who had direct expert knowledge about and professional experience worked with baalei teshuvah) questions, notes, an extensive bibliography and a detailed index.

The author is a Professor Emerita at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy and Practice and the author of several other books. Part of her motivation for the study and subsequent was her daughter’s “transformation” to Orthodox Judaism. There are many reasons why people become frum (Orthodox), including “desires for a structured life, a search for spirituality and/or meaning, and a need for community.” What makes the discussion of the study results interesting is that each participant’s story is different, and they describe, in detail, why they made certain decisions, what parts of Orthodoxy appeal (or not) to them, and how family dynamics changed when they became Orthodox. The book is best suited to an academic library or resource center at a Jewish family service or counseling center that deals with those who become Orthodox and/or their families.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Arc Humanities Press’ “Past Imperfect” series aims to produce concise volumes on specific topics. François Soyer’s contribution to this series discusses the controversial question of whether one can apply the use of the word “antisemitism” (as opposed to a religiously based “anti-Judaism”) to periods before the 19th century, and specifically in the medieval period. In four short yet comprehensive chapters, Soyer provides an overview of various forms of Jew-hatred in medieval Europe and concludes that indeed, there was racially based hatred of Jews prior to the modern era. The book provides a review of the debate on the use of the term and a description of the development of religious hatred of Jews, followed by a detailed progression of race-based hatred throughout different areas in medieval Europe. In compellingly arguing the case for the use of antisemitism (either as “Christian antisemitism” or “medieval antisemitism” to differ from later uses), Soyer has produced a work that is sure to be assigned in courses on the subject. The one quibble with the book was also its strength—the small format makes the content easily digestible, but its physical size made it difficult to read. Recommended for secondary schools and research libraries.

Michelle Chesner, Columbia University

One of the great schisms in Jewish history is the Jewish calendar controversy of 921/922 between the Jewish communities of Palestine and Babylon. The New Year ended being celebrated on different days between the two communities. Eventually the controversy was forgotten for over 500 years until the late 19th with the discovery of the genizah fragments in Cairo. However, the scholarship produced, based on the fragments, was faulty. Sacha Stern, a scholar of calendar studies, in his new book *The Jewish Calendar Controversy of 921/922* comes to correct the scholarship. Although the work is divided into four parts totaling seventeen chapters, it can be regarded as having two major parts: the first part serves as the overall introduction to the subject by introducing the calendar controversy and its relevance, the cast of characters, and explaining the calendar, while the second part— which divides into twelve chapters within three parts— discusses the genizah documents themselves. In this “second part,” Stern brings together all of the relevant material, documents studied by previous scholars and those newly discovered, both in critical and diplomatic editions, along with an English translation, and over 20 pages of color plates of the fragments, allowing the reader and scholar a chance to view the documents themselves. The chapter on manuscript studies is particularly notable. It is here that Stern and his colleagues detail how they went about and approached the research into the Jewish calendar controversy of 921/922. Stern convincingly and masterfully corrects previous scholarship and helps readers make sense of the controversy revolving around the Jewish calendar of 921/922. This work is a very important contribution to genizah studies, calendar studies, and manuscript studies. Highly recommended, especially for academic libraries.

Haim A. Gottschalk, Olney, MD


This is a thoroughly composed companion book to the major exhibition that was mounted on three floors of the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York. Its subject is Auschwitz, the “largest documented mass murder site in human history.” Following the exhibit, the book provides a 240-page long, “authoritative yet accessible,” exhaustive history of Auschwitz and its 48 concentration and extermination camps in which 1.1 million people, primarily Jews, but also thousands of Romas, Poles and others, perished. Photographs of the 600 original objects and 400 images from the exhibition are provided to the reader, including those from the Museum’s own collection as well as many items that were borrowed from institutions all over the world.

The exhibit itself has garnered very positive reviews. It was divided into three main parts: the first being about the area where Auschwitz was erected before it became an efficient death camp; the second and longest is about the camp during the years it was a German concentration camp; and the last about the place after it was liberated. Each part of the exhibition is described at length with a full narrative explanation about the many images and objects, including relevant maps and ten separate stories. Fortunately, the exhibition is available to travel to cities around the world.

This excellent work could be used as a text in history classes that focus on World War II because much of the information included focuses not only on Auschwitz but also on the war in general. The book belongs in every basic Holocaust collection, from high school to university libraries as well as to large public libraries.

Michlean L. Amir, retired Reference Archivist, USHMM, Washington, DC

In *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, Elliot Wolfson makes the case that there are kindred affinities between some of the philosophical themes in Jewish mysticism and the philosophical writings of Martin Heidegger. Wolfson asserts that the ethnocentric concept of the German Volk’s destiny, the primacy of the German language, and the notion of Ayran superiority all correlate with ideas in Kabbalistic texts that, on the flip side, privilege Hebrew as the divine language, speak of the superiority of “the Chosen People,” and posit Eretz Israel as the divinely destined homeland.

Wolfson is aware (and it is telling) that Buber, Scholem, and Fackenheim were never able to forgive Heidegger for his unpuntenant allegiance to Nazism. Despite having numerous Jewish students, such as Arendt, Strauss, Lowith, etc, the implicit antisemitism in some of Heidegger’s articulated ideas, his personal involvement with National Socialism, and his silence about the victims of Nazi atrocities, could not and should not be overlooked.

Nonetheless with intellectual integrity, Wolfson courageously brings together and juxtaposes these seemingly divergent modes of philosophical discourse and, in so doing, enriches our understanding of both while providing a means of counteracting their respective ethnocentric viewpoints. In this way, *Heidegger and Kabbalah* provides an unusual and refreshing approach to the study of Western philosophy. This excellent book is recommended for its academic rigor, its brilliant synthesis, and its unexpected, amazing insights.

David B Levy, Lander College for Women, NY


In *Sources of the Sacred Song*, Yahalom examines major trends in Jewish Liturgy during Late Antiquity and considers the ways in which the shirat ha-qodesh (liturgical poems) of that period connect to other contemporary Jewish writings, such as the Aramaic Targum and Midrash, and to mystical and popular beliefs circulating at the time. He also shows how these early liturgical poems later spread to Southern Italy and then to Europe. Using the texts preserved in the Cairo Genizah collections, Yahalom demonstrates how the performance of the sacred songs evolved over time, and how they were incorporated into various liturgical cycles and survived into later practice.

Among the many things this book discusses is the relationship between the culture of sacred song and the culture of sermonizing (*derash*), between Hebrew and Aramaic translations, and between rational thinking and the radical aspects of Jewish mysticism. Chapters of the book also look at the material culture of composing and transmitting the sacred song (piyyutim). In the Golan, piyyutim were recorded on papyrus. In ancient Gaza, they were copied by noteworthy *paytanim* (the authors of the piyyutim) who also served as local judges. Some of the work of the ancient *paytanim* was preserved in the Cairo Genizah in palimpsest form, whereby the lower script of the original writing surface, consisting of pagan and Christian letters, was partially erased and reused by medieval Jewish scribes. By charting the historical evolution of these texts across centuries and geographies of space, Yahalom’s book provides new insights into the creative process of poetic genius, and the complex process of religious and cultural appropriation and transmission. Recommended.

David B Levy, Lander College for Women, NY

In *The Power of a Tale*, Bar-Itzhak and Pintel-Ginsburg showcase a wide array of folktales collected over many years by different people connected to the Israel Folklore Archives (IFA), and narrated by different storytellers. The fifty-three tales illustrate the different backgrounds of the communities living in Israel. The selections include many Jewish stories from across the Diaspora as represented by the various Jewish communities in Israel, as well as Israeli Arab (Muslim and Christian), Bedouin, and Druze tales, told by the members of each community.

For each story or group of stories, there is a commentary that explains the meaning(s) behind the events of the tale(s) and connects them to other similar types for each story. The information about each tale includes the IFA story number, narrator, who transcribed it, and in some cases the language(s) from which it translated, etc. The personal history of the narrator is also sometimes included, such as who told them the story, how and when they arrived in Israel, etc.

The many different types of stories include those about women or girls who outwit their potential suitors, stories about holy artifacts/places/people (both Jewish and non-Jewish), demons, and elements of daily life. One of the most helpful aspects of this collection, aside from the commentaries for the stories themselves, are the many appendices and indices that group the tales by the ethnic distribution of the narrators, transcribers/translators, scholars who wrote the commentaries, type of tale, etc. There are also appendices that list which IFA publications the stories came from and other IFA material that may be of interest as well. The fact that the commentaries connect each tale or set of tales both to the wider cultural context from which they originate, as well as to other stories of a similar type around the world, shows that folktales have a very long and illustrious tradition in every culture.

This book is highly recommended for every level of Jewish library, but academic institutions especially would benefit from integrating it into their collections of folktales, legends, and ethnographic studies for further study and enjoyment.

Eli Lieberman, Judaica Librarian, HUC-JIR, NY


This historical fiction captures the reader immediately as the story begins with the words of a kind and compassionate ghost, or revenant (Julien) who tells us that, “in the end, a lifetime is not enough, the heart yearns for more.” Thus, he continues to be a presence throughout the book.

It is the summer of 1989 in Paris where the celebration of the French Revolution’s bicentennial has the community’s complete attention, except for Sylvie, Julien’s loving companion of 30 years. He is devotedly watching over her from beyond as she tries to go through the motions of her life without him in this first year after his death. Then, by chance, she discovers a mysterious envelope in his desk that ultimately reveals what had tormented him throughout his life. Julien had died without knowing the answer to the fate of his beloved sister and nieces who had vanished in the horror of Vel d’Hiv, Roundup Velodrome d’Hiver, that took place in Paris on July 16-17, 1942. As the tale goes back and forth in time and place, the unspeakable nightmare of the Holocaust is painfully depicted while Sylvie continues Julien’s exploration for the truth. She ultimately succeeds in finding answers, bringing comfort and peace to all.

The author has skillfully taken us on a journey of everlasting love and endless hope in this cherished novel. Julien’s narrative is poetic, and Sylvie’s dedication and adoration as the tale unfolds is positively beautiful and completely enthralling. This is a perfect selection for a Book Club gathering.

Etta D. Gold MLS RJE, Congregational Librarian, Temple Beth Am

This evocative collection of poetry focuses on origins, including ancestry, memory, language and names. The author’s origins began in the Ukraine, which she left at age six as a Jewish refugee. The poems are grouped into five sections, with at least one poem in each titled “Other Women Don’t Tell You.” These poems explore intergenerational motherhood, family connections, mothers, sons, and grandmothers.

The author holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Oregon and is a Ph.D. candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania. Her poems have appeared in many poetry journals. The book is the winner of the 2018 Stan and Tom Wick Poetry Prize, part of the Wick Poetry First Book Series. It includes a brief forward and notes. The poems are powerful, holding the reader’s interest. The book is a valuable addition to poetry collections in Jewish high school, public, academic and synagogue libraries.

*Susan Freiband, retired Library Educator, Volunteer Synagogue Librarian, Alexandria, VA*


Dreifus’ poems have appeared in many newspapers, literary journals and on websites, but when they are brought together in this chapbook, recurring themes of family, Jewish identity and women’s power are evident. Some compositions pay homage to her German-Jewish ancestry (“Pünklichkeit,” “Mannheim,” “Bloodlines”). There are several with biblical references (“Miriam, Quarantined,” “Ruth’s Regret,” “Abel’s Brother Anticipates Lady Macbeth: A Soliloquy,” “On Reading Chapter 19 in the Book of Judges,” “Fighting Words”). But Dreifus’s talent lies in making the mundane interesting, like in “A Walker in the Post-Blizzard City” and “The Smell of Infection,” where a root canal inspires thoughts about social media posts that infect the world with hate and lies. She also shares personal moments in “Kaddish for My Uterus,” modeled after the traditional prayer said by mourners, in which she describes her hysterectomy.

Whether referencing other works (one poem is “after Wallace Stevens’ “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”) or biblical stories or current politics (“Pharaoh’s Daughter Addresses Linda Sarsour”), there is something for all tastes. Highly recommended for libraries that collect poetry, this quintessentially Jewish poetry collection would work well in the classroom or with a reading group.

*Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel*
The **AJL Newsletter** (Irene Levin-Wixman z”l, founding editor) was published in print from 1979 to 2010 by the Association of Jewish Libraries to inform members about AJL activities and issues related to Judaica libraries. From January 2011 through August 2019 it was split into two separate electronic publications – the **AJL News** and the **AJL Reviews**. As of September 2019 it is published digitally as **AJL News and Reviews**. Receipt of this publication is one of the benefits of membership. Please see the AJL website at [http://www.jewishlibraries.org](http://www.jewishlibraries.org) for membership rates.

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